Is the conventional profile of St Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa (335–394?) authentic? Was he a “philosopher” and “mystic?” Was he a student of Plotinus and Philo, a disciple of Origen? Did he seek to hellenize Christianity? How are we to understand the remark by Johannes Quasten that St Gregory “endeavored to bring the mysteries of faith nearer to human understanding” (Patrology [vol. 3]. Westminster [MD.], 1960, 283–285)? may we believe the words of F. Ueberweg, “Niemand vor Gregor hat die rationale Begrundung des Glaubens in so umfassender Weise durchzuführen gesucht” (Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie [bd. 2]. Berlin, 1928, 84)? Put another way, Quasten, Ueberweg, etc. maintain, among other things, that St Gregory endeavored to give a firm rational basis to the Church’s theology which had been called into question by the intellectual ferment of the fourth century.

For many Fathers, including Gregory, Origen was the model of the Christian intellectual, save for his careless use of Hellenism (See Eusebius, Eccl. Hist. VI, 19 PG 20 565–568). Whatever his errors, the Alexandrian, nonetheless, gave them direction, illustrating the way in which “theological” and “economic” problems were attacked. Unlike him, however, the Fathers did not reconstruct Christianity with the principles of Hellenism. They compelled Greek philosophy and letters to serve the Church. Pagan thought was not the source of Christian doctrine, as it was in Origen.

Noteworthy is the fact that, as so many heretics before and after him, whether from the East or West (Tertullian, Augustine, Erigena, Joachim of Flores, Meister Eckhart, Nicholas of Cusa, Raymund of Lull, Solov’ev, etc.), Origen justified his innovations by divine inspiration. He claimed to have spoken with the Logos (Song of Songs I,7 ACW), a vision by which he justified his intrepid “extension” of the Apostolic Tradition.

Did St Gregory follow Origen in this adventure? Was his concern to produce, as H.A. Wolfson insists, a Christian version of Greek philosophy, as if somehow a personal “philosophy” might gain universal acceptance in the Church, and that she would welcome it as the magic key in the penetration of the divine Mysteries and the resolution of all her intellectual problems? Or, perhaps, the Bishop of Nyssa was so rash and so pretentious as to develop, with the aide of the Greek paideia, a wholly personal vision of the world, unconcerned with the reaction of the Church?

Judging from the remarks of Cherniss and others, the latter appears to be unlikely. At the same time, it seems that modern scholars, having no place in
their logic for supernatural revelation, the Christian Economy, or that St Gregory, a true believer, had no other purpose, and in terms of “boundaries set by the Fathers,” than the defense of “the faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude3).

The “evidence” is there to determine the issue, but evidence not so narrowly defined as to include only manuscripts, monuments and artifacts. Science, nor any of the disciplines which depend upon it, should not be so confident in its (their) method or its (their) presuppositions. None can provide complete answers. None have the right to read their understanding of the world into the *philosophia* of St Gregory.

Contrary to ordinary historiographical practices, moreover, serious consideration must be given to his religious faith which was indeed the *sine qua non* of the Saint’s *philosophia*; therefore, the “evidence” necessarily includes the life and worship of the Church. (One may recall that St Gregory was, in his youth, a Reader and, later, a Christian Bishop or high priest).

No analysis of his works can be made outside that context nor, what is the same thing, outside the abiding patristic witness to the Christian Revelation, a Revelation communicated in the Church as *traditio*: the teachings of Christ as delivered to the Apostles, from them to every generation of Christians under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; to which nothing may be added nor subtracted (Matt. 28:18–20). Research will not produce a real portrait of the Bishop of Nyssa, or any Church Father, without recognizing their belief in Christ Jesus as Incarnate Lord.

First, “evidence” provides an understanding of “the faith once delivered to the saints,” beginning with the Church’s belief in and testimony to the God’s Providence (the Word in history) – particularly the Greek and the Jews – to the revelation of “the Mystery hidden before the ages,” or the Will of God as the Incarnation of the eternal Logos (the divine Economy). *Cur deus homo?* necessarily involves the Spouse and Body of Christ, the Church, the race of men whom He had come to save – say, deify – and, consequently, the elaboration of the divine Plan in history through her. With these facts, we initiate our study of the *philosophia* of St Gregory.

Unless the writer deals seriously with the “faith” of St Gregory, a bishop of the Catholic Church, and to some degree has himself experienced “the life in Christ” – however unscientific this requisite may appear – his research provides neither a complete nor a convincing portrait of the man and his teachings. All the learning, labels, language, all the conjectures, are as personal as they are pretentious without a comprehension of that “faith” and “life.” Moreover, I am dubious of any opinion which denies St Gregory a place within the *continuity* of
patristic thought and which fails to give credence to the patristic belief in and commitment to the special nature of the Gospel which they inherited, elucidated and defended.

Likewise, I cannot take seriously the “pioneering study” of St Gregory’s “philosophy” made by Professor F.H. Cherniss; neither any literature like it. He proclaims “the strongest link between Plato and Gregory and the most important characteristic of the system of the latter for the history of philosophy is the acceptance by him of the fundamental metaphysical ideas of Plato and his constant adherence thereto.” With these ideas, insists Cherniss, St Gregory sought to reshape Christianity, injecting Platonism within “the very framework of Christian problematics.” Cherniss arbitrarily discounts St Gregory’s indictment of Eunomius the Arian who “struck by the beauty of the Platonic style, presumes to make Plato’s theory (in the Cratylus) a doctrine of the Church” – καὶ τότου χάριν περιτύπθεις τῆ καλλιϕωνία τῆς Πλατωνικῆς λέξεως πρέπον οίεται δόγμα τῆς ἐκκλησίας τὴν εκείνου φιλοσοφίαν ποίησασθαι (Con. Eun. XII PG 45 1045D). So penetrating was Gregory’s thought, laments Cherniss, yet so perverse in drawing his conclusion, that St Gregory was ready at every turn to show “the scourging tongue of the righteous servant of the Church, pointing a hand of scorn at Eunomius for using the arguments of Aristotle and Plato while with the other he filched from the same source.”

While persuaded that St Gregory sought “to recast Christianity in the form of philosophy” – in fact, save “for some few Orthodox dogmas which he could not circumvent, Gregory had merely applied Christian names to Plato’s doctrines and called it Christian theology” – at the same time, Cherniss reproaches him for failing to realize this ambition. The major obstacle to his success was the Bishop of Nyssa’s constant need to prove himself a faithful member of the Church. And, Cherniss will not forgive him that fidelity, saying he paid the price for this compromise with the loss of “intellectual integrity” (The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa. Berkeley. 1930, pp. 61–64).

St Gregory’s “contempt for Hellenism” (which often parodied Christianity) will be discussed in Chapter II. Suffice it to say, the Cherniss thesis falls to the ground, if only because he undertook to examine the Saint’s “Christian philosophy” with assumptions that arbitrarily discount the God of revelation and the sacred tradition in which it was communicated. But also, Cherniss seems completely oblivious to the context of Gregory’s intellectualism: the Christian idea of “the city” (πόλις) and the “education” (παιδεία) which is intrinsic to the teaching of the Scriptures and the Fathers – indeed to Philo and the Greeks. No wonder Cherniss was so disconcerted by his typically patristic “scourging” of Hellenism “while... filching from it.”
Also, the professor should have taken seriously Gregory’s Christian understanding of history, which viewed the Jews and the Gentiles as paidagogos of the Gospel, “for which reason St Paul called himself “a debtor” to both, including the “barbarian” (Rom. 1:14).” Considering Cherniss’ secular version of history, one might suspect that he would not allow for a divine Hand guiding it, a fortiori for the sake of a privileged People, the Church, according to a divine Plan, toward a terrible End.

Like so many others, Cherniss might ask, how it is possible to write a scientific history if the historian is required to make the “supernatural” part of his evidence – a “supernatural” in which he does not believe? Let a question answer the question: how truthful is that record which, deliberately or not, excludes a fundamental component of reality? Or put another way, is it not only illogical but futile to undertake the study of history without first determining the nature of human existence; and, indeed, the existence of something beyond space and time influencing the course of our history?

Such an inquiry compels us to ask more specific questions: metaphysics is unavoidable; hence, further exploration: If there is a God, is He the Creator? Is He personal? Is the world intelligible without His Providence? What is His purpose for the creation? Has He revealed Himself to the creature? Do “miracles” occur? Do angels and demons exist? Do they influence human life? If such things are part of human experience, how can the historian ignore them? How can the story of St Gregory of Nyssa be told – or, for that matter, anything else – without taking into account the “supernatural” and the human encounter of it? If the historian will not even put these questions, for whatever reason, how true is his account?

Contemptuous of “metaphysics,” most patrologists and historians of religion and philosophy commonly dismiss faith (albeit they hold one of their own) as unscientific, fearing that its presence will prejudice their investigation. Thus, their “mind-set” dictates that they look exclusively for the “sources” of St Gregory’s “philosophy” in the history of Platonism with no concern for anything beyond the generosity of the empirical data? Consequently, they will not permit, if it is to be called “philosophy” at all, that Gregory’s thought has no foundation beyond human reason and its instruments to establish. In point of historical fact, the only rational element in “patristic philosophy” are those ideas the Fathers borrowed from Hellenism and the pagan world. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments receive the same treatment (e.g., W.L. Knox, Some Hellenistic Elements in Primitive Christianity. London, 1944).

One is not obliged to accept this point of view. The Fathers understood
their mission differently. According to St Gregory the Theologian, they took from “the external culture” (secular learning) “its method of inquiry and conjecture (έξετασις καὶ θεωρησις) while rejecting whatever fatalism, delusion, terror and pit of destruction it bears” (In Laud. Basil. Magn., 11 PG 36 508C). In other terms, it is precisely because God had not abandoned the Gentiles, because He had not left the flower of Hellenism without “honey,” without the “light of knowledge” – as a part of His praepartio evangelica – that the Church Fathers were able to “christianize Hellenism” (G. Florovsky), that is, not a synthesis, not a fusion of opposites, but making proper use of “secular thought,” the use God had intended for it. Indeed, there is truth in all cultures and we make no apology for our confidence in the belief that God is the source of that truth: a “sowing” with a divine Purpose.

Without establishing that “the philosophy of St Gregory of Nyssa” rested upon the Christian revelation (albeit I am certain he believed it), the late Cardinal Daniélou yet came to the conclusion that this Cappadocian’s “indebtedness” to Hellenism (more specifically, Platonism) was largely “formal.” “Ainsi l’étude de tous les textes nous a convaincu qu’il n’y avait pas lieu de chercher quels etaient les elements platoniciens de la pensee de Grégoire, mais qu’il fallait nous habituer à cette vue d’une pensee purement chretienne, mais qui a emprunte ses formes expression à la langue philosophique du temps ou elle s’est constituée” (Platonisme & Théologie Mystique. Paris, 1944, 9). However true his conclusion, it is incomplete, even misleading.

Daniélou does not stress, as does Hermann Dörrie, the fundamental antithesis between Christianity (hence, the Fathers) and Hellenism. Dörrie warns us that the Platonism of late antiquity was not a “secular philosophy,” but a doctrine of salvation; indeed, another religion. To use the words of Henri Crouzel, “Philosophy, even pagan philosophy, is not a purely intellectual exercise, but involves a man’s whole way of life” (Origen. trans. by A.S. Worrall. San Francisco, 1989, p. 8). Naturally, the Church was hostile to it and early Christian theology was "christlicher Gegen-Platonismus”; and, while the Fathers used the language of Platonism, “die patristiche theologie in ihrer Substanz vom zeitgenössischen Platonismus beeinflusst nicht worden ist” (H. Dörrie, “Was ist spätantiker Platonismus? – überlegungen zur Grenzziehung zwischen Platonismus und Christentum,” Theologische Rundschau XXXVI (1971), 285–302). Unfortunately, Dörrie called “Father” virtually every Christian writer of the early Church (e.g., Clement and Origen of Alexandria, Tertullian, Evagrius Ponticus etc. and, of course, Augustine), a tolerance which obviously weakened his argument.
It is, nevertheless, in the light of such opinions that we find support for the argument that St Gregory of Nyssa did not “produce a Christian version of Greek philosophy” – and neither did the other Fathers – Professor Wolfson, et. al. notwithstanding. The Saint did not undertake to amalgamate Christianity and the “first principles” of Hellenism – especially not its idea of cyclical time, *anakyklosis*, the endless cycle of genesis and decay, which lay at the heart of the Greek *polis* and *paideia*. He had no plan to elevate “faith” to “knowledge,” or to escape the merciless consequences of human logic by allegory and “mystical flight.” Careful examination of his “Platonism” brings the result (taking into consideration the ontological bias of his thought) that the truths of Platonism were useful only in the exposition and defense of the Christian Faith. No doubt, too, he spoke to his times. If there is any fault in him, it lies in some of the measures he took to implement his purpose.

The aim of our inquiry into “the philosophy of St. Gregory of Nyssa,” then, is not only to challenge the ordinary thinking about him, but also to describe, as much as that is possible, the patristic understanding of pre-Christian history as a “preparation for the Gospel,” that is, regarding the truths of paganism as the enlightenment of the divine Logos in nature; and, therefore, the achievements of the noble pagan and the Chosen Jew not as “sources of” and “impetus for the development of Christian doctrine,” but rather, if we may repeat, as the groundwork for the reception of the Incarnation, God’s ultimate revelation of Himself in time; and, to be sure, as a means for the spread of the Gospel.

Also, some questions will be asked about the assumptions and methods of Western historiography – religious and profane – which ordinarily casts the Fathers into the role of pre-Scholastic metaphysicians or as corrupters of Christ’s “simple Gospel.” St Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, is, in effect, the means to that end. First, we must put him in patristic context, that is, in the *traditio* in the Fathers which itself requires reassessment. When we compare him to Plotinus, Philo and Origen, the essential difference between them will become apparent, whereby also some mistaken notions about St Gregory of Nyssa and the source of the Christian Faith to which he and the other Fathers gave uncommon witness.

Unlike Origen, who made a serious attempt to “hellenize Christianity,” “the philosophy of St Gregory of Nyssa” was consistent with the Apostolic Tradition. Unlike Philo the Jew, who “demythologized” the Genesis account and, consequently, the material universe, Gregory maintained the Biblical doctrine of creation and history, as his own cosmogony shows; and, unlike Plotinus, he did not proudly “seek what was too wonderful” for him (Sir. 3:21).
Perhaps this work will prove the beginning of a reappraisal of St Gregory and all the “theologians” and/or “philosophers” whom the Church calls her spokesmen.

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Chapter I. Introduction: who is a Father of the Church?

In his introduction to *A Handbook of Patrology*, J. Tixeront writes that “Christian literature is the name given to the collection of writings composed by Christian writers upon Christian subjects.” “There seems to be a tendency (among historians) to reduce the history of Ancient Christian literature to a history of the writings of the Fathers of the Church (Patrology).” “The title Father of the Church, which has its origin in the name ’Father’ given to bishops as early as the second century, was commonly used in the fifth century to designate the old ecclesiastical writers – ordinarily bishops – who died in the faith and in communion with the Church.”

“Ancient Christian Literature,” Tixeront continues, “is that of the early centuries of Christianity or Christian antiquity. Authors generally fix the limit at the death of St John of Damascus (c. 749) for the Greek Church, and of the death of St Gregory the Great (604) or, better, of Isidore of Seville (d. 636) for the Latin Church.” No reason is given for the limit placed on the history of the Greek Fathers, but for “the Latin Church,” the seventh century seems to be “the time when new elements, borrowed from the barbarians began considerably to modify the purity of the Latin genius.”

According to “modern theologians,” the title applies only to those writers who have the four qualifications of antiquity, orthodoxy of doctrine, holiness of life, and ecclesiastical sanction. “Practically, however,” it is given to many others who possess only the mark of antiquity. “No one would dream of eliminating from the list of the ’Fathers’ such men as Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, (St) Faustus of Riez, etc. Errors may have been laid to their charge, but these mar their works without making them more dangerous than useful; whilst they are wrong on a few points, there is in them much that is good. At all events, they eminently deserve the title of Ecclesiastical Writers.”

Thus, patrology “is the study of the life and works of the men designated by that name. As a science, then, it is part of the History of Ancient Christian Literature, since it excludes from the field of its labors both the canonical writings of the New Testament and all writings that are strictly and entirely heretical. On this latter point, however, most authors exercise a certain tolerance.” The knowledge of heretical works is very often useful, even necessary, Tixeront argues, for understanding the refutations of them written by the Fathers; therefore, most patrologies include a description of the principal ancient heresies. He intends to follow this method.¹

Tixeront’s “preliminary remarks” about the Fathers and the nature of
patrology is burdened with a host of gratuitous assumptions, largely the result of his Western religious and secular education. Before we can answer the question of this chapter and identify the Fathers of the Church, we need to examine Tixeront’s not untypical statements about “patrology.”

First, before we may describe the “literature” and the man who writes it as Christian, we must know what the word denotes. There is no doubt, especially if we ask the Fathers, that a “Christian” is one who belongs to “the one, holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.” Thus, a “Christian writer” is anyone, who being in communion with her, writes in her behalf; and Christian literature is the product of their efforts. He is one who “observes all things whatsoever” Christ “commanded” the Apostles to teach (Matt. 28:19–20); one who “stands fast and holds the traditions” which the Apostles bequeathed the Church (II Thess. 2:15).

The “given” of this present work is that “Christian” is the equivalent of “patristic” and “the Church” is “the Church of the Fathers.” Moreover, the Christian Faith to which they are true and inspired witnesses, did not “develop” in their hands, each theologian making a small contribution to the evolving whole. I will not hesitate to repeat that this Faith, “which in other ages was not made known (οὐκ ἐγνωπίσθη) unto the sons of men” was “revealed unto the holy apostles and prophets of the Spirit” in Christ (Eph. 3:5). The Fathers merely gave their individual testimonies to it, each with his own style, each with his own perception of the Church’s immediate needs; but none of them presumed to add or subtract from the Faith given “for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the Body of Christ” (Eph. 3:12).

In other words, if Christianity is “revealed religion,” “the great mystery of godliness,” then, God is the Source of it. What are these revealed teachings? The answer to this question defines the words “Christian” and “orthodox” – and “Father” – which, in fact, are all synonymous. The Scriptures distinguish between truth (orthodoxy) and falsehood in doctrine (heterodoxy), affirming thereby that advocates of the latter, whether apostates or sectarians, have no membership in the Church (Acts 24:14; I Cor. 11:19; Gal. 5:20; II Pet. 2:1). Hence, “Christian literature” is the exposition of the Christian Faith left by Christ to His Spirit-guided Apostles, whom He personally charged to deliver unadulterated to the nations.

“Therefore, we confess,” writes St Gregory of Nyssa, “the teaching of the Lord which He taught His disciples, delivering to them ’the Mystery of godliness’ as the foundation and the root of right and sound faith, denying, too, that we believe anything to be higher or safer than this tradition. The teaching of the Lord is summarized in the words, ’Go, teach all nations, baptizing them
in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ (Matt. 28: 19)” (Ep. ad. Seb. PG 46 1029D-1032A). In a word, “the holy and God-inspired Fathers” are the guardians of the Apostolic Tradition. “Remember the holy Fathers,” Gregory writes to his friend, Eustace, “which the grace of God has made us worthy to succeed. Remove not the boundaries established by our fathers; neither treat lightly what is ours for the sake of some more subtle proclamation, but walk strictly according to the ancient rule of faith, and the God of peace will strengthen you in both soul and body” (Ep. Ill ad Eust., PG 46 1024C).

Thus, if an “ancient writer” is to be called “Christian,” he must be a member of the Church and committed to the Apostolic Tradition; but a heretical writer, by virtue of his doctrinal innovations, can be called neither “Christian” nor “Father.” He cannot speak for the Church to which he no longer belongs and in whose Faith he no longer believes. Nevertheless, as Tixeront notes, the study of heretical works is often useful, “nay even necessary,” in understanding Christian orthodoxy by the forces which oppose it. If nothing else, the heretic occasioned the formulation of the divine Faith which “ought to be kept in the silent veneration of the heart” (St Hilary of Poitiers. De Trin. II, 2 PL 10 51).

Second, Tixeront is also correct that the title “Father” customarily is given to bishops, because they are “the teachers of the Faith,” and as the Orthodox Church sometimes describes her hierarchs, “icons of Christ”: the visible heads of their flocks, which are each, “in a particular place,” the Body of Christ. But, as we know, the universal Church has anointed many Christian writers beneath the rank of bishop as “Fathers of the Church,” such as Sts Justin Martyr, Macarius of Egypt, Hesychius of Jerusalem, Maximus the Confessor, Ephraim the Syrian, John of Damascus, John Cassian, etc. In truth, then, any man can be a Father of the Church if his life is characterized by holiness and his doctrine by apostolic orthodoxy.

Furthermore, since the Fathers of the Church are the supreme expositors of the Holy Scriptures, “the conscientious keepers of the apostolic traditions”; “God-mantled blessed Fathers” who were “enlightened by the Holy Spirit,” enabling them “to establish doctrine revealed from on high”\(^2\), then, it is unthinkable that the impious and the heretical may be found in that “blessed fraternity.” And, for that reason, too, it is quite “thinkable” that such men as Augustine of Hippo, Lancantius, Tertullian, Clement and Origen of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea, Didymus the Blind, Evagrius Ponticus, etc. are left off the list of the Fathers – whatever may have been their contribution to the defense and understanding of Christianity.
Tixeront insists that, although “errors have been laid to the charge of some writers, these mar their works without making them more dangerous than useful; while they are wrong on a few points, there is in them much that is good.” His defense of such writers might carry some validity, if under discussion were savants and philosophers and not “confessors of the faith,” “revealers of God,” who “have no private doctrine, none but the common Faith of the Catholic Church,” as St Maximus the Confessor declared. “They did not draw from their own resources, but learned these things from the Scriptures and charitably taught us... They spoke only by the grace of the Holy Spirit which entirely permeated them” (Rel. Mot., 6–9 PG 90 120CD; Op. theol. et. pol., 28 PG 91 320BC).

Again, the “errors” – in Greek πλάνη has the double meaning: going astray (i.e., error) and satanic delusion – which blemish the works of these “ecclesiastical writers,” the “few wrong points” which Tixeront seeks to trivialize, the Church considers “blasphemy”. The “ancient literature” expresses a very definite point of view concerning those who would defile “the Faith which the Lord gave, the Apostles preached and the Fathers preserved,” to quote St Athanasius (Ad Serap., I, 28 PG NPNF). Not without good purpose did St Paul exhort the Christians of Ephesus “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: there is one body, one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is above all and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:4–6).

Third, the “few wrong points” of these ancient theologians were indeed “dangerous,” a threat to the Apostolic Tradition, traditio veritatis, whose every “jot and tittle” is necessary to salvation; whose source is the Holy Spirit. “Ultimately,” writes Fr Florovsky, “tradition is a continuity of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, a continuity of Divine guidance and illumination”. Right belief, then, is not the discovery of some abstract truth; it is the saving verity which is delivered by the Holy Spirit, “the Spirit of Truth” (John 14:26; 16:13), Who abides in the Church, the New Israel, as His Temple. For the majority of Christians, at least, one who departs from the revealed truth and teaches others to do the same, is surely “more dangerous than useful.” These “ecclesiastical writers” profane the truth by which they might have been saved.

Shall we address Tatian and Tertullian who left the Church (whatever good may be found in their writings) as “God-mantled Fathers?” Is Origen, condemned by a general Council of the whole Church, a “spiritual trumpet” of Orthodoxy? Was the Hellenizer, Clement of Alexandria, a “confessor of the Faith,” with “no private doctrine, none but the common Faith of the Catholic
Church?” Perhaps, the semi-Arian, Eusebius of Caesarea, was a “revealer of God?” Is the Nestorian, Theodore of Mopsuestia, a teacher of true Faith? Indeed, is Augustine of Hippo, author of the _filioque_, predestination, irresistible grace, inherited guilt, etc. to be called “holy Father?” In the Orthodox Church, whatever their theological accomplishments and even their high moral character, such writers have no authority as Fathers and accounts for the lack of cultus, local or ecumenical, of temples called after them, traditional Orthodox Christians taking their names. Having distorted “the faith once delivered to the saints,” the Church refuses to honor them as doctors of the Faith.

Fourth, it is the Church, not modern theologians, which determines her spokesmen. Surely, if the Church is divided spiritually and doctrinally; if we count every “Christian writer” in the history of the Church as her doctor; if we may speak of an “Alexandrian or Antiochian heritage” or a “Cappadocian legacy” or a “Latin theological patrimony” – rather than “a flood of witnesses” to a universal and infallible faith, “a river of faith, flowing from the Throne of God”; and if it is true that every “ascetic and theologian,” eclectically, capriciously, picked ideas and principles from the treasury of pagan philosophy in order to construct and promote personal views of Christianity, then, the argument of this book is nonsense.

To be sure, if the Christian Tradition is no better than a “mosaic of human opinion,” there is no “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph. 4:4); and there is no “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church”; and, consequently, we have no way of knowing whether Christ has spoken to us or not. Even the New Covenant rests on the testimony of the Apostles. Moreover, if that Tradition has been continually adapted to the vagaries of the intellectual, social and political climate; or, if it may be judged by strangers and enemies, of what value is the Church and what meaning the struggle for salvation? Again, if there is no infallible and holy Tradition, how do we understand the Scriptures, since there is no way to authoritatively interpret them? If the truth cannot always be distinguished from error on the basis of an immutable “canon of faith,” whose origination and guarantee is the Holy Spirit (not fallible man), how shall we know the divine Plan by which we are saved? And if we have no certainty, it is as if God had never spoken to us.

But the Fathers professed “one Lord, one faith, one baptism,” “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church,” the guiding and protective presence of the Holy Spirit – for which reason there is a patristic consensus, East and West, on every doctrine delivered to the Church of God by Christ through His Apostles, in whatever form or language, or under whatever historical circumstances, the Catholic Faith may have been expressed. How else could St Polycarp have
reached an agreement with the Bishop of Rome on the date of Pascha? How else could his disciple, St Irenaeus, a Greek, have become bishop of Lyons in Gaul? How could St Firmilian of Caesarea have strengthened St Cyprian in his struggle with the Pope over the question of “heretical baptism” if they did not share a common Faith? St Athanasius fled to Rome where he inspired the organization of Western monasticism. The Italian hieromartyr, St Autonomus, became a bishop in Bithynia. St Jerome, the Westerner, built monasteries in Bethlehem. The Roman, St John Cassian, a disciple of St John Chrysostom, learned asceticism from the monks of the Egyptian thebaid, and built monasteries in Gaul.

St Hilary of Poitiers, St Martin of Tours, St Paulinus the Merciful have always been revered in the East. There is no Greek or Russian Menologia without the hagiography of St Ambrose of Milan. The Greek, St Theodore of Tarsus, became the first Archbishop of Canterbury. St Benedict the Italian was indebted to St Basil the Cappadocian for his monastic Rule. St Gregory the Great lived comfortably in the theological and ascetical atmosphere of Constantinople for six or seven years. Most of the Popes during the seventh century were Greeks. Hymns, such as Christos aneste, are found in the medieval Polish liturgy, etc.

The unity of the Fathers is an oneness of mind, which does not outlaw individual style and personal perception and insight. Historical and cultural circumstance often dictate approach and emphasis, exaggerated and wrongly formulated as they might sometimes be; but the “mind” is always the same, a “mind” based in spiritual knowledge (γνῶσις) and experience. The distinctive mark of patristic theology (part of the “Christian philosophy”) is θεωρία, not as the continuation of the pagan vita contemplativa, not as “philosophical speculation,” not as “self-induced meditation and pondering on this or that aspect of God’s majesty...,” but θεωρία as “divine vision.” To use the words of St Gregory the Theologian, the Fathers “theologized in the manner of the Apostles, not of Aristotle” – ἀλειψτικῶς, σοφικριστοφελικῶς (Horn., 23.12), because Christian teachings, although often explained plausibly, defended logically, and supplied with intellectual arguments, had originated in heaven and were received by men with “divine vision.”

In other words, the Fathers never conceived the beliefs of the Christian religion to be a subject for academic debate, quarrels in the market place, or casual after-dinner conversation; it does not belong on the college curriculum. Moreover, theology, contrary to Tixeront, is not a “science,” examined according a rational methods; and the truths of theology are not acquired by dialectics and speculation, not even assiduous research, but only by the askesis
of those initiated into “the Mystery of godliness,” that is, “only the pure in heart may see God.” There is no greater theologian in the Church than the Ever-Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, ἄειπάρθενος θεοτόκος. God allows only those who are becoming like Him, in body and soul, through grace to approach Him. The “noble spirits among the Gentiles” were enlightened in “preparation for the Gospel,” but their insights were meager and ultimately useless. Only Christ could proclaim, “And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

To know God presupposes “dispassion” (ἀπάθεια) – the corrupting desires of our flesh (σάρξ). Dispassion is a condition of soul and body acquired only in the life of Christ, in the Church, wherein dwells the Spirit of God. This Person of the Holy Trinity, ever present with the Son, dwells in the Temple of the Church, that He might be “acquired” by her members, to quote St Seraphim of Sarov. The Spirit of God brings the knowledge of God (θεογνῶσις), for He is the source of holiness. No wonder Christ declared, “Be ye holy even as your heavenly Father is holy... Be ye perfect even as God is perfect... Blessed are the pure in heart for they see God.” The Creator is holy and none may “know” Him, and none may share His eternity unless he is like Him, that is, a “god.”

With the process of our purification and renewal comes a new vision, the vision of “a new heaven and earth,” whose complete transfiguration has already begun in the Church. It is the vision of a creation whose head is Christ, the God-man, who is Himself “the Form of creation,” to borrow a phrase from St Gregory Palamas. On account of Him, the Uncreated and the created, the Invisible and the invisible, spirit and matter are linked “without confusion, division or separation.” The Incarnation is, among other things, the knowledge that the cosmos was patterned after Him Who became flesh for our salvation (deification). Put in other terms, the creation, imitating the Incarnation, is monodual, meaning that everything visible or material intrinsically and directly presupposes the superior spiritual world which upholds it: the two orders of creation united as the two natures in Christ: He is the living mediator between time and eternity.

Furthermore, if the creation imitates the Incarnate Lord, and He is “the alpha and the omega” (Rev. 1:11), then, we “know” the secret of history. The presence of Christ/Church signifies that the past and the future are mysteriously now, for He is the “second” or “last Adam” (ἔσχατος Ἀδάμ). Aside from becoming the anti-type of the first man He created, He is also the fulfillment of all the types and antitypes in ancient Israel (Moses, the Red Sea, Jericho, etc.); and among the Greeks and “barbarians” (e.g., the Logos, phoenix, etc.) prepared for His Advent in the last days (ἐπ’ ἔσχατον ἡμέρον τοῦτον), as
the Prophets declared. “In the fullness of time,” the revelation of a “mystery” which “in ages past was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed to His holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit” (Eph.3:5).

In His Person, too, the resurrected Christ was the type of every person who will share the Age to Come with Him. The Second Person of the Holy Trinity “was made flesh, and tabernacled Himself among us, and we behold His Glory, the Glory of the Only-Begotten Son” (John 1:14), the Glory which He shared with His Father and the Spirit, the Glory of the eternal Kingdom. This connection between time and eternity, established not only in the Redemption of Christ, but in His theanthropic Existence, is “the ground and pillar” of the Christian philosophia, the highest expression of which is monasticism; indeed, the monk stands on the very boundary of time and eternity. His vision of spiritual realities, the reward of his sanctity, is beyond the comprehension of the unbeliever and the uninitiated.

In other words, the resurrected Christ, alias the mysterion, is the “second man” (I Cor. 15:47), the “new Adam.” He is the “form” or eidos of the initiated. His “brethren,” the elect. But the “last” (ἔσχατος) is the “first” (πρότος), “the alpha and the omega, the beginning (ἀρχή) and the end (τέλος), says the Lord, which was, and which is to come, the Almighty (Rev. 1:8). The future is σήμερον, hodie, today: Christ is the nexus of what was and what will be. He is what His members will become. What has happened to Him is happening to them. No word better summarizes the divine Economy of the Lord than today.

Consequently, the Fathers viewed history in terms of this christological eschatology, a history to which the Church is central – she who is today “the Kingdom of God” (βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ), “the City of God” (πόλις τοῦ θεοῦ): by whose way of life (πολιτεία) and culture (παιδεία) its citizens, the Faithful, are formed into the “new man” where dwells “the Mystery of godliness”; and, therefore, whose home is not this world but the Age to Come. To quote St Macarius the Great of Egypt, “Christians belong to another age, children of the heavenly Adam, a new race, children of the Holy, shining brethren of Christ; even as their father, the heavenly shining Adam! To that city, that age, that power, they belong and not to this world. As the Lord Himself said, ‘you are not of this world, even as I am not of this world’” (Sp. Hom. XVI. 9 PG 34 618D-620A).

The Church is linked to the future, to the Age to Come – the Eighth Day, the everlasting Day, after the seven periods of current history expires – by the Mysteries: especially the Eucharist, sacramentum ogdoadis, the mysterium redemptoris, to use the words of Pope St Gregory the Great. The Sunday
Eucharist – the solemn ritualization of the *mysterion*, as Dom Odo Casel observed\(^\text{11}\) – is “the icon of the Age to Come,” “the eighth Day” (St Basil. De Spir. Sancto. 66 PG 32192B). For this reason, the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom asserts, “Thou hast done everything to bring us to Heaven and to confer on us Thy Kingdom which is to come” – καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν Σοῦ ἐχαρίσω τὴν μέλλουσαν (cf. Heb. 2:5)\(^\text{12}\).

If, then, the Church has denied the title, “Father,” to certain “Christian authors,” she has done so because of their conception of the mysterion or, put in other terms, of the Incarnation. Necessarily, a false Christology leads to a false understanding of the Church, the Sacraments, the Scriptures, history and the whole divine scheme of salvation\(^\text{13}\). The common life of the Body of Christ finally answers the question “Who is a Church Father?” And, somewhat ironically, renders the question unimportant. One comes to “know” that a Church Father is whoever the Holy Spirit anoints as her spokesman, whoever the consciousness of the Church recognizes as her champion. Undoubtedly, his doctrine and his piety will be apostolic; he will have ecclesiastical cultus, even if only locally. His errors, if any, are errors of logic, formal and lingual errors, implying no loss of the patristic *phronema*.

This brings us naturally to the final point of difference with Tixeront and “the modern theologians,” the question of the periodization of church history, in particular the so-called limit to the “age of the Fathers.” Although “the age of the Apostles” is unique, ending with the death of the last Apostle, St John the Theologian, there is no reason to close “the patristic epoch” at some specific time. The Orthodox Church has not. To end “the patristic era” with St Cyril of Alexandria or St John of Damascus in the East or with Pope St Gregory in the West is wholly arbitrary. Neither is there any reason to agree with the opinion that it has been succeeded by “the age of the schoolmen” which many interpret as an essential step forward. Of course, if such periodization implies a difference between the Fathers and the Schoolmen (“the Scholastics”), we concur\(^\text{14}\).

There is no “age of the Fathers”; or, better, the historical life of the Church is the “age of the Fathers” – hence, the names of St Photius the Great, St Symeon the New Theologian, St Gregory Palamas, St Gregory of Sinai, St Symeon of Thessalonica, St Gennadius Scholarius, St Nilus of Sora are found on the patristic roll; or, in modern times, St Nectarius of Aegina, Alexi Khomiakov, Archbishop Anthony Khrapovitsky, Fr Justin Popovich, Archbishop Hilarion Troitsky, etc. have been honored as spokesmen for the Church. Christ will raise up Fathers for His People until His Return. They will offer the same witness, because they have the “Mind of Christ.” Whatever the
language, whatever the style, whatever the challenge, the “mind” of the ancient, medieval and modern Fathers will never change, for “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).
Historically, philosophy (“love of wisdom”) in the West has been a rational enterprise, the human attempt to discover the truths (i.e., the correspondence of thought and being) concerning material phenomena, human nature (anthropology), conduct (ethics), community (politics) and creativity (aesthetics), as well as the tools (logic) and symbols (religion) by which that truth or truths may be apprehended (epistemology) and the way in which the results are communicated. Philosophy was a legacy of the Greeks: the manner in which questions are asked, the certainty the intellect desires.

The quest for “wisdom” took three forms in the ancient world: (1) as a description of the reality which lay behind phenomena: being, the unity of all things, their universal and necessary presupposition. Plato, therefore, styled the philosopher *synoptikos* – he who has apprehended τὸ ὅν presents a comprehensive and coherent vision of all things; and (2) philosophy as a system of thought which considers “the manifold of sense-experience” to be the source of all knowledge, with generalizations inductively drawn from it through observation and experimentation; and, finally (3), philosophy as an intellectual construct whose speculations depend wholly on the conclusions of the physical sciences, and consequently, deny the existence of rational knowledge beyond which the sciences have not determined to “exit.”

The “philosophy” of St Gregory and the other Fathers does not fall within the scope of these alternatives. Nevertheless, “the wisdom of the Greeks” was not without value as a preparation of the mind for higher forms of knowledge, including the “knowledge of God,” *theognosis*. Greek philosophy was especially useful in Christian apologetics and polemics. Unlike Augustine and the philosophical tradition which he spawned – notably, the thought of the medieval Latin Schools (Scholasticism) – the Fathers of the Church, Greek or Latin, Russian or Oriental, were not concerned with elevating “faith” (fides) to “reason” (ratio) whether by rational demonstration of the doctrinal truths of Christianity, or by using the divine truths of revealed religion as the “first principles” of their independent religious and philosophical speculations.

The Fathers used the word *philosophia* in four ways: (1) as “the totality of revealed truth which was expressed as “culture” or “education” (παιδεία, παιδενσις, cultura, educatio, etc.); (2) as “the Christian way of life” (πολιτεία, conversation) – sometimes called “the life of virtue” (ἀρετή), (3) the highest plateau being “asceticism,” “the summit of philosophy”; and, finally (4), the Fathers employed the word to identify the pagan schools Platonists,
Aristotelians, Stoics, Neo-Pythagoreans, the Cynics, etc. They described them as “the foreign philosophy,” “the profane wisdom” – ἕξω φιλοσοφία, externa sapientia.

This chapter offers a general description of Christian or patristic philosophia – and equally as important, of the Christian philosopher. The beginning of “wisdom” was the encounter with the “Mystery,” or “wisdom spoken in a mystery” – σοφία ἐν μυστηρίῳ (I Cor. 2:7) – and revealed to the human race in Christ. The “Mystery” was revealed, not discovered: apprehended in faith and holiness, not by ratiocination and dialectic. The philosophia was an attempt to communicate their encounter. The forms of communication were in the language and symbols of the Jew, in the language and symbols of the Greek and the Romans; and, indeed, as in the case of the African, Syriac or Russian Fathers, often in idiom of their milieu. So it was that the Apostle Paul wrote, “I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to barbarians: both to the wise and the unwise” (Rom. 1:14).
1. The Mystery

The God of Christianity is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: the holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit: one God, not the God of philosophers and savants. In Himself, announces St John Chrysostom, God is “inexpressible, the unthinkable God, the inapprehensible; Who quells the power of speech and transcends the grasp of every mortal thought; inaccessible to the angels, unbeheld by the Seraphim, unimaginined by the Cherubim, invisible to principalities and authorities and powers and, in a word, to all creation” (De Incomp. Dei., Ill, 1 PG 48 720). The Father is the “fount” or “source” of the Only-begotten Son and life-giving Spirit Who proceeds from Him alone. According to the Fathers, the Person of God the Father is the “cause” of the Only-begotten Son and the Holy Spirit.15

This is the Trinity in transcendence. In Its revelation to the world the Persons of the Trinity assume new relations to each other, that is to say, in God’s general dealings (προνία, providentia) and in His several covenants with men (οἰκονομία, dispensatio) the Spirit proceeds through the Son. Moreover, the Persons ordinarily act through Their uncreated Energies, which include Grace and Light (cf. I Cor. 12:6; I Tim. 6:16), about which St Gregory Palamas wrote so much. Among Western writers, little is said about them. Sometimes the Latin Fathers mention the mysterious Energies; calling them “Divine operations” with little comment about their nature save as they effect the life of man and Nature. To illustrate with the words of St Pope Gregory the Great, Longe ergo dissimiliter operatur dissimilia nunquam sibi dissimilis Deus, qui et ubique est, et ubique totus est (Hom in Ezech. II, v, 10 PL 76 991B).

The supreme revelation of God to His creation, however, is the “divine οἰκονομία” or “dispensatio of salvation,” His secret Plan to recover man and the universe from death and the devil. That Plan, revealed in Jesus Christ, St Paul described as the mysterion, “the mystery which hath been hidden from ages and from generations, but which is now made manifest to His saints” (Col. 1:26). “Unto me, who is less than the least of all the saints,” the Apostle writes, “is the grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to enlighten all men with the economy of the mystery which has been hidden in God, Who created all things in Christ” (Eph. 3:8–9). He created all things with His Wisdom, His Word, He with Whom God also has recreated them. Through that same Wisdom, “He has made known to us the Mystery of His Will, according to His good pleasure which He has purposed in Himself: that in the economy of the fullness of times, He might
gather together in one all things in Christ (είς οίκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν ἀνακεφαλαίωσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ), whether in the heavens or on the earth (Eph. 1:8–10).

The expression “divine economy” meant for the Fathers what it had for the Apostle Paul, whatever other implications they may have drawn from his doctrine. “Whenever St Paul considers the mystery of salvation through Christ,” writes St Cyril of Alexandria, “he refers to the recapitulation of all things in heaven and on earth, according to the good pleasure and Will of God the Father, in which there will be a universal reintegration and restoration of man to the condition which he enjoyed in the beginning, something he explains with the name anakephalaioseos” (Glap. in Gen. I, 1 PG 69 68C). Christ is the “One Man” into Whom all things saved will be gathered. The entire creation will become His Body, His Church, His Kingdom, in the Age to Come.

Put another way, Christ Himself is the mysterion (Col. 4:3), “even the hidden Wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory” (1 Cor. 2:7). The revelation of the mysterion, declares Pope St Leo the Great, is “the Mystery of our salvation” (sacramentum salutis nostrae), “the Mystery which was promised from the beginning, accomplished in the fulness of time, which will endure forever – sacramentum, ab initio promissum, in fine redditum, sine fine mansurum (Serm. XXII. 1 PG 54 193B). This is the Incarnation of the Lord. In the words of St John Chrysostom, “The economy is for our sakes... Consider this Mystery...’a great Mystery’ and a ’mystery of godliness... The Creator was seen in the flesh: God became Man and Man became God” (In Ep. ad I Tim., XI, 1 PG 62 554, 555).

What was the purpose? St Gregory the Theologian explained that “the new Mystery of the God-loving economy came for him who fell through disobedience” – καινὸν μυστήριον ἡπειρτῶν πεσόντων δι’ ἀπείθειαν ἐκφίλανθροπίας οἰκονομία (Ora. II, 24 PG 35 433A). The Incarnation was necessary in order to restore the creature to fellowship with the Creator, a fellowship lost by our first parents when they hearkened to the counsel of the devil. Thereafter, asserted St Paulinus of Nola, “the devil claimed the entire offspring of Adam through the laws of death” (Ep. XXIII, 15 NPNF)16. “The law of death followed the transgression,” wrote the great St Athanasius, “and from it there was no escape.” Man could not save himself, not by his own efforts, not without grace; so, “The Word of God Himself, Who also in the beginning had made all things out of nothing, He took a body, our body, as His own” (De Incarn. Verbi Dei., 6–8 PG 2512D–17C). “He blotted out the sentence of death by His death,” testifies St Hilary of Poitiers, “that by a new creation of our race He might sweep away the penalty of the former Law” (De Trin. I, 13
God became man, maintained St Valerian of Cimiez, in order to help us overcome “the devil, the author of death” – *diabolus, auctormortis* (Hom. XI, 2 PL 52 725D).

Thus, God, “mixed (ἔμιχθη, κατεμίχθη) with human life (βίος),” says St Gregory of Nyssa, and was able to accomplish for man what he could not do for himself (*Ora Catech.*, 28 PG 46 69BC). The Birth of Christ, observed St Peter Chrysologos, was an extraordinary occurrence, “not of reason, but of virtue; of authority, not nature; not something common, but unique; not human, but Divine.” Wherefore, “let philosophy cease its inane labor, for the Birth of Christ was of power, not necessity, honor not injury: the Mystery of godliness (*sacramentum pietatis*) was not to the detriment of God, rather for the restoration of man; to his salvation, not the diminution of the divine Substance” (*Serm. CXLVIII* PL 52 569B).

“God appeared in the form of a man to give us newness of life, eternal life,” wrote St Ignatius of Antioch (*Ep. ad Eph.* I, 19 FC). To receive that “life” – that is, salvation – human nature must become “partakers of Christ” (Heb. 3:14). The Lord is true Man joined mysteriously to the “true God“, one Person in two natures; He alone brings immortality, the immortality of Him “Who alone hath Immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light” (I Tim. 6:16): Christ “Who hath abolished death, and hath brought immortality” (II Tim 1:10). He alone, by His Death and Resurrection, allows “mortality to put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:53).

How is union with Christ and, therefore with God, possible? The universal answer of the Fathers is through Baptism, τὸ μυστικῶ λουτρῷ, which itself is an extension of “the Mystery of godliness”; the “mystical water” and the Holy Spirit (John 3:6) by which we are “reborn” as “new creatures” in Christ (Gal. 6:15), or, as St Cyril of Alexandria affirms, “we have become one body with Christ through this mystical blessing” – Σύσσωμοι μὲν γὰρ γεγόναμεν αὐτῷ δι᾽ εὐλογίας τῆς μυστικῆς (Glap. in Gen., I, 5 PG 69 29CD). The Church, which, as “one flesh” with Christ, is, consequently, “a great Mystery” (*Eph. 5:32*). Through her the initiated share in the Mystery, the Mystery of our Redemption; or to quote St Cyprian of Carthage – *dominicae passionis et nostrae redemptions sacramentum* (Ep. ad Pomp., LXII, 14 PL4 397B).

Necessarily, then, the Church, as the Body of Christ, partakes in whatever has befallen Christ, for the two live as one: the members of Christ confessing their identity with him, proclaiming, “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God Who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). In other words, the life of the Church is the extension of the
Incarnation. To be more precise, “the holy Church has two lives: one in time and the other in eternity,” as St Pope Gregory the Great testifies (In Ezech., II, 10 PL 76 1060) – for Christ is both human and Divine, temporal and eternal – and the Church, by virtue of the Resurrection, is already the Kingdom of the God. The Church reigns in her Lord even now by heavenly conversation – Regnum coelorum scilicet vocatur Ecclesia, cuius dum more Dominus ad superna sublevat, iam haec ipsa in Domino per coelestum conversationem regnat (Mor. XXXIII, 34 PG 76 695C).

These words only take us deeper into the Mystery, into the nature of the Church’s relationship with her Spouse. First, if those who are baptized into Christ are “crucified with Christ,” they also rise with Him, for it is written “that those have been planted together in the likeness of His death, shall be in the likeness of His resurrection” (Rom. 6:5). Thus, St Gregory of Nyssa referred to the Church as “the initiated People” – οἱ μύστης λαός (In Bapt. Christ., PG 46 580A), the People who have been incorporated into the Mystery of Christ. Secondly, as incorporated into Him, the “initiated,” are joined to His Body, His Spouse, the Church, our Mother. Thus, the resurrected Lord as “the head of the body, the Church: Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18) is “brother” to them who are her members, the “adopted” sons of God. He is “the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29), for the Church, according to the author of Hebrews, is “the general assembly of the firstborn, which are written in heaven... with Jesus the mediator of the new covenant” (Heb. 12:23–24).

St Paul calls Christ “the beginning” (Col. 1:18) which means, not only the “beginning” of the world, but of the “new creation.” He is a “new beginning.” He is the first New Creature, and His “brethren” also “new creatures” by virtue of their baptism into Him. In other terms, the Incarnate Lord is the “beginning” of a final world order, a “new creation” – in novissimus temporibus, to use the language of St Irenaeos (Adv. Haer., IV, xxxiii. 15 ANF). The creation is renewed in Him as the the typology of Noah and the Flood suggests. Listen to the words of St Justin Martyr,

...at the time of the flood, the mystery of man’s salvation had already been accomplished. For the righteous Noah together with the others who survived the flood, that is, his wife, his three sons and their wives, eight persons, were a type of that eighth day, the day on which Christ rose from the dead, for this was the eighth day (ὅγδόνης ἡμέρας)... Christ is the firstborn of all creation, and is become the beginning of a new race (ἐρχῇ πάλιν ἄλλου γένους), the race of those who on account of the mystery of the Cross are reborn of Him in water, faith and the wood” (Dial. cum Tryph., 138 PG 5 793AB).
Significant, too, is the fact that the story of Noah and the Flood is linked in patristic literature with Baptism, something already found in II Peter 2:4–9. In the sixth chapter of his epistle to the Romans, St Paul identified Baptism as the Mystery by which one enters the Church, as the Death and Resurrection of Christ. In order to stress the connection between Christ, the Church and the Eighth Day, Baptism of the Christian is commonly celebrated on Sunday, “the icon of the Age to Come”; and, if possible, on Pascha, the Sunday par excellence. Moreover, as the Flood was the destruction of the old world by water, so by the holy waters of Baptism, the Christian enters the “new creation” inaugurated by Christ, “the second Noah,” as St Ambrose called Him.

Christ is the beginning a new creation by His Resurrection: He is “the first” of his race as Adam, who brought mortality and corruption to his progeny, was “the first” of his race. “For He is considered the second Adam,” St Cyril of Alexandria tells us, “a certain root which sprouted a second humanity. In Christ all things are a new creation and we have been renewed unto a sanctified and incorruptible life” (Glaph. in Gen., 3 PG 69 172B). The “first man, Adam, was made a living soul which the last Adam (ἐσχατος Ἀδάμ) was made a life-giving spirit... the first of the earth, earthly; but the second Man heavenly” (I Cor. 15:46–47). The “second Man,” writes St Irenaeos, established Himself as the Head of all things visible and invisible, following the divine Plan to begin the recreation (deification) of the world even now, “so that what had been lost in Adam – namely, the image and likeness of God – might be recovered in Christ” (Adv. Haer. II, iii, 18).

Not unexpectedly, St Gregory of Nyssa placed the “recovery” of man in the Savior in the perspective of the Resurrection. As the purpose of the Incarnation was the redemption of the human race, “we assert also that His resurrection in the body is also the beginning of the restoration of man to the original grace,” that is, “just as death was introduced to all by a single person, Adam, and so passed to all men, similarly the resurrection of one Man, Christ, extends to all humanity.” In fact, “by means of His own power He fused together body and soul according to the condition of their first formation, even as on a more universal scale, He reunited the noetical and sensible natures, that is, the new beginning was extended to its furthestmost limits... This then is the Mystery of the divine economy of God with regard to death and of the dead” (Ora. Cat., 16 PG 45 52B).

We do not miss here the significance of Gregory’s words concerning the Christ as eschatos Adam, that is, as the first man, Adam, was created on the sixth day of the creation, whereby he was father of the human race; so the Lord Jesus was the “first man” and father of the new human race, born, according to...
patristic historiosophy, in the sixth age of history. He appeared in “the last days” of the Jewish dispensation. The resurrected Christ is also “father of the Age to Come” (Isa. 9:6). Thus, He was “the last man” in comparison to Adam who was “the first.” As St John the Theologian recorded, “Fear not, says the Lord, I am the first and the last. I am He Who lives, having once been dead” (Rev. 1:17). The words of Isaiah (44: 6) are confirmed – “Thus saith the God of Israel, and his redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.”

But Christ is also now. The Mystery is now: all the promises of the past, all the power and the glory of the future are realized now. As St Gregory the Theologian explained in his Oration on Pascha. “A Mystery has anointed me... Now I come in with a Mystery, bringing with me the Day... that He Who today rose from the dead may renew me also by His Spirit; and clothing me with the new man may give me His new creation as one begotten of God... as eagerly rising again with Him” (συνιστάμενον)19.
2. The Definition of Christian philosophy

According to Etienne Gilson, “a true philosophy, taken absolutely and in itself, owes all its truth to its rationality and to nothing other than its rationality: that is indisputable, and St Anselm and even St Augustine would be the first to admit it.”\(^{20}\) Of course, Gilson and his tradition – a tradition originating with Augustine and culminating in the *summae* of Thomas Aquinas – understand “philosophy” in the customary sense, whether united with or separated from “theology.” M.C. D’Arcy informs us that Augustine did “not admit the division of labour, the forced neutrality between philosophy and faith, desire and reason, which was adopted, for instance by St Thomas, and has become since so widely accepted.”\(^{21}\)

“At the same time, D’Arcy agrees with Gilson that “the constitution of this true (Christian) philosophy could not, in fact, be achieved without the aid of revelation, acting as an indispensable moral support to reason.”\(^{22}\) “The Christian philosopher does not use revelation as a premise in an argument,” writes D’Arcy, “but he is better off because faith enlightens his mind to seize the true meaning of what baffled him before.”\(^{23}\) In other words, the Faith, taking the Christian philosopher by the hand, puts him on the right road, even accompanying him in case he needs protection from error. The weakness of human reason, Augustine argued requires that it should not act alone; only faith can provide reason with the certitude it has always sought.

In truth, the Bishop of Hippo asserted, it is impossible to understand unless one believes. He quoted the Prophet Isaiah, saying, *Fides quaerit, intellectus invenit: propter quod au propheta* [Isa. 7:9 LXX]: *nisi credideritis non intelligetis* (DeTrin. XVII, 2 PL 42 1058). Philosophy, then, begins with the ultimate verities: the soul and God – a notion for which he was indebted to Platonism. Access to God on earth is made through the soul, not only because the human soul is the supreme value created in the world of time and space, but because God and the soul are analogous, that is, both are immaterial and immortal being; and, moreover, God has impressed the eternal Ideas (the Platonic *Ideai* or Forms) of His Knowledge, of His very Essence, on the mind of man, to the end that man may know Him.

The *raison d’etre* of Augustine’s philosophy is the soul’s knowledge of and fellowship with God. The means to that blessed hope, he says, is the Socratic “know thyself” (De Trin. X, iv, 6 PL 42 976–977). “And being thence admonished to return to myself,” he ruminates in his Confessions. “I entered even into my inward seif, Thou being my God: and able I was, for Thou were
become my Help. And I entered and beheld with the eye of my soul (such as it was) above the same eye of my soul, above my mind, the Light Unchangeable.”24 God is Truth, Wisdom, Happiness; and, therefore, philosophy, which has these as its object, is the supreme human endeavor.

But philosophy – to know by reason what he already held by faith, to prove by reason, as far as that was possible, what he held by faith – was a rational enterprise, and for its principles Augustine turned to the Greeks, especially Neo-Platonism. He believed them to be enlightened by God and their philosophy an approximation of the Christian truth. Augustine was distressed, of course, at their disdain for the idea of God incarnate. In any case, what first attracted him to these “noble philosophers” was the possibility of adapting the Platonic doctrine of Ideas to the Christian notion of Providence, an adaptation which allowed him to exit “Manichean difficulties,” “a saving solution in which God creates and disposes all things sweetly. He is truth and goodness and all that exists participates by reason of its being in the Ideas; therefore, creation and Providence are one.”25

This “saving solution” was only the beginning of Augustine’s dependence on Platonism. By it he resolved various intellectual questions. It was a trusty handmaiden to theology; indeed, a means for the development of a Christian world-view. But his rapprochement with Hellenism was bought with a price. The compromise brought in its wake a revision of the traditional conception of God. Unlike St Gregory of Nyssa and the other Fathers whose thinking presupposed God in Trinity, the first principle of Augustine’s theology (as also Plotinus, Philo, Aquinas, etc.) was the “simple unity” or unicity of God.

From this point of view, he was able, as he believed, to reconcile unity and trinity in God, a model of the Divine which generated his filioque – the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son in the cause of Their unity – a model of the Trinity adapted from the writings of “the Platonic Christian philosopher,” Marius Victorinus. A new theology wrought changes in his Christology and ecclesiology (their two dimensions associated only by created grace, κάτα χάριν), mystagogy (“dualism” of visible signum and Divine action), soteriology (predestination), charitology (created and “irresistible grace”), etc.; in a word, his Hellenism altered the Christian mysterion.26

The Bishop of Hippo did not apologize for his innovations. He claimed to have been correcting writers before him, completing their work27. He spoke of his efforts as “Christian philosophy,” but his conception of it is not patristic. Let us compare him to St Ambrose whom so many call Augustine’s teacher. To begin, the great Bishop of Milan felt no need to justify by reason what he held by faith. He sometimes, not unlike Augustine, described “philosophy” as “the
love of wisdom” (amor sapientiae); and also “the study of wisdom” (studium sapientiae), as “the teacher of virtue” (virtutis magistri), and as “the meditation on death” (meditationem mortis philosophiam esse dixerunt). But the same language did not mean the same understanding of “philosophy” nor the same value of Hellenism for the Christian Economy.

In his exegesis of the Song of Songs (5:7), Ambrose directs our attention to the “cloak” (pallium). In one sense, it is “the vestment of prudentia”, the cloak about which Christ spoke when He said, “If anyone will sue you at the law, and take away thy coat, give him your cloak also” (Matt. 5:40). The cloak is “the emblem of your philosophy” (insigne philosophie tuae), that is, “the Christian way of life; or, more generally, the cloak is the doctrine which Christ has given to the world through His Apostles” (De virg. VIII, 48 FC). In either case, Mardec insists, philosophia meant for St Ambrose realités chrétiennes, which the Greek Fathers designated, ἡ ἐμετέρα φιλοσοφία, ἡ κατὰ Χριστὸν φιλοσοφία.

Ambrose characterized pagan philosophy as aliena (Hexa. II, 7 PL 14 160D). Not unlike some Fathers, he believed that the truths found in Plato and the other Greek thinkers were lifted from holy Scriptures. More will be said about this matter later, but suffice it to say that Ambrose, unlike Augustine who assimilated Platonic doctrine in a personal way, judged Plato, Plotinus and Platonism according to the Church’s evaluation of human wisdom. Although he sometimes borrowed words and phrases from pagan writers whom he read, the Saint was careful to edit them. He was callously indifferent to the philosophical inspiration of Plato, Plotinus and Cicero. “C’est Plotin un jour, Cicero un autre jour!”

In the East, St John of Damascus summarized the attitude of the Greek Fathers towards “philosophy” in very much the same way. “Philosophy is a knowledge of things which are,” he testifies, “a knowledge of things which have being... the knowledge of things both Divine and human... of things visible and invisible.” “Philosophy is a study of death... physical death, which indicates the separation of the soul from the body... the other is voluntary death or disdain for this present life and aspiring for the Age to Come... Philosophy is making oneself like God. Now, we become like Him in wisdom... in true knowledge of the good... righteousness... fair judgment... holiness. Philosophy... is the love of wisdom; but true Wisdom is God. Therefore, the love of God is the true philosophy.”

In connection with this, St John also writes, the philosopher organizes his work into two parts: “contemplative” (θεωρητικόν) and “practical (πρακτικόν) philosophy.” The first concerns “the orderly disposition of knowledge”
(γνῶσις) – that is, the action of reason (organon ths vilosovias) upon the discoveries of gnosis – “for knowledge is the light of the rational soul” (ἡ γὰρ γνώσις φῶς ἡ ψυχῆς λογικῆς), including theology which covers the subjects of God (Who is “absolutely immaterial”) as are all things incorporeal and immaterial in relation to Him. On the other hand, “practical philosophy” encompasses primarily “the life of virtue, but also human public behavior” (Dial. I, 3 PG 94 529AD).

The latter has a far broader sense than interpersonal relations, social justice or legal and business ethics; it implies the whole life of the Christian community (ἐκκλησία) which, initially, was equated only with local congregations and their bishops; and, later, when the Church and the Empire mated to form romanum imperium christiana, also equated with the Christian city. In both instances, the purpose of the community or city was the salvation of its members: to educate them in the life of wisdom or deifying virtue. Sometimes that involved the study of profane letters which, in the case of St Athanasius, as St Gregory the Theologian tells us, meant that he “was raised from the first in the divine practices and teachings (παιδεύμασι), while briefly studying pagan literature and philosophy that he might not be completely unskilled in those subjects or unlearned in those matters he was prepared to despise” (Ora XXI, 6 PG 35 1088D).

At the heart of the Christian paideia were the divine Scriptures. “The door whereby the Saints enter into the knowledge of truth,” affirms St Isaac the Syrian, “is the teaching of the holy Scriptures” (Book of Grace, 2:2 HTM). In his Contra Eunomius, St Gregory of Nyssa confessed that the Scriptures are given by inspiration of God (θεόπνευστος) and, as the Apostle Paul says, “is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (πρὸς παιδείαν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ).” Consequently, it is not ordinary literature; not everyone can read its meaning, especially not the Will of God hidden in the Scriptures, “as under a veil,” so to speak. For this reason, the Apostle says that not everyone can read the Scriptures, for some have ‘a veil over their hearts,’ and, therefore, they cannot gaze upon the glory of the spiritual law; hence, the words of the Apostle, ‘the letter kills, the spirit gives life,’ meaning that even the literal sense, if not rightly understood, has an effect contrary to the life promised by the Spirit – the heavenly perfection of virtue in dispassion.”

With these last words, the Bishop of Nyssa disclosed another aspect of Christian philosophy. Although the acquisition of “dispassion” (άπάθεια) or “perfection” or “holiness” is the spiritual state which all Christians are obliged to acquire, “dispassion” is more readily won in the monastery, where “quiet”
and “solitude” may be found. Monasticism, therefore, is not “flight from the world,” nor some “delusion that heaven can be purchased by self-torture in this life” (C. Bigg); but “spiritual warfare,” a more intense struggle with the flesh and the devil that brings fulfillment of the Lord’s command, “Be ye perfect... Be ye holy.” In the monastery, the male or female monk anxiously seek their divine end initiated by Baptism. They live now as if already in the Age to Come. The monastery, an eschatological community, is evidence that the future is present among us.

In his or her own self-restoration, the monk welcomes eternity into time and a part of the world is already transformed. The sanctification of the ascetic comes by Grace, the Uncreated Grace, which brings the “holy one” even now to share in the Glory of God, in the Uncreated Light with which Moses was blessed, which the disciples experienced on Mt Tabor, which filled with Light the cell of St Symeon the New Theologian: the future is now, and the monastery or the cave is a city on the border between visible and the invisible, between what is and what will be, between what is everlasting and transient. It is the city on the edge of tomorrow. For this reason only, monasticism is the highest plateau of the Christian politeia; and, to be sure, monasticism is “other-worldly,” with a “contempt for the world,” indeed; but not a contempt for God’s creation but for the “age,” for the Zeitgeist. His otherwordliness is eschatological.

Not without purpose, then, did so many Fathers write about the monastic life: the life of dispassion as the life of “virginity.” St Methodius of Olympus referred to Christ as “the Virgin.” Adam was a “virgin,” the type of Him Who was to come; and the Lord anticipated the Age to Come where men and women, being like the angels, are neither given nor taken in marriage (Luke 20:34–38). Moreover, the absence of marriage (and, therefore, sex) in the Age to Come does not imply an absence of gender, not anymore than it did in Paradise before the Fall. The first man and woman lived in innocence and obedience, even as the angels. Paradise was a type of the Age to Come.

“The fact that primordial man was in a like condition with the angels,” St Gregory wrote, “is shown by the restoration of that state... in the resurrection” (De Horn. opif. 17 PG 44 189B). From this fact, the Bishop of Nyssa was not the only Father to conclude that the life of virginity is even now the life of angels. Therefore, he called “the life of virginity a certain image of the blessedness of the Age to Come, a life which in itself bears already so many signs of the things stored up for us there.” It brings to an end the corruption which existed from the time of man’s Fall (De Virg. 13 PG 46 377C). Also, Gregory alluded to “virginity” as “the life according to philosophy” – τοῦ κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν βιοῦ
(De Virg. pref. PG 46317B) which leads not only to deifying virtue but elevates “the spirit to the vision of higher things” – περὶ τῶν ύψηλῶν θεωρία τὸν νοῦν (Vita s. Macr., PG 46 977C).

Thus, the motive of this “philosophy” (and let us not dwell on the Platonic metaphor) “is to provide the soul with wings, to rescue it from the world and to give it to God,” proclaimed St Gregory the Theologian, “and to guard His Image within us, if it abides; to take the soul by the hand, if it is in danger; to restore it, if ruined; or to make Christ to dwell in the heart by the Spirit – to deify it; in short to endow heavenly blessedness on those who are the companions of the heavenly hosts” (Ora. II, 22 PG 35 432A). Such is the task of monasticism, the apex of the Christian philosophy: a task, incidentally, which belongs to every member of Christ, each according to his ability; a task which the very essence of the Christian polis and paideia.

Thus, the Christian “city” and its “culture” to prepare its citizens for “the heavenly Jerusalem” which, according to St Basil the Great, the Church on earth is a dimension – Εἴτε σὺ τῇ ἄνω Ἱεροσαλὴμ εἴτε τῇ κάτω ἐκκλησίᾳ τὸ τῆς Πόλεως ἐφάρμασε ὄνομα. Moreover, the historical Church is His tabernacle. Christ dwells in the midst of the city, giving her stability, sending out on every side providential rays to the limits of the world – καὶ διὰ τοῦ σκηνώματος τούτου, ὃ κατεσκήνωσεν ὁ θεὸς, ἐν μέσῳ δὲ αὐτῆς ἐγένετο χαριζόμενος αὐτῇ τὸ μὴ σαλεύεσθαι. Ἔν μέσῳ ἐστι τῆς πόλεως ὁ θεός, ἰσας πανταχόθεν ἐπὶ τὰ πέρατα τοῦ κύκλου τῆς ἐαυτοῦ προνοίας ἀκτίνας ἐκπέμπων (Hom. in Ps. XLV. 5 PG 29 424BC, 425A).

Hence, the Christian city, such as Rome or Constantinople or holy Moscow, mirrored the Kingdom to Come. The Emperor, symbol of Christ’s humanity, and the Patriarch, symbol of His Divinity, governed the Empire with philanthropia. Its universities and temples (e.g., Hagia Sophia) reflected in their art the Age to Come. Necessarily, the Christian city was opposed to the pagan city and its unredeemed culture, which pretended to reflect the ideal state of nature, sought to make men rational not holy. The antithesis between Christianity and Hellenism (and the world) lay precisely in their conceptions of the city and the service education rendered to it, especially “philosophy,” whose chief labor was the defense and exposition of the city’s faith35.
According to Augustine, the Christian philosopher may be defined as the man in whom exists, “so far as that may be in a man, the clearest possible knowledge of man himself and of God, together with a mode of life consistent with such knowledge” (De Util. Cred. xii, 27 NPNF). His “philosophizing” begins with an examination of the immortal soul, its origin, powers and natural end (De vera Rel. XXXIX, 72 NPNF), which leads logically to inquiries about truth and falsehood, universal doubt and the Good, i.e., God. Consequently, “Christian philosophy” rests on two pillars: God and the soul. The Existence of the first is proven, mainly by the power of the soul, that is, by virtue of its immateriality, its ability to transcend the realm of phenomena, of the mind to probe the higher realm of necessary and changeless truths, of super-sensible reality, or, more precisely, the intelligible world, the world of Ideas, towards which the highest activities of reason are directed.

“It is at this point, then, that the connection between the principal objects of Augustine’s philosophy becomes apparent,” observes Professor R. P. Russell. “For in some mysterious manner God is the ‘Intelligible light’ (‘Sol. I, 3) Who by reason of His existence and intelligibility is the source of man’s intellectual activity.” God illumines all things and without Him nothing can be known. The human ability to know and the things it knows depends on the amount of light our moral and intellectual condition permits to enter. The knowledge of eternal things is sapientia, and of temporal things, scientia (De Trin. XII, iii, 2 PL 42 999).

Augustine’s analysis of knowledge reached its zenith in his doctrine of religious contemplation, his “mysticism,” as some prefer to call it. Thus, the Christian philosopher is ultimately a “mystic,” for it is the lover of wisdom who “with the flash of one trembling glance... has arrived at THAT WHICH IS...,” seeing “Thy invisible things by the things that are made...” The object of the mystic’s intuition is the immutable and timeless Absolute, a clear perception of the supreme Principle, God, with immediacy, that is, with nothing to block “the knowledge of the higher by the lower,” an idea the Bishop of Hippo took from Plotinus (οὐδὲν μεταξύ [Enneads V, i. 6]). The Christian “philosopher” or “mystic” knows with a certainty, in this vision, however brief it may be, that God is the very urgrund of life and knowledge. There is no greater experience, no higher sapientia than the visio Dei, whether in this world or in the next.

Augustine claimed to have developed every aspect of his “Christian
philosophy” (whose end is the vision of God) in terms of the great virtues of the soul about which St Paul spoke in I Cor. 13: the soul’s “faith” by which it is fixed on what begets the soul’s happiness; of “hope” by which it trusts that it will see, if only reason’s gaze is persistent and intense; and “love” by which it yearns to see and enjoy God (Sol. I, vi, 13). The realization of this end, so it seems, is possible only for the predestined. In truth, in the last years, even after the publication of the Retractions, the notion of predestination consumed almost all his time and became, in effect, the cornerstone of his religion, and, by inference, his “philosophy” and “mysticism,” for the vision of God would seem to have been reserved for the predestined, the “elect.”

We have here the general principles of Augustine’s philosophy. They tell us, among other things, that he was not the climax of the patristic tradition, but the founder of another: a religio-philosophical tradition which will eventually redirect the course of Western culture and contribute mightily to the separation of East and West. We may admire Augustine’s genius and devotion, but his use of pagan sources, his rationalism and subjectivism, demands a generous stretch of the imagination to call his philosophy patristic, the accepted Western view of his status notwithstanding.

Though there seems to be much in common between Augustine and the Fathers, Greek as well as Latin, much in their concepts and vocabulary; even access to the same Tradition, but the common mind is missing. For example, Augustine would have agreed with St Gregory the Theologian that the Christian philosopher is “the true philosopher,” because he loves “the true wisdom,” the love of “the true wisdom,” Jesus Christ. But here the similarity ends. The philosopher, Augustine said, pursued the understanding of God and the soul by rational means. What is held by “faith” ought to be certified by “reason” wherever possible, for “reason” gives the greater certainty.

The motive for the philosophical enterprise is the life of virtue. The Fathers would have agreed. Significant, however, is the fact that Augustine produced no work on virginity, or the lives of monastics, as did Ambrose, Jerome, John Cassian and Pope Gregory the Great. Also, looking at his schools in North Africa and Cassisiacum (near Milan), it is difficult to think of them as monasteries (they were rather study centers); and, consequently, to consider him and his students as ascetic strugglers for perfection through purging the heart of the passions.

According to the patristic tradition, the greatest Christian philosophers have always been the ascetics. St Gregory the Theologian tells us, for example, that there is no better model of the Christian philosopher than St Basil the Great (In Laud. Basil. Magn., 13–14 PG 36 512A) “His pursuit of philosophy
was breaking with the world, and with the help of God, he became as one above with those below, and gaining, where all things are flowing, things which are stable and permanent” (512C). He “martyrs” himself to the Truth, meaning that he has adapted himself to “the heavenly life of virginity, in which every sense is subdued, every passion overcomes” (62, 577A). In the exercise of his reason, he does not imitate “the fashion of the stranger” (the pagan Greek) who seeks disciples with his “bastard wisdom” (τῆς νόθου σοφία) and his “bewitching eloquence” (Ora. XXV, 2 PG 35 1200B). In a word, Christian “philosophy” is the practice of true religion (εὐσέβεια).

Human reason, regenerated by the Mystery of Baptism and true faith, becomes a function of the Christian life: guardian of the “heart” (kardia, cor), instrument of spiritual knowledge (gnosis), servant of divine love (agape).

Not everyone can be a “Christian philosopher,” not everyone may “philosophize about God.” “The subject is not so cheap or low,” declared St Gregory the Theologian. “Let me add, not always, nor to all, but only sometimes, with some, among a few. Only those who have been examined and made strides in theoría, and before this have been purified, or, at the very least are being purified in body and soul” (Ora. XXVII, i, 2 PG 36 13CD). If a Christian wishes, nevertheless, to “philosophize,” let him “philosophize about the world and worlds, concerning matter, souls, rational natures, what is better and what is worse, the resurrection, judgment, about reward, and the passions of Christ.” He will do well to “attack the Platonic Ideas, and the transmigrations and courses of our souls, and reminiscences, the unlively loves of the soul for lovely bodies... For in these subjects to miss the mark is not useless, and to miss it not dangerous” (Theol. Ora. I, 10 PG 36 24B–25A).

Evidently, the Christian philosopher may operate on two levels – the level of transcendence, theologically, “philosophizing about God,” that is, revealed wisdom, revealed by His Energies if not by His Person; and, at the level of the divine economy, which invites regenerate reason, dianoia, to examine and discourse upon various subjects, such as the Platonic Ideas, metempsychosis, anamnesis, etc. These are of interest the Christian philosopher largely in his refutation of error and his defense of the divine truth. To those Fathers who won their fame as teachers of Christian theology (i.e., discourse on God in Himself, triadology), the Church has often given the title “theologian,” while those who have treated topics dealing with the benefits of Providence and the divine Economy were often called “philosophers.” The difference between the “theologian” and the “philosopher” is not always clear, for “the knowledge of God,” theognosis, is dependent upon the divine Action, which takes more than one form.
Curious to some is the fact that, although St Gregory the Theologian referred to St Basil the Great as the “model of the Christian philosopher,” he did not gain the cognomen, “philosopher,” as did St Justin Martyr, St Heron of Alexandria (about whom St Gregory the Theologian wrote a eulogy), St Leontius of the St Sabbas Monastery in Jerusalem, or St Constantine (Cyril) who, together with his brother, St Methodius, was “the Apostle to the Slavs.” Remarkable, too, is the fact that St Gregory of Nyssa himself was never called “the Philosopher,” as proficient as he was in both secular and sacred thought. Yet, it cannot be said that Sts Justin, Heron, Leontius and Constantine were well known for their treatises on theology; and, perhaps, they were styled “philosopher” because they were trained in secular wisdom, or even because they put their “philosophical learning” so well to the service of Christianity. St Gregory of Nyssa was, in fact, both a “philosopher” and a “theologian” but won no titles.

Interesting, too, is the fact that none of the Latin Fathers were described as “theologian” or “philosopher,” albeit they discoursed with holy zeal on God and His activity among men. St Hilary of Poitiers wrote De Trinitate and St Ambrose his De Spiritu Sancto ad Gratianum, while St Leo the Great presented his christological Tome to the Fourth Ecumenical Council (451) and St Gregory the Great composed the Moralium Libri which were later translated into Greek. The Latins, not unlike the other Fathers, usually mixed theology with philosophy, the doctrine of God with the Church’s teachings about Christ, the Mother of God, the Sacraments, piety and salvation, etc. The knowledge and experience of these matters all derived from the Word Himself, the Wisdom of God, Who guided and sustained the race of men before and after His Incarnation. He it was Who “enlightened every man that comes into the world” (John 1:9), Who spoke to them about God, He Who became flesh and revealed to the sons of men the plan of salvation hidden from before the ages.

Put another way, “theology” and “philosophy” are rooted in the eternal Wisdom of God, whether as Providence or as Savior. The distinction between “theology” and “philosophy” is not keen or, more precisely, they are as distinct and/or related as the two natures in Christ. Thus, from the Christian perspective, “philosophy” and “theology” are intertwined without “confusion or separation,” whose ultimate purpose is the salvation of man. Knowledge which does not, sooner or later, lead to love of God and fellowship with Him is vain and, as the history of modern philosophy clearly shows, repetitive, contradictory and self-destructive.

Salvation begins with faith and repentance, and, therefore, the study of “philosophy” and “theology” begins with the spiritual imperative: Γνῶθι
σεαυτόν which does not mean, as it did for Augustine, that knowledge of the soul leads to the knowledge of God because they share the same being analogously; but rather, as St John of Damascus said, self-knowledge is “to know whether light or darkness is in you” and, also, “to understand your nature, your mortal body, your immortal soul, that your life is dual” – γνῶθι σεαυτόν τὴν φύσιν ὃτι θυμόν μὲν σοὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀθάνατος δ᾿ ἐ ψυχή, καὶ ὃτι διπλή τις ἡμῶν ἤ ζωή (Sacr. Par., 5, 2 PG 95 1297D).

This self-knowledge brings the awareness of human sin and limitation, human need and human dependence on God; and, not so incidentally, that same awareness informs him that, whatever ability with things profound and divine, or his purpose for venturing into the spiritual arena, “he must guard the tradition we have received from the Fathers, keeping it always sure and immoveable,” wrote St Gregory of Nyssa, “always seeking from the Lord the means to defend the Faith” (Quod non s. tr. dii, PG 45 117B). St Photius the Great further cautioned that “the grace of the Mystery is comprehended not by those who have a curious turn of mind and are shamelessly inquisitive, since the knowledge of piety is revealed to those who approach it with an unaffected [dispassionate] mind and thoughts unaccustomed to evil. For if a man subjects to scrutiny what is above scrutiny, instead of following the divine writings, he will grievously tear asunder those very rules of nature by which he is so elated, and will altogether forsake the laws of theology, which he offends and will be driven far afield by his laborious speculations” (On Palm Sunday, horn. VIII, Ar II 417 Mango).

What carries him astray is his “darkened mind,” darkened by the sin of Adam which brought death and corruption, a death and corruption no more forcefully seen than in the power of the passions – pride, hate, lust, anger, gluttony, etc. – enervating, with the help of the devil, the “inward man,” the “heart” or “spirit” (καρδία, νοῦς), and, consequently, his “knowledge” of the truth, love of things spiritual, and the power to contemplate and commune with God which, according to St Justin Martyr, is the end of “philosophy.” Many have failed to discover the nature of philosophy and the reason it was given to the human race, Justin explains, “Otherwise there would be neither Platonist, nor Stoic, nor Peripatetic, nor Sceptic, nor Pythagoreans. The study of philosophy is one and the same... the knowledge (ἐπίγνωσις) and the study (ἐπιστήμη) of what exists,” and most especially God (Dial. cum Tryph., 2 PG 6 476B).

Hence, to be a “true philosopher” or “theologian” (which, to some degree, is possible for all Christians, to anyone united to the incarnate Wisdom through Baptism), requires “purification” (κάθαρσις) from the passions. Without
mortification of our fallen human nature, all knowledge is uncertain, inadequate and even harmful. Without regeneration in Christ, man and his knowledge remain in an unnatural condition. His mind is always susceptible to “delusion,” πλάνη. He cannot penetrate the spiritual realm and without grace; indeed, he cannot become rational according to nature, that is, as he was in the beginning,” declares St Gregory Sinaitica, “not unless he has first been purified and become dispassionate” (De Quiet., 10 PG 150959A–960A).

Apatheia, dispassion, is the state of the “new creature,” the creature whose end is the “knowledge” of truth and, what is the same thing, “participation in the divine Nature.” But the “fallen man,” the man subject to the devil, death and the passions cannot “theorize” or “philosophize” about God nor enter into His Presence. There is no Mediator between God and Man, save “the Wisdom of God” and “Light of the world.” He is a “philosopher” that loves that Wisdom Who “in these last days” became incarnate to release the human race held captive by the devil.
4. The Wisdom of God and the Wisdom of the Age

When St Paul wrote in his first Corinthians 1:21 that “by wisdom the world knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe,” he was not condemning all “wisdom.” The revelation of the mysterion is a revelation of wisdom, sophia. Thus, the “foolishness” he preached was “the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Jesus Christ in Whom are hidden all the treasures of σοφία and γνώσις” (Col. 2:3). The “folly” was that these treasures should be revealed in the Crucified God and store in His Kingdom which has no end.

The Kingdom, which is to come, is already present in the Church, the beginning of a “new order” which, although in the world, belongs to the future age (St John Chrysostom, In Illud. vid. Dom., IV, 2 PG 52 121). The Church is now “the City of God,” the Kingdom, albeit imperfectly. She is the icon and entelechy of “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22), “the Jerusalem which is above, free and the mother of us all” (Gal. 4:26); indeed, “a city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:10). The Scriptures of the New Testament contrast her to the world, itself a “city,” “Babylon, the mother of harlots,” the regnum diaboli, whose master is the devil, “the god of this age.”

Each city has its own culture, the wisdom which is its foundation. Profane wisdom, the wisdom of “the city of man,” is essentially destructive; but the wisdom of the Church is the wisdom of those who received not “the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God that we might know not the things which man’s wisdom devises, but what the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with the spiritual. But the natural man, receiving not the Spirit of God, considers those things to be foolish: neither can he know them (καὶ οὐ δύναται γνῶναι), for they are spiritually discerned... we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:11f.), that is, “Wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). The “natural man” has a wholly “carnal” (or “unnatural”) understanding of himself and his destiny, an understanding formed by the city in which he lives and learns; so, likewise, the Church, “the city of God,” which prepares her citizens by the divine wisdom not for an earthly destiny, but for the “heavenly Jerusalem.”

As already mentioned, the opposition of the Church to Hellenism was the necessary opposition between these two cities – “the city of God” whose Lord is God, and “the city of man” which is precisely regnum diaboli. The Church has never objected, not in the first instance, to every element of the world’s wisdom – certainly not that which paralleled her own and which, as her Fathers
taught, contained truths planted by Providence in nature that might lead the nations to faith in Christ, the true Wisdom – but to the polis whose wisdom (especially “the delusion or πλάνη of heathen philosophy”) whose paideia or system of education was used to form the “natural man.” The pagan city was the Church’s competitor in the race to win men’s souls.

So it is that St Basil the Great, addressing a group of young monks, cautioned them concerning worldly learning. The holy Scriptures, he said, offer “sacred and mystical knowledge” (τῶν ἱερῶν καὶ ἀπορρήτων παιδευμάτων), which the world has not been given and cannot know. Nevertheless, God has left some knowledge of Himself always and everywhere which explains why “Moses, that most illustrious man whose name for wisdom is greatest among all men, first trained his mind in learning (μάθημα) of the Egyptians, and then proceeded to the contemplation of Him Who is; and like him, although later, the wise Daniel in Babylonia initially acquired the wisdom of the Chaldeans and then applied himself to the divine teachings.” Such “wisdom” is a “preparation” (προπαιδεύσις) to the saving “wisdom” of Christianity.

Therefore, “my children, we do not conceive this human life to be the object of our concern, nor do we consider anything which contributes only to this life of any value,” for such learning has no regenerative power. St Basil maintained that even the most profound “worldly study” can do no more than sharpen the mind for the reception of that higher knowledge. At the same time, even the smallest “contribution” to our salvation by “the external wisdom” must be appreciated. We pursue it, he says, as the bee, taking only the honey from the flower and leaving the rest as “a snare of the devil.” It is always safer, Basil advises, to read those pagan books which praise virtue and condemn vice (Ad Adol. de Leg. Gentil., II, 6–8 LC). His general conclusion about Greek philosophy is not only that it is “vain,” “subtle,” “contradictory” and “artificial,” but rendered totally superfluous by “the truth of the Gospels which are enfranchised in the oikoumene...” (Hom. in Ps. XXXIII, 7 PG 29 341 A).44

The pagan city, the city of the fallen creation, is the rival of the Church, the Christian city. The profane philosophy, which lay at the heart of the pagan paideia, contains much good; but also is a temptation, and the spiritually untutored and unlearned Christian, is easily seduced by it. No wonder, exclaimed St Hilary of Poitiers (De Trin. II, 20 NPNF), that St Paul warned, “Take heed that you not be led astray by philosophy, through the vain deceit, after the tradition of men, according to the rudiments of the world, and not after Jesus Christ” (Col. 2:8–10). Hilary continues,

...we must restrain and instruct the simple, lest they be spoiled by these teachers. For since God can do all things, and in His Wisdom can do all things


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wisely – for neither is His purpose without power nor His power without purpose – it behooves those who proclaim Christ to the world, to face its impious and faulty doctrines with the knowledge imparted by the wise Omnipotence, according to the words of the blessed Apostle, ‘For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down reasonings (λογισμούς) and every high thing, which is exalted against the knowledge (γνωσεως) of God’ (II Cor. 10:4–5). The Apostle did not leave us a faith which is simple and devoid of reason; for although a simple faith may be necessary for salvation, yet, unless that faith is trained by teaching, it will have no secure retreat... Therefore, we must beat down the insolent arguments raised against God, and destroy the fastness of false reasoning, crushing the cunning of impious minds with weapons not carnal but spiritual, not with earthly learning but heavenly wisdom; so that in proportion as divine things differ from human, so the heavenly philosophy surpasses its worldly rival.

It would be easy to fill a book with such quotes from the Fathers, but redundancy would not make the point any clearer than has St Hilary. First, judging from this paragraph, there is no reason to agree with Philo that “philosophical reason” is the “handmaiden of religion” (Preliminary Studies. 7 LC), if only because “philosophy” and “reason” are not understood in the same way by Christians as by Philo and the Greeks: say rather that a regenerated reason is a function of the new life in Christ, with the grace to discern the truth, even as the reason of the Greeks cum sui is a function of the old life in Adam, which has little power to discern it.45

But why, in this paragraph, does St Hilary call for overcoming “faulty and impious doctrines,” the λογισμούς of the philosophers, with the divine γνώσις, while refusing to condemn the wisdom of the world in toto? may not “external wisdom” serve the Church? He says in another place (De Trin. V, 1 NPNF) that unregenerate or “natural” reason is “fettered by its limitations, its philosophy confined by the very weakness of natural reason.” If it has found any truth it is “the gift of God” (Ibid., I, 2), the same God Who has become incarnate for our salvation; therefore, unbelievers do not supply the Church with truths she lacks, but her “philosophers” rather recovers from them what was given to them by Providence for a purpose, a purpose which has now been fulfilled.

Second, St Hilary spoke of the “warfare” (cf. Ephesians 6), the “rivalry” between the “worldly wisdom,” whose origin is man, and “the heavenly philosophy” which was revealed by God. The wisdom of God, he says, is “mighty through God for the pulling down of strong holds,” meaning her weapons are spiritual, the weapons of grace and love. The “foreign wisdom” is
“carnal,” expounded by sinful men who are unable to change the heart, for they themselves are slaves to their appetites. Third, although the wisdom of God is not ultimately fought at the level of human argument, of dialectic, even the “simple Christian” must be “trained in the teaching” of the Faith, if only as a refuge from the “vain deceit” of men. The true religion is not without rational power.

More than one Father has pointed out that the Christian man is more rational than the unbeliever, because the latter belongs to the race of Adam while the Christian is a “new creature.” He receives the divine and saving wisdom in the divine life, politeia, which produces not only virtue but reveals the truth and how it is to be expressed. The natural man, still subject to the devil through death, fails to achieve his ideals, even though he has organized himself to promote them. In other words, the Church Fathers rejected not so much any particular doctrine of Greek philosophy (which may contain some truth), but their ontological presuppositions upon which the worldly city stands: its hybris, the formation of the rational man whose destiny was achieved by his own will and genius, disdainful of the divine mysterion, of the divine Will, of the true God and His Plan of salvation.
Chapter III. St Gregory and Plotinus: God and the One

William Ralph Inge (1860–1954), Dean of London’s St Paul Cathedral, delivered his famous Gifford Lectures (1917–1918) at St Andrew, in which he uttered words typical of, if not axiomatic for, modern scholarship. He contended that the later history of Platonism “must be sought not among the crumbling ruins of Hellenism, but within the Christian Church. If it is true, as Eunapius said, ’the fire still burns on the altars of Plotinus,’ it is because “the theology of the Church is Neoplatonic,” which develops from “the Fourth Gospel” into “Pauline Platonism.” Of course, “the Galilean Gospel, as it proceeded from the lips of Christ, was doubtless unaffected by Greek philosophy’; Inge continues, “it is essentially the consummation of the Jewish prophetic religion.”

Inge is not alone in overestimating the importance of Plotinus to Christian thought, as this chapter’s treatment of St Gregory of Nyssa’s Christian trinitarianism will show. Moreover, although not critical to our argument, one could maintain, not without profit, that Christianity may have had influence on Plotinus, a subject about which not much has been written. Of greater interest, however, is the fact that there is a necessary opposition between Neo-Platonism and Christianity on a fundamental level. From the beginning, the Church had claimed the uniqueness of the Christian Revelation: the Incarnation of a divine Person, “a stumbling-block to the Jews, and folly to the Greeks” (I Cor. 1:23).

One may wonder, then, for what is Christianity indebted to Neo-Platonism? The “trinity” of Plotinus is not the Trinity of the Scriptures and the Fathers. For this Greek, the Divine is impersonal, and remote, which externalizes into equally loveless, relentless manifestations. Christianity declares that God so loved the world that He took flesh and dwelt among us. He became true man, as He was true God. He came to die for His creation, to destroy death by His death, whereby He restored it to fellowship with Himself. Again, Plotinus as a metaphysician was a “dynamic pantheist,” as Eduard Zeller called him. The Church teaches a mitigated dualism, a “monodualism,” if you will, creation ex nihilo. The Scriptures and the Fathers have a different understanding of time and history than Neo-Platonism. They have another ethic and spirituality. The similarities between Christianity and Neo-Platonism are surface, and need not
imply “filching.” This fact this chapter will show by contrasting the theology of Plotinus with the Christian theology of St Gregory of Nyssa and the other Fathers.
1. St Gregory and Plotinus

Historians, in general, argue that the evidence indicates a substantial influence of Plotinus on the philosophia of St Gregory of Nyssa (and other Fathers). They are certain that Christian theology would not be what it is without him. At the same time, they have been unable to determine the extent to which the Fathers are indebted to him, albeit often satisfied, so it would seem, with verbal and phraseological similarities. Scholarship commonly fails to account for the difference in “general context and structure” while also refusing to recognize anything sui generis about the doctrine which St Gregory offers.

Moreover, we do not know how widely diffused was the knowledge of Plotinus’ works in late antiquity. They seemed to have been circulated in separate treatises, even fragments, rather than in the organized manner imposed upon them by his disciple and biographer, Prophyry. That the Enneads, in one form or another, were known in the East is suggested by the extensive extracts found in Eusebius of Caesarea’s Praeparatio Evangelica. An educated man, such as St Gregory, it is assumed must have read as much of Plotinus’ writings as was available to him.

His works show familiarity with the Plotinus and Greeks, but it cannot be said that, like Augustine, St Gregory cited them as theological authorities. Thus, he produced no filioque nor a model of the Trinity consistent with it. The Bishop of Hippo referred to “the Platonists” as philosophi nobilissimi, “who had the wit to perceive that the human soul, immortal, rational and intellectual, as it is, cannot be happy except by partaking of the light of that God by whom both itself and the world were made”; and with them, he adds, “we have no dispute on these matters.” In fact, he believed that “certain books of the the Platonists were inspired” (Conf. VII. 13; Pusey). Many centuries later, Thomas Aquinas will anoint Aristotle the Philosopher; thus, in discussing whether truth resides only in the intellect, Thomas exclaims, “On the contrary, the Philosopher says, ’The true and the false reside not in things, but in the intellect’” (Metaph., V, 4 [1027b 25]). Thomas Aquinas is the acme of the Augustinian tradition.

That tradition is syncretic, which explains its departure from the patristic mind. In all fairness to Augustine and Aquinas, it would be false to casually refer to them and their “mysticism” as Neo-Platonist. They were neither monists nor pantheists; and, although Augustine, Aquinas cum sui, like Plotinus, defined philosophy in terms of “God and the soul,” their peculiar
conception of God, conceived as “most perfect being,” *ens realissimum,* is not the One of Plotinus. And although they wrongly pictured the soul as wholly spiritual, it was not for them an indirect emanation from the One. It would seem almost gratuitous to mention the bodily resurrection, sin and grace, ideas to which Augustine and Aquinas were devoted, but for which Plotinus had no sympathy.

Ultimately, Plotinus was a rationalist. He may have consistently maintained that the spiritual realm is shrouded in mystery and “the One” Itself beyond thought and being; but, at the same time, he declared that the truly rational man, “the virtuous man” is able, dialectically, to ascend to that realm where multiplicity vanishes and the ineffable and unitive reality is apprehended by a supreme intuition (ὑπέρουσίος, as he calls it in Enneads VI. viii, 16) – an experience which he delineated in some detail. On the other hand, St Gregory of Nyssa, often accused of the same rationalism (along with Augustine and Aquinas), had far less to say about the blessed Trinity. Not because he failed to discover more, but because there was nothing revealed on those matters about which he was silent. In other words, Gregory’s taciturnity is explained by the negative theology of the Church and by the fact that the Christian’s “ascent to God,” has no summit, no “beatific vision”; only an incessant striving (epektasis) which continues even in the Ages to Come. Flights of speculative fancy were constrained by the Apostolic Tradition, especially the holy Scriptures, if not simply his own piety.

The Saint was a “mystic,” but not in the genre of Plotinus, nor even Augustine. Gregory’s ontology was “chalcedonian,” that is, “Christological” after the model of the Incarnation – the existence of a created, visible and physical world, united to and reflecting an unseen and superior spiritual reality, everything sustained by the uncreated Grace or Energies of God. For Plotinus, “the sensible world” is not created ex nihilo. It is the product of the uncreated, “primal matter” (“the Last,” ἔσχατος). The Soul, which is the emanation from the Nous (World of Ideas), is responsible for moulding “primal matter” or “chaos” into the physical universe.

If, indeed, St Gregory read the Enneads, and if he took anything from them, it was not the ontology of Plotinus; and, therefore, it was not his triadology. *Hypostasis* is a Person in the thinking of St Gregory; it is not for Plotinus. Thus, there is nothing in common between the Father and the One, the Son and the Nous, between the Holy Spirit and Neo-Platonic World-Soul. The “philosophers” differ radically in their “faith” and “culture.”
2. The Paideia of St Gregory of Nyssa

Nothing was more important to ancient Greeks and Romans than the city (πόλις, civitas), founded by the gods and governed by their laws and customs. Its purpose was “the good life,” a life achieved through “education” or “culture.” By means of the paideia, the polis hoped to create the man of virtue, the truly rational man; to mold the character of its citizens, rather than merely extend the range of their knowledge: the polis was a way of life (politeia). “The good man,” then, was image of “the good polis,” and, therefore, pleasing to the gods, as Aristotle said (Pol. X, 8 1178b24).

The “good city” was the precondition of the “good man.” As the “chief business” of the polis was to mold the character of its citizen, polites, cives, into the best kind of man “according to nature”; and it was the responsibility of the citizen to embody, perpetuate and even contribute to the ideals of the polis. In the words of Isocrates, it is the “cultured man” (most especially the philosopher) who “has helped to discover and establish all these institutions which have educated us (ἡμᾶς ἐπαίδευσε) and made us gentle towards one another” (Paneg., 47 LC). Consequently, the “cultured man,” or more precisely, “the virtuous man” is “dearest to the gods,” on account of whose blessings he is “presumably the happiest man; so that in this way, too, the philosopher will be more happy than any man,” Aristotle declared (Eth. X, 8 1178b30). “His happiness,” he wrote in another place, “consists first in the rule of the soul over the body, of reason over the passions” (Pol. 1, 5 1254b9). In this state, he is good, for he is the man who “lives nobly and vanquishes his enemies” (Plato, Laws I, 641c). Of course, the same мάй be said for the good polis of which the virtuous man is microcosm.

Plato’s confidence concerning the “cultured” or philosophical” or “virtuous man” rested on the conviction that wisdom is divine and education is primarily a “training” in “the divinest thing, most truly our own,” the soul, which resembles Him, God, Who gives wisdom and, in the end, whose Being the soul will imitate and whose life it will share (Laws IV, 716e). Plato’s Republic was likewise an attempt to show the way in which the principles of wisdom might become “political,” and, thereby, giving to both the city and its citizens the goal of life – the “good (rational) life” – a quest which exhals the nation and ennobles its citizens.

The Greeks understood very well that the achievement of this goal depended upon wisdom, σοφία. Wisdom was ultimately “first principles and causes,” rationally discerned, rationally applied. In the case of Plato, “true
wisdom” was the knowledge of the eternal Ideas, a knowledge he, the “lover of wisdom,” the philosopher, uncovers and contemplates – not, incidentally, without divine assistance. The fruit of his labors, he brings to earth, to his fellows, as the Promethean fire, to the polis, whether a city like Athens or a city like Platonopolis.

When the Fathers of the Church looked upon the classical city and the culture (at the heart of which lay philosophia), they found it and the wisdom by which to erect it, radically flawed. Firstly, the pagan city, the city of man, was subject to “the god of the age,” regnum diaboli; indeed, its gods were demons (Ps. 95:5 LXX). Secondly, the truth of its sophia was vouchsafed them by the divine Logos, the Word of God in creation. That wisdom was never intended to be final; and the years of pagan impiety have perverted it. In any case, the Word has become flesh and dwelt among us; therefore, the wisdom of the ancients, having served its purpose, is now superfluous.

The Church isἡ πόλις τοῦ θεοῦ,ἡ Ἑκκλησία (St Gregory of Nyssa, Con. Eun. XII PG 45 912C), the city which the classical polis, as the city of the Jews, was the anticipation and anti-type. For this very reason, Hellenism (i.e., the pagan city and its wisdom) was antithetical to the Church whose purpose was not the “good life” according to reason, but the restoration of the “image of God” in man through revealed wisdom and grace, changing his sinful nature, abolishing the power of death and the devil over him and the world, all in preparation for heavenly citizenship.

On account of the antithesis between the Church and Hellenism, one must not infer that Christians could find nothing of value in the Greek wisdom. Riddled with error and perversity, it was not without truth – truth planted everywhere in the world by the very Logos Who created it, guides it, and became incarnate for its salvation. It was this truth which the Saints of old discovered in the cultures which flourished before the Birth of Christ, observed St Gregory. Thus, Daniel among the Babylonians and Moses among the Egyptians were “educated in the foreign culture” – καὶ παιδευθεὶς τὴν ἕξωθεν παίδευσιν (De Vit. Moy. PG 44 305A) – training the mind and preparing the soul for spiritual knowledge (γνῶσις) and, ultimately, a vision of the Divine (θεωρία).

Nevertheless, the sophia of those civilizations, whatever good they possessed, could not produce righteousness. Commenting on it, St Gregory compared “the foreign culture” to Pharaoh's barren daughter.

Truly barren is the foreign culture (ἕξωθεν παίδευσις, which is always in labor but never giving birth. What palpable fruits does this philosophy produce despite so long a time in labor? Full of wind it always miscarries, never coming
St Gregory would not dismiss “the foreign culture” and “philosophy” out of hand, although he urges caution. For there are certain things derived from the foreign culture which ought not to be ignored, inasmuch as the “woman” does give birth to virtue (τῆς τεκνογονίαν ἀρετῆς); indeed, the ethical and natural philosophy (φυσικὴ φιλοσοφία) may become at times a comrade, friend and companion in life to the higher way of existence, provided that no foreign pollution (τοῦ ἄλλοφύλου μιάσματος) is conceived by this union. Thus, he allowed the Christian to “borrow with discrimination” (ὑποδέζασθαι) from “the foreign culture” and other “strangers to the faith” (οἱ κατὰ τὴν πίστιν ἄλλοφύλοι), aside from ethics and physics, geometry, astronomy, dialectics “and whatever else will be useful to beautify the divine temple of the Mystery with the riches of reason” – τὸν θείον τοῦ μυστηρίου ναὸν διὰ τοῦ λογικοῦ πλούτου λαλλωπισθῆναι (De Vit. Moy. PG 44 360BC).

At the same time, reason, however helpful, is not the source of Christian doctrine. Discussing the soul in De anima et resurrectione (PG 46 49B–52B), he wrote,

If the foreign philosophy – which treats the subject most skillfully – provided a truly sufficient demonstration, our discourse on the soul would be superfluous. But it envisions the soul according to its own authority, while we have no such freedom, inasmuch as we take the holy Scriptures as the measure and law of all doctrine (κανόνι παντὸς δόγματος καὶ νόμῳ κεκρημένοι τῇ ἁγίᾳ Γραφῇ). Necessarily, then, we recognize and receive only that which falls within the scope of those writings.

Disdaining, therefore, the Platonic chariot and the team of horses, each pulling at its own pace, and the charioteer, by whose lead Plato allegorically philosophized about the soul; and, after him, Aristotle who, according to his empirical method, determined that the soul was mortal...

Rejecting all those before and after him in time, whether they philosophized in verse or prose, the validity of our discourse depends upon the God-inspired Scriptures which decrees that we discount any notion which denies that the soul reflects the divine Nature. Their pages tell us that the soul was created in the likeness of God and whatever is alien to God is beyond the limit of the soul. Nothing can be different from it and yet preserve its divine likeness. If, therefore, we cannot envision (συνθεωρεῖται) it in its relation to the divine Nature, neither may we reasonably infer that the soul is similar to It.

Later in the same discourse, he asserted once more that reason, using the method of “syllogism” (συλλογισμός), is useful in the defense of the faith, but
“more trustworthy are the sacred Scriptures” (πιστότερον εἶναι ὑμολογεῖται τὸ διὰ τῶν ἱερῶν τῆς Γραφῆς), especially those which record the teachings of the Gospel (New Testament). The Scriptures necessarily inform and seal (σφρανίσ) all of Gregory’s opinions – χρή τικαὶ τῆς τοῦ Ἑυαγγελίου διδασκαλίας πρὸς τὴν τοῦ δόγματος τούτου συνηγορίαν (De an.et res. PG 46 64B). The Scriptures are not ordinary literature; they are inspired by God; they stand at the heart of the Christian paideia; and, hence, their special place in the worship of the Christian community. Not everyone can understand their meaning, especially when one mines them for their spiritual treasure, which is the primary source of instruction in the “life of virtue.”

The Scriptures are God-inspired (θεόπνευστος), or in the words of the Apostle Paul, ’Every Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for teaching (διδασκαλία), for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness’ (πρὸς παιδείαν τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ) [II Tim. 3:16]. But it is not within human reach to discover and utilize these things; rather God’s Will lies hidden in the Scriptures, as under a veil, so to speak, with truths sometimes hidden under legislation or history (νομοθεσίας τινος ἡ ἱστορίας), for which reason the Apostle tells us that not everyone can read the Scriptures, for they have a ‘veil over their hearts’ and, therefore, cannot gaze upon the glory of the spiritual law. Thus, the Apostle says, ’the letter kills, the spirit gives life’, meaning that even the literal sense, if not rightly understood, has an effect contrary to the life promised by the Spirit – the perfection of virtue through dispassion” – τὸ τέλειον τῆς ἄρετῆς ἐν ἀπαθείᾳ (Con. Eun. VII PG 45 744A).

Not without good purpose, then, is it written that the “word of God” is a “two-edged sword.” Consequently, misunderstood or perverted, it becomes “a doctrine of death” (θανάτου διδασκαλία). Thus, a “veil” covers the Scriptures against “the carnal-minded.” But those who by grace belong to “the initiated people,” “initiated” into the Mysteries of God, and who “turn to the contemplation (θεωρίαν) of truth with faith, to them is revealed the glory which underlies the letter” (ἀνακαλύπτεσθαι τὴν ἐγκειμένην δόξαν τῷ γράμματι). Success depends on a “higher understanding (διὰ τῆς ψυχικοῦ κατανοήσεως) or, as the Apostle writes, There must first be a turning to the Lord, and then the veil will be taken away; now the Lord is the Spirit’ (II Cor. 3:16–17)” (Ibid).

St Gregory is grateful “to our most godly bishop and father (Basil) as the only one having educated us on such things” – τοῦ θεοσεβατάτου ἐπισκόπου καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν ἐπεμνήσθημεν ὡς μόνον δυνατῶς ἔχοντο τὰ παύσιμα παϊδεύειν (De Virg., PG 46 320A) – “who by God’s grace has been raised up as a protector of the life of virtue” – παρὰ τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ χάριτος εἰς προστασίαν τῆς
κατ’ ἀρετὴν πολιτείας ἀναδεικνυμένοις (De Virg. PG 46 320B). The highest plateau of the Christian politeia or “life according to philosophy” (τοῦ κάτα φιλοσοφίαν βίου), “the life according to Christ” (εἰς τὴν κάτα Χριστὸν πολιτείαν) is, of course, the state of virginity, the state of holiness, the state which imitates the divine Nature, a state alone which gives us the power to “see” God (De Vit. Moy. PG 46 368D).

Also, the Bishop of Nyssa was aware that many pagan Greek ideas and ideals which compose the Greek paideia often parallel, if not parody, the teachings of Christianity – the result of God’s “education of the human race” – which, for the most part, refuses to efficaciously utilize the “gift of philosophy” which He has given the world by His “philanthropic economy.” They have despoiled the truth with the “the teachings of demons” (De Virg. VIII PG 46 353B) which have wrought not only impiety, but an “untrained and unproductive intellect” (ἀπαιδεύτω καὶ μικροφυεῖ διανοία). Consequently, the Greeks have been unable to achieve a true and useful concept of the Deity.

Christians, on the other hand, “having been taught to behold the Godhead according to Scriptures, are trained (ἐπαιδεύθημεν) to think all created existence as external to the uncreated Nature and to worship and reverence Him alone” (Con. Eun. Ill PG 45 681D). In these “sacred writings” are found the secrets of God’s Plan for the salvation of His creation. Indeed, that Plan had been provisioned (something hidden from the Gentiles) by the Prophets, such as Isaiah who, “knowing more precisely the evangelical ’Mystery of godliness’ (τὸ τῆς εὐαγγλικῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον), foretold the marvelous sign concerning the Virgin, and the good tidings about the birth of the Church, plainly showing us the name of the Son” (Con. Eun. Ill PG 45 684A).

In other words, Christians do not attribute their salvation to mere human effort. By the grace of God are we saved, but not grace alone (synergy). “As the grace of God will not visit the souls of those who evade salvation,” wrote St Gregory, “so likewise the power of human virtue is not in itself sufficient for the uplifting of souls to the state of perfection” (De inst. Christ. PG 46 289C). Necessarily, then, “we receive into our creed only those conceptions which are consistent with the divine utterances” – τὰ πρόφορα τῆς θείας φωνῆς νοήματα τῇ πίστει δεχόμεθα (Con. Eun. V PG 45 712C). It is “the ignorance of the uneducated or untrained” (ἀμάθειαν τῶν ἀπαιδεύτων) who, like Eunomius, dispute with the Tradition of the Church. Gregory, on the contrary, spoke “out of my shepherd’s authority, that is, from ecclesiastical dogma” – ἕκ τοῦ μειμενικοῦ καδοῦ τουτέστιν ἕκ τῶν ἐκκλησιαστικῶν δογμάτων (Con. Eun. XII PG 45 912D) – the training in which he gained from St Basil the Great.

His brother taught Gregory that the purpose of the virtuous life was “to be...
known by God and to become His friend” – γνωσθῆναι τε ὑπὸ φίλον γενέσθαι αὐτοῦ (De Vit. Moy. PG 44 429B). He was alluding, of course, to “the life of virginity,” the monastic way, “the higher philosophy” (ὑψυλοτέρας φιλοσοφίας) whose own logic implied a contempt for the logic of the world – τῆς περὶ τοῦς ἔξωθεν τῶν λόγων ἀσχολίας ύπερδῶν (Vita s. Mac. PG46 972D, 977B), a “logic” which must inevitably fail, since it has no power to take the soul beyond the senses. Whatever its truths, they are always mixed with error and vice, having not the faith nor grace of Christ to realize their lofty aspirations. The Gentiles have not been “educated” by divine things through the grace of God’s mysteries (In Can. Cant. VIII PG 44 948B).

These “mysteries of faith” refer, one ought not forget, to something to which the cognitive truths of Christianity likewise express. All things in the Church are but aspects of “the great Mystery” which, as the Fathers taught, is ritualized in her worship. The supreme act of worship is the Eucharist, “the Mystery of Mysteries,” the “unbloody” participation in Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross. The divine Liturgy is not only the actualization of the unity of the heavenly and earthly Church, the anticipated realization of the Kingdom of God, but that without which there could be no Christian politeia.

St Gregory described “liturgical prayer” as “intimacy with God, a vision of the invisible” – προσευχὴ θεοῦ ὁμολία τῶν ἀοράτων θεωρία (De Ora. Dorn. PG 44 1124B). It is also an “education,”

Liturgical prayer is the guardian of sobriety, the education (παιδαγωγία) of the temperament, moderation of vanity, forgetting of injuries, extinction of envy, destroyer of injustice; it amends impiety. Liturgical prayer strengthens the body and family ties; it brings order to the city (πόλεως εὐνομία), gives power to the Empire (βασιλείας), victory in war, security in peace, reconciles enemies, preserves allies. Liturgical prayer is the seal of virginity, fidelity in marriage (Loc. cit).

The Liturgy is the nexus between the higher (monasticism) and lower plateaus of ecclesial life. Even anchorites, such as St Mary of Egypt, would not leave this life without the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is the very heart of Christianity – most especially the Paschal Liturgy – whose implications are far wider than spiritual fortification of the Faithful; it is more than the end towards which all the Sacraments are ordained. The Eucharist is, as we have seen, the ritualization of the Christian mysterion; but even more, it implies, relative to the mysterion, a unique concept of time and history, which involves the eschatological future and the typological past. It is the realization of the divine Plan which has unfolded through history and which reaches its fulfillment in Christ and His Cross, as St
Basil the Great tells in the prayers of the anaphora in his Liturgy. Not without good reason, then, did St Gregory link the “wonder” (θαῦμα) of the Resurrection of Christ – the sign of the Cross’ victory – with the creation of man or tie, as he does in five festal sermons, the Lord’s Resurrection with Jonah and the whale. More will be said on this subject in another chapter.

Unlike St Gregory, who believed that “through liturgical prayer the Lord changes human nature into something divine” (De Ora Dom. V PG 441172A), Plotinus never viewed communal worship as essential to the achievement of salvation, i.e., deification. Many of his followers, nevertheless, were practitioners of theurgical and magical rites, religious practices not without their historiosophical implications. In view of the commentaries on the Chaldean Oracles and the practice of Chaldean rites, one must assume that, as the Christian liturgies were part of the Church’s world-view, so the worship of the Neo-Platonists was intrinsic to their life and thought. Thus, too, the Neo-Platonic autosoteric “philosophy” – hence, its historiosophy – was necessarily a rival to the Christocentric philosophia of the Church. Whatever its form, the Neo-Platonic paideia and, therefore, politeia, was naturally antagonistic to Christianity. And since the liturgies of their religions differed in content and purpose, it would seem that the “mystical theologies” which they presupposed were likewise opposed.
3. “Mystical Theology”: A Comparison

According to the Fathers, “theology” is the knowledge of God, the Trinity, revealed to the Church and, as part of His Plan of salvation, implanted in the hearts of all men the knowledge of Himself, as St John of Damascus tells us (De Fid. Orth. I. 1). In other terms, for the Fathers, theology was not a science nor did it bear the inclusive sense which has found currency in modern times. Albeit not without their theological presuppositions, Christology, ecclesiology, mystagogy, Mariology, etc., are not “theology,” but belong to another field of study and contemplation.

The term “economy” is applied to them. The Fathers used the word in many ways, but especially for the Incarnation, God’s Plan for the salvation of His creation, the revelation of “the mystery of His Will,” that “in the fullness of time, He might gather together in one all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:9–10). This Plan, unfolding throughout history, involved His action in time and space, sometimes directly, sometimes by His uncreated Energies or Operations. Providence is an extension of the greater economy whereby He willed that all men should be saved and come to be saved in Christ Jesus. Providence, sometimes called “the economy of nature” is the means by which certain truths concerning God and His activity in the world could be known by the Gentiles.

As St Gregory writes in the sixth homily of the Beatitudes, we may know that God exists inferentially (αναγωγικῶς) through a study of the universe; and, also, through introspection, that is, contemplation (θεωρία) of the soul wherein God has left a knowledge (gnosis) of Himself. Of course, neither way guaranteed success – not without faith (πίστις, fides) and grace (χάρις, gratia) – for the devil may lead the passionate man to deny the existence of God, or to ignore the path of virtue. Not only St Gregory, but all the Fathers warn us, that the evil one may drive the knowledge of God from our heart, or substitute a false conception of the Deity in our hearts, such as polytheism or pantheism. He may mingle falsehood with the truth, as the philosophies of the Greeks demonstrates.

Plotinus and the Neo-Platonists – and much of the philosophy contemporary to them – probably found attractive certain aspects of Christian theology and economy, but, having no conception of a personal Deity, they could not understand the Church’s teaching on Providence as expression of His loving care. For Plotinus, writes Bréhier, “Providence consists only in the fact that matter receives through the very nature of things, the maximum amount of being of which it is capable of receiving.” And although he might have
agreed with St Gregory that “the end of the virtuous life is to become like God” – ὄτι τέλος τοῦ κατ᾽ ἀρετὴν βίου ἐστιν ἡ πρός τὸ θεῖον θεωσίν (Beat. I PG 44 1200C) – Plotinus excluded the body from “salvation” and, also, had no idea of what Christians called “sin” (the impediment to salvation) and “grace” (without which there was no deification); and although union with “the One” was achieved only by persistent striving through higher and higher levels of being (or what St Gregory called the way of perfection, ἐπεκτάσις), Plotinus placed his trust in himself, or more precisely, in the power of dialectic.

Plotinian dialectic is much more than a method of argument; it is the type of life which allows the wisdom-loving mind to move beyond the sensible realm, to ascend to the noetical or, intelligible world where, it is carried by the Intellectual-Principle or Nous, the dwelling-place of the Platonic Ideas (Enn. I, iii, 4; Mck) – step by step, to the supreme, unbegotten, impassible, unconditional Source of all things. Consequently, dialectic is not the same as philosophy. “It is the precious part of philosophy: we must not think of it as the mere tool of the metaphysician,” he explained. “Dialectic does not consist of bare rules and theories; it deals with verities. Existences are, as it were, material to it, or, at least, it proceeds methodically towards Existences, and possesses itself, at the one step, of the notions and of the realities.” Our reasoning faculties employ the discoveries of dialectic in the exposition of wisdom, “having the task of presenting all things as universals and stripped of matter for treatment by the understanding” (Enn. I, iii, 5, 6 Mck).

Dialectic is “the flight of the alone to the Alone” – ϕυγὴ μόνου πρὸς μόνον (Enn. I, vi, 6; VI, ix, 9). The same expression is to be found in St Gregory’s homilies on the Canticle of Canticles (VIII PG 44 949D, 952A). However, “the Alone” to whom Plotinus fled was not a personal Deity; It is the One who, if viewed from perspective of Its desireability, is the object of love (eros), the natural end of things (Enn. VI, viii,15); and, therefore, described by Plotinus as “the Good” (τὸ καλόν).

The Supreme, as the Absolute Good and not merely a good being or thing, can contain nothing, since there is nothing that could be its good. Anything it could contain must be either good to it or not good; but in the supremely and primally Good there can be nothing not good; nor can the Absolute Good be contained by any good: containing, then, neither the good nor the not good, it contains nothing and, containing nothing, it is alone: it is void of all but itself... (Enn. V, v, 13).

Also, since the Good is the One and the One is, in a sense, all things, the Good is all things. “Thus is revealed to us the Primarily existent, the Good, above all that has being, good unalloyed, containing nothing in itself, utterly
The One, alias the Good, is not an Idea or Form: It is beyond all being, all knowledge, and is prior to all existing things (Enn. Ill, viii, 8). Human reason can provide only negative terms, an occasional metaphor perhaps, as the soul experiences ever higher spiritual or noetical realms of existence, as the soul ascends towards the “the negation of all plurality” (Enn. V, iv, 6). Plotinus “knows” that the One is, in truth, beyond all predications: nothing may be affirmed of it. The One is not an object and does not even know Itself, save by the Noûs through which It comes to self-consciousness. It is, in fact, “above the need of knowing which pertains solely to the secondary Nature (the Nous). Knowing is a unitary process, expressing definition: the first is One, but undefined: a defined One would not be the One-Absolute: the Absolute is prior to the definite.” Therefore, the One, “resting in self-gathered repose,” is above even the most august Mind (Nous), “neither knows itself nor is known in itself... and no name can be given to it” (Enn. V, iii, 12–13).

No predication applies to the immobile, ineffable, invisible, incomprehensible, incomparable One (Em. V, 1, 6), including the most obvious predicate – “It is.” The Supreme “has no need of Being: even ’He is good’ – as humans perceive It – has no application, since it [good], too, indicates Being: the ’is’ should not suggest something predicated of another thing; it is to state identity” (Em. VI, vii, 38). Furthermore, to say that the One “just happens to be” is equally false. It is sufficient to imply that the One possesses “a certain nature and power” which constitutes It as the Principle of all things”; and, as this Principle, it is not the product of chance, but is “by necessity prior to all necessities.” We must not think of it “as a chance existence; it is not what it chanced to be, but what it must be – and yet without a ’must’” (Enn. VI, viii, 9).

The One is perfect, Plotinus tells us, “because It seeks for nothing, and possesses nothing, and has need of nothing, and being perfect it overflows, and thus its superabundance produces the Other” (Enn. V, ii, 1). How else, he asks, can we account for whatever else exists, save the fact that the One could not remain, by virtue of Its perfection, “shut up in itself, as though it were jealous or impotent – Itself the potency of all things?... Something must therefore be begotten of It” (Enn. V, iv, 1). In other terms, the One, on account of Its superabundant, overflowing nature, becomes aware of Itself, in the Nous. Self-Conscious, it becomes an Object to Itself. But being is the object of thought. Therefore, thought and being are identical in the One or, more precisely, in the Nous, the dyad of thought and being. As the Nous, turns from the One, and thinks or “passes” beyond Itself, It produces the Soul, the third hypostasis, which, in looking away from the Nous, becomes the World or Universal Soul or
what Lovejoy describes as “the immediate parent of nature.”

Here is the “trinity” of Plotinus – the One (τὸ Ἐv), the Intellectual-Principle (ὁ Νοῦς), and the Soul (ἡ ψυχή) – three hypostases, the second rising or emanating without interval from the very substance of the first and the third proceeds without interval from the very substance of the second (Enn. II, iii, 9; V, iii, 15; iv, 1; VI, vii, 39; ix, 3). The cosmos was not freely created ex nihilo, but issues from the Soul (“God”) secundum necessitatem naturae, “there being a principle of necessity that the less perfect should issue from the more perfect,” writes Copleston. “It is a principle that every nature make that which is immediately subordinate to it (τὸ μετ’ αὐτῆς ποιεῖ), unfolding itself, as a seed unfolds itself, the procession being from an undivided source or principle to a goal...” Plotinus did not believe this sequence of emanations (περίλαμψις, ἔλλαμψις) impaired or impoverished the divine Principles.

At this point, the question necessarily arises: if the One is beyond all knowledge, how does Plotinus know of Its “existence?” Admittedly, it is not an ordinary knowledge, such as the knowledge of the sciences; rather it is supra-logical (dialectic), which explains, incidentally, his resorting to metaphors and phrases (“as it were” [ὡσπερ οἶον]) or “as far as possible” [κάτα τὸ δυνατόν]). In other words, the mind cleansed of sense impressions and images, as it ascends higher and higher into the spiritual realm, is also “freed from all evil because it is eager for the Good; to go back to the beginning within oneself, becoming one instead of many in contemplation of the beginning and of the One” (Enn. VI, ix, 3). Arriving at the Intellectual-Principle or Nous, the mind greets the very Image of the One or Absolute.

The One comes to consciousness in the Nous which, at first, is “undeteriminate” or “unformed,” but which, in turning towards the One, is fecundated and fulfilled by its gaze: the Nous now is the unity of thought and being, an infinite Dyad, whereby it generates the “intelligible cosmos” or “World of Forms” (Enn. V, iv, 2) and, therefore, intelligible “otherness” (Enn. II, iv, 5) and/or “multiplicity.” This multiplicity is born only with the Nous or “Mind” in the sense that It does not see the One as multiple, but multiplied, “as it were” (Enn. VI, vii, 16). But these “forms” (hence, the “multiplicity”) are noetical, i.e., belonging to the Nous. These Forms, or Ideas, are the archetypes of something other than, but dependent upon the Nous – “multiplicity,” including man and nature.

To objectify that multiplicity, the Nous or Mind begets the Soul. “When the act of Mind is directed upon itself writes Plotinus, “the result is the manifold (particular) minds; when it looks outwards, Soul is produced.” As Reale explains, “The One had to become in order to know, in the same way He
had to become Soul in order to generate all the things of the visible world.”

Soul constitutes the extreme moment in the process of the One’s expansion, the cosmogonic hypostasis which is identical with the moment when It generates corporeal reality through the Soul which he identifies as “the final goddess” (Enn. IV, viii, 5). The Soul is mediator, a “Janus”: generating the corporeal and sensible dimension, even relating Itself to it, while enjoying the prerogatives of the incorporeal (Enn. IV, viii, 7).

Thus, the Soul is temporalized, wishing to realize ab extra what it has contemplated in the Nous or Intellectual-Principle (the “World of Ideas”), according to the necessary law of procession.” The Soul becomes the World Soul when It looks towards the physical cosmos, which Plotinus calls a “god” and “the last born of God” (Enn. II, iii, 9; V, viii, 12): Nature, which coming into existence as the Soul, stamps the Mind or “the image of eternity” on matter (ὕλη) which itself “has always existed” (Enn. IV, viii, 6). Prime matter, Plotinus tells us, is the modification of the One’s power, a privation of the Good and, in this sense, it is evil: matter is the absence of the Good (Enn. III, vi, 7). In other terms, the world, albeit a composition of the physical and noetical, is eternal.

The physical or sensible universe was not created. The Soul is not its Creator, even if we view the Soul as a Plotinian adaptation of Plato’s Demiurge. To be sure, the name appears in the Enneads and the Soul does employ the World of Ideas to form the cosmos, but Plato’s “creator” forms the cosmos from an independent reality, chaos. With the Ideas, he moulds the eternally co-existent matter into the world in which we live, and move and have our being. The monism of Plotinus, however, gives not the slightest autonomy to things outside the One. The cosmos of Plotinus proceeds from the omnipresent One through the Nous and Soul and will eventually return to It as to its Source (Enn. IV, 111, 12). Thus, according to Bréhier, “the time [say better, “duration”] in which the universe exists presents the cyclical movement of departure and return, which is, as it were, the Plotinian scheme of all existence. Neither it nor the universe is produced by an original reality.”

The accepted doctrine of Plotinus and his school is precisely the doctrine that there was never a time when what is did not exist or matter unformed. Call the One what we will (“God” or “Creator” or “Demiurge”), It is the womb of all things, coming to consciousness in the Nous Who generates the Soul which produces the world from the substance of the One. “To exist” means to participate in the One through the Cause closest to It, while the totality of beings, derived from their proximate source, form a descending scale of ontic perfection. The One comes to “life” in Its externalization and, in this sense,
cosmogony is theogony. Necessarily, it follows that the unique and the novel have no place in the reality of Plotinus and the Greeks.

The philosophy of Plotinus is a monism dominated by merciless necessity while, on the other hand, the God of St Gregory of Nyssa is characterized by freedom and personality. Had the Greek sage of Lycopolis refashioned the idea of fate? Had he perhaps confused fate with the One? The student of patristic theology may indeed wonder if St Gregory of Nyssa may not have had Plotinus in mind when he wrote Contra Fatum. If, as scholars commonly insist, St Gregory was a genuine Christian believer who, as so many of his generation, was intrigued by Neo-Platonism, may it not have been the intrigue of an antagonist, not a disciple? He was surely aware of the danger of Plotinian rationalism to the Christian Gospel. Let us admit that Gregory borrowed for his theology language, methods, even concepts from Platonism; but the philosophia of St Gregory shows no reconstruction of Christian doctrine, no revision of the Apostolic Tradition, as a result.

Observe that from the outset of his debate with the heretic, Eunomius, St Gregory is careful to identify the authority to which he has submitted.

Knowing that the divine Nature differs (διαλλατόν) from our own, let us quietly remain within our own limits. For it is both safer and more reverent to believe the majesty of God to be greater than our understanding; nor should we seek to circumscribe His glory within concepts (πιστὶν ὑπονοίας) as if there was nothing beyond them. It is safer, also, to avoid thinking at all about the divine Essence which is ineffable and transcendent to all human reasoning (ἀπόρρητον καὶ ἀνέπαφον ἀνθρωπίνοις λογισμοῖς). The desire to examine the unknown and to gain hidden knowledge by the designs of human cognition always leads to deceptions and misunderstandings. He who aspires to know the unknown not only misses the truth, but often confuses truth with falsehood. However, the disciples of the Gospels and the prophets believe that ὁ ὢν has been revealed to the Saints and also through the good harmony of those things which exist through the work of divine Providence. No disciple opens the door to falsehood in the name of truth by useless and inane speculation...”

In the Beatitudes, St Gregory writes that the human mind can devise no means for the comprehension of the divine Nature, for which reason that St Paul describes His ways as “incomprehensible.” He indicates thereby that His “ways” are impervious to all human reasoning. “None of those who have passed before us in this life, not even Moses, has left any indication whereby the powers of thought might grasp what is beyond knowledge. God is by nature above every being” – κατὰ τὴν φύσιν ὑπὲρ πάσαν φύσιν.  

God has not hidden Himself from us and He may be known through the
things which have been made. The Creator, as the artist, leaves His mark on His work. We may be unable to form any thought of His Essence, but “we can detect His wisdom from the things which He has wisely created.” Moreover, when we recognize that God created all things, “not from any necessity, but freely out His Goodness, we may say that we have contemplated God in this way, that is, His Activity not His Essence.” Hence, what has been said shows that the Lord spoke the truth when He promised that the pure of heart will see God; nor does Paul lie when He asserts that none has seen God and never shall. For He is invisible by nature, revealing Himself in His Energies whereby we behold Him in such things as refer to Him (ὅρατος ταῖς ἐνεργείαις γίνεται ἐν τισὶ τοῖς περὶ αὐτὸν καθορώμενος). The Beatitude is not limited to believers..., for even the wise of the world may learn from the harmony of the cosmos something about the transcendent Wisdom and Power... Yet, the Lord does not say He is blessed by virtue of this understanding... rather it is necessary to have God in oneself. ’Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’ is not the promise of a direct vision unless the eye of the soul has been purified. I think that this marvelous saying is established more plainly by the words which He places next to them: ’the Kingdom of God is within you.’ By this we should learn that if a man’s heart is cleansed from everything creaturely and from the passions, he will behold God in the beauty of his image which reflects the divine Nature (De Beat. VI PG 44 1268B–1269C).

By nature, the God of Christianity is incomprehensible, uncircumscribable, immutable, ineffable, uncontainable, yet He manifests Himself to them who seek Him. But, according to Plotinus, to know the One is to know oneself – his version of the Socratic γνῶθι σαυτόν – is to know the divine “inner man” which has a direct link with the Soul, the hypostasis by which the One communicates with the noetical and physical worlds. In other words, the self knows the realms of spiritual being, even the One, because it, like them, is divine by nature79. On the other hand, St Gregory teaches that the created and virtuous soul “knows” God by the grace which the divine Providence sheds in the hearts of those who pursue Him. Of course, no human knowledge extends to the divine Essence which is forever beyond its ken, now and in the Age to Come. As he informs Eunomius, “There is no faculty of human nature able to comprehend the divine Essence” – οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἀνθρωπινῇ φύσει δύναμις εἰς ἀκριβὴ κατανοήσιν θεοῦ οὐσίας (Con. Eun. XII PG 45 932C).

There is no contradiction here. God does not reveal His Essence and, in this sense, “No man has seen God at any time.” But He may be known providentially through His divine Energies – a subject about which St Gregory
tells us very little – and, of course, through various theophanies and in the supreme revelation, the Incarnation of God the Son. A fuller exposition of the divine Energies or Operations and Their difference with the divine Essence must wait until the fourteenth century, with St Gregory Palamas (d. 1359) who, meeting the challenge of Latin Scholasticism, reached into the secret treasure of the Church, to expound the distinction between the divine Essence and Its Uncreated Energies, a distinction all but lost on his enemies. Failing to understand that distinction is necessarily to distort the “mystical theology” of St Gregory of Nyssa and the Fathers.

A little attention, for example, to Gregory of Nyssa’s discussion about the divine Names and the distinction he makes – one which is everywhere implicit, often explicit, in the “mystical theology” of the Greek, Latin, Oriental and Russian Church the patres – between the Essence and Energy in God becomes apparent. “The word ‘Godhead’,” he wrote, “signifies the divine Energy, not the divine Nature” (Quod non sit tres Dii PG 45124D). “Godhead” is a name and, therefore, “away of talking about Energy” – ἀλλʹ ἐνεργίας τὴν φωνὴν τῆς θεότητος (125D). A “name” or predicate (good, merciful, just, etc.) describes not the holy Trinity’s incommunicable Nature or Essence, but His eternal, participatable and communicable Energies, for “the divine Nature is superior to all goodness” (De an. et res. PG 46 93A). Even the name of God “Father” does not present the Essence, rather it indicates the relationship between Him, His Only-begotten Son and His Holy Spirit (cf. Con. Eun. II PG 45 473B).

The divine Nature has no attributes. “He receives appellations from what are believed to be His Energies with regard to our life. Thus, the Psalmist declares, ‘The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, longsuffering and of great goodness’ (Ps. 103:8).” What do these indicate?” St Gregory asks rhetorically. “No one will say they indicate anything but His Energies” (Con. Eun. XII PG 45 960D). The “names” or “appellations predicates” or “attributes” reflect not the richness of the divine Nature, but the poverty of our own nature. Not for His sake, but for the creature were names invented. They show forth the impact of His Uncreated Energies on creation – ἀλλʹ ἦμῶν ἐνέκεν τὰ ονόματα πρὸς δήλουσιν τοῦ ὅντος ἐπινενόνται (Loc. cit.).

Thus, all created existence, that is, all being, is the result of the divine Activity. “Everywhere we find that the Power and Energy of God is beyond human understanding and susceptible to no human art,” St Gregory of Nyssa observed. “He calmly produces whatever He wills while hiding from our knowledge the smallest detail of His creative Energy” (In Baptism Christi PG 46 584D). Both the physical and noetical dimensions of the creation have come into existence according to His Plan; but the divine Nature is in Itself above all
being, however it may manifest Itself. Moreover, “one cannot infer from created being the existence of the uncreated, for it is impossible that two unlike things should know each other” — τὰ ανομοίως κάτα τὴν φύσιν ἔχοντα, δι’ ἀλλήλων ἐπιγινώσκεθαι (Con. Eun. I PG 45 385D). Consequently, the “unfailing voice of the Lord” promises to “the pure of heart” not the knowledge of “the unbounded and incomprehensible Divinity,” but, as we are able, that by which He made all things, His Energies (Can. Cant. XI PG 44 1012C).

Whatever exists is being (τὸ ὄν). Being is the object of human and angelic knowledge. God transcends all being and, therefore, all knowledge. In the words of St John of Damascus, “what transcends knowledge will transcend being; and, conversely, what transcends being will transcend knowledge” — τὸ ὑπὲρ γνώσιν, πάντως καὶ ὑπὲρ οὐσίαν ἦσται καὶ τὸ ἀνάσαλιν τὸ ὑπὲρ οὐσίαν, καὶ γνώσιν ἦσται (De Fid. Orth. I, 4 PG 94 800B. Cf. St Dionysius. Myst. Theol. 2 PG 3 1000AN). Thus, to “see God” is to see Him as He reveals Himself. If this is true, why then, do the Fathers, including St John himself, refer to the Creator as “being” and, often in the language of Plato, as “the really real being” — τὸ ὄντος ὄν? Likewise, in the words of St Gregory of Nyssa, God is “the really real being, the knowledge of which is the knowledge of truth” — τοῦτο ἐστιν ός ἄληθις τὸ ὄντος ὄν, καὶ ἡ τούτου κατανοήσις, ἡ τῆς ἄληθείας γνώσις ἐστιν (De Vita Mov. I PG 44 333C)?

The explanation is threefold: (1) polemically, against the Greeks: the expression “the really real being” is preempted: appropriated for the true God (cf. Acts 17:23) and denied to “the false deities of atheists” (St Basil the Great); (2) “being” is, at best, a metaphor, at worst an abstraction in the thinking of the Fathers; or, put in the language of philosophy, pure being and pure nothingness are identical, as Hegel observed. In other words, by calling God “being,” we say nothing about Him at all: a concept wholly suitable to the apophaticism of the Fathers; and (3) “being” is the most adequate and cautious way to indicating His unique and ineffable Existence. “Being,” Ens, as all theological language, gives a sense of something which in fact cannot be contained in words.

Thus, what can be positively said and known about God is the result of divine revelation, a fortiori the Incarnation. If God had not spoken to the human race, it would not have known that He is Trinity: One Essence or Nature, three Persons — μία οὐσία, τρεῖς υποστάσεις, a triadological formula whose clearest expression is found in St Gregory’s Letter XXXVIII (PG 32 325–341)83. Circumstance required that Gregory deal with a subject, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which he would have preferred “to have kept in the silent veneration of the heart.” Unlike Plotinus, too, he did not take his
intellectual skill seriously when treating the “paradox” of the Trinity, especially when “faith is better than apprehension through logic, for faith teaches us that what is separated in person is united in essence.” The best description of the Trinity he could provide were questionable analogies (e.g., three individuals who share a single human nature) which he called “the shadow of the truth” – σκιὰν ἀληθείας (Ep. XXXVIII, 5 PG 32 336B).

Unfortunately, he was compelled to give a greater precision to a teaching about which the Scriptures intentionally give little detail.

For we have been taught by the holy Scriptures that all thing were made by Him (the Son) and in Him they cohere. When we have been raised to this conception, we are led by the divinely inspired guide and taught that through Him all things are brought into being from nothing... there is a power which exists without generation and without beginning, the Cause of the causes of all being (αἰτίαν τῆς ἀπάντων τῶν ὄντων αἰτίας). For out of the Father comes the Son by Whom all things exist, and also the Holy Spirit Who is ever associated with the Son, if only because it is impossible to arrive at an understanding of the Son without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. Also, the Spirit, He Who is inseparably united to and produced with the Son, He from Whom all blessings gush forth all blessings upon creation, this same Spirit is joined to the Father, as One from Whom He proceeds (ἐκπορεύεται) as His Cause. He is identified by the fact that He is known after the Son while He possesses His subsistence from the Father (Ep. XXXVIII, 4 PG 32 329BC).

St Gregory insisted that in the Trinity there is no conflict between “essence” and “persons” (cf. Heb 1:3). While what is peculiarly characteristic of one Person does not characterize another. There is, however, a “community of essence,” an incomprehensible and infinite oneness with no variation, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit sharing “a continuous and uninterrupted community of nature,” the difference between the Persons in no way severing the natural continuity between them, nor the community of essence confounding the distinguishing properties of each” – οὔτε τῆς τῶν ὑποστάσεων διαφοράς τὸ τῆς φυσέως συνεχές διασπώσης, οὔτε τῆς κάτα οὐσίαν κοινότητος τὸ ἰδιάζων τῶν γνωρισμάτων ἄφαχεούσης (Ep. XXXVIII, 4 PG 32 333A).

Here is a picture of the eternal relationship between the divine Persons of the Trinity, a picture which God altered for the sake of the divine Economy. Thus, the Son “empties Himself, taking on the form of a servant,” becoming true Man; but also the Spirit is “manifested through the Son” (Con. Eun. I PG 45 336CD). The Father, too, is revealed to the world through the Son. He remains, nevertheless, the unique “Cause” of the Son and the Spirit which depends on Him “without dissolving the distinction of the Persons in the
common nature,” he wrote to Ablabium. “The principle of causality distinguishes the Persons of the holy Trinity” (Quod, non sint tres dii. PG 45 133D). He is the “cause” of the Only-begotten Son and the ever-proceeding Spirit.

In part, Gregory’s theology мая have been directed against the Neo-Platonists, in particular, and Greek philosophy in general – hence, the constant appeal to “the tradition we have received from the Fathers, as ever sure and immovable” – тην μεν παράδοσιν ἢν παρὰ πατέρων διαδεξάμεθα εἰς ἀεὶ βεβαιὰν τε καὶ ἁκινήτου (Quod non sint tres dii PG 45 117B) – against the pretensions of dialectic and the whole system of emanations, for which reason he sought to keep a balance between Essence and Persons. We are never confronted in the writings of St Gregory with hypostaseis emanating from each other or, as in the case of Augustine, a self-enclosed, simple essence of God, wherein lies “a relation of opposition,” an idea of Divinity which gratifies the demands of the philosophic reason.

Thus, in Christian theology what is not peculiar to one Person is common to all three, and what is peculiar to one Person is shared by no other. There are not two “causes” in the Trinity; and one hypostasis cannot be the “unity” of two. The antinomic theology of St Gregory – the monarchy of the Father as the substantial principle of the unity in three Persons – passes beyond the rationalism of Plotinus and Augustine. The God of St Gregory and the Fathers is ultimately a mystery. In any case, they are not concerned with some abstract truths about Him, but His relevance to our salvation. Soteriology is the fundamental motivation of all patristic thought. To be sure, the same мая be said for Plotinus. But the God of Christians is a personal God Who became incarnate that we might “partake of the divine Nature” (II Pet. 1:4). The One of Plotinus is the Divinity who manifests Itself in many forms. Salvation appears to be the elimination of multiplicity and the return of all things to the unity of the One.
4. The Pantheism of Plotinus

The sources at my disposal generally deny that Plotinus was a pantheist, that is, the teaching that all things are “God.” J.M. Rist argues that Plotinus was not a pantheist because the philosopher did not take the position that the One is “the all” (Enn. V, v, 12). He is even beyond (ἐπέκεινα) the Nous and reality it forms with the eternal Ideas. Moreover, “the only people who call Plotinus a pantheist... must be those who either entirely neglect those texts of the Enneads which fix the One above the physical universe, or those who identify pantheism with monism, that is, suppose that complete identity with the material world is another way of describing complete identity with the cause of that universe. A pantheist would say that the One and matter are identical and that there is a reconciliation of good and evil. Plotinus cannot be imagined holding either of these views.”

Although concuring with Rist, other writers have their own reasons for denying the pantheism of Plotinus. Reale hesitates to call Plotinus an “acosmist”; and Underhill refuses to concede that Plotinus’ doctrine of divine immanence had “degenerated into pantheism.” “What we call ’pantheism’ in Plotinus is an illusion of perspective due to the interplay of two inconsistent doctrines of being,” writes Gilson. “Such an illusion arises, in the mind of his interpreters, at the very point at which, identifying the One and the Good of Plotinus with the Being of the Christian God, they turn the Plotinian emanation of the multiple from the One into a Christian emanation of beings from Being.”

One may differ with Rist and Gilson, etc. for several excellent reasons. There are three possible types of cosmogeny: creationism ex nihilo, as the Scriptures and Fathers teach; co-eternity of God and matter, as the dualist holds; and the pantheism (or pанcosmism) of the monist. Some have called “creationism” a “mitigated dualism,” that is, the existence of two ontological realities, the one contingent and dependent, the other absolute and autonomous. The dualism which espouses the doctrine of two eternal principles is generally associated with the names of Plato and Aristotle. The Stoics are often described as pantheists.

Plotinus and most of his school should be painted with the same brush as the Stoics, for they also maintain the unity of all reality, that is, in the One from which all things proceed and to Which they must return. Thus, the cosmos shares one nature and with It through the Nous and the Soul. “The many” are modulations or declensions of Their (Its) Substance. Plotinus was a pantheist!
He was nothing else, not by any admission of his own, but on account of the metaphysics elaborated in the Enneads. Let us recall once again that Plotinus asserted that the Nous and, indirectly, the Soul, issue from the substance of the One, “the First remaining in self-gathered repose throughout... the One as light before light, an eternal irradiation resting upon the Intellectual Realm” (Enn. V. iii, 12). These “manifestations” from the One are not new realities: the One is not “first” in a temporal or numerical sense. There is no “before” (or “after”) in the transcendent Substance of the eternal One.

The Nous, “the image of the One,” and the Soul, “the image of the Nous,” and everything which proceeds from them, in one way or another, are “the overflow” of the One (Enn. V, ii, 1). Also, the One retains Its imperishable character whatever emanates from it – an antinomy, no doubt. As the other hypostases, the One engenders without losing what is peculiar to Itself (Enn. V, i, 6). The One remains what It is despite Its generation of the Nous, the Nous (“Intellectual Realm”) remains always self-identical despite its generation of the Soul and the Soul is always Itself despite Its generation of the physical universe. To use the words of Plotinus,

The station towards the One (the fact that something exists in the presence of the One) establishes Being; that vision directed upon the One establishes the Intellectual-Principle and Being; and attaining resemblance in the virtue of this vision, It repeats the act of the One in pouring forth a vast power. This second outflow is a Form or Idea representing the Divine Intellect as the Divine Intellect represented Its own prior, the One. This active power which springs from essence (from the Intellectual-Principle considered as Being) is Soul. Soul arises as the idea and act of the motionless Intellectual-Principle which Itself sprang from its own motionless prior; but the Soul’s operation is not similarly motionless; Its image is generated from Its movement. It takes fulness by looking to Its Source; but It generates Its image by adopting another, a downward movement. This image of Soul is sense and nature, the vegetal principle” (Enn. V, ii, 1).

Plotinus conceived reality as an “unbroken unity” with the One as its transcendent Source. However, as the Source of all existences “outside” Itself, the One is more than the origin of unity: It sustains and attracts them. Furthermore, he mentions that what is other than the One is different from the One, but, yet, “anything existing after the First must necessarily arise from the First, whether immediately or as tracing back to It through intervenients; there must be an order of secondaries and tertiaries, in which any second is referred to the First and any third to the Second” (Enn. V, iii, 16).

Plotinus struggled to maintain the position that everything emanates from
the One while It is also “the negation of plurality.” He persuaded himself that with this distinction he had avoided pantheism, a theology he rejected for many reasons, not the least of which was his abhorrence of the flesh. He also found the Judeo-Christian Genesis of the Creator-God and the Platonic cosmogeny of the Demiurge unappealing. Dualism, whether Christian or Platonic, destroyed his vision of truth, the object of philosophy, which is the knowledge of and union with the Good.

Neither a creationist nor a dualist, Plotinus was a monist and, therefore, a pantheist, an acosmic pantheist: everything emanates from the One, including matter itself (Enn. VI, v, 4)\textsuperscript{90}; and if whatever proceeds from It as its Origin returns to It as its End, then, the unavoidable conclusion is that the One is all and all is the One. There is nothing but the One and Its modulations. He cannot protect himself from this accusation by declaring “the One cannot be any existent thing, but is prior to all existents” (Enn. III, viii, 8). His only route of escape from pantheism is the recognition of an existence alien to the Substance of the One; and that he would not do. His system could make no concession to dualism, save by denying the ontological unity of reality.

What else did Plotinus mean, saying that “the One is all things and not one of them; the Source of all things is not all things; all things are Its possession... It is precisely because there is nothing within the One that all things are from It” (Enn. V, ii, 1)? The One is not the Maker Who creates from absolutely nothing; nor is It the Demiurge which creates from no-thing. From where comes, then, the stuff out of which things are formed? From the Nous or Soul? But they emerge from the One. Plotinus clearly did not believe in a number of independent and infinite substances, if only because such an admission is a denial of the absolute unity and sovereignty of the One.

Likewise, matter itself originates in the One, unless we are willing to uphold its eternity apart from the Substance of the One, suggesting thereby that Plotinus was, after all, a crypto-dualist. Since there are only three “sources” – the One from which emanates the Nous from which emanates the Soul which erects the cosmos out of “being” and “matter” – and matter must originate from one or all of these hypostases, and ultimately from the One. There is nothing but the One to explain Their existence and, therefore, the existence of things generated and formed by Them. There is no discontinuity between the One and the cosmos. Even time (χρόνος) is merely “the life of the Soul” in Its passage from one particular modulation to another (Enn. V i, 10; VII, vii, 11, 45).

Finally, to describe Plotinus as a pantheist is not to argue that everything but the One is illusory. Although the branches and roots of a tree have different shapes and perform different functions than the trunk, all share the same
nature; so it is with the One, the Nous, the Soul and the cosmos. Whatever and however they exist, nothing is which is not a manifestation of the One. Arguing to the contrary, must lead us to the conclusion that something exists which does not originate in and through the One and is independent of It, something Plotinus never conceded.

The fact of evil or non-being did not deter him.

It was not a ultimately moral concept for Plotinus as it was for St Gregory. Neither did the sage of Lycopolis view it as a “mystery,” nor even a paradox. Rather he saw evil as the absence of the Good or, more precisely, the distance of things from their goal, the Absolute alias the Good, to which all things must return. Departure from the One (i.e., the “defiance” of the Soul) wrought evil – an evil which is gradually diminished as a thing returned to the Good. Surely, the existence of “sin” or “moral evil” is a problem for pantheists.
Chapter IV. St Gregory and Philo: the Logos and creation

The Logos of St Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the Only-Begotten of the Father, forever associated with the eternal and Life-Giving Spirit. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob Who “in these last days” for the human race and its salvation became Man (θεάνδρος, θεανθρώπος) by the Spirit and the Ever-Virgin Mary, the Theotokos: Son of God, Son of Man: One Person in two natures.

The Logos of St Gregory is the Logos of the Fourth Gospel, not the impersonal Logos of Heraclitus nor of the Stoics, nor of Philo Judaeus. John proclaimed the Logos to be God the Son, the Creator at the “beginning” of time, Who became incarnate at the “beginning” of a new age, if we may believe St Ireneus of Lyons (the disciple of St Polycarp, the disciple of St John the Theologian). Ireneus cast this truth into the face of Cerinthus the Gnostic who visited Ephesus to his “vile doctrine.” John might not have said anything about this aspect of Christian theology (something he heard from the Lord Himself) had the Catholic Faith not been threatened.

There is no reason to accept the theory that the source of the Logos of St John’s Gospel, as described in its Prologue – the Logos of St Gregory’s theology – to have been Hellenism inspired by Philo. Also, those calling themselves Christian do nothing to support the claims of the Gospel by speaking of John’s “originality” or of the “brilliant advance in theology” which later was developed by “Cappadocian speculation.” What is the historical evidence that St John, “the beloved disciple,” while in the company of the Lord, was not instructed directly by Him? The writings of St Gregory (and all the Fathers) show a clear dependence on the Tradition which originated with Christ Jesus and the Apostles, a fortiori the Fourth Gospel.

“The sublime John... proclaims the mystery of theology,” Gregory wrote in reference to the Prologue (Con. Eun. IV PG 45 624A). On the same subject, he expressed kind words for “the mighty Paul” and “the great Moses” (Con. Eun. II PG 45 477B: Hexa. PG 44 61 A). As in the case of these Saints – and, likewise, Philo and the Greeks or, for that matter, Origen – Gregory’s doctrine of the Logos follows from his doctrine of God; and, like these Saints, the regulating principle of his thinking was not the Logos, but the Incarnate Son of God; not metaphysics but soteriology.

In this chapter, St Gregory’s incarnational theology is viewed as heir to the Fourth Gospel. Likewise, neither is indebted to Philo Judaeus nor any other
“philosopher.” Nor again is Gregory’s Logos-theology a synthesis of Greek and Christian thought. He was no imitator of Philo which may be seen in his treatment of the Fourth Gospel, his cosmogony and, finally, the Saint’s teaching on the Incarnation.
1. The Fourth Gospel

Although there is dissenting opinion, most Biblical researchers still look for the origin of the Logos doctrine of the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel in the history of Greek metaphysics. For Dean Inge “the large obligations of the author of the Fourth Gospel to the Philonian school cannot be reasonably denied, though they have often been questioned.” Inge’s statement that Philo (save for the Incarnation) is the source of St John’s Logos is supported by H.A. Wolfson, among others, who simply assumes without proof that “proceeding to re-write Paul’s sketch of the pre-existent Christ in terms of Philonic philosophy, John substitutes the term ’Logos’ for Paul’s ’Wisdom...’”

Aside from the fact that St John teaches that “the Word was God” (John 1:1) – not a “second God” or “the companion of God” as Philo said – there are numerous reasons for rejecting “the Philonic origin” of the Prologue. John was a simple fisherman with little interest in Plato or the Pythagoreans, or the Stoics, while Philo, in the words of Emil Schörer, “had appropriated their doctrines so completely that he must be reckoned among the Greek philosophers.” Again, as E.C. Hoskyns observes,

The theory that the prologue is directly dependent upon the writings of Philo, or upon the school of Alexandrian thought of which Philo was the most eminent representative, is undeniably attractive. But it rests upon a series of assumptions that can be justified only if it be held that parallel imagery demands a literary relationship. There is no evidence to suggest an Alexandrian provenance for the Fourth Gospel, nor can it be proved that Philonic terminology was generally familiar to Jews in the first century in Palestine, in Ephesus, or even in Alexandria itself. Philo was an isolated figure. In fact his writings were preserved by Christian, not Jewish, theologians, because they came to appreciate the points of contact between Christian theology and the speculations of Philo. The theory that the prologue stands in a direct or indirect literary relationship to the Philonic writings, except in so far as both are dependent upon the Jewish Scriptures and upon Jewish tradition, raises more difficulties than it solves.

Moreover, the Prologue is intimately bound with the entire Fourth Gospel and, even St John’s epistles, in which the Theologian testified that what he saw and heard and touched was He “that was from the beginning” (I John 1:1). John made no appeals to Greek philosophy in the Prologue nor in his other writings, not even the word, “Logos,” for as Hoskyns informs us, “the author did not write his gospel to prove that Jesus is the Logos, not even the true Logos, “but
that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Approaching the Fourth Gospel with a set of assumptions inimical to its clear testimony, must necessarily lead to an understanding of the text which perverts, even obviates, its message. Moreover, those assumptions leave no room for truth that the Logos of Philo and the Greeks were merely anti-types of the Christian Logos Who later became flesh. They will not allow that the pre-incarnate Lord gave to the Jews and Greeks a glimpse of Himself in preparation for His Coming. Such an explanation has no place in the historiosophy of non-Christian scholarship. A case in point is Professor H. A. Wolfson who interprets not only the Fourth Gospel but the entire patristic tradition – which claims John’s theology as its own – in terms of Philonic method and metaphysics. Indeed, he believes the entire patristic theological enterprise to have been inspired by Philo. The Christian Fathers, he declared, manipulated the revealed truth and pagan thought in such a way that they produced a Christian version of Greek philosophy. It might be useful to test Wolfson’s theory against St Gregory of Nyssa’s exegesis of the Fourth Gospel.

In his struggle against Arianism, St Gregory accused his opponent, Eunomius, of allying himself with Philo and, therefore, with Plato. There is a “close relationship between the doctrine of Eunomius and the reasoning of the Jews,” Gregory observed. He is a plagiarist, even copying Philo word for word – ὁ λόγος ἐπὶ αὐτῆς τῆς λέξεως ἀπὸ τοῦ Φίλωνος τοῦ Ἐβραίου μετενήνεκται πάρα τοῦ λογογράφου ἐπὶ τὸν λόγον (Con. Eun. VIII PG 45 804BC). The Saint, in his polemic (IX, 815C), also described Eunomius’ work as Πλατονικός φαιδρός, because he accepted Plato’s speculation on the question of the “cessation of generation” (which Eunomius applied to “the generation of the Son”).

St Gregory swung the argument around to the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel. No doubt he identified St John’s Logos with St Paul’s Wisdom, but, contrary to the Wolfson thesis, Gregory showed himself innocent of the idea that St John substituted the term “Logos” for Paul’s “Wisdom.” In addition, the writings of Gregory show no familiarity with the Logos as the repository of the Platonic Ideas. According to Professor Wolfson, Philo read the “In the beginning God created...” of Genesis as the formation of the intelligible world (κόσμος νοητός), “which is the content of the Logos and is identical with it.” If Wolfson implies that St Gregory or any of the Fathers read Philo’s version of the Ideas into the Prologue of John’s Gospel, or that John himself had in mind some variation of the Ideas when he testified to the Logos as Creator, Wolfson’s conclusions depend on theory not facts.

Wolfson continues his analysis of the Prologue with the comment that he is uncertain whether John meant to say, “the Word was (ἰη) God, and the Word
was (ἡν) with God, and the Word was (ἡν) God” (John 1:1–2), that the Logos “simply existed” (in the Greek sense) or that He “came into existence” (in the Hebrew sense). According to Wolfson, the Fathers, too, held various opinions about the meaning of the verb. If we inquire into the opinions of every “Christian writer” he calls “Father” (which for Wolfson includes Tatian, Clement and Origen, etc.), then, one might concur with him. His treatment of St Gregory of Nyssa, however, is pure obfuscation.

Commenting on the Prologue’s en arche, St Gregory invoked the liturgical tradition of the Church, an authority for the Fathers which Wolfson ignored. The Bishop of Nyssa stressed that John’s Gospel has been read continuously in the Churches from ancient times to the present day – ἀ γὰρ ἐξ ἀρχαίων μέχρι τοῦ νῦν κάτα διαδοχήν ἐν ταῖς Ἐκκλησίαις ἀναγινώσκεται (Con. Eun. II PG 45 476C). His allusion here was to the trinitarian formula conventionally employed by the Church during the celebration of Baptism. We are not baptized, St Gregory wrote, simply in the Name of “the one and only true God,” as Eunomius would have it, but in the Name of the entire Trinity. Christ Himself instructed us, Gregory reminded his opponent, that the Name of God involved not only the Name of God the Father; but also the Holy Spirit, and the Son, for the Gospel of St John records in its Prologue, “The Logos was with God and the Logos was God” (John 1:1); and, likewise Jesus said later in the same Gospel (John 10:30), “I and my Father are one” (Con. Eun. II PG 45 476B).

Wolfson seems unconcerned about the integrity of the Gospel and, therefore, rummages through the Epistles of St Paul to substantiate his pet theory about John’s exploitation of them. John, he says, describes the Logos as the “only-begotten Son of God,” agreeing with Paul that the “preexistent Christ” is the Wisdom by Whom “all things were made” (John 1:2; Col. 1:16) and, likewise with Philo (Cher. XXXV, 127; LC), who spoke of the Logos (i.e. kosmos noetos) as the One “through which the world was framed;” and even Solomon (Wisd. 7:22) – a common source for Paul and Philo – who refers to “wisdom” as “the artificer of all things.” Again, Wolfson argues, that John, like Paul who proclaims that it is the preexistent Christ by Whom “all things are held together” (Col. 1:17); and John, like Philo who teaches that God implanted the Logos in the world for that purpose (Plaut. II, 9; LC); and with King Solomon that the “wisdom pervades and permeates all things” (Wisd. 7:24). The Prologue is no more than a summary of these opinions, to which John then applied to his Logos “the traditional conception between the hidden Messiah and the hidden wisdom already made by Paul, John says, ’the world knew Him not’ (John 1:10).”
Wolfson’s analysis differs considerably from the explanation provided by St Gregory; indeed, by the whole Church. The fact that St John might or might not have read St Paul, or that he might have used Solomon’s writings in the delineation of the Christian Logos doctrine, did not have the same significance for St Gregory as it does for Professor Wolfson. St Gregory treated the Gospels, St Paul and the wisdom literature of the Old Testament not as “Biblical resources,” but as authoritative witnesses to the saving truth. His writings do not show the Bishop of Nyssa examining Solomon as a source of “Johannine” and “Pauline metaphysics.” Rather these sacred writers were vessels of grace, “hierophants,” revealers of the divine wisdom. Hence, the reference to Paul’s experience of “the third heaven” where “he was initiated into the knowledge of things inexplicable” — ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ μυθηθεὶς τῶν ἀπορρήτων τῆς γνώσεως (Tunc ipse fil. subj. PG 44 1304A).

Wolfson thinks there is something missing in John’s Logos theology, as there is in the theology of the Apostle Paul: no demonstration of the Logos become flesh (John 1:14; Rom. 8:3; Phil. 2:6, 7). Aside from the fact that it was not the purpose of the Apostles to build a metaphysical system, Wolfson evidently has not the slightest idea that the Apostles and the Fathers were testifying to “the Mystery.” No wonder Wolfson is astonished that neither John nor Paul provided any proof that the birth of Jesus was supernatural or without human paternity. Wolfson concedes that some “Church Fathers” found “an explicit assertion in John for the supernatural birth of Jesus in the thirteenth verse of the Prologue, which they read, ’who was born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.’” They are wrong, he says, the verse refers not to Christ but, as in verse 12, to the “sons of God.”

The Professor is far too eager to accept the variant reading of the text which favors his argument. In point of fact, it has no relevance to the understanding of the Fourth Gospel whether John 1:12–13 refers to the “supernatural birth” of Jesus Christ or the “supernatural rebirth” of Christians: the second is impossible without the first. Of course, if the Logos of the Prologue (and the Pauline Epistles) was not confessed to be God Himself, then, Wolfson’s argument might have some validity. The Logos of John’s Prologue might be a Christian version of Philo’s Logos; but it is not. Of course, it might also be a revision of some other Greek philosophers Logos; but it is not.

St Gregory of Nyssa is not alone in affirming that “the great John, by whose lofty proclamation (κηρύγματι), the Only-Begotten (“the Only-begotten God,” as St Gregory sometimes refers to Him) is declared to be Him Who was “with God” and “was God” (Con. Eun. VII, PG 45 769D; IX, 801A). For this reason, wrote the Saint, John conjoined the Logos with “the Beginning,” that is,
pointing to eternity (ἀιώνιος) – “saying that the Logos was in It” (Con. Eun. IX PG 45 777A). The hypostasis (Heb 1:3) of the Logos is the very “Image” of the Father, “the brightness of His Glory,” begotten of Him, of His “eternity” (ἀἰδιότης) and of His “nothingness” – ἐκ τοῦ ὀντος ἄρξασθαι (Con. Eun. VIII PG 45 772D, 773A).

St John (1:4–5) tells us, “In Him was Life; and the Life was the Light of men. And the Light shines in the darkness,” proving, writes St Gregory, that the Logos is “Light from the Light of the Father,” He who dwells in “the Light unapproachable,” the Light which is His Glory, “the Glory of the Only-begotten of the Father.” John beheld His Glory and in it recognized the Glory of the Father which He shares together with the Holy Spirit (Con. Eun. XII PG 45 893AB, 897AB). From time to time, St Gregory reminded Eunomius (and his readers) that the Divinity of the Logos, and His Incarnation, which St John revealed, is “the common dogma of those who have received the word of our piety” (Con. Eun. XII PG 45 925C).

In the thinking of St Gregory and all the Fathers, the Incarnation (often called “the Economy,” or “Dispensation”) always refers to the Logos “Who was made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). This “common dogma” of Christians rests on the Prologue and the entire Fourth Gospel. St John the Theologian identified the Logos not only with Wisdom, but with the historical Jesus, and “He Who dwelt among us” with the Messiah, an equation Philo would not have made, if only because the Messiah is a figure in whom he had little interest. But, then, the Logos of Philo was not God, and was “created” by the Absolute because it is inherently antithetical to matter. St Gregory of Nyssa seems to have read Philo – inasmuch as he charges Eunomius with “reasoning” like him and quoting him directly. One may choose to wonder how much of what the Saint wrote (e.g., The Life of Moses) might have been directed against Philo. Gregory’s exegesis of the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel (and of St Paul’s “Wisdom”) may have, aside from a polemic against “the Greeks,” implicitly an attack upon the unBiblical monotheism of Philo.
2. The Logos and the Genesis Cosmogony

The Logos of Philo is the Logos of his peculiar theism. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as he conceived Him, is the Pure Being (τὸ ὄντως ὄν), absolutely simple (φύσις ἄπλη), free and self-sufficient (De post cain., 48, 167). He occupies no space, but rather contains all things within Himself. He is the transcendent Good and Beauty. He is ineffable; hence, man cannot attain to God by rational demonstration (λόγου ἀπόδειξεί), but through “intuition.” Philo makes the provocative remark, “In order to comprehend God, we must first become God, which is impossible” (Frag., a 654 L). Why “provocative?” Because it is relevant to the argument at hand. Philo offered no doctrine of deification by grace which is another difference with the Logos-theology of St Gregory. Perhaps, he neglected any discussion of the matter for the sake of his Judaism to which he claimed loyalty.

In any case, his cosmology presupposes a theology peculiar to it. The logic of his thought concerning the origin, formation and government of the universe is found not in Old Testament Scriptures – whatever his reliance upon them – but in Hellenism. For Philo of Alexandria the Maker of the world is not God, but the Logos; for St Gregory the Logos is likewise the Creator, the Creator-God: the God of Genesis, the God of Moses, the God of Israel, the God of the Old and New Covenants. For Philo, the Logos was in the beginning as the World of Ideas and Preserver of the cosmos; for St Gregory, the Logos is the beginning as the Maker of the heavens and the earth, and the new beginning as the incarnate Savior.

Gregory’s doctrine of the Logos, whether as Creator or Savior, is dependent upon the Christian Tradition. Philo, on the other hand, was a “Greek,” who viewed the Scriptures and the Jewish tradition, as data for the construction of his own “philosophy,” or, what is the same thing, he treated them as Plato and so many other Greek philosophers treated Homer and the mythology of their nation. If one asks, then, why Philo remained a Jew and of what did his Judaism consist, “it lies mainly in the formal claim that the Jewish people, by virtue of the divine revelation given to Moses, possess the true knowledge in things religious.” No doubt, too, he identified ethnically with them. Yet, he did not believe that the truths taught by Moses were restricted to the Jewish people. The Prophet uttered universal truths. Philo found the “wisdom” hidden in the Pentateuch also among the Greeks who may have, in some instances, plagiarized the books of Moses.
3. Allegorism

Philo’s use of allegorism to uncover those truths. This was the method of Scriptural interpretation practiced in the rabbinical schools of Palestine before Philo – the Hagada, Halakha, “with some affinity for the Midrash” (Eusebius, Praep. Ev. VII, 7 [frag.]). Yet, he was so deeply read in Greek literature that Philo seems to have taken little else from the rabbinic culture (despite his reference to “the tradition of the elders”), save the allegorism which allowed him to distinguish between the “literal” and “mystical” sense of Scripture (De Spec. Lea. II, 147: De Somn. I, 25, etc.).

Philo maintained, too, that he was among those “inspired men who take most of the content of the Law to be visible symbols of things invisible, expressing the inexpressible” (De Spec. Leg. Ill, 178). His grand scheme was to harmonize the Scriptures with the discoveries of human speculation which sometimes led to a struggle with kinsmen who, unlike him, viewed the Jewish faith as unique. Philo berated them as “pedantic teachers of literalism,” “the sophists of the literal sense” (De Somn. I, 102; Pe Cherub., 42) for their rejection of exegesis and eclecticism.

Biblical exegesis for Philo was “an esoteric enterprise.” He did indeed profess respect for the literal sense, but somehow persons and events in the Scriptures were commonly treated as symbolic, a veil behind which great religious and philosophical truths were hidden and which only the spiritually intuitive could apprehend. He knew nothing of the typology everywhere present in the commentaries and homilies of the Fathers. Typology recognizes the historicity of OT persons and events, whatever else they might mean; indeed, that “hidden” or “mystical” meaning of words and texts, including their NT significance, takes its cue from the literal sense.

One ought not be surprised at this difference in their attitude towards the Scriptures. The Fathers and Philo understood history differently, and this variance can only be explained by opposing ontologies. For Philo, who followed Plato, reality was distinguished not merely by the division of matter and spirit, visible and invisible, temporal and eternal, but by their opposition. Also the material, visible and temporal was the realm of “opinion” (δόξα), as Plato said, the spiritual, invisible and eternal realm the arena of truth (ἀληθεία). In other words, the truth of Scriptures is understood in the same way as the truth of the world.

Although St Gregory (and all the Fathers) also distinguished between the things historical and things spiritual or noetical, between what the Apostle
called “that which is seen” (Col. 1:15) and “what is unseen” (1:16), “the mind reaching the bodiless and noetical realm through the former” (Con. Eun. IPG 45 333B), they did not disparage things material and historical for the sake of things spiritual and uncreated. Consequently, they took seriously the historical truth and mortal profit of the literal sense of the Scriptures. We can demonstrate this contention by looking at the different ways in which Philo and St Gregory interpreted the Biblical cosmogony.

From the outset, let us concede that the God of Genesis is the God of the Scriptures, whether of the Old Covenant or the New. Let us also acknowledge that both the Christian Fathers and Philo rightly identified the Logos as the “Creator” of the physical and spiritual universes (including the angels). The initial disparity between them lies in the description of the God Who spoke to Moses. For the Christian, God is the unknowable Trinity: the Father, arche ton panton (De Bapt. Chr. PG 46 585C), is the “cause,” aitia, of “the Only-Begotten Son,” and the all-holy, life-creating Spirit Who is eternally con-substantial (ὁμοούσιος) with the Father and the Son, the triune Deity “to Whom every conceivable existing thing is subject” (Con. Eun. I PG 45 489B); and by Whom “the creation, both the sensible and spiritual nature, come into being from absolutely nothing” (Con. Eun. III PG 45 629C).

According to St Gregory, it was the eternal Son, the pre-incarnate Logos, Who was the major force in the unfolding of that great “mystery” which “the mighty Moses” called “genesis,” the beginning of all that which exists outside of the Trinity. It was He, the Logos, Whom the Prophet records as the Architect of the cosmos, the “Word” uttered by God the Father in order to bring all things into being through His Energies, the two aspects of creation united in the way the soul “has a bond and kinship with the flesh” – πρὸς τὴν τῆς σαρκὸς οὕσιαν συγγενὲς ὁμόϕυλλον. Indeed, they enjoy “a certain harmony,” “a mixture of the sensible and the spiritual, so that all things partake equally of the good, for as the Apostle says, ’no part of creation is rejected’ nor fails to share in the divine fellowship” – μηδὲ τῆς θείας κοινονίας ἀπόκληρον (Ora. Catech. 6, PG 45 25D).

That “divine and blessed Life” which transcends all space and time and which nothing can measure, created all things “in the beginning” (Con. Eun. I, PG 45 365A). When “the great Moses philosophized (φιλοσοφηθέντων) in his cosmogony” about that the physico-spiritual cosmos “in the beginning” (in principio, en arche),” explains St Gregory, we understand “that God by His Power and Wisdom established in the same instant, the principles and potentialities of the cosmos which were subsequently brought to perfection in a certain order” (Hexa. PG 44 72B). As if having Philo and the Greeks in mind,
the Saint stated that, although the Logos created the universe from matter (οἴδανεν ὅτι ποιητὴς ἐστι τῆς ὦλης ὁ Λόγος), “He needed neither matter nor instrument to help Him in the establishment of the universe, for His power and wisdom require no assistance: Christ is the Power and Wisdom ‘through Whom all things were made,’ and without Whom there is no being, as John testifies” (Con.Eun. II PG 45 497A, B).

The first moment of creation is the first moment of time, as the first moment in the existence of everything outside of God. Time, with the creation, thereafter passes through “ages” or “intervals of history” which, according to Solomon the King, is “marked by the sequence of beginning, middle and end” (Con. Eun. I PG 45 365B). The idea of “interval” (διάστημα) characterizes St Gregory’s view of time and the history of the visible world. Whatever is beyond the measure of interval is beyond time and beyond rational cognition. The universe was created in distinct intervals of time, that is, “the time of this life in the first work of creation is fulfilled in one week of days” – ὁ τοῦ βίου τούτού χρόνος ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ δημιουργίᾳ τῆς κτίσεως διὰ μιᾶς ἐβδομάδας ἦμερῶν σωνέπτηρωθη (De Oct. PG 44 609B); and, St Gregory adds, “We measure time in terms of days, starting with the one day (τῆς μιᾶς, not πρώτη) and closing with the number seven, always returning to the one day; and always measuring the totality of time through the circle of seven days or intervals until the passing away of movement and the flux of motion” (609C). In other words, “the nature of time is defined by the week of days” – ἀλλὰ περιωρίσθη τῇ ἐβδομάδι τῶν ἦμερῶν ἢ τοῦ χρόνου φύσις (609C).

Finally, commenting on the words of the Lord’s Prayer, “on earth as it is in heaven,” Gregory stated that what may be fittingly said about the rationality (λογική) of creation made by the Word (ὁ Λόγος) may be inferred from “what is seen.” St Gregory, however, will not speculate on God's purpose in creating the world as He did. Given what he already knew about the revealed Will of God to the Church, the creation of things corporeal and incorporeal (of which man is the nexus), he affirmed only that the universe had been created “so that what is below may share in what is high and heavenly and what is above may not be estranged from those things which are earthly” (De Ora. Dom. II PG 44 1165C).
4. Man

Man, created on the Sixth Day (i.e., in time), dwelling in Paradise, was a microcosm, “encompassing in himself the elements by which he is made complete” (De an. et res. PG 46 28B). Adam was created a soul with a genuine body and, not as some scholars (e.g., Volker) insist, with a light, transparent, incorruptible and pure “spiritual body” – a theory with which Origen might better be credited. Such an anthropology, moreover, cannot be justified in terms of the patristic christology, i.e., Adam as the type of Christ Who was the enfleshed Logos, the Christ Who rose from the dead on the third day. Later, God made “the woman” from him and, if one wishes, here was a “second creation.” Initially, Adam and Eve were “sexually differentiated,” albeit without sexual desire and the need to reproduce. Until then our first parents were able not to die and not to sin. Neither was copulation a necessary condition for procreation, if there was to be any.

“Man,” then, was the link between “what is high and heavenly” and what is “earthly,” between the incorporeal and the corporeal. “The spiritual or noetic nature of his soul, albeit akin to heavenly powers, inhabits (ἐνοικοῦν τοσά) an earthly body,” says Gregory, “terrestrial flesh which in the restoration of all things will together with the soul dwell (συμμετοικιζόμενης) in heavenly places” (De Ora. Dom. II PG 44 1165CD, cf. Eph. 1:3). Κάτα τήν ἀποστολικὴν διδασκαλίαν, the visible or phenomenal body and noetical soul, “the hidden man,” sharing common growth and energy, together form one person. The “soul is not adapted to a strange building any more than the seal impressed on wax is unsuitable to it” (De hom. opif. XXIX PG 44 237B).

As Moses records in his “mystical anthropogeny, “man (male and female) was made in “the image and likeness of God,” that is, to Adam and Eve the genderless God imparted “a certain Godlike grace” wherein they would be able to share in divine Nature (De hom, opif., VIII–IX PG 44 148C–149B). Unlike Philo, St Gregory espoused no theory of androgeny. The words of St Paul, that “in Christ there is neither male nor female” (Gal. 3:28), did not imply for Gregory that the two sexes did not exist in Paradise; nor that in Christ they have disappeared. Rather, as Moses said, “male and female created He them” (Gen. 1:27), as the natural attributes of humanity (De hom. opif., XVI PG 44 181CD).

The progenitors of the human race possessed “the grace of immortality” (De hom. opif., XVII PG 44 188B), which they will subsequently lose through disobedience. Death was their reward, as God promised. The “image of God” in
which Adam (and Eve) was made, will be shattered. Their divided progeny will suffer the same penalty because they share the same humanity, the same substance with the fallen Adam. In “the fullness of time,” there will come a second Adam, Christ the Lord, forging a “new creation,” Himself the first of a new race, which bears His Name. He will reunite the “image” and recall the first man to his primitive destiny. The “new creature” will partake of the Second Adam’s immortality (achieved by obedience, even to the death and victory of the Cross), as the “old man” partook of the first Adam’s mortality (the penalty of disobedience, even by consuming the fruit of the tree).

Gregory's Christian view of the first man’s Fall is a major difference between himself and Philo of Alexandria. Whereas Gregory, following the Scriptures, described human choice as the cause of the Fall and the introduction of evil into the creation, Philo, if we may believe N.P. Williams, seems to have adapted the Greek idea of evil (as inseparably bound up with the nature of finite existence) to the Jewish idea of “evil imagination” (yêcer ha-ra), that is, the “passions” as “rooted in the flesh” or “connatural with our race” (Quis rer. div haer, 54, 55). This opinion was drawn literally from Genesis 6:5 (“every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”) and 8:21 (“for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth”). Philo may have also accepted the teaching of some Rabbis that God had implanted yecer directly into the soul of each person. Such an idea cannot be found in St Gregory of Nyssa who said, “whatever was made in the beginning did not receive evil” – οἱον ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐγν, ὅτε οὕπω τὴν κακίαν ἐδέξατο (Tunc ipse fil. subj. PG 44 1313B). Evil came with the sin of Adam, with the wrong choice of the empirical man, on a historical day, in a historical place. It was unthinkable to St Gregory that God was responsible for evil in any way. He also refused to inject into his theodicy, as Origen and Philo had done, the theory of a pre-temporal fall of pre-existent souls. He likewise repudiated their conception of a double creation – “the six days” of Genesis to which God later added the physical world. Gregory, as we have seen, held that “in the beginning” God created the spiritual world while simultaneously crafting the physical world from the matter which He wrought ex nihilo.

Thus, Paradise was a historical state (albeit with a “mystical” meaning) in which the first man and woman abode. The “heavenly man” (deified humanity) and the “ideal state” of which St Gregory also spoke, exist only in God’s foreknowledge (De hom. opif. PG 44, 16 185B), and realized only in Christ (ἐν, σῶν Χριστῶ). They are eschatological realities, typified throughout the Scriptures. Thus, Adam, king of the first creation, was the type – or, the anti-type – of Christ, “the second Adam,” “the ideal man,” “the last man,” the alpha
and omega of “the new creation” – Lord of history and “Father of the Age to Come” (Isa. 9:6).

For Philo, there is neither historical Fall nor Redemption in the Christian sense. Therefore, St Gregory’s teachings on the “garment of skins” would have made no sense to him (nor to Origen). He did not confuse the “skins” with the human body (σῶμα). They represented the “flesh” (σάρξ), corrupt, sinful and dying human nature, and not, as in the case of Origen, vessels of matter into which the soul had descended as punishment for a pre-temporal sin. The catastrophe of Eden was an historical event with historical consequences; and man’s “return to his original splendor” will likewise be an historical occurrence.

Meanwhile, among the consequences of the Fall or the “ancestral transgression,” according to St Gregory, was the appearance of sexuality (see above), the need to procreate the human race through irrational and physical generation. Only after the Fall did God say to our first-parents, “Increase and multiply” (Gen. 1:28). Had man not fallen, the Bishop of Nyssa asserted, God would have provided other means for the perpetuation of the human race (De hom. opif. XXII PG 44 205BC).

As the result of this opinion, not a few writers have mistakenly inferred that St Gregory disparaged the marriage. The truth of the matter is that he saw marriage and sex as a fact of the fallen world; nevertheless, the marital state ἐν Χριστῷ, sanctified by the nuptial grace, was a vehicle of salvation; but, to be sure, inferior to virginity (as, indeed, it is). With the other Fathers, St Gregory taught that virginity, because it anticipates the resurrection and the Age to Come, where men and women will be like the angels neither giving nor taking in marriage (Matt. 22:30), the state of Christian virginity imitates the virginity of Christ (and His Bride) while signifying the return to Paradise (De Virg. 12 PG 46 376A).

Philo could not have approved Gregory’s conception of human existence or destiny, largely on the basis of his theology which, like the Saint’s, determines every aspect of his religious philosophy. If this is true, if his understanding of God was the major difference between them, then, as we have seen, Philo had a different conception of the Logos to whom he denied any equality with God. Consequently, the creation of Gregory is not the creation of Philo, and the Adam of Gregory is not the Adam of Philo, and the history of Gregory is not the history of Philo.

What, then, was the influence of Philo on the Logos of John’s Prologue? Philo had often spoken of Him in language familiar to Christians – “first-born Son of God,” “the Wisdom of God,” “the Power of God,” “the Image of God,” a “mediator” between God and the creation, etc., but his Logos was not a Person,
not He Whom St Gregory and all Christians adore; not the Incarnate Lord, not God the Son, come to suffer and die in the flesh for the redemption of the human race – “folly to the Greeks and a scandal to the Jews.”

Also, one may wonder at the extent of Philo’s acquaintance with Christian doctrine; or, indeed, whether he might not have been influenced by the Christianity of Alexandria and Rome. Or if the Church were under his spell, why she preached a Deity whose Spirit was God. And one might conjecture what he thought the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the World of Ideas might be; and might he not have been disconcerted to find that neither in the New Testament Scriptures nor in the Fathers of his day, no World of Ideas were in

Consonant with his Hellenism, Philo had placed the Logos within the divine Mind (De Opf. Mun. V, 20). The Logos is the assembly of eternal Ideas, “the intelligible world” (and Philo is the first to use the phrase, κόσμος νοητός), the same Ideas about which Plato said so much and St Gregory and the holy Fathers said so little. There, in the divine Mind, the Ideas are inactive; but when God decided to construct the universe, they were externalized or, more exactly, they were – the Logos was – formed as entities outside the Absolute. As suggested already, there is reason to believe that their “externalization” was necessary, not merely for the creation of the world, but also as the principle of revelation; or to use the words of F.H. Colson, the Philonic solution to the “antinomy” of God’s immanence and transcendence is the postulation of the Logos (and the divine Powers).

In other terms, God is revealed to the creation through the Logos. The Logos is the revelation of His Wisdom (Leg. All. I, xix, 65). The simple, hidden, immaterial, ineffable God is “the Father of Wisdom.” The Logos or Wisdom is the World of Ideas, He by whom God framed and organized the cosmos. Thus, in one place, Philo wrote that God “stamped the entire world with an image and idea, namely, of His own Logos” (Somn. II, vi, 45), that is, “the Logos of God is the first principle, the archetypal Idea, the first measure of the universe” (Migr. Abr. XVIII, 103). The Logos is “the Idea of Ideas” (ιδέα ιδεῶν), an expression based upon Aristotle’s description of the divine Mind as the “form of forms” (ειδὸς εἰδῶν), which also explains Philo’s conception of the human mind as shaped “in conformity with the archetypal idea, namely, the most sublime Logos” (Spec. Leg. III, xxxvi, 207) – a theory, incidentally, upon which mutatis mutandis the epistemologies of Augustine and Origen also rest.

According to Philo, “to see things as they really are” is to see “the most holy Logos,” that which impressed itself not only on the human mind but on the
universe. Although the Logos is “the image of God through whom the entire universe was framed” (De Spec. Leg. I, 81) and the Logos dwells in the creation as its “soul,” it cannot be said that anything is made “in the likeness of the most High One and Father of the Logos” (Quaest. in Gen. II, 62). Moreover, although the very purpose of philosophy is the vision of the divine Logos, *visio Verbi*, one may not expect that such a vision entitles us to the direct vision of God, *visio Dei*. But Philo’s God is the Absolute, beyond all human knowledge and experience, and we know Him only indirectly through the Logos by which He created the world, the Logos, Who is the reflection of the divine Mind.

Given these “first principles,” we may know whether the world is eternal. The question is not without its perils to answer: if God is eternal, if there is no change in Him, must He act eternally? If “no,” He is mutable, one time acting, one time not; if “yes,” does He continue to create even now and, therefore, our world is forever being created; or are there an infinite number of worlds? The distinction between God and the Logos was a partial answer to the first question. Philo dedicated an entire treatise to the second, Concerning the Indestructability of the World (De Aeternitate mundi or, in the Greek, *περὶ ἀϕθαρσίας κόσμος*). Such inquiries held no fascination for St Gregory. He took literally the declarations of Scriptures concerning the beginning and end of the created universe. He went no further in his cosmogony.

As we have seen, the Saint held the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, a world and its history ending with the Second Coming of Christ, the general Resurrection and the transfiguration of the cosmos in the eternal Age to Come. In a sense, then, the world has no termination; it is infinite and “indestructable” by grace. On the other hand, the ambivalent Philo, mesmerized by the Siren of pagan wisdom, yet unwilling to ignore his Jewish heritage, was never able to clarify his position.

In more than one place, Philo denounced the notion that the world is uncreated and indestructible. “There was a time when it was not,” he proclaimed (Decal. XXVII, 58). More than once he decried pagancyclism and the Stoic theory of conflagration and rebirth (De aet. mundi. IX, 47). Some things can be destroyed, he said, by addition or subtraction, transposition or transmutation, none of which applies to the universe *in toto* (XXII, 113). He favored the notion that it was imperishable by the Will of God. At other times he seems to have been intrigued by the argument of Plato’s Timaeus 32c that the world, once formed, is indestructible. Its obliteration, if nothing else, would mean the negation of Providence and creative power, ideas Philo would not abandon.

His general opinion seemed to be that God, through the Logos, made the
universe out of nothing (τὰ μὴ ὄντα), i.e., “prime matter.” It was created in and co-extensive with time which measures the movement of the universe (De aet. mundi X, 52). In a way, however, time and the world have, by necessity, “subsisted from everlasting, without beginning, and things which are everlasting are indestructible” (X, 53). But the world did have a “beginning,” and, therefore, its eternity must refer to its presence in the divine Mind, as a pattern of the Logos. We may be certain, in any case, that the words which open the book of Genesis, In the beginning God created... (ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεός) are not to be understood in a temporal sense.

“Beginning” refers to the principle in a sequence of numbers, not the origination of time. Although the pattern for the days of creation and their content existed before their external realization, they issued from the Mind of God (i.e., the Ideas) “in a sequence and concatenation of things which precede each other” (De opif. mundi IX, 26–28). Thus, Moses recorded that the Maker brought forth “one day,” not the “first day,” indicating the uniqueness of the Intelligible World which, Philo tells us, has a natural kinship with the number “one” (De opif. mundi IX, 35). The construction of the spiritual world, completed on the “one day,” was a preparation for the appearance of the physical world which God formed according to the noetic pattern of the Ideas.

On the other hand, the Genesis exegesis of St Gregory shows no Pythagorean fascination with numbers: “one day” (Sunday) refers to that “period” or “age” when God began creating the spiritual and physical realms. The other days of the week, as Moses detailed, follow in temporal succession. But also, the days of creation prefigure the whole duration of historical time, successive ages (ἀκολούθία) which, at their term are followed by “the eighth Day,” “the Day after the seventh,” of which the “one day” of Genesis is a type, of which the Sundays after the Resurrection of Christ are also types or “icons,” as St Gregory writes in De Octava. This Day, of which the Prophet Isaiah spoke (Isa. 2:11; 13:6, 9. Cf. II Hen. 33:7), is also a type and symbol of life everlasting, because, in the thought of St Gregory, it is associated with the Resurrection of Christ by which the Age to Come and our salvation has been inaugurated. Philo and the Greeks obviously had no such historiosophy and soteriology.

Further evidence of this fact may be illustrated by their views of man’s creation. When God created him on the sixth day, Philo explained, He made him according to the pattern of the microcosmic and genderless “heavenly man,” ὁυρανιος ἄνθρωπος, of Jewish apocalyptic literature, himself born in the image of God, sharing in nothing corporeal or corruptible. He is the archetype of the mortal and perceptible. The Jewish philosopher discovers him also in the
Platonic Idea and, as Louis Ginzberg observes, Philo is “evidently combining Midrash and philosophy, Plato and the rabbis. Setting out from the duplicate Biblical account of Adam, who was formed in the image of God (Gen. 1:22), and of the first man, whose body God drew from the earth (Gen. 2:7), he combines with it the Platonic doctrine of ideas, taking the primordial Adam as the idea and the created man of flesh as the ‘image.’”

In Leg. All. I, xii, 31, Philo writes that the “the earthly man was formed from the matter scattered here and there, which Moses calls ‘clay.’ For this reason, he says that the heavenly man was not moulded; while the earthly is a moulded work of the Artificer, and not His offspring.” Moreover, the “earthly” or “moulded man” was “the sense-perceptible man and a likeness of the intelligible type.” He was made according to the “original seal” which is “the Logos of God, the first principle, the archetypal idea, the pre-measurer of all things.” This Adam was sculpted from the dust of the earth, in respect to his body. He obtained a spirit when God “breathed into his face,” an act by which Adam was endowed with a higher element (νοῦς), the rational part of the soul; for it is written that man “became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7).

Philo maintained a sharp dualism between soul and body, a fact suggested in several treatises. For example, in De Plantatione Noe, Philo stated that souls were assigned human bodies according to cosmic law (cf. Plato’s Timaeus 42f.); while in De Somniis and De Gigantibus he taught, not unlike Origen, that souls were not created with bodies but voluntarily descended into them because they longed for the corporeal state where God “breathed” “into his [Adam] face,” because it is this part of the body which hides the “image of God” the “image” which allows him, as far as it is possible for him, to know and experience things spiritual: it is the leading element (ἡγέμονα νόῡ) of “moulded” or “primitive man,” his “mind.” Adam was, therefore, a “likeness” of God, by virtue of his kinship to the noetical intermediaries which reflect the divine Nature.

Discussing Gregory’s Genesis anthropology, Balthasar finds no “ideal man,” but a historical person, created “in the image and likeness of God, as Moses declared. He finds no sharp distinction between “image and likeness” in the Saint’s writings; in fact, “image and likeness” are virtually synonymous. R. Leys does not altogether agree, arguing that the term “likeness” is less static than “image” in Gregory’s thinking. The truth of matter is suggested by Gregory’s belief the entire human race partakes in the “image of God” by virtue of its origin and descent from Adam. His offspring share his substance. Moreover, we may gather from both In Verba. Faciamus hominem (PG 44 264B) and De hominis opificio (16, PG 44 184B) that the “image of God” is the
natural ability of man in the Good (lost in the Fall), implying thereby not only mankind’s eventual deification, but its rationality and free will. “Likeness” is “likeness to God” which is acquired by growth in virtue and dispassion (In Verba, Fac. hom. PG 44 276C).

Following Moses’ account, both Philo and St Gregory agree that the creation of Adam occurred on the sixth day, as the “crown” of His work, as a part of the physical world. He was the “crown” on account of the divine wisdom he possessed in Paradise. Philo allegorized the trees of Eden as “the ideas of the Creator planted in the rational soul” (Quaes et sol. in Gen. I, 4). Moreover, if God took six days, Philo theorized, it was “not that its Maker required a length of time for His work, since we must not think of God as doing all things simultaneously, remembering that ’all’ includes the commands which He issues the thought behind them. Six days are mentioned because for the things coming into existence there was a need for order. Order implies number, and among the numbers, six is the most suitable, according to the law of nature” (III, 13: Leg. All. I, ii, 2–5).

Moreover, if God erected the universe after the “beautiful pattern” (καλοῦ παραδείγματα) of the Intelligible World, we must believe that the visible world could not have been produced in any other way: “God created the best possible of all worlds” (cf. De Prov., fragm. 1). He “established” (Jer. 10:12; Prov. 3:19; 8:23–29) it according to His most perfect Wisdom (Leg. All. I, xix. 65) – Logos as ὀργανον, as the Architect and Designer, fashioning and arranging things by His power and image of beauty. There is a sense, then, in which Philo’s idea of creation may be judged as deterministic.

Again, if Moses declared in Genesis that God rested on the seventh day, we must understand not a literal cessation of divine Activity, a literal resting on the Sabbath, “but that we may know that to mortals the process of creation is unobserved, obscure, incomprehensible; and thus he [Moses] adds, ’when it came to be’, not defining the moment but establishing a limit for the things which come into being by that Cause which has no limitation. Such is the explanation of the origination of the universe in six days” (Leg. All. I, viii, 17–20).

According to St Gregory and the Fathers, on the other hand, the “seventh day” was indeed the last day of the first week of creation, marking the end of His work on the first creation (Gen. 2:2); but also it is a type of “the true and eternal Sabbath,” the “rest” of the Lord on Holy Saturday, when He slumbered in the grave, a “rest” (ἀναπαύσις) which prefigured the “eternal rest” of those who will abide in Christ. Thus, “the mystery of the sabbath,” is revealed as an eschatological event (In Psal. II. 5 PG 44 504D–505A: Test, adv. Jud., XIII PG
The philosophy of Philo has no such vision of the future. He did not link past and future in this way. His eschatology had no direct involvement of God with His creatures. His communication with the creation is mediated by the Logos, to be sure, but also by the “Powers” (δυνάμεις) – which are both created and uncreated: not uncreated like God nor created like man (Quis rer. div. her, xiii, 206). As uncreated, the Powers are properties of God or, as Philo expresses it, they are His “escorts” (Spec. Leg. I, viii, 45). The Powers are sometimes identified with the “angels,” e.g., the Cherubim who kept the gates of Paradise, the two Angels who entered Sodom (De Cherub., 9; De Abra. Mig., XXIV, 25).

As God’s agents, the Powers imprint the Ideas on matter, giving to each genus its “appropriate shape.” Philo calls the immanent Ideas the “seemal essence” of things (Quest. in Ex. II, 68; Quis rer. div. her. XXIV 68) which, in the case of man, form his constitution and gives him rationality, and Nature its intelligibility; hence, the Powers act as “the bond (δεσμός) of all existence, holding and knitting together all the parts of creation” (Fug. XX, 112). Through them the Logos, the seat of the Ideas, becomes is the “World Soul” or, to use Wolfson's words, “On the whole, to Philo’s mind, the immanent Logos is the totality of the immanent Powers in the visible world, just as the incorporeal Logos is the totality of the incorporeal Powers in the intelligible world.”

Philo classified the Powers in many ways, but in the moral sphere, they are represented in the Scriptures under the Names of God: Yahweh (Κύριος) by which He expresses His mercy, forgiveness, favor; and Elohim (Θεός) by which He displays His justice, anger, and punitive aspects. Together, the Ideas and/or Powers lead the human souls – Adam was originally androgynous, only later divided into male and female – and the entire universe to “the closing,” the “eighth day,” which, in first century Judaism referred to the last feast of the year; but, philosophically, to the destiny of the world, the universal kingdom, “the eighth day,” “the city” (Spec. Leg. II, 211, 213), to God, to ecstasy for the elect soul.

The “city” of St Gregory is the eternal Kingdom of God, the City of the Age to Come, the Eighth Day, in which “all things will be subject to the Father,” and where the deified creature, body and soul, will participate in the Glory which the Father shared with the Son and the Holy Spirit before the world was. The destiny of man and the creation is achieved through the Logos, the incarnate Logos, but with the collaboration of the Father and the Spirit, through a condescension which returns man to “the blessed state” from which he had fallen. In the Age to Come, all creation will be bathed in the Uncreated Energies of Light and Grace.
One must avoid the temptation, incidentally, of confusing Them with Philo’s Ideas and Powers, whether in the *Philosophia* of St Gregory or any other Father of the Church. For instance, both St Dionysius the Areopagite and St Maximus the Confessor expounded a doctrine of the uncreated Energies. They conceived them as immanent and dynamic forces by which the triune God created, sustain and govern the noetical and physical worlds. Never, incidentally, must these “forces” be confused with the divine Essence, nor as the “overflow” of It. In themselves, the “forces,” alias “ideas” *(λόγοι)* or “models” *(παραδείγματα)* or “wills” *(θελήματα)* are “the reasons of things, which give them substance... for it is by them that all things have been determined and are created by the substantial God” (St Dionysius, De div. nom., V. 6 PG 3 824C).

These “forces” of the communicable eternal and divine Energies, incidentally, do not determine the nature of God, nor are they exemplars by which He is compelled to create the universe. And thus, as Vladimir Lossky affirms, the created universe of the Fathers is “not seen, as in platonic or platonizing thought, under the pale and attenuated aspect of a poor replica of the Godhead; rather it appears as an entirely new being, as creation fresh from the hands of the God of Genesis ‘who saw that it was good,’ a created universe willed by God and the joy of His Wisdom, ‘a harmonious ordinance’, a marvellously composed hymn to the power of the Almighty’, as St Gregory of Nyssa says (In Psa. inscript., PG 44 441B)\(^{124}\).

The “philosophy” of St Gregory has no impersonal Platonic or Philonic God, no insuperable dualism, no *kosmos noetos*. With regard to the latter, St Gregory had no appetite for them, considering, one may suppose, that whatever they could do the divine Energies could do better. One may also infer from his writings that St Gregory felt less compelled to give a rational explanation for the government of the world than did some of the other Fathers who built on his work. He was clear on one thing: the Christian God has no fear of direct, of intimate, contact with matter, whether as Providence or the Incarnate Logos. His Plan for the world includes, too, the sanctification of matter now and later its deification in the transfigured universe of the Age to Come. Central to his thinking was the bodily Resurrection of the Lord without which salvation would have been impossible.

Philo had no such vision of the end. Having said so little about eschatology, one may wonder whether he was motivated by any hope of future life. As already mentioned, he offered a doctrine of immortality – of the soul. The good human soul, he declared, will depart the body at death and “will come to the purest ether as to its father,” to an element other than the four basic
elements which compose the world. The “unjust and godless souls,” God banishes from His Presence “to the furthest bounds, and scatter them to the region of pleasures and lust and injustices. That region is most appropriately called “the region of the impious,” but it is not “the mythical Hades” of the Greeks. “For the true Hades is the life of the bad, a life fiendish, defiled by blood guilt, and liable to every curse” (De congr., 56–57 LC). One may be curious for what reason he developed such a soteriology when his system does not seem to call for it.

St Gregory of Nyssa and Philo of Alexandria believed and lived and ratiocinated in two different realities. The opposition between them was not only the Christianity of the one and the Judaism of the other, but also their attitude towards Hellenism. Philo was a “philosopher” in the sense in which Plato would have understood it. Philo was not a Christian for the very reason that St Gregory was follower of Christ: the Incarnate God and His Economy. Hence, the *philosophia* of St Gregory had as its purpose the defense, elucidation and propagation of the Gospel. Philo used Judaism, as he used Hellenism, in the development of a personal *Weltsanschauung*. 
Chapter V. St Gregory and Origen: history

Commonplace among historians and patrologists is the notion that Origen of Alexandria (185–255) was “mentor” to St Gregory of Nyssa. Such has been the attitude – indeed, the prejudice – among them surely since the 19th century. That Gregory, on more than one occasion, referred to his brother, St Basil, as his “teacher in the Faith” apparently has little effect on his judges. When the facts show that the authenticity of some Origenist manuscripts are open to question or that enemies of Orthodoxy may have tampered with Gregory’s writings; and when it can be demonstrated that the theologies of Origen and St Gregory differ fundamentally in most ways, why, then, does modern scholarship persistently use the word “dependency” to define their relationship and demand, consequently, an “Origenist” interpretation of St Gregory’s works?

For instance, L.R. Hennessy provides us with an outline of St Gregory’s ostensible debt to Origen. From his “master,” Gregory learned the nature of “philosophy,” especially Platonism, and its role in the development of a Christian theodicy. From his Homilies on Jeremiah, (among others), the Saint won an appreciation for the Almighty’s “unwillingness to constrain human freedom” in the struggle for salvation. From Origen’s Commentary on Matthew and his Homilies on Leviticus. Gregory came to understand that God’s action towards the sinner is disciplinary rather than punitive. Origen’s De Mortius taught him, writes Hennessy, that in the Age to Come the body becomes (μεταστοιχειωθέντος) “spiritual body.” The “coats” or “garment of skins” was delineated in Origen’s Homilies on Genesis and adapted in Gregory’s De anima et resurrectione. Finally, from De Principis, Origen’s major work, St Gregory was exposed to his ideas about moral evil, human freedom, Scriptural exegesis (allegorism), cosmology and, above all, “the restoration of all things.”

That St Gregory and Origen shared what Lossky calls “a community of language”; and, indeed, a “common pool of thought,” explains, in part, the similarity of theological approach. Both drew upon the Apostolic Tradition. Such things account for similarities, but what accounts for the differences between them? It was surely more than individual temperament or the nature of their audiences. Origen, unlike St Gregory, confessed that he was dissatisfied with the semel traditae sanctus fidei. He hoped to reshape its content, in order, as he wrote, “to advance beyond mere faith” (Con. Cel. Ill, 33 Ch), “to discourse more clearly” (De Princ., I, 6 B), or, indeed, to accommodate the spirit of the times – which finally brought Origen into conflict with the very
Tradition he claimed to defend; and which caused his banishment from the Church at the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553) – never to be numbered among her Saints, never to be ranked with the Church Fathers, never to be placed on the ecclesiastical calendar, never to be commemorated in her Liturgy, never to have any Christian temple called for him, no son of the Church to bear his name. St Gregory, to the contrary, has been honored as a “Father of the Church” indeed, “Father of Fathers” by Nicea II (787) – his feast celebrated in the East on 10 Jan and in the West on 9 марта. Such approbation would not have been given to one “filled with the spirit of Origen” (Tixeront) and a “Hellenizer” (Cherniss).

What precisely is this accusation which has been brought against Gregory? What is this opprobrium which some have attached to his name? Why have so many scholars labeled him “Origenist?” Chiefly on the basis of a purported eschatology he held in common with Origen: the doctrine of universal salvation, *apokatastasis*?

Too many, however, have come to the study of St Gregory ready to cast his *philosophia* in a false light. Fatal to their undertaking is the failure to take seriously his anti-Platonic, anti-Origenist “Chalcedonian christology” or, what is the same thing, the Bishop of Nyssa’s Christian understanding of the beginning of, the course of and the end of created things.
1. Apokatastasis

In the preface to his The Boundaries of Life, St Germanos of Constantinople (c. 635–733) rejected as false the charge of “Origenism” against St Gregory of Nyssa, maintaining that, in fact, his writings had been corrupted by heretics. He may have been following the lead of St Anastasius Sinaitica (630–700) who was the first to suggest that St Gregory’s books had been altered, probably, in the workshop established in Alexandria by heretics, a workshop whose whole purpose was to adroitly change the writings of the Fathers, twisting for their “evil purposes (κακονοίαν) their lofty teachings” (Via Dux PG 89 289D–292A). The Byzantine historian, Nikephoros Kailistos (fl. 1330), will later concur.

Did St Maximus the Confessor (580–662) hear any rumors about the falsification of Gregorian manuscripts? Did he believe them? Maximos, so completely immersed in the controversies of his day, must have been aware that the disciples of the Monophysite, Severus, the Patriarch of Antioch (d. 538), did not hesitate to “correct” any patristic text which employed the language of Chalcedon, among them a work entitled Peri arethns, “qui n’est autre que notre Vie de Moïse.” And certainly he knew and despised this Severian tactic to discredit St Gregory. Was it not heretics who attributed to the Saint the errors of Origen? Why, then, did he (and later St Theodore the Studite) refuse to disavow the so-called “incriminating passages” found among the writings of Gregory? What evidence did they possess which led them to believe that the writings of St Gregory were not adulterated?

Were they really so well informed? Could either St Maximus or St Theodore have read Gregory’s the fortieth chapter of Oratio Catechetica Magna (PG 45 104D–105A) in which he asserted,

The wretched life of the sinner in this world bears no comparison with any of the unspeakable torments which they will meet in hell. Speaking of its fire, you should know that it is totally different from anything we have ever experienced. There is a difference between a fire which is quenched and not quenched. The fire of hell is unquenchable...

One must be curious if St Maximus cum sui were familiar with the words of de Infantibus, qui Praemature Abripiuntur. “Judas... on account of the inherent depth of his evil, his chastisement through purification will extend to infinity” – Ἰοῦδα...διὰ τὸ βάθος τῆς ἐμφυείσης κακίας εἰς ἀπειρον παρατείνεται διὰ τῆς καθάρσεως κόλασις (PG 46 184A); or the words of Gregory’s first de Pauperibus Amandus – τοῖς δὲ μισανθρώποις καὶ πονηροῖς τιμωπία πυρός, καὶ
Perhaps, Maximus studied Gregory’s entire “system” and came to the conclusion that its idea of eternity, αἰώνιος – a word he applied to God Himself, ὁ Θεός ὁ αἰώνιος (De vita s. Mac, PG 46 984D) – was erroneous and, therefore, Gregory’s teaching on “the unquenchable fires of hell” could not be sustained? Perhaps, St Maximus confused Gregory’s idea of “hell” with his teaching on “hades” (ἄδης) which the latter is described as “a state of life, invisible and bodiless to where the soul is carried after its departure from this life” (De an. et res., 85B). Hades is indeed temporary, for Christ συντρίψας τὰς πύλας τοῦ ἄδου (De vita s. Mac.. 984C), while hell is τοῦς ἀτελευτήτους ἐκείνους αἰώνας, ὡν πέρας ἡ ἀπειρίας ἔστιν (81C). Also, awaiting the final Judgment of God, the soul in Hades, by the prayers of the Church may be saved, because, among other things, after his death, St John the Baptist proclaimed to them in Hades the God Who came in the flesh” (Troparion of the Beheading, Tone 2). The Lord Himself also descended into the abode of the dead where He “didst break the everlasting bars of Hades” (Matins of Pascha, Sixth Ode).

In any case, from what St Maximus has written about the eschatology of St Gregory, one may not declare that he reproached the Bishop of Nyssa for holding the universalism of Origen, a heresy whose inspiration was Greek thought, that is to say, the pagan idea of “eternal recurrence,” cosmic cyclicity, with the components of Platonic metempsychosis, the Stoic and Pythagorean “the Great Year,” and “the celestial ascension” of the Gnostics. Maximus nevertheless conceded that Gregory expounded an eschatology which led to much confusion. He unwisely employed the “much abused” (κατακέχπηται) word, apokatastasis, to describe the condition of the creation after the general Resurrection.

St Maximus the Confessor explained the meaning of apokatastasis in the works of St Gregory of Nyssa as, the restoration of the soul’s powers, fallen under sin, to that very state in which it originally was created. Just as it was necessary that our whole nature in the resurrection of the flesh receive incorruption at the appointed time, so also the perverted powers of the soul, with the passage of the ages, may put off the memory of wickedness implanted in it, and come to God Who has no limit. Thus by spiritual knowledge, not by participation (ἡ ἐπιγνώσει, οὐ τῇ μεθέξει) in the divine goods, the soul (and body), will be restored to its ancient state and thereby the Creator is shown not to be the cause of sin (Quaest. et Dubia. 13 PG 90 796AC).

It would seem that St Maximus’ judgment of Gregory’s eschatology was...
based almost wholly on the “incriminating passages” which he (Maximus) interpreted to mean that the fires of hell, *gehenna*, will be quenched, although not everyone will partake of the divine Nature, not everyone will be deified. But St Gregory taught clearly that in the Age to Come the creation will be transfigured and that God will be “all in all.” Unlike Origen, he taught that our place in the Age to Come will be determined by the use of freedom made in this life. That some creatures will not possess Him to the same degree is not the point. He who is saved will be deified.

St Maximus, writes E.B. Daley, was embarrassed by the idea of the ultimate salvation of all spiritual beings, including the devils, an idea which is found in Gregory’s *De an. et res.* PG 46 69C–72B. Assuming the text was not edited by a foreign hand, St Gregory proclaimed, “when evil shall one day have been annihilated in the long evolution of the ages, nothing shall have been excluded from the age of goodness, even some of those evil spirits shall rise to confess the Lordship of Christ.” Of particular interest here are the words, *nothing shall have been excluded from the age of goodness, even some of those evil spirits...*

If only *some of the evil spirits will rise to confess the Lordship of Christ* in the *age of goodness*, then, Daley, etc. have failed to prove that St Gregory held the doctrine of universal salvation. Moreover, one may not infer from this text that the “confession” of Christ’s Lordship and repentance by some of those evil spirits could not happen even now. And if Daley hoped to argue that St Gregory’s allusion to a *long evolution of the ages* suggests an endless cycle of worlds, a process of “education” – which, in the case of Origen (Comm. in Rom. V, 10 PG 14 1052B), opens to the evil spirits the opportunity to return – he has failed once more. Such phrases in Gregory may just as well apply to “the ages of time” and not to the idea of “universal salvation delayed.”

Of course, the “incriminating passages” alone did not convince Maximus of St Gregory’s error. He considered also the Bishop’s view of the natural impulsion of all things towards the Good, the Good which must eventually prevail against evil and finally extinguish it. St Maximus discovered this idea in De Hominis Opificio. 21 (PG 44 201 BO),

Now whatever is always in motion, if its progress is towards the good, and by virtue of the infinite way before it, it will never cease its journey. It will not find any limit on account of the undefinable thing which draws it. If it inclines towards the opposite, when it has finished the way of evil and has reached the nadir of its course, and finding there nothing suitable to its nature, by necessity it turns towards the good once more. For since evil does not extend to infinity, it is succeeded at its boundary by the good. And thus, as was said, our ever-
moving nature makes again the passage to the good being taught prudence by
the memory of its previous wickedness whereby we might never fall into the
like state again. The good path is ever open to us because the nature of evil is
necessarily limited.

What, in this passage, has announced universal salvation? It says nothing
about apocatastasis ton panton. Gregory rightly stated that evil is neither
eternal nor infinitely extended. Given his faith in the perpetuity of human
freedom, he said nothing inconsistent with the Christian idea of the Age to
Come. There is nothing in this life nor the next which compels the created will
to follow any path which leads away from the Good. If the soul heeds the lesson
of prudence, although it has chosen τοῦ δρόμοῦ κακία, it retains the power
of will to elect once more τοῦ δρόμοῦ ἀγαθός towards τὸ καλὸν. Perhaps, on
account of Gregory’s conception of freedom, St Maximus understood the
soteriology of St Gregory to promise universal participation in the Good.

St Gregory’s definitive soteriological statement is found in his Oratio
Catechetica Magna (16 PG 45 52BC) where the question of soteriology is
placed in the context of the Resurrection.

This is the resurrection: the reintegration of the elements into an
indissoluble reunion with one another; and, consequently, humanity’s original
grace will be recovered and man will again return to eternal life (χάρις
ἀνακληθείη, καὶ πάλιν ἐπὶ τὴν ἁίδιον ἐπανέλθοιμεν ζῶη). The wickedness
which had mingled with our nature by virtue of its dissolution will pour off like
liquid from a broken vessel which now cannot hold it. Just as the beginning of
death was found in One Man and spread to his posterity, so in the like manner
the resurrection of the One Man will extend to all the humanity. For He
reunited the soul with the body that He assumed through His own power. He
fused (ἐμμιχθείσης) with each element at their initial formation, even as He
conjoined on a more universal scale the noetical and sensible natures whereby
the new beginning will be extended to its logical limits. As in the case of the
human nature He assumed, by His own power He rejoined the body to the soul
which He had taken. With equal force this new principle is extended to all
human nature. Here, then, is the Mystery of the divine Economy with regard to
the resurrection from the dead... Christ Himself the nexus of life and death,
having reestablished in Himself that which death had disrupted, becoming
Himself the ground of reunion for the separated parts.

For Dr Constantine Tsirpanlis such passages describe the salvation of all
humanity, the pleroma –”without even one exception, of those who lived in the
past, are living in the present, and will live in the future.” Placed in the
context of the Saint’s entire theology, however, there is reason to argue that the
pleroma is the eschatological fulness of the Savior, which includes all deified creatures, angelic and human: His Body in the Age to Come; but also, that “new Being” does not include all humans at the time of the general Resurrection, suggesting that the words, “extends to all (the) humanity” (πᾶσαν διατείνει τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα) has no obvious meaning.

Unlike Origen, the soteriology of St Gregory (hence, the eschatology), has no element of compulsion. In the Alexandrian’s teachings, all creatures must return to the spirit-world. Curiously, Origen, arguing in this way, also maintained that in the Age to Come, man, enjoying free will μαχαίρινα, therefore, choose to secede again and again from the fellowship of God. The fall of spirits (νόες), in the first instance, was the result of their turning from divine contemplation (θεωρία) whereby their spirits became “souls” (i.e., a “cooling” of the spirit = ψυχαί) which fell from their high station. Condemned to take earthly bodies, souls must now struggle to escape them (De Princ. I, iv, 1; B). Incidentally, there μαχαίρινα have been other ages or worlds prior to our own, as there μαχαίρινα be more after this one, before all creatures are deified. Yet, if, as Origen seems to have believed, that deification is the very purpose of the divine Economy, how could he also hold that spirits μαχαίριμα fall again and again139? One μαχαίριμα seriously wonder what he meant by deification.

Not so incidentally, his theory of new worlds with impermanent new destinies for souls, as more than one scholar has observed, implied for Origen the “reincarnation” (Comm. in Matt. XIII, 1 PG 13 1089BC) of which Plato had written so well. To use the words of St Gregory, Origen taught that “before their appearance in bodies souls pre-existed in a realm (πολιτεία) of their own” (De hom. opif., 28 PG 44 229B; De an. et res., PG 46 125B). It is a “realm” to which they must return at the end of the age (De Princ. I, vi, 2 B). By contrast, St Gregory taught that “humanity” returns in Christ (“One Man”) to the fellowship it shared with God before the Fall of Adam (“one man”). The creation, visible and invisible, is not recycled, and the saved (deified), even in glory move infinitely towards “the Good,” never reaching its goal while ever part of It.

At the center of God’s Plan of salvation is the God-Man and the Church, His Body, the new humanity, the pleroma140. Understanding this, is to comprehend the divine Plan or Economy (Incarnation). Knowing this, is to grasp St Gregory’s conception of history as the vehicle of salvation; and grasping this, is finally to recognize that the apokatastasis of St Gregory cannot mean universal salvation141. Salvation, or deification, will occur when God, at the end of history, has “put all things under His (Christ) feet, and given Him to be the head over all things for the Church, which is His body, the fulness of
Him that fills all in all” (Eph. 1:23). At that moment, too, all evil will be eradicated. Moreover, that “moment” will not require the annihilation of hell, if only because “hell” and the suffering of the wicked is not evil. Also, hell, which opens only in the everlasting Eighth Day, exists by virtue of God’s love, a love which the proud and the blasphemer resist, and which, ironically, becomes a “scourge,” a “river of fire,” to them who will not return to the Good.
“Christianity is essentially eschatological,” Fr Florovsky once observed, “and the Church is an ’eschatological community’, since she is the new testament, the ultimate and finally, and, consequently, ’the last.’” She is the “eschatological community,” precisely because she is the Body of Christ. Her Head is “the second Adam,” “the last Man,” eschatos anthropos, “the first born from the dead” (I Cor. 15:20), the first of a new humanity, a new race. He is now what will be: the future is present in Him, today in the Church, particularly in her Mysteries. To use the words of St Gregory, the baptized have been “recalled” to Paradise, “while the creation, physical and spiritual, of old in rebellion with itself, is knit together now in friendship” (In Bapt. Christ., PG 46 600AB).

Thus, eschatology presupposes soteriology and ecclesiology, all of which rest upon christology, whose meaning is determined by the question of the relationship between Christ’s two natures. We have already encountered in the theology of St Gregory that God the Son is “true God of true God,” possessing the same substance as the Father and the Spirit, differing from each in hypostasis. This divine Person became (a) true man (θέανδρος, θεάνθρωπος), born of the Virgin Mary (without a man of the Adamic race) in order that He might become to those who are adopted “by water and the Spirit” a new father, a new Adam. He became the first of a new race whose life His children will share through the “new Eve,” the Church, even as corrupt human nature shared in the life of the old Adam through our first mother.

“In the last days (ἐσχάτων ἡμερῶν), the Word of God, uniting Himself to the lowliness of our human nature, is made flesh for the love man,” wrote St Gregory, “and took all our human nature into Himself so that it should be deified in Him. Through this mixing with the Godhead (ἵνα πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ανακράσει), the whole lump is being sanctified through these ’first-fruits’” (Adv. Apol. 13 PG 45 1152C). Christ is the “first-fruits” because He was the first to have been raised from the dead. Those incorporated into Him put off the old man and become a “new creature.” He came “in the last days” in order to mark a new beginning. He ended the sequence of “ages” and inaugurated the final period of history.

“The last days” of which the Old Testament speaks, the dawn of the sixth age of history from Genesis, arrived with the Incarnation. With His Resurrection, the seventh age began, the latent “principle” of the new creation planted like a seed in the soil of this last extention of time before His Return.
The Age to Come is already present and the resurrected Christ is already “father of the Age to Come” (Isa. 9:6), the Eighth and everlasting Day. He mixed Himself with humanity, destroyed the power of death, a victory in which all share by participation in Him. “In His conquest of death,” exclaimed St Gregory, He became “the first fruits” of the new creation (Con. Eun. II PG 45 501D, 504AB), which even now allows identification with the Risen Lord through a historical process of deification or sanctification initiated by Baptism.

In the theology of Origen, the Christian Economy is critically altered. First, the Logos Who became “man” is not God. Inspired by Philo (De Somn., I, 23; LC), Origen distinguished between God the Father, “the true God,” ὁ ἀληθινὸς Θεός; and the divine Logos, Θεός. God the Father alone is Divinity in His own right (αὑτοθεός), “the absolute Good, ἀπλῶς ἀγαθός, and, therefore, transcends even the Son (Comm. John. II, 16–33 FC; Con. Cel. V, 39; De Princ. I, i, 13). He only is utterly immaterial and always self-identical – Ego sum qui sum; et una est ilia Del substantia quae semper est (Comm. Rom. IV. 5 PG 14 978C).

According to Origen, the Scriptures show in such verses as John 16:28 (“The Father is greater than I”) the superiority of the Father “in all respects... so that even in His knowledge the Father is greater, and is known more clearly and perfectly by Himself than by the Son” (De Princ. IV, vi, 8). Consequently, the Logos is merely the image of the Father’s perfection (De Princ. I, ii, 13). He was eternally engendered from the Essence of the Father and, in this sense, is “God.” Never did the Son not exist (De Princ. I, ii, 9). Nevertheless, the Son, like the Holy Spirit, is ontologically inferior to the Father.

The more theological analysis he provided, the more Origen succeeded in ascribing to the Son a Divinity merely by participation, “not essentially different from created beings who are sometimes described as Θεοὶ.” He is superior in dignity to “the gods,” for He alone is “with the Father” and alone knows the Father and alone accomplishes the Father’s Will. The Logos, the Son of God, is God’s surrogate, revealing Him not only in the pre-temporal world (“the beginning”) of the “spirits” which He created, but the realm of space and time of which He was also the Demiurge.

Origen rejected the idea of uncreated matter (De Princ. II, i, 2) which is not to deny that “prime matter” was eternally formed. If, on the one hand, the Son is defined by His relationship to the eternal Father, and, on the other, defined by His relationship to the cosmos, the implication from the “eternity” of the Son is the “eternity” of the cosmos – perhaps, too, the Holy Spirit, although the Alexandrian has little to say about Him. In the words of Origen,
“If there was never a moment when God was not Pantocrator, then, there must always have existed beings to whom He was Pantocrator. Hence, there has always existed beings governed by Him to whom He was Lord” (De Princ. I, ii, 10)\textsuperscript{147}

Furthermore, God did not act for the first time when He made our visible universe, just as He may create other worlds after the present world vanishes; it will be replaced by another (ibid., Ill, iii, 3). At the same time, Origen insisted that God had no direct contact with matter. He fashioned things indirectly through the Logos. He was always “Father” Who always had a Son, a Son or Logos “eternally begotten that a world might be eternally created.”\textsuperscript{148} The Logos is the Creator or Demiurge in His capacity as the Wisdom of God, which meant for Origen, as it had for Philo of Alexandria, “Everything has been created in accordance with the Wisdom and Archetypes of the system of the thoughts within Him” (Comm. in John. I, xix, 113 FC). One may gather from this fact that the Logos is the mediator between primal unity and created multiplicity. He exhibited features of both. The “unity” of the Logos is naturally different from the oneness of the Father, The latter is simple unity while the unity of the Logos is composite.

J.M. Rist describes the relationship of the Father to His creative Word – or Wisdom – as “thought to thinker” (cf. Comm, in John. I, 32, 42; II, 2, 5). In relation to Himself “the Word is a distinct being and is to be conceived in Platonic terms, what Plotinus called ’Mind.’ That is, He is to be equated with the Demiurge of Plato’s Timaeus, as well as with the model by which the Demiurge fashioned the visible universe.” The Platonic forms, which are the intelligible archetypes (τύποι) after which the perceptible world is made, “comprise the model and are thought of as Ideas in the Demiurge’s mind. Finally, the Word may be understood in relation to rational beings. Like the World Soul of the Timaeus or the ’Soul’ in Plotinus, the Word in this relation informs and gives life and knowledge to rational beings.”\textsuperscript{149}

The first contact of the Logos with rational beings, outside of His creation of them, was the pre-mundane world of incorporeal spirits where they, most especially the spirit of Christ, enjoyed the \textit{theoria} of God (De Princ. II, vi, 3). Abandoning it, for reasons Origen does not make clear, the other spiritual beings ceased to be what they were. Now degraded, they become “souls,” falling into bodies made for their inferior existence. Caught in time and wounded by the “original sin,” the “souls” could not return, neither to their former blessedness nor, indeed, to the vision of God. The divine solution was to send to earth the very Logos who had created all spiritual being. The Logos was dispatched by God, because He retained some “kinship” with the human soul
made in His Image; and because it is not “contrary to nature” for “the substance of a soul” to act “as a medium between God and the flesh (for it was not possible for the nature of God to mingle with a body apart from some medium)...” (De Princ. II, vi, 3).

The Logos assumed the unfallen “spirit” – sometimes rendered “rational soul” – of Jesus, joined as iron in fire, “forever in God with all its acts, feelings and thoughts; and therefore it cannot be called changeable or alterable, since by being ceaselessly kindled, it came to possess unchangeability through its unity with the Word of God” (De Princ. II, iv, 6; II, vi, 3). In this way, “the spirit of Jesus was united by a supreme participation with the majesty of the Son of God” (Con. Cel. VI, 47 Ch). Christ became “the firstborn of all creation” (De Princ. IV, iv, 1). Moreover, through the mediation of the spirit of Christ, the Logos was associated with the body which was thereby spiritualized and deified from the moment He was born.

One may question whether Origen described a true Incarnation, an “enfleshment,” a “communication of idioms” in the traditional sense. To be sure, Origen proclaimed that the Logos of God and “the first born of all creation” were not “two separate beings” (Con, Cel. VI, 47); but considering that he permitted no direct contact between body and spirit in Jesus, that He was already deified at His birth, that the present body of the Lord may not be permanent – or, for that matter, the body into which any soul may have dropped – it is also unlikely that Origen (without a redefinition of terms) would have agreed with St Gregory and the other Fathers, “that the birth of Christ occurred because of death whereby He Who is eternal had a bodily beginning not from any need to live, but to recall us from death to life” (Ora. Cat., 32 Sr).

For St Gregory, then, the Incarnation is an historical, albeit a paradoxical, event; it is the beginning of a soteriological process (oíkovanía) which began with the Logos, the Architect, the Wisdom of the Father, and ended with Him Who has made manifest “the mystery of God’s Will,” having “recapitulated” or “placed under one head all things” (Eph. 1:10), Christ, the very things which He in His divine state had formed and even now governs. God the Father has already “put all things under His feet, and given Him to be the Head over all things for the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that fills all in all” (Eph. 1: 22–23), In other words, Gregory’s christology affirmed that eternity had penetrated time. The future has become present. The visible and the invisible, real and independent spheres of existence, intertwined in anticipation of the Age to Come when the cosmos will be transfigured.

In comparison, Origen’s christology was based on a set of “first principles” – not the least of which an ontological dualism of Middle Platonism
– alien to the patristic tradition, alien precisely because they diminished the value of time, history and the Incarnation. To quote Professor R.P.C. Hanson,

Origen sees the Incarnation, not as the crisis whereby God poured Himself out into human nature and committed Himself to history, but as merely one important stage in the long process of God’s strategy of making Himself known to human beings, preceded by other comparable though lesser stages, and followed by other more important stages of the process. Similarly, and working with the very same assumptions, he sees the End and all that was traditionally associated with it, as another of these stages, necessary indeed, but of minor importance compared with the new phase of God’s strategy that was to follow it, the leisurely progress of souls over an immense period through a series of immaterial existences.

We need only look at Origen’s opinions concerning Christ’s mission. The master of Alexandria conceived Him to be merely a teacher and healer, if we may believe Koch; and, therefore, redemption is achieved through “education,” a gradual erziehung des menschengeschlectes, that is, the revelation of the knowledge (γνῶσις) by which that “soul” (ψυχή), or spirit (νοές) incognito, may be rehabilitated and return once more to the state of divine vision which it had forsaken, to an ascetic process of liberation, which, incidentally, could take more than one life-time (Comm. in Matt. XIII, 1 PG 13 1089BC).

There is no better illustration of Origen’s idea of redemption as education than his spiritualization of Pascha (Easter) found in his Commentary on the Gospel According to John. Treatise on the Passover and his Dialogue with Heraclides. He maintained that “nothing perceptible by the senses is true” (Comm, in John., I, 57 FC). Therefore, “The Pasch of the Lord is an example and shadow of heavenly things” (X, 91). If he had said that “the Pasch of the Lord is also an example and shadow of heavenly things,” there would be no quarrel. He cannot believe that “historical things are types of historical things, and the corporeal of corporeal things. Quite the contrary, corporeal things are types of spiritual things and historical of intellectual” (X, 110). Origen even reduced Holy Week to an allegory of the five senses of the human body.

Consequently, “the first Pasch of Moses pointed to the Pasch of Christ which points to the third Pasch which will be celebrated with ten thousand angels in a most perfect assembly and a most blessed exodus” (X, 111). To be sure, “the Passover is a type of Christ, but not of His Passion” – καὶ τύπος μὲν Χριστοῦ ἐστιν τὸ πάσχα, οὐ μὲντοι γε τοῦ πάθους αὐτοῦ (De Pas., 13:1–5 ACW). Thus, the Hebrew Passover did not prefigure the events of Christ’s bodily life, because the “true and spiritual Pasch will be celebrated, not in this
age, not upon the earth, but in the coming age in heaven, when the Kingdom of God is present” (X, 83). In truth, these three Passovers are three states of knowledge.

St Gregory of Nyssa also recognized “a sublime and heavenly meaning” for Pascha, discoursing at length about the types of “the ancient Scriptures” which convey “a hidden meaning set forth by history and dark sayings” – ἱστορικῶτερον μὲν, καὶ δι’ αἰνιγμάτων – which hide it. In his Commentary on Song of Songs, he wrote that the “bride’s perfume” is the promise of “the evangelic truth” which believers inhale, “the mystery of truth” which transcends every scent of the Law.” “The truth is no longer hidden by type and shadow but revealed in the good scent of the Gospel” (IX PG 44 957B).

What did the Old Testament Scriptures hide under a veil concerning “the mystical Passion” of the Lord? “The Lamb was proclaimed ahead of time, so too was the Cross prophesied” (In Bapt. Christ. PG 46 588B), including “His death, the wounds which His body received from the iron of the nails, the spear, neither of which offered any impediment to His rising from the dead.” “The Law” foretold that Christ is the “passover,” “high priest,” “paschal victim.” What did He accomplish by His death on the Cross? He furnished the human race with immortality by ransoming it from death with His own Life – παρασχόμενος ἡμῖν τὴν ἀθανασίαν κτῆμα ἰδίον τοὺς ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου παρ’ αὐτοῦ διὰ τῆς ζωῆς ἐξαγορασθέντος ἐποίησεν (De Perf. PG 46 261D).

The Cross as “the return from death to life” – ἡ ἐκτοῦ θανάτου πρὸς τὴν ζωὴν ἐπανδός (Ep. IV PG 46 1025A) – signified deification. As St Gregory wrote against the Arians, “When I hear the word ’Cross’, I understand what it is, because I know what the word connotes... For Peter says that He was ’highly exalted’ after the Passion and the Resurrection, but not as God... But he means that the lowliness of Christ’s humanity was ’exalted’, indicating thereby the elevation of man to the likeness of and union with the divine Nature” (Con. Eun. VI PG 45 733B).
3. The Church

In the writings of Origen, “the mystery of the Church is linked with the mystery of Christ.” The “mystery” involves a distinction between spiritual or “inward Christianity” and carnal or “outward Christianity” (Comm. in John., I, 42 FC), both religious states covered by the words, “body of Christ.” “We declare the body of Christ, animated by the Son of God, to be the whole Church of God,” he said in Contra Celsum VI, 48, “and the members of the body... to consist of those who are believers.” She is coetus populi christiani, coetus omnium sanctorum, fidem Christi (In Ex. IX, 3 PG 12 365A). She is “the City of God” ἡ πόλις του θεου (In Jerm. IX, 2 PG 13 349D). St Gregory said the same (Con. Eun., XII PG 45 912C). As the Church is the divine polis – or, as St Gregory said, τὴν Χριστου πολιτείαν (De Bapt. PG 46 421A) – the “holy city” intended for all men; so is her paideia.

Yet, Origen was not really concerned with the historical Church, any more than he cared about the humanity of Christ, or the human body. The “true Church,” he said, “the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church of the first born that is in heaven” (Heb. 12:22f), the ecclesia primitivorum, existed long before the Incarnation.

For you must please not think that she is called the Bride or the Church only from the time when the Savior came in the flesh,” wrote Origen. She is so called from the beginning of the human race and from the very foundation of the world – indeed, if I may look for the origin of the high mystery under Paul’s guidance, even 'before' the foundation of the world. For this is what he says, ’as He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in His sight, predestinating us in His love unto the adoption of sons.’” (Song of Songs II, 8 ACW).

The “true Church” is “the city of God.” She is invisible, dwelling only in the soul (De Princ. Ill, i, 19), which is “educated” and perfected by gnosis in order that the soul may return to the “heavenly Church” from which it fell and where it has been ordained by God to forever dwell.

In other words, the historical Church, although composed of all who have been baptized, is not the “true Church.” Origen defines her as “the Bride which Christ has presented to Himself – the souls which have reached perfection... And all of these together make up the body of the Church” (Song of Songs IV, 15 ACW). Eventually everyone will rediscover the pre-mundane Church of which all human and angelic spirits had been members, “the Jerusalem on high from which they fell (II, 8). They will shed or, perhaps better, so completely
metamorphosize their bodies or “coats of skins”\textsuperscript{160} that the soul (“spirit” once more), may “gaze” without interruption upon the Glory of God (De Princ. II, xi, 7). Apparently, the “simple believer,” the lesser Christian, must continue to experience new incarnations after his death(s) in new worlds – until they have achieved perfection (De Princ. II, iii, 3; v, 3).

Origen’s ecclesiology has now come into focus. The idea that in the Age to Come the “perfect” will achieve a “spiritual body” is a deduction from his christology, that is, he maintained the belief that Christ was “God and Son of God from the beginning, the very Logos and wisdom and truth itself. We affirm that the mortal body and human soul in Him received the greatest elevation not only by communion but by union and intermingling, so that by sharing in His divinity he was transformed into God... why is it remarkable then that by the Providence of God’s Will the mortal quality of Jesus’ body should have been changed into an ethereal and divine quality” (Con. Cel. III, 41; Ch).

The transformation of human nature begins in this life. It is a process whose aim is union with God, an end which is achieved by the elimination of every distraction, whether of body or mind; hence, \textit{askesis}. God must become the sole content of the mind. The knowledge (\textit{gnosis}) of God comes by contemplation (\textit{theoria}). As knowledge increases love (\textit{agape}) becomes more fervent (De Princ. I, iii, 8), that is, the “cold soul” gradually becomes “warm spirit,” until finally the believer achieves once more fellowship with divinity. In other words, it is a transformation which comes to “all those who believe and go on to undertake the life which Jesus taught, the life which leads everyone who lives according to Jesus’ commandments to friendship with God and fellowship with Jesus” (Con. Cel. III, 28). More precisely, he returns to the state from which he had fallen, that is to say, to the perfect unity of the human spirit with God.

If man, having perfected himself in Christ, returns to his primitive state, one must assume that he returns without his body (De Princ. Ill, vi, 1–4)\textsuperscript{161}. We must conclude that Origen proposed a christology in which the human body was not “assumed” by Christ, or that the Alexandrian’s soteriology had nothing in common with the traditional understanding of Christ’s mission and, therefore, with St Gregory’s \textit{philosophia}.

In fact, Origen denied veneration to Christ’s humanity, calling it “a sign of contradiction” (Comm. in Rom. IV. 2 PG 12 963BC). The Logos dressed Himself in the flesh that men might perceive the educational pattern of salvation; or, in the words of Origen himself, “it was the soul that He assumed and in which the utmost perfection, that was the pattern displayed to men” (Song of Songs II, 6 ACW). If, Jesus Christ then, is the prototype, “the first-
fruits” of them that will be saved, and His body will be completely transformed in order that He and the Father may be one, so, likewise, the human body and soul will be totally altered in condition and quality,” so as to become “one spirit” with God (De Princ. III, vi, 6).

Here is Origen’s conception of the Church, her purpose and her end. St Gregory of Nyssa (and the other Fathers) are, in fact, an antidote to his paideia. Their ecclesiology also presupposes christology, a christology of the Incarnation: a “mixing” of God and man, a “joining” of “inward” and “outward Christianity.” In the bodily Resurrection (which is not central to Origen’s soteriology), St Gregory relied upon the testimony of St Paul, citing I Cor 15:42–44; the body is “sown in corruption and rises in incorruption... a spiritual body,” that is, an “incorruptible body,” a body which shares with the soul the honor and glory which “are the recognized marks of the divine nature and which also formerly belonged to him who was created in God’s image” (De an. et res. PG 46 157A).

Necessarily, then, the Church, as the Body of the resurrected Christ, is raised in “honor and glory”; so necessarily all creatures incorporated into His Body. The ecclesiological distinction between the “perfect” and the “simple” is a class distinction (borrowed from Gnosticism by Origen) not found in Gregory's writings. All the members of the Church – the Faithful – are being perfected, while, to be sure, some of them, such as Saints, have achieved spiritual perfection through faith, love and askesis. “His body,” as the Bishop of Nyssa often said, “is the totality of the humanity which He has united to Himself – Σῶμα δὲ αὐτοῦ, καθὼς εἰρήται πολλάκις, πάσα ἢ ἀνθρωπίνη φύσιν, ἡ κατεμίχθη (In illud: tunc ipse fil. subj. PG 44 1320B). “For anyone who is united to Christ has become one body (σύσσωμος), as St Paul states,” he remarked. “For all who have been united with (συναπτόμενος) the one body of Christ through participation, have become one body with Him” (1317A).

The Body of Christ to which St Gregory refers here is the whole Church, whether in the heavens or on earth, of which the empirical Church, consisting of those who, having been baptized, will produce “the fruits of repentance,” will be raised in “honor and glory,” even as the historical Jesus. The Mystery of Baptism is the mystery of man’s unity in Christ and therefore the unity of His members “in love and truth,” to borrow St Ignatius of Antioch’s celebrated phrase.

This Mystery, then, is the Mystery of incorporation into Christ, “the second Adam,” for which reason St Gregory described Baptism as “the recall to Paradise” (De Bapt. Christ., PG 46 600A). Adam was the “one man” from which the human race had originally sprung; Christ is the “one man” into
whom that humanity is drawn through the rebirth of Baptism\(^{162}\). By water and the Spirit, the man who had been expelled from Paradise is renewed, and the devil who had occasioned his expulsion is put to shame (De Bapt. Christ. PG 46 580BC: De Bapt. PG 46 417C). By this Mystery or Sacrament, one enters into the process of spiritual regeneration through the grace of the Holy Spirit, returning thereby to the state from which man had fallen in Adam\(^{163}\). As Gregory said, “holy Baptism is the participation in a life not subject to death... the life of the Spirit” (Adv. Maced., 19 PG 45 1324D),

In the case of adults, the rite of Baptism follows the confession of faith. The end to which this Sacrament (and all the Sacraments) is naturally ordained, the Eucharist, is itself the re-presentation of “the Mystery,” \textit{mysterion}, whereby the divine Life is communicated to the baptized or initiated. St Gregory reminds us that our union with God through the Sacraments, most especially Baptism and the Eucharist, was promised long before the Incarnation. “We are everywhere provided in the ancient Scriptures with types of our rebirth... prefiguring enigmatically the philanthropy of God. And as the Lamb and the Cross were announced by anticipation, so was Baptism by deed and word...” (In Bapt. Christ. PG 46 588B).

To have mentioned the Old Testamental types – including the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan by St John – in connection with the sharing of believers in His Redemption through the Sacraments, was no accident. The Cross, the Grave, the Resurrection, the Ascension of Christ are all aspects of the divine Economy, the revelation in time and space of “the mystery hidden before the ages.” Baptism, as the other Sacraments, is physical (581A), as well as spiritual, that is to say, a liturgical act, by which is initiated “the mystical regeneration” (Con. Eun., II PG 45 545BC). St Gregory elaborates further,

To this end the people initiated into the Mystery, gathered together through the existential goodness of our faith, carefully guides the inexperienced and uninitiated (τοὺς ἀμυήτος), as benevolent fathers, to the experience of piety. I rejoice for both: those being perfected, which have been enriched with a lofty gift; and the uninitiated who have the great expectation of possessing the same hope that comes with the remission of sins, the release from bondage and the fellowship of God; and, consequently, freedom instead of servility, equality with the angels. These things, among others, the grace of Baptism conveys and provides surety (In Bapt. Christ., PG 46 580D).

Origen would not have said the same. He would not have concurred with St Gregory that the Holy Spirit \textit{εὐλογεῖ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ βαπτιζομένου καὶ τὸ ὑδωρ τὸ βαπτίζων} (581B). Baptism, he said, cleanses the souls of adults and children, cleanses them from the “original sin” committed in realm of the spirit long
before their physical birth (Comm. in Rom. VIII, 3 PG 12 469B: Song of Songs III. 3ACW). Origen’s interest in Baptism was surely as the beginning of the return to God, that is to say, a “cleansing” as the spiritual precondition for the gnosis of contemplation.

According to Origen, there are three kinds or levels of Baptism – the prefigurative Baptism of St John and the Old Covenant; the Christian Baptism, which is a typos of the Age to Come; and lastly, Baptism with fire, which brings the final purgation before entering into the divine Glory along with the power to read “the eternal Gospel.” These correspond, writes Daniélou, to various degrees of purification achieved in the mystical life, purification by the askesis which produces the gnosis. Ultimately, ritual Baptism merely celebrates the Passion and Resurrection, which instill the hope of the soul’s return to spirit and the primordial contemplation of God.164

In other terms, the Baptismal rite of the earthly Church is a “sign”: a “sign” of the realization of things past and, also, a “type” and infallible testimony of things to come. In the same way, the Incarnation is but a “sign” of the presence of the Logos, so the rite of Baptism and its material elements are but a “sign” of those spiritual realities which the regenerated soul will encounter on its way to God.165 Therefore, Baptism into Christ – He Who is the “first fruits” of the new creation – is the first moment in the soul’s mystical union of God, a union of the soul and/or “spiritual body” consummated in the Age to Come. Thus, the rite of Baptism is not incorporation or “assumption” into the historic Body of Christ. One would not expect that the idea of physical conformity by visible means for a spiritually soteric end would win his endorsement.

For Origen Baptism was access to “the life of the Church,” of “inward Christianity,” an inwardness which, in part, is “fed” by the Eucharist. For just as “corporeal bread” feeds the body, so also “the living bread which came down from heaven nourishes the mind and soul” (Ora. XXVII, 2, 9 ACW). His teaching on the Eucharist, as his teaching of Baptism, shows little concern for the body – is it not the prison-house of the fallen soul? In any case, his mystagogy is perfectly consistent with his doctrine of the Church, which is itself a deduction from his christology and illustrative of his cosmology: a dualism which allows to the physical elements of Sacraments a wholly ancillary role in the union of the soul to God (and the body not at all) and which, necessarily, in docetic fashion, denies the “the real presence” of Christ in the bread and wine of the Mystery,166 which was established by Him for the purpose of unio mystico.

Whatever Origen may have said about the Eucharist, there is nothing in his
...the manifesting-God mixed Himself with our perishable nature so that by this communion we might be deified. By this economy of grace in the flesh He disseminates Himself among the Faithful. The imparted substance comes from bread and wine, a blending of Himself with the bodies of believers. By this union with the immortal Man, we partake of His incorruption, a participation made possible by the changing of the nature of the visible elements offered (Catech. Ora., 37 Sr).

"Initially the bread was ordinary bread," asserted St Gregory, "but when the Mystery is sacrificed, it is called and becomes the body of Christ (λεγέται τε καὶ γίνεται)... Likewise the wine which before the blessing (εὐλογίας) was nothing, but after being sanctified by the Spirit, it has different operations" (De Bapt. Chr. PG 46 581C).

Communion in the Eucharist is more than “eating the flesh of God” and “drinking the blood of God,” to borrow the words of St Ambrose. It is recalling the past and a reaching into the future or, what is the same thing, the past and the future, each in their own way, are realized in the Eucharist today – most especially on the Pascha of the Resurrection – Χριστὸς τοῖνυν ἀνέστη σήμερον. His In Diem Luminum, In Sanctum Pascha, De Tridui Spatio, Salutare Pascha and Domini Resurrectionem all describe Pascha Sunday as the Lord’s Day, a new Day, in which, as St Gregory has told us, “this time that flows and passes has come to an end, the world of generation and corruption no longer exists” (Co. Ps. II, 5 PG 44 504D). Scholars have discussed Gregory and the so-called “problem of time,” even the Saint’s vision of the Eighth Day; but rarely in the light of Pascha and/or the interaction between liturgy and theology. They say very little, states R.L. Wilken, about “time and the Resurrection,” “time and the Easter festival” which are “the exegetical roots of Gregory’s ideas on the Eucharist.”

Origen, on the other hand, had a different understanding of time and, therefore, presented a Eucharist not essential to the Christian pronoia and paideia. Why else was “the Mystery of Mysteries” not a “first principle” for him? The Eucharist was never more than a figure of “the celestial banquet on high.” Why else did he allegorize Scriptural sources for the Eucharist, such as John 6:53 (“Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood...”)? “Are we then to eat His flesh and drink His blood in a physical manner?” Origen inquired rhetorically. “But if it is said spiritually, then the Passion is spiritual, and not physical” (Comm, on John XIII. 10–19 FC). In another place, he spoke of the Eucharist as “a certain body” which “sanctifies those who partake of it with pure intention”; and, in the same book, Origen alluded to “a symbol of our
thanksgiving to God in the bread which is called ’the eucharist’” (Con. Cel. VIII, 33, 57).

It is not necessary to collect a multitude of texts from the Alexandrian’s writings to prove or disprove his orthodoxy, as some scholars are wont to do. At best, he understood the Eucharist as a “canon” or “measure” of spiritual development. Grace comes through this rite to those whose faith and moral condition prepares them for it. Never did Origen define the Eucharist as intrinsic to “the mystery hidden before the ages,” nor as the sine qua non of Christianity, nor as “immaculate body of Christ, and His most precious blood,” or as “the remission of sins, communion of the Holy Spirit, the fulfilment of the Kingdom of the heavens,” as St John Chrysostom will in his Liturgy. “Simple Christians” were allowed this naive view of the Mystery, but Origen knew that it was “faith” and “the word” that sanctified. Since anything physical in the universe is a “sign” and “symbol,” how else could Origen have treated the Eucharist? Under these circumstances, what importance could the Eucharist have for redemptive history?

The differences between St Gregory and Origen in their attitude towards the sacramental rites of the Church is critical to our understanding of their versions of Christianity, a most crucial antithesis if one recognizes that “the law of worship is the law of belief,” an ancient dictum which reflects, in the case of Gregory’s Orthodoxy, the truth that things spiritual are incarnated in things physical; and, therefore, the sensory aspects of Christian worship are not “signs” of the Divine Presence, rather God makes Himself present by means of things physical. The immaterial Glory of God, in which the faithful initiate will share in the Age to come, is liturgically made known and experienced through them.

Unlike Origen, Bishop Gregory did not develop a personal theology which he confused with the Faith of the Church. Like St Maximus, he had no doctrine of his own, “only the Faith of the Catholic Church,” for which reason, as C.W. MacLeod observes, “Gregory never speaks of any religious experiences of his own.” The Christian conception of God, of the Incarnation, of time, led him to a different view of redemptive history – of the Church and her Sacraments, of body and soul, of the letter and spirit – than portrayed in the writings of Origen.
4. The Scriptures

Origen’s exegesis of Scriptures involved, L.G. Patterson tells us, contemporary philosophical assumptions. His approach to them necessarily “represented a drastic change not only in the Christian understanding of Scriptures, but also in the pattern of Christian theology based upon it.” Moreover, “Origen’s drastic departure from inherited views of the Scriptures is the result of his acceptance of the notion that salvation lies in the intellectual communion of the mind or rational soul with the rational element of the cosmos.” Thus, Origen’s reliance on allegorism, that is, “proceeding from the literal to the allegorical levels is nothing less than the process of salvation itself.”

If Patterson means that Origen’s “drastic departure from inherited views” represented a serious dissent from the Christian Tradition, a dissent which he conceived to be “traditional,” we may concur. If, however, we are asked to believe that the work of Origen was “epochal” and implied not only a new direction in the Church’s interpretation of the Holy Bible, but that her theology was henceforth never the same then, we part company with Professor Patterson. Let us agree that many of the Fathers came to grips with numerous philosophical and theological issues raised by Origen; but, if Patterson wants us to concede that they – and, perhaps the entire early Church – adopted, among other things, his gnostic economy, we find no basis for such arguments.

Firstly, no angel, no man, no group of men, whatever their eminence, may speak for the whole Church – least of all, one condemned by an Ecumenical Council. Origen himself was aware that the Apostolic Tradition governed the Church; he appealed to it. Secondly, Origen did not alter “the Christian understanding of the Scriptures” nor revise the Christian Faith by means of it. The Holy Spirit would not permit it. Origen’s use of allegory was his own, whatever his debt to Clement of Alexandria, Philo and the rabbis, or to holy Tradition.

No doubt, too, “allegorism” has always had an honorable place among Christians, which explains the great similarity between the Scriptural exegesis in Origen, St Gregory and other Fathers. Finally, Patterson’s remarks compel us to reiterate the simple truth that the Scriptures are based on revealed truth, the truth hidden from eternity but which, according to His discretion, God disclosed to His People and to the noble men and women of the nations before His Coming in the flesh, as St Justin Martyr declared in his Dialogue with Trypho. And when, in “the last days,” He sojourned with men, He fulfilled what
was spoken to the Prophets and the noble Gentiles. The Scriptures, the “written tradition,” are, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, an inerrant record of God’s communication with man. In a word, Origen’s exegesis of Scriptures reflects his personal understanding of the Divine-human encounter.

Let us examine his exegesis. “Just as man consists of body, soul and spirit, so in the same way does the Scripture,” Origen declared (De Princ. IV, xi, 4). Moreover, the Scriptures are the analogy of Christ Who is flesh, spirit and Logos (Comm. in Coloss. [frag.] PG 14 1297). Thus, the Scriptures, inspired by the Holy Spirit, have three senses: the literal, moral and allegorical (including typology). At the same time, “all the Scriptures have a spiritual meaning, but not all have a bodily meaning; for the bodily meaning is often proved to be an impossibility” (De Princ. IV, iii, 4). Origen refused, he said, subservience to the literal sense, which might instruct him to accept something unworthy of God and reason, such as sacrificing lambs and calves, and to offer fine wheat flour with incense and oil (Horn. in Lev. I, 2 FC). In point of fact, he paid very little attention to the literal sense.

Origen saw the task of the Christian exegete as pushing beyond the “letter” of the Bible in order to plumb the mystery of Christ speaking to the soul – cor ad cor loquitur. He had little patience with the visible or literal or historical sense. Its value was to attract people to the study of the Bible so that they might eventually venture upon the allegorical sense (Con. Cel. VII, 60). In his Scriptural exegesis, if we may believe Hanson, there is no necessary connection between the literal and spiritual senses. Any connection at all between “the original text and the spiritual interpretation of it... in the vast majority of cases exists only in Origen’s imagination.” Moreover, he made no clear distinction between allegory (which perforce deals in symbols) and typology; and, unlike the allegory in the epistles of St Paul (which are usually typological), Origen’s “typology” is almost wholly allegorical (something for which he is greatly indebted to Clement and Philo of Alexandria).

Most significant about Origen’s allegorism and/or typology, however, is his understanding of the Scriptures as the door to something beyond their given testimony: “the eternal Gospel” (cf. Rev. 14:6), which is the reality to which all things in the Old and New Testament Scriptures are mere promises. Just as the Law was a “shadow of the good things to come” (Heb. 10:1), so the Gospel is a “shadow of the mysteries of Christ,” that is, “what John calls the eternal gospel, clearly provides both the mysteries presented by Christ’s words and the things of which his acts were symbols, to those who consider ‘all things face to face’ concerning the Son of God Himself” (Comm. in John. I, 40 FC). What specifically are these “mysteries” to which Origen refers? The “mysteries” of
“the eternal gospel?” They are the fulfillment, the reality adumbrated by the Lord’s first coming (De Princ. IV, iii, 13). As Daniélou puts it, the “mysteries of Christ” or “the eternal gospel” are “the secrets of the beginning and of the end of all things, and of the heavenly and infernal worlds; in short, a gnosis in the strict sense.”

For Origen, then, the “letter” of the Scriptures has no real value, save as it gives a certain form and direction to his speculations. As history, the Scriptures have no interest for him, because, as Fr Florovsky once remarked, Origen looked upon history as “unproductive.” The creation, and everything in it, are but symbols behind which lurks permanent realities, and even the Incarnation – and the Church, the Sacraments, the Scriptures, the whole economy – cannot be regarded as a permanent achievement. “The fulness of creation had been already realized by divine fiat in eternity once and for all. The process of history could have for him but a ’symbolic’ meaning.”

Thus, C. W. MacLeod is right that with Origen, the allegorical mentality “governs his whole conception of the religious life; with Gregory of Nyssa, it is rather a literary form.” Also, that “what sets apart Gregory’s treatment of allegory is the attempt to find a structure and sequence in the text with which he deals. Allegory becomes a literary form then, insofar as Gregory seeks to create a coherent scheme in his allegorical works,” such as his Commentary on the Song of Songs.

But there is a greater disparity between the two writers, and it is found in their presuppositions, that is to say, for St Gregory the visible is real and redeemable, joined permanently to an invisible reality without both losing their independence and integrity. The intercourse between history and the realm of the spirit is immensely “productive.” He who is initiated into “the guidance of history,” St Gregory wrote, will come to understand its enigmas and the virtue to which they lead (De Vit. Moy. I PG 44 337A). Common phrases used by Gregory, such as ἱστορίας βοώης and ὑπὸ τῆς ἱστορίας λέγεται or ἱστορία φυσί – “history cries out,” “it is said by history,” “history says” – are never found in Origen. This language reveals his attitude towards history, indicating his opposition to Origen’s general method of exegesis. Thus, where the Alexandrian read things spiritual into Moses and the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt, St Gregory saw first the historical record, containing events, which alone or together, pointed to future salvation history. Thus, the crossing of the Red Sea typifies Baptism or the twelve springs point to the twelve Apostles or “burning bush” prefigures the Incarnation, or the baptism of Christ in the waters of the River Jordan, the descent of the dove and the voice of the Father, revealing the holy Trinity and promise of a new creation, was typified in
Genesis cosmogony. In such a view of history, St Gregory exclaimed, “the love of God for man is adumbrated (προέτυπωσε), “our regeneration... is shown forth in dark sayings (αἰνίγμασι)...” (In Bapt. Christ., PG 46 588B).

St Gregory found this “love” and other “mystical” meanings beneath the letter, but he was critical of anyone who plundered the literal or historical sense in order to find them. For example, he wrote, concerning the book of Genesis, that it must be taken in the literal sense, because everything about this account demands that “one display the bare literal reading of the words, as though God had pronounced each and every one of them” – προφέρει δὲ ψιλὴν ἐπὶ ῥήματος ἡμῖν τὴν τῶν γραμμάτων ἀνάγνωσιν, ὡς θεοῦ τοῦτο διεξελθόντος (Con. Eun. XII PG 45 976D). At the same time, the history of the Old Testament (“the Law”) is “the shadow of the future good things to come, proclaiming ahead of time the truth by certain enigmas and types.” Christ Himself “strips the Law of the bodily veil and reveals at the appropriate moment” their meaning (De Beat. III PG 44 1148D–1149A).

As important as the literal sense may be, St Gregory argued vigorously for the deeper sense of the sacred writings. In the prologue to Song of Songs,

Because some of the clergy always think it right to follow the letter of the holy Scriptures at the expense of the hidden and recondite meaning (αἰνίγματων καὶ ὑπονοιῶν), we must respond to them who accuse us of making undue use of spiritual interpretation. In fact, there is nothing unusual in searching out the divinely inspired Scriptures by every means at our disposal, including the literal sense, as it is called, wherever it is applicable in our search. Thus, if there is something hidden or enigmatic beneath the literal sense, we will as the Word teaches and as Proverbs (1:6) states, understand the passage either as a parable, a dark word, the utterance of wise men, or some kind of enigma. With regard to analogic contemplation, whether we call it typology or allegory, as long as we grasp the meaning, it matters not (PG 44 756D–757A).

Gregory followed, he tells us, the example of the Apostle Paul who described the Law as spiritual (Rom. 7:14). He included under the name of “the Law,” historical narratives. The Scriptures teach by precepts and by history, both of which lead to the knowledge of the mysteries and the pure way of life” – διὰ τῶν ἱστορικῶν διηγμάτων παιδεύουσαν, πρὸς τε γνώσιν τῶν μυσηρίων, καὶ πρὸς καθαράν πολιτείαν (Cant. Can., prol., PG 44 757AB).

The Apostle employed whatever method was useful in the exposition of God’s revelation, including allegory. Thus, when explaining the relevance of the Old to the New Testament, he maintained that the historical truth of the former is a veil for the truth of the latter, and he employed the story of the two children of Abraham (Gal. 4:24) to illustrate his argument. Likewise, in another
place, St Paul, after relating various details of an incident, says, “These things happened to them as a type (τύποι), but for us as instruction” (I Cor. 10:11). St Gregory cites other examples from the epistles which the Apostle calls “a mirror and enigma, or what we know in part” (I Cor. 13:12). Thus, Paul teaches us to pass from the corporeal to the noetic, “a turning to the Lord and a removal of the veil (II Cor. 3:16).”

There is an important lesson here. We must move from one level of understanding to another: from what is human and visible to something greater. “If we remain with the mere facts of the text, the historical narrative of the Scriptures does not provide examples of a good life. There is nothing to learn about the indiscretions of Old Testament personalities, “unless there is something behind the letter.” Also, “the Word Himself delivered the divine Mysteries when He assumed the likeness of man,” St Gregory continues. “He revealed to us the meaning of the Law,” training the minds of His disciples through parables, obscure words and enigmas. The Lord often upbraided them for seeking to understand corporeally what required penetration beyond the word or image” (Can. Cant. pro. PG 44 757C–760B).

God’s Will lies hidden in the Scriptures. The literal sense acts as a veil. The lack of education is not the reason for our inability to read them, but “a veil over their hearts” explains our impotence. Also, the Apostle Paul declares, “the letter kills, the spirit gives life,” meaning that even the literal sense, if not rightly understood, is a danger to the “carnally minded.” A personal interpretation makes the Bible “a doctrine of death,” warns St Gregory. On the other hand, to those who turn to the contemplation of the truth with faith, there is revealed “the glory which underlies the letter.” The Holy Spirit will reveal to the pious a “higher understanding (διὰ τῆς υψηλότερας κατανήσεως) or, as the Apostle said (II Cor. 3:17), ‘When it shall turn to the Lord the veil shall be taken away’” (ibid., VII PG 44 744A).

In another perspective, St Gregory had the same appreciation for the literal sense of the Scriptures, as he had for humanity of Christ. But as behind the humanity of Christ stood His Divinity, so behind the literal stood the spiritual sense of the Scriptures. One could not reach the Godhead in Christ save through the human nature in which It was enfleshed, so likewise it is impossible to discover the spiritual sense of the holy books without first grasping their literal meaning (if any). As Gregory recognized a necessary and permanent connection between the humanity and Divinity in Christ – and, therefore, between time and eternity, between the heavenly and earthly lives of the Church, between body and soul – so also between the two senses of the Scriptures. Nevertheless, he rightly acknowledged the superiority of things
spiritual to things physical\textsuperscript{183}. 
Chapter VI. Reassessment

The seventh century Byzantine poet, George Pisidios, rhapsodized the memory of St Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa,
And with the word of his mouth,
He fought them who despise us:
Gregory, the most mystical mind,
Pondered the font of God,
The Gate of God,
Through which comes the Spirit To flood every heart,
And open the streams of pious thoughts.¹⁸⁴

In like manner, another writer declared,
O blessed man, pouring out an abyss of sweetest words, Thou hast avoided all noetic deception;
And like another great Moses,
Thou leadest excellently the People of the Lord.¹⁸⁵

The Church of God has ever upheld the orthodoxy – hence, the sanctity – of St Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. St Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople (820–891), records in his Bibliotheca (CCXXXIII, PG 103 1105C–1108D), St Germanos’ defense of St Gregory, with which he agreed, having numbered Gregory “among the Saints” – ἐν ἀγίοις. Photius knew at least the Bishop of Nyssa’s Dialogus ad Macrinam sororem de anima (De anima et resurrectione), Liber Catecheticus (Oratio catechetica magna), De perfecta vita (De Virginitate), in which the Patriarch found nothing objectionable. Photius followed his predecessor in affirming that “the divine Gregory” opposed by his “orthodox,” “enlightened and salvific words” the “dark and destructive doctrines of Origenism.”

St Mark Eugenicus, Metropolitan of Ephesus (1399–1444), aware that there had been some controversy about the his teachings, nevertheless did not hesitate to call him “blessed Gregory of Nyssa.” The immediate occasion for eliciting this praise was during the debate with the Latins, who had appealed to the writings of St Gregory to support their doctrine of purgatory. Almost parenthetically, Mark observed that Gregory’s teachings had little in common with the heresy of the Origenists who, at one time, flourished in Egypt and Palestine. They were responsible, Mark said, for associating the name of “this great saint and light” with their impious doctrines. They were condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553); St Gregory of Nyssa was not (De Ign, Purg. 1.11 PO 15 531.
In her Menaion\textsuperscript{186}, the attitude of the Orthodox Church towards St Gregory is unmistakable. In the Vespers, he is called “God-inspired,” “a canon of virtue,” “invincible champion” of the uncreated Trinity, “a revealer of things pertaining to God.” The Matins eulogizes St Gregory as “an abyss of wisdom and a treasury of gnosis,” “adornment of teachers,” he who “enlightens the minds of the faithful,” “a most faithful servant, a most wise teacher of doctrines, a friend and initiate... a steward of His (Christ’s) traditions, whose exposition thou didst excellently preserve unsullied, O supremely wise Gregory.” He is also praised for joining “divine vision (\textit{θεωρία}) with praxis (\textit{πράξις}).”

Relative to these things, Gregory is venerated as “having received the grace of the Spirit (whereby) thou didst rend the paltry garment of the letter of the Law and didst reveal unto us the hidden beauty of the significance thereof.” “Thou didst prove, O wise one, the Law to be a shadow of grace for the Hebrews who by the Law had worshipped God; and that the good tidings of the divine manifestation are a mystery...” (4th Ode of Matins). As the result of his contributions to Christian worship, Gregory is described by the Church as a “hymnographer” and a “muse,” “expounding the words of prayer unto all... a minister of sacred rites” (Stichera of Vespers).

Also, the Church pays tribute to Gregory’s teacher, St Basil the Great – not Origen. “Let us all praise and honour with songs and hymns blest Gregory, the most wise and good shepherd and sacred prelate of Nyssa; and also his brother the wise Basil, who hath also shown forth as one of like ways with him” (Exapostilarion of Matins). And in the Eighth Ode of the Matins, she chants, “O wondrous pair of brothers, kinsmen in the flesh, who were of one mind in things divine! Whilst honoring Basil as is meet, we also honor Gregory unto the ages.”

The Orthodox Church never separates sound doctrine from holiness, whether in the judgment of her spokesmen, or in her assessment of the people’s piety. Sanctity is impossible without the divine truth. But truth contributes nothing to salvation without holiness. Sanctity or holiness, moreover, depends upon the degree of “perfection” achieved in the struggle with the passions. The struggle is maximized among monastics. Thus, in the Sessional Hymn of the Matins, she declares, concerning St Gregory, “Divine radiance didst thou inherit, passing thy life in ascetic struggles, excelling as a priest in a manner worthy of thy name. For having made clear the doctrines transcendentally, in Orthodoxy thou, O Gregory, didst establish the world.”

For his doctrine, as we have consistently argued throughout this work, St Gregory turned to the witness of “blessed Fathers” before him to determine the
“boundary” of the Faith — μὴ μεταίρετε ὀρία, ἃ ἔθεντο οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν. To Origen he was thankful for questions not answers. He was cognizant surely, even as we, that the fidelity of the Alexandrian to the Apostolic Tradition was more rhetoric than fact. We may have every confidence that St Gregory took his own advice and refused to transgress the “boundary established by the fathers” or profaning “the richness of the proclamation with private opinions.” “Walk by the ancient rule of the Faith,” he demanded of his correspondent, “and the God of peace will be with you, strengthening you in soul and body” (Ep. III PG 46 1024C).

There is no reason to doubt that Gregory “walked by the ancient rule of Faith.” The Church has never denied him a place on the patristic roll. She has always regarded him as her champion. So certain of his orthodoxy was St Maximus the Confessor that, even without sufficient or reliable documents, he found a way to mitigate the charge of “Origenism” which had lately been brought against St Gregory. One may disagree with Maximus, as we have, but his efforts are nevertheless a testimony to the Church’s respect for the Bishop of Nyssa, a respect which implicitly rejects the false accusations brought against him, a fortiori the advocacy of universal salvation.

In part, the Church’s defense is based on the knowledge that the works of St Gregory had been adulterated by his enemies. More than this, one is encouraged by his so-called “system” — the christological model of reality — his understanding of time and eternity, of history and the spirit, by his fidelity to the Tradition of the Church, his recognition of the limitations of the human intellect. In other words, the created world, as he saw it, was more than matter in motion, more than cause and effect, more than a necessary concatenation of events, more than a kingdom of rational ends. He viewed creation as the monodual realm where the struggle between good and evil — between God and the devil — transpired. They contested for the soul of man. God became man to defeat the evil one on Calvary’s Cross.

On this score, St Gregory’s construction of the history surrounding the Crucifixion and Resurrection is interesting. In De tridui spatio (PG 46 605C–616D), he discussed time in relation to the three days burial of Christ. He found the events of Pascha prefigured in the Old Testament Scriptures, a most important type being the Genesis account of the creation. He also linked Pascha to such types as Jonah in the belly of the whale. Good Friday, the Sabbath of Christ’s Rest and His Resurrection also has eschatological significance: they adumbrate the future, they point to the end of this age, the seventh age, and to “the great Day,” the Day which the Lord has made,” wherein the resurrection of the Church and all humanity will occur, and His victory will be complete.
Concerning the dark period of the Lord’s voluntary Passion, St Gregory explained the time sequence as unusual but factual. Thursday night and Friday morning, he said, formed one day. When Christ was crucified, darkness fell upon the earth for three hours. By that darkness, which God called “night,” a “strange night” in the middle of the day; Good Friday was divided into two parts; thus, one day and two nights. To these add a third day, the Sabbath, the “day of rest,” “image of the heavenly Sabbath,” the “rest of Christ” or “true Sabbath.” On “the first day of the week, very early in the morning,” the Ointment-bearing women came to the grave, but Jesus had already risen from the dead, as St Luke (24:1) reports 188.

Most important here is St Gregory’s conception of time, which is further evidence of his Christian world-view. Unlike Origen and the Greeks, his conception of time, of history, was linear and redemptive, rather than cyclical and historiosophical. For an Origenist or “Greek” interpretation of St Gregory’s philosophia, one may turn to the ninth century author of Periphyseon, the Neo-Platonist, John Scotus Eriugena, an admirer and translator of St Gregory’s De opificio homnis.

In the Periphyseon, we find the Augustinian model of the Trinity, itself an adaptation of Plotinian triadology, the World of Ideas, an allegorical exegesis of Genesis, pristine human nature as neither male nor female, and gender as a result of the Fall. Disunity of creation as the primary consequence of the “original sin.” None of this, or what follows, was taught by St Gregory.

In Eriugena’s treatise, we discover the motive for the Incarnation as the return of the human race to Paradise and the resumption of its pre-lapsarian condition, to the cosmic unity. In the eschaton, gender will vanish, the “heaven” and the “earth” (i.e., the primordial causes of all things), the sensible and the intelligible, the created and Uncreated, will be reintegrated and deified. Here is universal salvation (Periphyseon. trans. by I.P. Sheldon-Williams & J. J. O’Meara. Montreal, 1987, bk. 2).

In other words, St Gregory conceived history not in terms of “first principles” but sacred events. He viewed them as shaping the configuration of time. History, he said, is determined by its content, which explains why he did not “spiritualize” the Redemption nor the events and persons which typified it, such as the first creation, Noah and the Flood, or Moses and the Exodus. For this, St Gregory was not indebted to Philo or Origen, nor to the “myths” of Plato, but to St Paul or, better, to the Savior Himself Who has instructed the Apostles on such matters.

Moreover, in his explanation of those aweful days, Gregory reaffirmed the Christian vision of history, a history which began with the event of creation ex
nihilo, moving to its center, the historical Incarnation, the divine Economy, whereby Christ “through death might destroy the power of him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14). So, too, with the death of death and the devil reduced to impotence, the human race was invited to become in Christ, through the communicable and Uncreated Energy of Grace, “partakers of the divine Nature” (II Pet. 1:4).

Returning to communion (κοινωνία) with God – indeed, becoming a god – is the very essence of Christianity. Thus, the words of the Mystical or Last Supper (“Take eat... drink ye...”), of the Apostle Paul (“It is no longer I who liveth...”), of St Peter (“partakers of the divine nature”). All virtue, all thinking, all knowledge has no other end. This is the tradition of St Gregory of Nyssa and the other Fathers. Christianity is the true mysticism as she is the true philosophy. Christianity, the Church, offers now the life of the Age to Come. She is the “new age,” the “new creation” which Christ inaugurated with His bodily Resurrection.

The Church is the beginning of the recovery of the cosmos from the devil (Eph. 3:9–13). When the whole purpose of God has been fulfilled, the blessed Trinity will be “all in all.” That end (eschaton) will not be the predetermined return of all things to God, apokatastasis ton panton, a new episode in the eternal cycle of ages; but anacephalaiosasthai ton panton in Christo (Eph. 1:10). But Gregory’s theodicy, his attempt to prove to an ecumene still very Greek, that God of the Christians was “the Good,” the true and living Deity, Who had in person abolished evil, and to gather the race of Adam unto Himself as its new Head. In his enthusiasm, the Bishop of Nyssa often relied unwisely on pagan philosophy intellectual means for the communication of the Christian message, a practice which sometimes brought confusion not clarity.

In his quest, Origen was frequently helpful – as non-Christian sources sometimes were. There is no reason, however, to interpret Gregory’s tactics as forming a “dependence” upon such sources, with the effect that he compromised his Faith. Saint and scholar, how could Gregory have missed the implications of “the foreign philosophy” for the Apostolic Tradition, especially the fatal and pagan doctrine of apokatastasis? Was not his theodicy, in the first instance, propounded to oppose such falsehoods? Indeed, what greater falsehood, what greater mockery, what greater parody of the Christian Revelation, confronted him than the rationalism of Origen?

The express teachings of the Scriptures, the Church and her Sacraments, the hope of the Faithful, the struggle of ascetics, the sacrifice of martyrs, and the suffering of confessors were emptied of all meaning by the universalism of the Alexandrian heretic. The “Origenism” of which St Gregory is accused
would have entailed nothing less. It would have meant the abolition of the “Christian Mystery,” “the Mystery of godliness,” “the Mystery hidden from the ages,” the Economy of salvation. When all the facts are known, who may seriously hold that he sought to replace “the faith once delivered to the saints” with a personal “philosophy.” The evidence shows that St Gregory had no such aspiration.

He was concerned about the honor of God and, for the sake of that honor, the importance of human freedom. Reproach him if we must for his lack of caution, but also let us commend his bold arguments in the defense of the free Christian man and his Faith. Let it be noted, too, that St Gregory’s belief in the inextinguishable free will of man could indeed imply, even in the Age to Come, choices. Not, however, as Origen conceived such choices; not a choice that will lead man to fall again into another world, another body. He denied the finality of the Christian Revelation. St Gregory reaffirmed it.

Furthermore, those men and angels who by the “hardness of their hearts” refuse to embrace the Good cannot escape the Love of God, for His Uncreated Energies reach even into “hell.” Here is a paradox that the Love of God is the occasion for its existence. In a sense, good is responsible for evil, but an evil for which, as always, human liberty is responsible. The existence of “hell,” then, is good, a sign of God’s justice and mercy. But is not the resistance to His Will evil? Did not St Gregory expressly teach that evil will disappear in the Age to Come? How then does he justify the continuation of hostility toward God in eternity, when the Kingdom of God has come, everything being put under the feet of Christ, and the cosmos transfigured by Grace and bathed in the Light of God’s Glory?

These words meant for St Gregory exactly what they meant for St Paul, and Christ Himself. Hell “exists” along with the everlasting Kingdom of God, if only, as some scholars say, temporarily. But neither the Lord, nor the Apostle nor the Bishop of Nyssa describe gehenna as a transitory state. The word “existence” may be the key to the whole matter: the Kingdom and hell each have their own “existence.” The “existence” of hell will not infringe upon the “existence” of the Kingdom of God wherein the Trinity will be “all in all.” Nevertheless, the same “river of fire,” which flows around the Throne of God, will run through both existences.

Let it not be forgotten, also, that the same question asked of the Lord and His Apostle as was asked of St Gregory: how do the Kingdom of God and everlasting gehenna co-exist? How it is possible, when God is “all in all,” when the Body of Christ, the Church, has become “the new heavens and the earth,” how does the evil of resistance to God, hatred of God, persist? The answer is
simply that God will be “all and all” and hostility towards God will continue. Nothing more can be said. Speculation on this matter is futile, however annoying it may be to the curious intellect.

At any rate, even if one accepts the authenticity of the “incriminating passages,” one finds in them St Gregory teaching only the theoretical possibility of a return of the damned (including Satan and all his demons) to God. Moreover, as the other Fathers, the Bishop of Nyssa explained *gehenna* or hell (*hades* shall have disappeared completely) will be the condition of torment for those who defy the Love of God, which reaches even into the abyss where, as Gregory would say, the proud have chosen to hide. Hell, then, is not a demonstration of Divine vengeance, but of the destructive power of angelic and human *hybris*.

Having corrupted their nature, choosing to resist the divine Will while on earth, the possession of the Good in the Age to Come is more painful to recalcitrant God-haters than alienation from Him. Unrepentant are the devil and his angels for the very reason that caused them to rebel: envy of God. Perhaps, too, Milton was right that the demons prefer “to rule in hell than serve in heaven”; or as Aristotle might have said, like is freely attracted to like, like freely dwells only with like. Having come this far, there is yet one more question: was St Gregory of Nyssa a “mystic?” If, by the question, one means to imply all Christian mysticism is ultimately Greek – or more specifically, Platonic – then, the answer is in the negative. But if the word “mysticism” is understood to infer that God by His condescending to become man, gave creation access to the Life of God, to *koinonia* with the Blessed Trinity, then, indeed, he was a “mystic.” In other words, mysticism is nothing but “union with God,” and all who belong to Christ by incorporation into His Body, the Church, is a “mystic” to some degree, if only by virtue of the initiates partaking in the holy Eucharist.

Any member of Christ may scale the hierarchy of being to a higher encounter with Deity. The Christian’s ascent to ever greater participation in the Life of God depends upon his spiritual condition, a condition achieved not by dialectic, as the Platonists thought, but by prayer, dispassion, and true faith. These bring the divine grace which creates the holiness which provides the *theoria* which opens the door to the upper reaches of the spiritual world. The holy ones, St Peter of Damascus explains, are “granted direct vision of the things which pertain to God and, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, becomes in the true sense a theologian.”

In the vision of *the things which pertain to God*, the Christian mystic is conscious of God’s Presence; indeed, His Presence is necessary to the ascent
and vision. Unlike the Greek ideal, the Christian aspiration is not an intellectual apprehension or vision of God in Himself, not with his eyes and not with his reason. He penetrates the world of the spirit to behold *the things which pertain to God*. The total man is involved, hence, St Symeon the New Theologian could feel the warmth of the Uncreated Light that had immersed his cell. The Christian mystic “knows” in his “heart” or “mind” or “spirit” – in his being – to what he has united in love (*agape*). The Essence of God is forever hidden, and the experience of the Christian mystic, as St Gregory testified, is the experience of the Uncreated Energies of the Trinity. Of course, in the Age to Come all the blessed will see the deified and enthroned Christ “face to face” (*I Cor. 13:12*).191

Was St Gregory a “mystic?” Indeed, he was – a Christian mystic. As final evidence of his mysticism, around the year 394, he disappeared into a monastery never to be heard from again. If it is true that he was guilty of the Origenist heresy, must we not believe that he repented of it, and the Church forgiven him. In truth, to call him “Christian mystic” is to call him Orthodox; and there is nothing in the history of the Church which shows that she ever doubted his soundness of doctrine – the painful doubts of St Maximus the Confessor and St Theodore the Studite notwithstanding. He was never charged with Origenism until the sixth century, as we said, and very few Christians took the allegations seriously then; certainly not the fifth, sixth and seventh Ecumenical Councils. His treatises and letters, his piety, prove him to have been nothing but a loyal son of the Church. St Germanos of Constantinople and St Anastasius of Sinaitica were not alone in decrying the redaction of his works by heretics.

Thus, she honors him as a Saint, her spokesman, a guide to the Faithful and to the world. He stands even now close to the Throne of God pleading for them who seek his intercessions.
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<td>ANF</td>
<td>Ante-Nicean Fathers</td>
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<td>ECQ</td>
<td>Eastern Churches Quarterly</td>
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<td>FC</td>
<td>Fathers of the Church</td>
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<td>GOTHTR</td>
<td>Greek Orthodox Theological Review</td>
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<td>HTR</td>
<td>Harvard Theological Review</td>
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<td>J</td>
<td><em>Gregorii Nysseni Opera</em> ed by Werner Jaeger</td>
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<td>JHI</td>
<td>The Journal of the History of Ideas</td>
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<td>Journal of Theological Studies</td>
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2. See the июла and октября Feasts dedicated to the Fathers in the Menaion of the Holy Orthodox Catholic Church.

3. St John of Damascus. Imag. II, 6 PG 94 1288C; St Theodore the Studite. Antirr. II, 18 PG 99 364C; and see the discussion in Jaroslav Pelikan’s The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine (vol. 3): The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600–1700). Chicago, 1974, p. 15f. If only for this reason, it is incredible that the Greek Orthodox scholar, Constantine Tsirpanlis, counts heretics (e.g., Origen, Tertullian) among the Fathers of the Church, for then it would be impossible to speak of a patristic consensus “or agreement among the Fathers on the fundamental tenets and beliefs of a Christian Confession” (See his Introduction to Eastern Patristic Thought and Orthodox Theology. Collegeville [Minn., 1991, pp. 21 –23). Such an “ecumenical” declaration could only fall from the lips of one who fails to recognize the doctrinal and ecclesiological boundaries set up by the Fathers.


5. Editor’s Foreword to Holy Transfiguration Monastery’s revised translation of St John Climacus’ The Ladder of Divine Ascent. Boston, 1991, xxix-xxx. Cf. C.N. Tsirpanlis, Introduction ..., p. 13. Lossky rightly states that it is unfair to speak of “the Platonism of the Fathers every time the subject of ’contemplation’ is raised. Contemplation is not the exclusive appanage of Platonism; and if it were, Platonism in a broad sense would simply mean spirituality which tends towards communion with eternal realities, where the degrees of contemplation correspond to the progressive deification of human beings immersed in the contingent. In this broad sense, almost all religious speculation would be unconscious Platonism. In any case, all religious thought of the Mediterranean world during the first centuries of our era has been Platonic in this sense” (The Vision of God, trans. by A. Morhouse. Clayton [Wise.], 1963, p. 55). Lossky might better have said that, according to the Fathers, the truths of Platonism are the work of the divine Logos; and that, therefore, “all religious speculation would be unconscious” Christianity. His remarks about the Mediterranean world of the first centuries of our era” – eclectic or syncretistic as it was – seem to exclude the influences of Persia, India and Africa. Whatever else we may say about Christian theology, it did not
6 - Plotinus and other Greeks espoused a doctrine of deification: of the soul, not of the body; indeed, the soul was divine by nature or, at the very least, contained a divine element, σπινθήρ. In addition, the pagan doctrine was autosoteric, having no conception of sin or transforming grace. The Christian teaching, on the other hand, was derived from Christ Himself, albeit first mentioned in the second Catholic Epistle of St Peter 1:4. According to the Fathers, deification, θεώσις, is achieved only as the result of Christ's Redemption. It is another word for salvation. To be deified is to “partake of the divine Nature” by grace, uncreated grace; hence, to become immortal, incorruptible and sinless. This is the universal teaching of the Catholic Church and her Fathers: St Ignatius of Antioch, Ed. ad Eph. 20 FC; St Dionysius the Areopagite, Eccl. Hier., I, 4 PG 3 376B; St Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. V., pref. PG 7 1120; St Athanasius. De Incarn. Verbi. 54 PG 25 192B; St Gregory of Nyssa, Ora Cat. XXV PG 45 65D; St Gregory the Theologian, Ora. I, 5PG 35 397C; St John Chrysostom, In Ep. ad Tim. XI, 1 PG 62 555; St Maximus the Confessor, Ad. Thal., 60 PG 90 921AB; St Hippolytus of Rome, Ref. Omn. Haer. X, 29–30 PG 16 3442–3445A, etc. St Cyprian of Carthage, Ed. ad Pomp. LXXII, 6–7 (ANF); St Hilary of Poitiers, De Trin. X, 4 PL 10 66B; St Pope Leo the Great, Serm. LXIII. 6 PI 54 211C; St Ambrose of Milan, De Sacr. Incarn. Dom. VI, 5 PL 16 867C; St Peter Chrysologus, Serm. LXVII PG 52 391 AB, etc. St Ephraim the Syrian, Hymns on the Nativity I, 99 (NPNF) and Tertullian, Ad Marc. II, 27; Augustine of Hippo, Ennar. in Ps. CXLVI, 11 PL 36 1906–1907.

7 - St Maximus the Confessor, Myst., 2:24 PG 91 669C–672A. All the Fathers, whether Alexandrian, Cappadocian, Antiochian, Persian, Russian or Latin, whether deliberately nor not, understood Christology to be the heart of the Christian doctrine. To illustrate: they recognized two basic Scriptural senses: the historical or literal sense, and the “mystical” or spiritual sense. The latter, sometimes called, allegory (cf. Gal.4:24), has several levels of understanding – moral, typological, etc. “For with one and the same word it (the Scriptures), as St Pope Gregory Dialogist tells us, “at once narrates a fact and sets forth a mystery” – quia uno eodemque sermone dum narrat textum, prodit mysterium (Mora. XX, I PL 76 135C). Cf. St Peter Chrysologus, sensus in littera latet, occultatur divinum in humano sermone mysterium (Serm. CXXXII PL 52 561B). The Parables of the Lord are allegorical. He disclosed The mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10), but spoken so that the unbeliever “seeing мая not see, and hearing мая not
hear” (Matt. 13:13). Moreover, the two senses are joined – as the two Natures of Christ – each with a purpose, the historical sense leading to the spiritual or mystical sense.


9 - A word of caution: the word “initiated” may have an occult ring; in fact, the Fathers apply it to any male or female baptized into Christ. They have been “initiated” into the mysterion revealed by the Incarnation. All members of the Church, all the Faithful, the initiated (μυστικαί), are “mystics.” All her “theology,” all her actions are “mystical” (μύσται): the visible hides an invisible power or grace. The raison d'être of “mysticism” is union with God, union by grace. Christ, not Origen, not Augustine, not even St Gregory of Nyssa and St Dionysius the Areopagite, is the founder of Christian mysticism. This understanding of “Christian mysticism” has, generally, been lost in the post-Orthodox West where the subject commonly traced to Plotinus or Plato (from whom the Fathers adopted it); and the realm of “mysticism,” as the Greeks taught, is ordinarily “reserved for the few, an exception to the rule, a privilege vouchsafed to a few souls who enjoy the direct experience of the truth, others, meanwhile, having to remain content with a more or less blind submission to dogmas imposed from without, as to a coercive authority” (Lossky, The Mystical Theology..., p. 8). A valuable work on the modern view of mysticism, see Bernard McGinn. The Foundations of Mysticism (vol. 1): A History of Western Christian Mysticism. New York, 1991.

10 - “This To-day is the very essence of Christianity,” writes the late Cardinal Daniélou. He illustrates his meaning with the Crucified Lord speaking to the repentant thief, 'Today you will be with me in Paradise.’ The operative word is not Paradise... It is Hodie... We have already remarked that for the Bible, Paradise does not signify a return of the Golden Age, as the pagan religions expected. Neither for Christianity, any more than for the Old Testament, is Paradise a future of an indeterminate nature. Paradise is upon us. It is a presence” (From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers, trans. by D. Hibberd. London, 1960, p. 16).

12 - See my “The Greek Fathers: Polis and Paideia,” SVTh XXIII. 1–2 (1979), 3–21; 67–86. Furthermore, it is the realization of the future in the present – that is, typology: whether of OT persons or events anticipating the NT; or the Age to Come as adumbrated by the Church – which explains the “mystical” character of the book of Hebrews rather than the influence of Philo’s allegorism. It is not important who wrote Hebrews; it is important that the author not be viewed as ‘unphilonien converti au christianisme’ (See C. Spicq. L’Épître aux Hébreux. Paris, 1952); and it is important that Philo, contrary to H. Chadwick, not be heralded as “the originator of Christian philosophy” (“Philo and the Beginnings of Christian Thought,” The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy, ed. by A.H. Armstrong. Cambridge [Eng.], 1970, p. 161). The Liturgy is, indeed, a “shadow” (Heb.10:1), as Casel observed (Ibid., p. 54).

13 - The Christian doctrine of Christ was formulated at Chalcedon. It reads: one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the distinction of natures in no way annulled by the union (Act V). Its Christology did not originate with the 4th Ecumenical Council or any other, but with the Lord Himself. So it is that one may disagree with F.C. Grant that Christianity was not “Christocentric” from the beginning (Ancient Judaism and the New Testament. New York, 1959, p. 130f.). Like so many other scholars, Professor Grant confuses the theory of doctrinal development with the evolution of doctrinal formularies. The former presupposes a conception of God and revelation, of the Church and history, hostile to the Scriptures (I Cor. 2:2; 5:8; 16:2; II These. 2:15; 3:6; II Tim. 1:13–14; 2:2; Jude 3) and the holy Fathers (See G. Florovsky, The Function of Tradition in the Ancient Church,” GOTHr IX, 2 [1963–64], 181–200). There is nothing in the Christian Tradition to suggest that the Fathers are the creators of new doctrine. No doubt, in the Catholic Church, there has always been, as there always shall be, a diversity of theological and ecclesial forms: of customs, language and symbols. For example, the Byzantine and Latin liturgies were identical neither in rubrics nor order; nevertheless, the Faith of the Church was the same. From the time of the Great Commission unto the present, it has remained unaltered. One generation of her children has not believed differently from another. The Holy Spirit, by Whose presence she is infallible, will not permit “the faith once delivered to the saints” to be sullied by the folly of men (John 14:16–17, 26; 15:26).
14 - See the discussion in Florovsky’s “Saint Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers,” p. 123f.

15 - The question of the “procession” of the Spirit is not in fact different among the Eastern and Western Fathers. None of them adopted the unique Augustinian model of the Trinity (filioque). Augustine theology was obliged to Platonic sources (especially, Marius Victorinus). In part, the alleged difference between the Greek and Latin Fathers is the scholarly identification of “Latin theology” with Augustine triadology. The Bishop of Hippo failed, among other things, to take seriously the distinction between “the transcendent” and “economic Trinity.” The Latin Fathers were not guilty of that failure. Thus, St Gregory the Great writes that the Holy Spirit qui de Patre procedens, et de eo quod est Filii accipiens (Mor., V, 65 PL 75 715A); and cum consubstantialis ei Spiritus ad nos per Filium veniens (ibid., XXVII, 34 PL 76 419B). In addition, the triadological formulae of the Latins stressed, especially in the face of Arianism, the unity in substance of the three Persons. Thus, Pope Hormisdas declared, proprium Spiritus sancti utde Patre et Filio procederetsub una substantia Deitatis (Ed, LXXIV ad Just. Aug. PL 63 414B). The Spirit “proceeds” from the common substance of the Trinity, not from the Person of the Son. The triadology of the Latin Fathers was never insensitive to the mystery of God. Again, since the purpose of any patristic formula were largely reactions to immediate threats to the Faith, circumstance often dictated that certain aspects of theology were deliberately left out of the debate. Moreover, the West Roman Fathers seemed more concerned with explaining the effects of God’s activity rather than exploring His Nature, perhaps by virtue of the Latin temperament. For the same reason, they commonly viewed the Incarnation from the human side; or, to use the language of C. Dumont, “Fuer den Osten ist Christ eher der Gott-mench, fuer den Westen der mench-Gott” (“Katholiken und Orthodoxe am Vorabenddes Konzils,” in Seit Neunhundret Jahren getrennte Christenheit. E.V. Ivanka, hrsg. Vienna, 1962, 116). Finally, most scholarship assumes that the West Roman Fathers were Ignorant of the Uncreated Energies and that the idea that human nature participates in the Life of God by virtue of Them is a “development” of Greek Orthodox theology. If the doctrine of the divine Operations or Energies is not a conspicuous feature of Latin Catholic theology, it is not because They were unknown to it. The Fathers of the West dealt with the divine Economy in their own way. Karl Rahner seems to have rediscovered them.

16 - Clearly, writes Fr J.S. Romanides, an essential motive for the Incarnation was the destruction of death, and of him who had the power of
death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14), which prevented man’s participation in

17 - R.L. Wilken considers the Adam/Christ typology to be a “Pauline
idea,” an opinion not without some currency. “Most patristic writers,” he
informs us, “though claiming to expound the Pauline text, actually go far
beyond Paul in employing the typology in new theological and exegetical
settings.” At the same time, Wilken bemoans the paucity of Adam/Christ
typology in the Fathers. The available literature, he concedes, is “very sketchy”
(Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandriáis
Exegesis and Theology. New Haven, 1971, p. 91, 95). Wilken ignores several
facts. If the available literature is “very sketchy,” then, his conclusions are
argumentum adsilentio, especially since many patristic texts are lost. Again,
the Adam/Christ typology originated with Jesus Himself (Luke 24:27, 44; Acts
28:23). St Paul, the first to mention the typology (I Cor. 15:45–47), proclaimed
that his teachings were inspired by God Himself (Gal. 1:11–12). Throughout
their writings, the Fathers, although not always concerned with this typology,
often make subtle allusions to it. Moreover, Wilken seems to have dismissed
the importance of the liturgical disciplina arcana, the “hidden teachings” of the
Church, reserved for Christian “initiates,” the “enlightened” or “newly–
baptized”: the “discipline” or doctrine about which the Fathers and even
ordinary Christians were ever silent before outsiders. Thus, St Dionysius the
Areopagite’s exhortation, “Do not betray the holy of Holies... Keep the holy
things of God unshared and undefiled and let not the uninitiated share in them.
Let the holy befit the holy. Speak only to holy men about them and only in holy
illumination” (Eccl. Hier., I, 1 PG 3 372A; also II, 8 404CD). See also St
Irenaeus. Adv. Haer. Ill, xvii, 16 NPNF; St Athanasius. Ora. c. Ar., I,44 PG 26
101C; St Cyril of Jerusalem, Catech. V, 12 FC; St Ambrose, In Luc. IV, 1 SC;
St Hilary of Poitiers. Trac. Mys., I, 3 SC; St Methodius of Olympus, Symp., Ill,
3–4 PG 18 65B–68A, etc.). On account of the many theological controversies in
the Church and the general spread of Christianity, the disciplina arcani were
gradually disclosed to the world.

18 - I will not debate the question whether there exists an inner connection
between “the Christian Mystery” and the teachings of pagan mystery cults.
There was not. Was there a “development” in the Christian understanding of
the mysterion after St Paul? There was none. Did the Fathers alter the Christian
revelation? They did not. “Jesus is here; and once more we stand before the
Mystery,” writes St Gregory the Theologian, “not the mysteries of Greek

19 - Ora. I, 2 PG 35 396A. Words beginning with Greek suffix, sun and the Latin con are found everywhere in the Scriptures and the Fathers. They refer to more than a common action or thought. 'They signify,” as Emile Mersch mentions, “that Christ’s actions and sufferings are prolonged and consummated in the actions of Christians, and that only in this way do they attain their totality and their pleroma... the Church is the continuation, the fullness, the pleroma of the Saviour” (The Whole Christ, trans. by J.R. Kelly. London, 1956, p. 131).

20 - The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, trans. by A.H.C. Downes. New York, 1940, p. 40. This understanding of “Christian philosophy” marks its beginning with Augustine of Hippo, not with the book of Hebrews (J.W. Thompson. The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: the Epistle to the Hebrews. Washington DC, 1982). Historians are not in agreement on the origin of “Christian philosophy.” In his The History of Dogma, Harnack argued for the second century, with the Apologists, a point of departure for many church histories and patrologies. He maintained the writings of the Christian Apologists initiated the “Hellenization of Christianity.” A recent study, E.F. Osborn’s The Beginning of Christian Philosophy (Cambridge [Eng.], 1981), agrees with Harnack, albeit not entirely for the same reasons. Osborn is not concerned with the question of Hellenization. He states that the second century is the time when Christians began to solve “philosophical problems” (the existence of God, good and evil, free will, etc.) which is precisely the classical definition of “philosophy.” To provide answers to philosophical questions does not necessarily constitute a “philosophy.” Traditional religion has always boasted that it provide by revealed wisdom what philosophy sought by unaided human reason. Neither must we always refer to him who offers the solution to the great questions of human curiosity as a “philosopher.” The difference between conventional “philosophy” and conventional “religion” is not “reason” and “faith” which play a role in both; but rather in their method of inquiry, the proof demanded, as well as the motive for the undertaking. The Christian has
always claimed to possess the wisdom which rendered all “independent” philosophical speculation superfluous. The fact that she has sometimes framed the answers in rational form implies neither that such a form was necessary to demonstrate the veracity of its content nor that the Church’s faith has been validated by its rationality. Divine revelation is ever the dominant force; human faith always the dominant response.


22 - Loc. cit.


24 - Conf., VII, x, 16 (Pusey translation. New York, 1949). D’Arcy observes that Augustine’s “mark on philosophy has been described... as that of interiorizing it. He is the first explorer of the hinterland of the self (“The Philosophy of Augustine,” p. 156). Adolf von Harnack said that Augustine deserves to be called a “philosopher” because he “brought to an end the development of ancient philosophy by completing the process” and by “making the inner life of man the starting point of his reflection on the world” (The History of Dogma [vol. 5]. trans. by J. Miller. London, 1898, p. 107). In fact, that honor goes to Plotinus.

25 - D’Arcy, “The Philosophy...,” p. 189. Augustine may have been guided in this matter by Origen whom he read while in Italy (See H. Chadwick, “Christian Platonism in Origen and Augustine,” in Origenia Tertia: the Third International Colloquium for Origen Studies (The University of Manchester, 7th–11th, 1981). ed. by R. Hanson & H. Crouzel. Rome, 1985, 220–230. He certainly was not indebted to St Ambrose who, for Instance, rejected the Platonic Ideas (Hexa. I, 1 PL 14 133A).

26 - To Illustrate: in the ecclesiology of Fathers, the Church, the Lord’s Body, as the continuation of the Incarnation, is the manifestation of the “mystery hidden before the ages.” Like Him, she is both visible and invisible, temporal and eternal, Divine and human, earthly and heavenly, the two dimensions joined without confusion or separation. But, in the thinking of Augustine, the visible is only a signum of the Invisible: they are not mated and the consequence is an “unPauline disembodiment of Christ’s Body, toward a one-sided view of Christ’s Body as an interior community of grace with Christ, whose headship is thus limited to an invisible inpouring of grace,” that is, the “Church” is only the predestined (New Catholic Encyclopedia [vol. 10]. Washington, DC, 1967, pp. 168–169). No wonder, too, that Augustine allowed for the efficacy of the Sacraments outside the Catholic Church (See my The

27 - See Augustine’s defense of the filioque (De fid, et symb. IX, 19 PL 40 191).

28 - The idea of philosophy as amor sapientiae was taken from Neo-Platonism, as meditationem mortis was taken from Cicero. St Ambrose and Augustine were certainly aware of their sources; yet, there is a difference between these Christian writers, says G. Mardec, “la différence n'est pas sans signification. Chez Augustin, la référence à un ideal philosophique fournit une sorte de critère objectif pour relativiser et juge toute entreprise philosophique particulière (C. acad. Ill, 17,38; De ordine II, 1,1). Chez Ambroise, au contraire, il semble que la philosophie se reduise à la somme de speculations philosophiques et au cumul des erreurs commises par les philosophies au cours des agès” (Saint Ambroise et las Philosophie. Paris, 1974, p. 91).

29 - De Virg. I, iv, 17 PL 16204B. Cf. καθ’ ἡμέραν ἀποθνήσκω, νῦν τὴν ὑμετέραν καύχησιν, ἢν ἔχω ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ Ἰωάννης (I Cor. 15:31).

30 - “The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote and wounded me; the keepers of the walls took my cloak.”

31 - Saint Ambrose..., p. 41.

32 - Ibid., p. 344. The fact that St Ambrose studied Plato one day and Aristotle another day, shows that he was indeed a student of pagan philosophy. He agreed with St Justin Martyr that “what is admirable in the writings of the philosophers belongs to us” (De Bon. Mort. XI, 51 PL 14 591B).

33 - Con. Eun. VII PG 45 744A: Cf. St Methodius of Olympus. Symp. IX. 1 PG 10 180B; St John Chrysostom, Ep.ad Rom., VII NPNF; St Isaac the Syrian, Book of Grace, VII, 7:92 HTM; St Ambrose, De Is. vel anima V, 39 FC; St Gregory the Great, Hom. in Ezek., X 20 PL 76 883B.

34 - St Athanasius wrote in his Vita Antoni (c. 14 PG 25 865AB) that St Anthony “persuaded many to choose the solitary life; and so henceforth there arose monasteries even in the mountains, and the desert was made a city by monks coming out from their own and enrolling themselves in the heavenly citizenship” (See Derwas Chitty’s valuable book. The Desert, A City. Crestwood [NY], 1966).

35 - The standard work on Greek city and its culture is Werner Jaeger’s Paideia: The Ideas of Greek Culture (2 vols.). trans. by G. Hightet. New York,

In Soliloquia I, 1, 2–3, Augustine offers “the Philosopher’s prayer.” Henri Marrou (St Augustine and His Influence Throughout the Ages, trans. by P. Hepburne-Scott. New York, 1962, p. 97), mentions, without further comment, that the Bishop of Hippo, in his Retractiones, revised the words, “Thou my God, who hast willed only the pure to know the truth,” because, as Augustine said, “no definition was given here of the truth which only the pure can perceive, and the nature of knowing was left undefined.” But he apparently did not regret the words of Sol. I, i, 4, “Hear, hear, O Hear me, Thy way is well known to a select few” – Exaudi, exaudi, exaudi me more illo tuo paucis notissimo. Considering Augustine’s penchant for logical precision, his admiration for “the Platonists” and his view that God imprints the concept of the good on every mind – impressa notio ipsius boni (De Trin. VIII, iii, 4 PL 42 949), such a revision would seem to be in order.


What Augustine meant by “illumination” has been a matter of great controversy since the Latin Middle Ages. For some, it involves “the agent intellect” which supplies intelligible species to mind on the occasion of sensation; to others, illumination is the occasion in which things intelligible are known “in God” through an immediate vision of Him; and, for others, Augustine taught by his doctrine of illumination the Divine empowering of the mind to confer intelligibility on the contents of sensation; while others interpret Augustine to say that illumination is the regulatory authority under which the mind acts with regard to the validity of its judgments; however, scholars seems to agree that Augustine taught a higher knowledge wrought by a special illumination which God gives to the most worthy, but which “the impurity of sin” disqualifies (See E. Teselle,, Augustine the Theologian. New York, 1970, p. 104f; E. Gilson,, The Christian Philosophy of St Augustine. New York, 1960, pp. 66–96; and F. Copleston, The History of Philosophy [vol. 2, pt. 1], pp. 66–82).

Conf. VII, xvi (Pusey). Augustine’s total religious experience is “inextricably involved in his Platonist philosophy – so that for him philosophy
and theology are not two but one discipline,” contends E.l. Watkin, “but his mystical experience, like those of the Neo-Platonists, was given on occasion and at the conclusion of a process of intellectual introversion and abstraction from the manifold of sense through the ideas they embody to God the Absolute.” To be sure, he believed, unlike “the noble Platonist,” that his ecstasy was “a free supernatural gift of Divine Grace” (“The Mysticism of St. Augustine,” in St Augustine: His Age, Life and Thought, p. 113). According to B. McGinn, the prime difference between the pagan mysticism of Plotinus and the Christian mysticism of Augustine is not difficult to discover. “For Plotinus, the soul, however fallen, always remains capable of lifting itself up to the vision of God because of its divine origin; for Augustine, the soul is a fallen creature, bound by both original and individual sin, and hence any such elevation is always the result of God’s action on us” (The Foundations of Mysticism (vol. 1): A History of Western Christian Mysticism. New York. 1991, p. 233). However critical, that difference is not an Augustinian declaration of independence from Hellenism. Fr Eugene Portalié states that “Augustine’s entire concept of philosophy was borrowed from the Platonists,” a concept which includes the idea of philosophy as “the love of wisdom,” God as the object of philosophy, wisdom as happiness, wisdom as the noblest pursuit of man, wisdom as the knowledge of eternal truths, science as the knowledge of temporal things, and reason rising by degrees to the contemplation of truth which is eternal and unchangeable (A Guide the Thought of St Augustine, trans. by R.J. Bastain. Chicago, 1960, p. 95–104).

41 - One may wonder whether the Christian “philosopher’s” or “mystic’s” love and quest for wisdom is related in any way to Augustine’s theory of predestination? This query was suggested by Watkin’s prolix statement (“Mysticism...,” p. 109) that Augustine who “in his earlier writings recognizes ungrudgingly the genuinely mystical character of the Neo-Platonic ecstasies, should later have narrowed his outlook and denied that philosophers like Plotinus and Proclus, who were wholly given to the service of God as they understood it, simply because they did not accept Christianity, and therefore gave to their experience an inadequate intellectual formulation, could not have received a grace bestowed upon himself while yet outside the Church and living in a state which he had already begun to believe definitely sinful.” Augustine, in the last decade of his life, was almost totally absorbed with his theories of irresistible grace, predestination and perseverance of the saints.

42 - Augustine’s belief in the analogy between God and the soul had several consequences: (1) he made “no sharp dichotomy between the spheres of
natural and revealed theology,” Fr Copleston observes, “not because he failed to make the distinction between reason and faith, but rather because he viewed the soul’s cognition of God in close connection with its spiritual search for Him as the one Source and Object of beatitude”; (2) and if, as Augustine asserted, the Platonic Ideas exist in the Essence of God; and if the soul (i.e., the mind) is the analogy of God, then, to know my immaterial and immortal soul is to know the Essence of God. As Copleston puts it, “If the human mind beholds the exemplar ideas and eternal truths, and if these ideas and truths are in the mind of God, does it not follow that the human mind, with all it contains is ontologically identical with the divine essence?” (A History of Philosophy [vol. 2]: Medieval Philosophy [p. 11: Augustine to Bonaventura. Garden City [NY], 1962, pp. 75, 86).

43 - The Fathers agreed with Augustine that God informs all things as He indwells them; all things; and, consequently, that He is responsible for the truth which pagan philosophers uncovered. Virtue, whatever was possible for seekers after the truth, brought them closer to God Who, according to their capacity, possessed and enlightened them; hence, St Justin (Dial, c. Trypho II, 6 FC) could speak of certain Greeks “and the wise men among the barbarians” as “Christians before Christ.” It was the Logos Who later became flesh that enlightened them, Justin wrote, even as St John the Theologian reveals in the Prologue (1:9) to his Gospel.

44 - E. Amand Medietta is confused, if not sometimes annoyed, by St Basil’s “conventional attitude of contempt” for Hellenism while clearly an admirer of it. He, as most of the Fathers, used pagan philosophy in his writings (“The Official Attitude of Basil of Caesarea As a Christian Bishop Towards Greek Philosophy and Science,” in The Orthodox Churches and the West. ed. by D. Baker. Oxford, 1967, pp. 24–49). The author’s consternation might disappear if he approached St Basil and The other early Christian theologians” as an authority not a resource; and if he would refrain from reading the “Western” problem of “faith and reason” into the writings of the holy Fathers, as so many have done for so long. He would, then, come to understand the real difference between Christianity and Hellenism as the rivalry between two theologies of the city and man (hence, two systems of “education”), at the heart of which was disparate concepts of time.

45 - Generally, the Fathers teach that the “heart” or “mind” or “spirit” is the uppermost part of the soul (ψυχή, anima = created life principle). Various described as the seat of thought, volition, self-awareness, the heart is the spiritual center of man. Reason (λόγος, διανοία, ratio) is that faculty of mind
dealing with analysis and synthesis, memory and judgment. In the fallen man, the “heart” is “darkened,” and therefore, the process of reasoning (ratiocinatio) is influenced by his destructive passions and susceptible to the lies and delusions of the devil. When the “heart” or “mind” or “spirit” (i.e., the soul) is cleansed by grace from the passions or wicked appetites, the soul and its faculties function, “according to nature,” the “nature” of the obedient Adam (κάτωφόσιν, secundum naturae). Moreover, they receive the divine gift of gnosis, a knowledge by which the “mind” might apprehend God and spiritual things, a knowledge which, albeit transcending ratiocination, enriches it.

46 - I recall the words of St Gregory of Nyssa, καὶ ἔχει ἡ Ἐκκλησία τὰς περὶ τούτων ἄπεδειξεις μάλλον δὲ ἔχει πίστιν ἄποδειξεως βεβαιοτέραν (In verba. Fac. hom., 1 PG 44 260A).

47 - Glanville Downey observes that there is good reason that Tertullian, “who had a thorough pagan education,” asked not “what has Socrates to do with Christ,” as he might have, but “what has Athens to do with Jerusalem?... The significant point is that he chose two cities to serve as the representative of two cultures” (“From the Pagan City to the Christian City,” p. 125). At the same time, one cannot doubt that the Church accommodated the classical paideia: (1) the use of Greek and Roman languages; (2) borrowing concepts (e.g., St Paul from the Greek poets); (3) utilizing many ideas of its philosophers in her apologetics, often against the Greeks themselves; (4) employing the pagan curriculum in the intellectual education of the Christian man, in preparation for encounter with spiritual realities. The Fathers often invoked the names of Moses (among the Egyptians) and Daniel (among the Babylonians) for this practice. Inevitably, the names of Clement and Origen of Alexandria are associated with the creation of “systematic Christian theology” and “the development of Christian philosophy” (W. Jaeger, “Paideia Christi,” in Erziehung und Bildung in der heidenischen und christlichen Antike. hrsg. von H.T. Johann. Darmstadt, 1976, 480). A curious choice of prototypes, since neither is accounted Fathers of the Orthodox Church precisely because of their Hellenism. Moreover, it is historically interesting, relative to the question before us, that Plotinus urged the Emperor Gallienus (253–268) to build the city of Platonopolis, a city for philosophers (Vita Por., 2), perhaps with a vision of Plato’s Republic or his words, “Education is the way to produce good men, and once produced, such men will live nobly” (Laws I 641C), men of πολιτικαί ἀρεταί (Enn. I, ii, 1). One may recall, too, Philós theory about the world as a "city" patterned after the World of Ideas (Frag. II, 44 LC); and, among other Fathers, St Cyril of Alexandria, lauds the Church as ἁγίον πόλιν (In Isa. V, 1 PG
70 1144C); also, Origen’s reference to the Church as πόλις τοῦ θεοῦ and her paideia (In Jer. IX, 2PG 13 349D); and, of course, Augustine’s de civitas dei, with the education which appertains thereto.

48 - Dean Inge, so. preoccupied with his thesis, so comfortable with his historiosopphical assumptions, either did not know or simply ignored the words of Ignatius of Antioch, “For Christianity did not believe on Judaism, but Judaism on Christianity” (Ep. ad Magn., 11). The Dean’s lectures neither mention nor show any acquaintance with the Christian mysterion.

49 - The Philosophy of Plotinus (vol. 1). London, 1923, p. 11–14. In fact, Inge held that NeoPlatonism is so much “part of the vital structure of Christian theology that it would be impossible to tear them apart” (Ibid., vii). Hence, there is no reason to separate Athens and Jerusalem, since “neither in philosophy nor in ethics were the differences very great.” The Dean described “Catholicism” (of which Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism and and “the Greek Church” are its “branches”) as “the last great achievement of classical culture” (Ibid., p. 14).

50 - Plotinus’ “trinity” – “the One,” “the Intellect” or Nous, and the “Soul” – may have been influenced by Jewish and Christian theology, even if mediated through Gnosticism (Katz, J., “Plotinus and the Gnostics,” JHI XV, (1954), 289–298).

51 - H. Dörrie agrees that the Incarnation was, perhaps, the chief difference between Christianity and Platonism (“Die andereTheologie,” in Theologie und Philosophie LV (1981), 1–46. He does not go far enough. The Incarnation presupposes an ontology not found in Hellenism. Fr Georges Florovsky believed that central to the antagonism between Christianity and Hellenism is the idea of time (See his ‘The Idea of Creation in Christian Philosophy,” in ECQ VIII (1949), 3, Supplementary issue: Nature and Grace). Valuable, too, are the observations of Oscar Cullmann on “the linear conception of time in revelatory history of the Bible as contrasted with the cyclical conception of Hellenism” (Christ and Time: the Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History, ch. 2).

52 - Meredith, A., “Gregory of Nyssa and Plotinus,” in SP XVII, 3. ed. by E. A. Livingston. Oxford, 1982, 1120f. According to C.W. Macleod, none can prove St Gregory read more than Plotinus’s Enneads I, 6 & VI, 9 (“Allegory and Mysticism in Origen and St Gregory of Nyssa,” JTS XXII. 2 (1971), 366 n. 11.Fr Louis Bouyer observes that one of the most common and undemonstrated assumptions of modern historiography is that “any ’mysticism’ in the Fathers necessarily implies Greek and, more specifically, Neo-Platonic Influence.”
What he says about St Dionysius the Areopagite (or more accurately the sixth century editor of his works, “the Pseudo-Dionysius”) is true also about St Gregory of Nyssa; to wit, “without a doubt admirably informed on the developments of Neo-Platonism, and if he is not slow to speak its language and borrow its favorite images,” he likewise “feels free to transfigure all this by the use he makes of it... and it is all the more remarkable that his use of the word mystikos, together with what is most characteristic of him in its use, is incorporated into a purely Christian and ecclesiastical context” (The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers (vol. 1). trans. by M.R. Ryan. New York, 1963, p. 406). Dörrie refers to the “platonischer Sprache” of St Gregory of Nyssa (and the other Fathers) as “de-Platonized” or “de-Plotinosized” (See ftn. 4).

53 - Nowhere in his writings does St Gregory quote the Greek philosophers directly. He never credits them as the source of the Christian doctrine; e.g., he states in his Dean, et res. (PG 46 49B-52B) that if “the foreign philosophy” (ἡ ἔξω φιλοσοφία) provided us with adequate knowledge concerning the existence and nature of the soul, his discourse on the subject would be superfluous. In this work, St Gregory does indeed allude to the speculations on the soul in Plato’s Phaedrus and in Aristotle’s De anima. He rejected the entire heritage of Plato and Aristotle (which, of course, included Plotinus). If, however, he uncovered elements in Greek philosophy useful to his exposition of the Christian anthropology, He employed them only when they supported the Scriptures. St Gregory never made more than “selective use” of the Greeks, writes A. A. Mosshamer, and only in order to defend Orthodoxy. He had no desire to develop a personal philosophy (“Disclosing but Disclosed: Gregory of Nyssa as Deconstructionist,” in Studien zu Gregor von Nyssa und der Christlichen Spaetantike. Leiden, 1990, p. 145).

54 - De Civ. Dei. X1 PL 41 277. Note the “created light.”


56 - We may agree with Émile Bréhier that Plotinus hoped to solve two problems: “first, the religious problem concerning the destiny of the soul and the means of restoring it to its pristine state; and second, the philosophical structure and rational explanation of reality... It consists, therefore, in affirming the religious significance of rationalism” (The Philosophy of Plotinus, trans. by J. Thomas. Chicago, 1958, pp. 32, 43). From a slightly different point of view, T. Whittaker also describes Plotinus as a rationalist, albeit he was personally a mystic, his theory of knowledge could not be mystical without contradicting
mysticism.” Whittaker compares Plotinus’ dialectic (Enn. 1,3) with Spinoza’s scientia intultiva (The Neo-Platonists: A Study in the History of Hellenism. Cambridge [Eng.], 1928, p. 100). Provocative is Whittaker’s comparison of Plotinus to a seventeenth century acosmic pantheist.

57 - Werner Jaeger reasons that “all attempts to form a nobler type of man merged ultimately into the problem of the Divine”; but also the relationship between the Divine and human is a “political” problem, inasmuch as the polis is the educator and its citizens the educated, while the care of each part is inseparable from and responsible for the whole (Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture [vol. II]. trans. by G. Hightet. New York, 1962, p. 298ff., 414).

58 - Albeit the Greeks never denied the value and necessity of the polis, it underwent several modifications. The primitive ideal of a Hellas composed of confederated city-states gradually disappeared in the fourth century B.C. It was replaced by another faith: the world-state or cosmopolis, under a single ruler, in imitation of the monarchy of God, whose purpose of universal brotherhood, would be realized through the values of the Greek paideia. In the opinion of Werner Jaeger, 'The Greek Idea of the future unity of mankind under the Greek paideia, as it appears in Isocrates as early as the fourth century B.C., had become a reality after Alexander’s conquest of the East” (Early Christianity and Greek Paideia. Cambridge [Mass.], 1961, p. 63). Isocrates attributed to the Greeks, particularly Athens, a superior philosophy or paideia which he explained by possession of a unique logos, a possession which distinguishes the wise from the ignorant (ἀπαίδευτος). The time will come, Isocrates said, that the name “Hellene” will designate not so much a common blood as a common culture (Panegyricus, 51; LC). Christianity will profit by Alexander’s propagation of Greek culture. The latter will provide the Gospel with easier access to those lands where the Greek paideia had been spread; and it gave to the Church the form for her own paideia and, so consequently, the language for the elaboration of her doctrine (Jaeger, Loc. cit.).


60 - De Vit. Moy., 336D. ἀλλοφύλου means literally “other tribe” or “other people” which implies another city; hence, the connection between it and the education used to mold its citizens.

61 - St Gregory distinguished between “the heavenly mind” and “the carnal mind,” denying to the latter (i.e., “profane reasoning”) any access to “the supercelestial sanctuary” (De Ora Dom. PG 44 1152A).

62 - St Gregory viewed ἐπαίδευτω καὶ μικροφυεὶ διανοία as the fundamental “error” of Hellenism – ἐντοῖς Ἐλλησι πλάνη (Con. Eun. V PG 45 681B). He
referred to the failure of the Jews to confess the Resurrection of Christ as ἐλθεῖσθαι οὐκ ὠφελείτον τῆς πλάνης (In Christ. Res. Ill PG 46 653B). That “error” disposed the pagans to look upon the beauty of the cosmos not as a guide to “the Nature which transcends them,” but rather limited their understanding to objects of reason and the senses. They marveled at the effect not the Cause, the ultimate consequence of which was to deify the creation. The word πλάνη, commonly translated “error,” but in the thinking of the Fathers signifies much more; it is “delusion,” the grand offspring of pride; to be sure, a hybris. Πλάνη does indeed bear the sense of “wandering,” but the Church understands the word primarily in a moral sense, a “leading astray,” “to deceive,” “to be lead in the wrong direction” by “the cunning of men” and demons, as the Apostle Paul taught. Πλάνη is often used as a synonym for “heresy” as something opposed to ἀλήθεια or Christianity (St Polycarp, Ep. II, 1; St Ignatius of Antioch, Ep. ad Magn. Ill, 2; St Barnabas. Ep. XII, 10; St Ireneaus, Ad. Haer. I, i, 3 PG 7 449B; St Justin Martyr, Dial. c. Tr yp. XXXV, 2 PG 6 549B; St Methodius of Olympus, Symp. II, 3 PG 18 1852B; St Cyril of Jerusalem, Cat. IV, 6 PG 33 460B; St Epiphanius, Haer. VIII, 9 PG 41 224A; St John Chrysostom, Comm. Matt. XXXVIII, 1 PG 58 335A; St Gregory Sinai tica, De Quiet., 10 PG 150 1324AC, etc.). Not without relevance is St Gregory’s comparison of “heresy” with “Babylon,” a city. “I see the heretical confusion (Babylon is the confusion)” – ἴδω τὴν αἱρετικὴν σύγχυσιν (βαβυλὼν δὲ ἔστιν ἡ σύγχυσις) (Ora. Fun. Meletio PG 46 860D).

- In a letter to his friend, Libanus, St Gregory wrote that many have helped him, “but If you ask who are my teachers (Διδασκάλους δὲ τούς ἡμετέρους), they are Paul and John and the rest of the Apostles and Prophets” – καὶ τούς λοιπούς ἀποστόλους τε καὶ προφήτας (Ep. XIII. PG 46 1048C); but pertaining to his understanding of these, “the wonderful Basil” was “my father... and teacher” – πατρὸς δ᾿ ἐμου καὶ διδασκάλου του θαυμαστού βασιλέιου (1049A).


- On the Uncreated Energies in the writings of the Fathers, see Vladimir Lossky’s The Mystical Theology..., pp. 67–90. Unfortunately, Lossky limits himself to St Gregory Palamas and the Greek Fathers. In another place, Lossky mentions that the term energia, “denoting a mode of divine existence beyond the essence of God, introduces no new philosophical notion alien to revelation. The Bible, in its concrete language, speaks of nothing other than ‘energies’, when it tells us of the 'Glory of God’, a glory with innumerable names.
surrounding the inaccessible being of God, and making Him known outside Himself, while concealing what is in Himself” (“The Procession of the Holy Spirit in Orthodox Triadology,” ECQ VII. 2 (1948), 47.

66 - The distinction between Essence and Energy in God is sometimes ignored, sometimes not taken seriously by scholars. Hans Urs von Balthasar comes very close to understanding it when he remarks, ‘Tout ce qui peut être pensée en Dieu est, acte et action” (Presence et Pensée: Essai sur la Philosophie Reliaieuse de Grégoire de Nysse. Paris, 1941, p. 143). Scholars seem not to know what to do with them: either they tend to ignore them or to concoct some clever explanation of their meaning and place in Gregory’s thought and in the history of so-called “theological development.” For example, W. Elert argues that Gregory had transvaluated (umwertung) the concept of Apeiron (infinity) and thereby revolutionized classical metaphysics. He elaborated the Infinity of God in terms of His Perfection. He made Infinity a ‘Wesenpredikat fur Gott (Der Ausgang der altkirchlichen Christologie. Berlin, 1957, ss. 67–70). Elert appears to think of Infinity as a divine emanation. For the Christian understanding of God’s Infinity, St Gregory appealed to the Scriptures. He found there the idea of God as transcendent and boundless. The prophets describe Him as “existing before the ages, the everlasting king who rules the ages, and beyond. Consequently, we define Him to transcend any beginning, to exceed any end” – τοῦτο λέγομεν περί της ἁλιότητος τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὃ παρὰ προφητείας ἡκούσαμεν, ὅτι Θεὸς, καὶ βασιλεὺς προαιώνιος καὶ βασιλεύει, τὸν αἰῶνα, καὶ ἐπὶ αἰῶνα, καὶ ἐτί, καὶ τοῦτο ἀνωτέρων μὲν πασῆς ἀρχῆς περισσότερον δὲ παντὸς τέλους εἶναι διοριζόμεθα (Con. Eun. I PG 45 457A). According to T. Boman, the familiar Christian liturgical doxology (found everywhere in the writings of St Gregory) – νῦν καὶ ἄει, καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων – is the equivalent of the Hebrew me ’ôlam ’adh”ôlam, meaning that God is endless, stretching back as well as forward in time, and beyond (καὶ ἐτί). Cf. Con. Eun. VII PG 45 769B; XII, 1064C–1065A; and Pss. 90:20; 10; 3:17; Jer. 7:7; 25:2 (Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek, trans. by J.L. Moreau. Philadelphia, 1961, pp. 144–154). In the theology of the Fathers, therefore, “infinity” is not a “predicate” of the divine Nature, but the denial of all predicate to It. One great purpose of St Gregory of Nyssa’s The Life of Moses was to establish the Trinity’s incomprehensibility. He is without name, without predicates, without attributes. Such things as God’s love or goodness or mercy mark not His Nature but the impact of His Energies on man and things (See Dr Alexandre Kalomiros’ valuable, ‘The River of Fire,” The Orthodox Conference [22–25 iюля], Seattle, 1980, 103–134).
- The Philosophy of Plotinus, p. 169

- Although both St Gregory and Plotinus taught that the eradication of the passions – dispassion (ἀπάθεια) – and the acquisition of virtue leads to deification, the Bishop of Nyssa, unlike Plotinus, held that the God to Whom the deified body and soul are united by grace (i.e., the Uncreated Energy) is the “true Good”: the Creator-Savior God in Three Persons. The idea of an Incarnate Logos, the Risen Lord, was folly to Plotinus. He expressly took a position against the fundamental Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body (Enn. Ill, vi, 6) which, of course, was linked to the belief in Him as the God-man. Plotinus simply could not accept the “Enfleshment of the Logos,” whether “in its revolutionary significance as a historical fact or in its metaphysical and theological significance” (Zeller. Outlines..., p. 312).

- “The Good is that on which all else depends, towards which all Existences aspire as to their source and their need, while Itself is without need, sufficient to Itself, aspiring to no other, the measure and term of all, giving out from itself the Intellectual-Principle (Nous) and Existence of the Soul and Life (Psyche) and all Intellective-Act. All, until the Good is reached, is beautiful; the Good is beyond-beautiful, beyond the Highest holding kingly state in the Intellectual-kosmos, that sphere constituted by a Principle wholly unlike what is known as intelligence in us” (Enn. I, viii, 2; Mck).


- Lossky comes to several uncommon conclusions about the “knowledge” of the One. “If Plotinus rejects the attributes proper to being in seeking to attain to God, it is not, as with Dionysius [the Areopagite], St Gregory of Nyssa and the other Fathers, on account of the absolute unknowability of God: an unknowability obscured by all which can be known in creatures. It is because the realm of being, even at its highest levels, is necessarily multiple: it has not the absolute simplicity of the One. The God of Plotinus is not incomprehensible by nature. If we can neither comprehend the One by discursive reason nor intellectual intuition, it is because the soul, when it grasps an object by reason, falls away from unity and is not absolutely one with our subject, in which all multiplicity disappears and the distinction between subject and object no longer exists (Enn. VI, ix, 10)... What is discarded in the negative way of Plotinus is multiplicity, and we arrive at the perfect unity which is beyond being – since being is linked with multiplicity
and is subsequent to the One” (The Mystical Theology..., p.30). In other words, the One of Plotinus is not unknowable, merely unknown to most people. The God of St Gregory is unknowable by nature: all comparison with created things is excluded: God is removed from any discourse (Con. Eun. XII PG 45 1104B). In any case, the theology of Plotinus is not strictly “negative.” Plotinus uses the word “remotion” (αϕαίρεσις), not “negation” (απόϕασις) to describe it (see H.A. Wolfson, “Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides,” HTR L, 2 (1957), 145–156). See footnote 34 below.


74 - From where does matter come if it is not coeternal with the One nor created ex nihilo? To describe ὅλη as the absence of the Good or the diminution of light, being shaded into darkness, is a word-game. As St Basil the Great rightly observed, “If matter is uncreated, it claims the same honor with God and shares the same rank with Him” (Hexa. II, 2 PG 29 32A). “Matter, then, proceeds from the One (ultimately),” Fr. Copleston states, “in the sense that it becomes a factor in creation only through the process of emanation from the One; but in itself, at its lowest limit, it forms the lowest stage of the universe and is the antithesis of the One” (A History of Philosophy [vol. 1]: Greece & Rome [pt. 2]. p. 213). The remarks of Dean Inge on Plotinian cosmogony are curious. He observes that “there is an unbroken chain from the One to matter. The One is present to all grades, since it penetrates all things with power. The chain is so continuous that wherever the third rank [Soul] is present, there is also the second [Nous] and the first [One]...” Also, “the Absolute does not cease to be Absolute by creating a world wholly dependent upon itself, nor does Spirit lose anything by creating a Soul-world. To say that the Absolute must be God plus the creation seems to me like saying that the real Shakespeare is the poet plus the folio edition of his works” (The Philosophy of Plotinus [vol. 2], pp. 119, 120). The “unbroken chain” is paraphrastic, Inge’s description of all that is external to the One or the Absolute – including the world – as “a kind of overflow (οἷον ὑπερερήφη) of the One” (Enn. V, ii, 1). Thus, the world is not “God plus the creation”; but Inge’s analogy is nonsense, for Shakespeare’s folio is not an “overflow” of the poets substance. But all things, whether the Nous, the Soul, the universe or matter, emanate from the One. The “creation” is not something added to the One; it is, as all things, a mode. They ”overflow” or emanate from It by necessity, because “the One could not be alone. If It were, nothing would be revealed, remaining hidden, “having no form in the One” (Enn. IV, iii, 6).
According to H.R. Schlette, ‘das plotinische modell elnes monismus, in dem notwendigkeit dominiert, und das christliche oder christlich vermittelte model!, in dem die Freiheit dominiert’ (Das Eine und Das Andere: Studien zur Prolematik des Metaphysik Plotins. Muenchen, 1966, s. 227). C.J. de Vogel calls Plotinus a monist, since “all things must be reduced to one single Cause, which works by itself and as a whole, not by its parts... the First Principle contains everything within itself... every multitude must be traced back to a principle which is absolutely one.” Moreover, the “creation” is necessary, Vogel observes, because “intelligible forms must spring from the First Principle, like the sensible world must spring from Soul, every nature producing by necessity what comes ’after’ it... By its fullness it overflows (ἐξεῤῥύη) and shines around (περίλαψις), which means; ’creation’ is an eternal relation; it is not an act of will” (Greek Philosophy [vol. 3]: The Hellenistic Roman Period. Leiden, 1959, pp. 438–445).

Con. Eun. XII PG 45 944A–945A. In the same chapter, St Gregory mentioned an aspect of theology not generally considered by his interpreters. He declared that “it would be safer for all, according to the advice of Wisdom, not to search the deeper things, but rather to keep inviolate the deposit of faith in quiet (διʹ ήσυχίας)” (945D). The reference to hesychia is not adventitious – since, of course, the doctrine is a 14th century theological development of the Eastern Church. “Quiet” or “tranquility,” ordinarily an ascetic achievement, is perfection in prayer and the beginning of divine vision, theoria, the anticipation of the Age to Come. The soul which has embraced the true faith is “engulfed by the Divine Spirit” (Lossky, The Mystical Theology, p. 207f.).The study of hesychasm as an “Eastern phenomenon” has been well researched by J. Bois, G. Ostrogorsky, Martin Jugie, Guichardin, Grumel, Krivosheine, Meyendorff and others. There seems to be scholarly agreement that Western asceticism “developed” ab initio along different lines and, therefore, inquiry into a hesychasm of the West would not prove fruitful – the “influence” of St Anthony and St Athanasius on St John Cassian, he on St Benedict, and, therefore, St Pope Gregory the Great notwithstanding. The fact that there was a Benedictine Monastery of St Mary on Mt Athos until the eleventh century seems to have little significance for them (See Dom O. Rousseau, “L’ancien monastère bénédictin du Mont Athos,” Revue liturgique et monastique (1929) 531–547).

St Gregory charged Eunomius with creating a personal theology from Greek philosophy. He, and those like him, “would have done better to have...
looked at the chorus of Saints, Prophets and Patriarchs, to whom 'at sundry times and diverse manners’ the word of truth was spoken; and, after these, to the eye-witnesses and servants of the Word, giving honor to the claims of the faith provided by the Holy Spirit, abiding thereby within the limits of His teachings and knowledge (διδασκαλίας καὶ γνώσεως), daring never to venture beyond those things established by the Saints (καὶ μὴ ἐπιτολμᾶν τούτοις ὁν ἀγιον λατάληψις οὐκ ἐϕήσατο). It is they who made God known to the humanity over which idolatry and human imagination had hidden. They made Him known from the wonders manifested in His works, and from the names which express the diversity of the divine Power, consequently, leading us by the hand to the understanding (σύνεσιν) and to the divine vision (θεωρουμένων) of the God” (Con. Eun. XII PG 45 945D).

79 - The Greeks sometimes called the soul or “the inner self,” σπινθήρ, “a spark.” Medieval heirs of Plotinus used the Latin word, scintilla. German mystics and theosophists, also indebted to him, chose the word, funklein, to describe the divinity of man. For a modern anthropology which attempts to reconcile Plotinus and Christianity, see Chapter Two, “The Origin of Good and Evil,” in Nicholas Berdiaev’s The Destiny of Man. London, 1954, pp. 23–44.

80 - Cherniss writes that from St Gregory’s “description of Moses’ view of God, it is possible to ascertain how thoroughly Platonic is the conception...” Why? Because his language is “generally colored with the language of the allegories in the Phaedrus and Symposium and guarded by the expression, ‘whatever God’s nature really is...’” Gregory takes great care to point out that the names applied to God are interpretative only of the contingencies of the divine nature (τῶν περὶ τὴν θείαν φύσιν), but have no signification of the divine Nature itself” (The Platonism of St Gregory of Nyssa. p. 35). Cherniss gropes for the truth, but the concept of divine Energies eludes him. His study is seriously flawed. T. A. Goggin states that Cherniss made only a “cursory reading of the Contra Eunomium” which a detailed study of his work confirms” (The Times of Saint Gregory of Nyssa as Reflected in the Letters and the Contra Eunomium. Washington DC, 1947, p. 147f.).

81 - Augustine and Aquinas apparently knew nothing of the distinction between the divine Essence or Nature (“Substance”) and the divine Energies; hence, they believed that the “names” май бе applied “substantially” to God. Thomas quoted Augustine, Bishop of Hippo: For God to be is to be strong or wise, or whatever else we май say of that simplicity whereby His substance is signified (De Trin. VI, 4 PL 42 927)... Therefore, all names of this kind signify the divine substance.” He mentioned different opinions concerning names

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applied to God, including those “names” which “signify His relationship to creatures,” but he rejected all these opinions including one which bears a resemblance to the doctrine of the divine Energies. In reply to the first objection to the names “applied substantially to God,” Thomas cited St John of Damascus: “Everything said of God must signify not His substance, but rather show forth what He is not; or express some of those things which follow from His nature, or an energy (De Fid. Orth. 1, 9 PG 94 833). The Damascene says that these names do not signify what God is because by none of these names is He perfectly expressed; but each one signifies Him in an imperfect manner, even as His creatures represent Him imperfectly” (Sum. Th. I, q 13, a 2). Aquinas misunderstood St John, because he failed to recognize the distinction between the Nature or Substance of God and His divine Energies or Operations; and because he was unable to think beyond the theological categories (particularly, analogia entis) inherited from the Augustinian tradition. Relevant to this point, St Gregory of Nyssa asserted, The divine word forbids God to be likened to anything known to man. All concepts of God are the fabrication of the pretentious intellect, vain conjectures about the divine Nature, idols which never reveal Him” (De Vita Moy. I, PG 44 377B).

82 - For Augustine and his tradition, being has attributes. Therefore, God as “the supreme being,” as verum esse and totum esse has attributes (E. Gilson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, trans. by A.H.C. Downes. New York, 1940, pp. 64–107). The angels, man and the physical creation are lesser beings. Since the Creator and the created share in being, the lesser may know the higher by virtue of their common nature. Being is hierarchal and analogous. Such a theory is Greek, rationalist, and fatally ignores the equivocality between super-Existent Deity and His creatures. The Fathers declare that the Trinity in Itself has no attributes. It is υπερούσιος, i.e., beyond all being, not merely “one and simple” (ἐν καὶ ἀπλοῦν), to the language of Greek philosophy. God, whether in His Essence or Energies, is far more than “indivisible” and “without qualities.” He is beyond “genus,” “species” and “differentia.” He escapes every similitude (ὁμοιότητα), comparison (σύγκρισιν) and analogy (παραβολήν). According to Professor H. A. Wolfson, before Philo no Greek philosopher, including Plato and Aristotle, believed God to be completely unknowable and ineffable. The idea that “God has no name” was not found among them. Philo taught both Plotinus and the Church Fathers about the “incognisability” of God (Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism. Christianity, and Islam [vol. 2]. Cambridge [Mass.], 1947, pp. 110–126, 160). Ekkehard Mühlenberg argues that St Gregory of Nyssa went beyond apophatic theology to the notion that, although God’s Nature cannot be known completely, He can be known in part
only; it is a knowledge, however, which is hardly exhaustive (Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa: Gregors Kritik am Gottesbegriff der klassichen Metaphysik. Gottingen, 1966, ss. 47f., 165f). B. Otis disagrees, contending that for St Gregory “...the creature is prevented by his creaturely nature from comprehending his Creator or God” (“Gregory of Nyssa and the Cappadocian Conception of Time,” in SP XIV (vol. 117). ed. by E. Livingstone. Berlin, 1976, 339).

83 - This is the trinitarian formula adopted by St Basil, Gregory’s brother and mentor. Grillmeier offers a brief study on the subject in Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451). trans. by J Bowden. Atlanta, 1975, pp. 367–377. Perhaps, the most useful primary source for Gregorian triadology, Great Catechetical Oration, is Letter 38, found in Migne among the writings of St Basil (PG 32 325–341). The controversy surrounding the authorship of this letter – whether it was written by St Gregory or St Basil – is academic.

84 - Plotinus the Road to Reality. Cambridge (Eng). 1967, p.216. Remarking on Rist’s defense of Plotinus against the charge of pantheism, P. Mamo writes, “If the pantheist wishes to claim the divine is identical with the material world, that the One and matter are identical and that there is reconciliation of good and evil, then, clearly Plotinus is no pantheist and Rist is right in dismissing that interpretation. Whether it is necessary to understand pantheism in this narrow sense is, of course, another matter” (“Is Plotinian Mysticism Monistic?” in The Significance of Neoplatonism. ed by R.B.Harris. Norfolk [Va.], 1976, p. 200). According to Copleston, Plotinus rejects “a fully pantheistic self-canalization of the Deity in individual creatures, a self-diremption of God. In other words, he tries to steer a middle course between theistic creation, on the one hand, and a fully pantheistic or monistic theory, on the other” (A History of Philosophy (vol. I [pt. 2], p. 211). On this subject, see also P.V. Pistorius. Plotinus an Neo-Platonism: An Introductory Study. Cambridge (Eng), 1952; R.C. Zaehtner. Mysticism. Sacred and Profane. Oxford, 1957; P. Merlan. From Platonism to Neoplatonism, the Hague, 1960.


87 - Being and Some Philosophers, p. 23. Gilson also denies that Plotinus was a monist, because the “first principles” of his system are above being. “There can be no sharing by the world in the being of a first principle which itself is not” (Ibid., p. 24). Interesting, and not altogether incidental, are Gilson’s remarks about Augustine’s departure from Plotinus on account of the
bishop’s insistence that nothing exists above being; and “since God is being, there is nothing above Him. True enough, the God of Augustine is also the One and the Good, but He is, not because He is both good and one; rather, He Is both good and one because He is He Who is” (Ibid., p. 31). If, as Gilson insists, Augustine of Hippo parted company with Neo-Platonism over “the primacy of being,” then, he also separated himself from the Fathers of the Church who place the Life of the Trinity beyond all thought and being.

88 - Contrary to “the folly of the Greeks,” wrote St Gregory of Nyssa, “we say that the creation of both the sensible and the intelligible natures came into being from nothing” – ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων γεγένησθαι τὴν κτίσιν φάμεν, τὴν τε νοητὴν καὶ ὅση τῆς αἰσθητῆς ἐστι φύσεως (Con. Eun. IV PG 45 629C).

89 - “The thesis of the eternity of the world,” observes Emile Brehier, “forms an essential and permanent trait of what is called Hellenism, in opposition to Christianity” (The Philosophy of Plotinus [vol. 1], p. 44). The duration of the universe without temporal beginning or end,” says Whittaker, “was the accepted doctrine of Hellenic Platonism” (The Neo-Platonists: A Study in the History of Hellenism, p. 72). Some clarification is needed here. Many of the Greeks (e.g., the Stoics) believed that the world were created, yet destructible; others (e.g., Aristotle) argued that the world was uncreated and indestructible; while some taught that it was created and indestructible (e.g., Plato), a view some attributed in Hesiod and which Philo found in Genesis (Aet. Mundi. 17–19 LC). The Church teaches the world to be created. In the Age to Come the cosmos will be transfigured and there will be a new heavens and earth (Rev. 21:1–5). Cosmologically, the essential difference between Christianity and Hellenism is well expressed by St John Chrysostom. “Where are they who disbelieve the resurrection?” he asked. “Who are they, pray tell me. For I am an ignorant man – nay, certainly I know. Are they Gentiles or Christians who disbelieve the work of creation. The two denials go together: the denial that God created ex nihilo and the denial that He raises from the dead” (Acta Apost. II, 4 PG 60 31). Fr Georges Florovsky reduces that difference to the question of time (See his “Eschatology in the Patristic Age: An Introduction,” GOTHr II, 1 (1956), 27–40).

90 - “There is an unbroken chain from the One to matter and back,” Inge observes. “The One is present to all grades, since it penetrates all things with power. The chain is so continuous that wherever the third rank is present, there also is the second and the first” (The Philosophy of Plotinus [vo. 2], p. 120). More precisely, every “grade” is a modulation of the One.

91 - Schlette makes the following observation. “Der plotinische
'monismus' deutet schon die 'erste metaphysische Differenz und Vielheit als Negativität und legt dieser auf die Ebene von Welt und Mensch mit Hilfe des Begriffs oder der Verstellung von der Materie den character des 'busen' bei wenngleich auch das so interpretierte Buse nichts spezifisch anders als Negativität bedeutet” (Das Eine und Das Andere. s. 225)


93 - E.K. Lee writes that John “crows and completes the Pauline doctrine by his definite and absolute identification of Jesus with the Logos” (The Religious Thought of St John. London, 1950, p. 75). Wolfson holds the opinion that John and Paul, as well as the Fathers of the primitive Church, made no such identification, but rather confused the Logos with the Holy Spirit. For example, John referred to both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as “paraclete” and Paul used the phrase, “the Spirit of Christ” (The Philosophy of the Church Fathers [vol. 1]. Cambridge [Mass.], 1956, p. 177f.). But John called the Holy Spirit “another Paraclete” (ἄλλον παράκλητον) or “Comforter”; and Paul says, “But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom. 8:9). Those who form the Church are the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit (John 2:19; I Cor. 12:12). In a sense, then, the Church is a “comforter.”

94 - Philo also identified his Logos with Wisdom, but not a living and personal Logos-God. It is for him the World of Ideas, the Thought of God, not God Himself, not a Person with His own peculiar properties (See R. Williamson. Jews in the Hellenistic World: Philo. Cambridge [Eng.], 1989, p. 107f.). Unlike St Paul who described Christ as “the Wisdom of God,” St John avoided the term; neither did he employ “Nous” which had no Scriptural precedent; and because of its current popularity with the Gnostics. The Evangelist chose the Greek word “Logos,” because it was found in the Septuagint and because of its equivalence to the Rabbinic memra, which was often used as “a reverential periphrasis for the name of God” and was, therefore, better suited to his purpose (T. E. Pollard. Johanne Christology and the Early Church. Cambridge [Eng.], 1970, p. 10). St Paul preferred “Wisdom” in order to contrast “Christ... the Wisdom of God” with the “wisdom of the world” (I Cor. 1:18–30). See the valuable discussion in L.S. Thornton. The Common Life in the Body of Christ. London, 1950, pp. 106–112.


96 - The Fourth Gospel, ed. by F.N. Davey. London, 1947, p. 158f. W.F. Albright suggests that the Dead Sea Scrolls show remarkable parallels with the
Gospel of John and probably account for the increased emphasis recently placed on the Palestinian-Jewish milieu of Johannine thought and the Palestinian Jewish tradition” (“Recent Discoveries in Palestine and the Gospel of John,” in The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology, ed. by W.D. Davies & O. Daube. Cambridge [Eng.], 1956, p. 153f.). Of course, John was living in Palestine and was part of Christ’s public ministry, an eye-witness to His Crucifixion in Jerusalem. He “looked upon” the Risen Lord, “the Word of life” (I John 1:1–2). As a disciple, he was taught theology directly by Jesus, and, in this sense, we may speak of a “Palestinian-Jewish milieu.” This opinion differs with C. Bigg who is virtually certain “that St John acquired from Alexandria that conception of the Word, which first brought Christian theology within the sphere of metaphysics,” albeit “not necessarily from Philo” (The Christian Platonists of Alexandria, p. 50).

97 - The Fourth Gospel, p. 159. Pollard writes that the purpose of the Gospel is (John 20:31) “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (Johannine Christology and the Early Church, p. 64).

98 - In the preface (vii) to The Philosophy of the Church Fathers, Wolfson argues that “Philonic problems” developed into “Patristic problems.” Thus, with regard to the Logos in the New Testament Scriptures, he maintains that “when the Pauline conception of the preexistent Christ, which is of non-Philonic origin, was given by John the name of Logos, which has a Philonic origin, the development of the doctrine of the Trinity and of the Incarnation was either in accordance with the Philonic conception of the Logos or in departure from the Philonic conception of the Logos.” Even denying the divine origin of Christianity, as Wolfson does, his thesis would be open to serious objection. Whatever truths John took from the OT or from Hellenistic Judaism (specifically, Philo), C.H. Dodd remarks, “the treatment of those ideas is indeed strikingly different.” He refers not only to the Incarnation, but to the fact that The Logos of Philo is not an object of love.” John’s Gospel offers an eschatology unknown to his pagan and Jewish contemporaries, an “inaugurated eschatology” (G. Florovsky) hidden in such phrases as the hour is come and now is (The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel. Cambridge [Eng.], 1954, pp.73, 447). On the eschatology of the Messianic Banquet in John, see A. Feuillet, Johannine Studies. Staten Island [NY], 1965, pp. 85–87).

99 - See the preface to Wolfson’s The Philosophy of the Church Fathers (vol. 1), iii–x.

100 - The accusation is not groundless. Eunomius, the good Hellenizer that
he was, equated “coming into being” or “becoming,” genetos, with everything but God Who alone was agentos. Following the principles of Platonic metaphysics – with which Philo also agreed – the “unbegotten” Nature of God must be simple, infinite, and unchangeable. But the Logos as “begotten” Is not God and, therefore, is mutable and necessarily Inferior; Indeed, He is a creature, ktisma, albeit with the “divine” status of an incorporeal spirit, a position from which he had never lapsed. Eunomius, an Arian, believed “there was a time when it was not,” a phrase already found in Philo (Decal. XVII, 58). As St Gregory remarked, Eunomius’ conception of God and the Logos differs little with Philo (See B. Otis, “Gregory of Nyssa and the Cappadocian Conception of Time,” in SP XIV (117), 338f).

101 - For a discussion of the variant readings of John 1:3 (“who was born... who were born...”), see E.C. Hoskyns. The Fourth Gospel, pp. 163–166.

102 - See Inge, “Logos,” p. 136. “There are three kinds of life,” Philo states, “one which is toward God (πρὸς Θεόν) and towards the creation (πρὸς γένεσιν), and another on the borderline, a mixture of both. But the life towards God has not descended to us, nor submitted to the constraints of the body” – εἰς τὰς σώματος ἀνάψκας (Quis rer. div. haer. IX, 45).

103 - I am at a loss to understand Daniélou’s words that we may “with Wolfson quite rightly hold him (Philo) as the founder of biblical philosophy” and a “mystic... in the biblical sense of the word” (From Shadows to Reality. Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers, trans. by W. Hibberd. London, 1960, p. 216). The Scriptures are not “philosophy” – in the classical sense – nor were they revealed in order to become “rational” through philosophical explication. Neither was Philo a “mystic... in the biblical sense of the word,” if “the biblical sense” is the traditional Christian, patristic or even OT sense. To repeat, if we mean by the word “mystic” one who has achieved fellowship with God by faith in Christ, then, to call him a “mystic” is either patronizing, insensitive and/or indifferent to the Scriptures. In the Canticle of Canticles (PG 44 940D), St Gregory described the Apostle Paul as a “mystic” who by faith and grace, by virtue of “purity of heart” was taken by God into the “third heaven” where “he mystically experienced Paradise (ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ μυσταγωγίας) and learned ever greater “mysteries” (which not even Moses knew “since he did not write about it in his cosmogony”). Love, agape, increased his knowledge: “Paul continued to move higher and did not cease to ascend.” St Paul's “mystical experience” has, for St Gregory, a christological and ecclesiological context.

104 - Emil Schurer says that the point at which Philo resisted Greek
philosophy (albeit not unaffected by its metaphysics) was his monotheism, laying stress “on the absolute majesty and sovereignty of God above the world, the principle that He is to be worshipped without images, are all points in which Philo justly feels his superiority as a Jew over popular heathenism.” But only “popular heathenism,” Schurer continues, for the Greek philosophers had long since found a theoretical monotheism, a fact nowhere “more strongly seen than in the detailed development of his [Philo’s] doctrine of God” (“Philo.” Enc. Br., 409f.). According to F. Longenecker, Philo was indebted to Aristobulus, also a Jew of Alexandria (c. 160 BC), for the opinion that the Greeks borrowed from the OT; hence, the superiority of Moses and the Prophets over Plato and the Greeks and, consequently, the belief that nothing in his ancestral faith shut him out from the achievements of classical antiquity (Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period. Grand Rapids, 1975, p. 46).

105 - Longenecker, Loc. cit.

106 - The word “allegory” means literally “to speak something other” (ἀλλο ἁγορεύειν), that is, something other than the literal sense, without necessarily deprecating it – at least, not by those writers whom the Church describes as her spokesmen. The patristic motivation for allegorical interpretation was not, as in the case of Philo, dictated by the need to expel “contradictions” from the Bible, nor mining the “genuine” spiritual sense, nor, indeed, to reconcile the sometimes bothersome literal text with private philosophical opinions. Christian allegorism “consists in drawing forth the profound and objective significance of a text, in the light of the entire economy of salvation.” There is no better example of such allegorism than “the two sons of Abraham” in the 4th chapter of St Paul’s epistle to the Church at Galatia (F.W. Farrar. History of Biblical Interpretation. Grand Rapids, 1961, pp. 11–84). Let us not forget the Apostles’ allegory concerning “the armour of salvation” (Eph. 6:13–17), nor the allegory of the Lord's parables. There is OT precedent: the Canticle of Canticles as well as allegory of old age (Eccl. 12:1–7); and Ezekiel’s δήγημα and παραβολήν to the house of Israel (17:2–24); and, of course, Daniel’s ἑξεώρουν” in the 7th chapter of his book. Farrar’s explanation of “allegory” mentions the many spiritual senses of the Scriptures (e.g. moral), but does not give the patristic use of “typology” (which is a form of allegory) the attention the subject deserves. This method of Interpretation understands Scripture events or persons as figures of NT events or persons (e.g., Adam as a type of Christ or Noah’s Ark as a type of the Church or Crossing the Red Sea as a type of Baptism, the Transfiguration of Christ as a type of the Age to Come, etc.). Thus, OT history prefigures NT history and
doctrines as NT history anticipates eternity. St Jerome called the “letter” medulla spiritus (In Amos. I,11, 5 PL 25 1036B); and St John Chrysostom says, Εἰδες τὴν προφητείαν τῶν ρημάτων μάθε τὴν προφητείαν καὶ διὰ τῶν τυπῶν (De Paen. VI, 4 PG 49 320). St Gregory generally described allegory with such words as “riddle” or “higher spiritual sense” (αἴνιγμα) which is also the “hidden sense” (μυστικός); likewise as “beneath the visible sense (ὑπόνοια). The Saint never ignores the literal or historical sense; it has a necessary meaning of its own; hence, the expressions, ὑπὸ τῆς ιστορίας λέγεται, ἡ ιστορίαφθορί (De Vit. Moy. I PG 44 337A, 345D). For christological reasons, the historical and spiritual senses are linked organically.

107 - “We hear the Scriptures say that all things are of God and we have believed,” confessed St Gregory. “As to how they are in God, the answer is beyond our reason and we do not pry, but rather believing that all things are within the power of God – both to give existence to what had previously no existence and to frame it in any way He likes; and with that same power to change the very elements (ἀνάστοιχείωσιν) of that same existence” (De hom. Opif. 23 PG 44 212B).

108 - “But this wise man (Moses) declares that the varied works of God are as varied as the Energies which produced them,” writes St Gregory. “Some have not learned the idea of the divine Energies (τὸ εἴδος τῆς Θείας ἐνεργίας μήπω μανθών) by which, according to the Scriptures, “all things were made by the Word of His command...” (Con. Eun. I PG 45 376C).

109 - De infan, qui praem. Abrip. PG 46 173B. Unlike so many of those theologians and philosophers with whom St Gregory is compared (Plato, Plotinus, Philo, Origen, Augustine, etc.), none of them propound “the categories of ’mingling’” (Adv. Apol. PG 45 1165CD, 1180CD, 1245C, 1257C), the most famous simile of which is the unity of the flesh in the Godhead “like a drop of vinegar in the endless sea” – οἷόν τις σταχών ὄξους ἀπείρῳ πελάγει (176D). True, the “mingling” or “mixing” here refers to the union of the two natures in Christ, but that union is also the pattern of the Church, of the Mysteries, of body and soul, and of the two dimensions of the cosmos (See Grillmeier. Christ in Christian Tradition [vol. 1 ], p. 371f. cf. De Bapt. Chr. PG 46 600B).

110 - See B. Otis, “Gregory of Nyssa and the Cappadocian Conception of Time, ” 327–347. There is no “Cappadocian conception of time,” only the Christian conception of time as formulated by Fathers designated by modern historical science as “Cappadocian.”

111 - All the Fathers do not, as St Gregory (and St Basil), describe
historical periods of time as moving cyclically from their beginning to their end. Daniélou argues that, by virtue of this “aeonlogy,” “History could not be more completely emptied of all significance; we are here in the midst of Hellenistic thought” (The Bible and the Liturgy. Notre Dame [Ind.], 1956, p. 265). The Cardinal errs on several counts: 1) St Gregory everywhere in his writings affirmed, unlike the Greeks, that the world has a definite ἀρχή and τέλος; 2) he viewed time as linear, albeit divided into seven periods or ages each rolling into the next, until history reaches the end predetermined by God: the “one day (age)”: “This day is called the ‘eighth’ because it follows the seventh day,” explained St Gregory. “But it is no longer subject to numerical succession. The ‘one day’ extends uninterruptedly, never divided by the darkness of night. Another sun rules the ‘one day’, the true Light which shines forever” (De Oct., 611D–612D); and 3) if certain Fathers do not offer aeonologic discourses, we may not assume that they were unaware or rejected the history of seven ages, especially in the early Fathers, when it was more likely part of the Church’s discipline arcani.

112 - As others have pointed out, St Gregory rejected Origen’s theory of the pre-existence of the soul. He mocked it as “mythology” and “a dogma of the Greeks.” He reproached both Plato and Origen with the word, Ἑλληνιστής, “those who suppose that souls revolve with the motion of the universe, weighed down by some wickedness fall to earth (and into bodies).” In fact, he said, God made the body before the soul, taking it from the dust of the earth and only later breathing a soul into it. But temporal priority of the body does not prove its superiority, because it exists for the sake of the soul (De hom. opif. XVIII, 229B, 233B, 252A).

113 - Williams states that Philo followed rabbinical traditions until they failed to provide him with the answers he wanted. Then, “Platonism emerges with redoubled power... He never attained to a single, internally harmonious explanation for the origin of sin” (The Ideas of the Fall and Original Sin. London, 1927, p. 84).

114 - “With regard to the existence of ideas,” writes Wolfson, “Philo’s view that the belief in them constitutes one of the Scriptural fundamentals of religion continued indirectly in the doctrine of the Trinity, and in Islam... in the doctrine of attributes among those who maintained the existence of real attributes. But while the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is a direct development, as we will show, of the theory of ideas as revived by Philo... the theory of ideas in its Platonic sense, ideas as the pattern of things, which to Philo is an essential creed in Scriptural religion, was not accepted as an
essential creed of religion either in Christianity or in Islam or in Judaism” (Philo [vol. 1], pp. 197–198). After tackling the torturous logic of this meandering paragraph, one wonders how a scholar of Professor Wolfson’s repute could have written it. Firstly, the only way that Philo could have understood “the theory of Ideas” to be “one of the Scriptural fundamentals of religion” is that he read this theory into the book of Genesis. To be sure, the cosmos is a creature of the Biblical Logos, not as a product of any so-called Ideas, but as Genesis declares: God proclaimed (“And God said...”) and acted (“Let there be...”) its existence. Secondly, even if the doctrine of the Trinity were not a “mystery” fully revealed in Christ, Wolfson, neither in his Philo nor his The Philosophy of the Church Fathers, demonstrates that “the doctrine of the Trinity is a direct development... of the theory of ideas as revived by Philo.” There is no Church Father, East or West, who adopts the Platonic Ideas (See the valuable discussion in Vladimir Lossky’s The Mystical Theology.... pp. 91–113). St Gregory knew that the Greeks, certain Hellenized Jews and, to some extent, Origen, used Plato’s Ideas to rationally explain the visible universe, but he rejected the theory. The phrase “thoughts of God” found in Cat. Magn., 5 PG 45 20D, for example, is anthropomorphic. Thirdly, Wolfson is not sure of his ground for which reason he writes that the theory of Ideas is “continued indirectly in the doctrine of the Trinity... in the doctrine of attributes among those who maintained the existence of real attributes.” Are we to infer that there are “unreal” and “real attributes”? Perhaps, Wolfson is stumbling into the patristic teaching on the divine Energies or Operations; but these do not describe God’s Nature, in which case “attributes” would have relevance only with regard to the Activity of the Persons. Lastly, Professor Wolfson argues that Christian triadology, an “indirect continuation” of Philo’s notion of “real” divine attributes, is a “direct development” of Philo’s theory of Ideas. Is the “attribute” an Idea in another form? He concedes that Christianity did not accept the Ideas as essential to her Faith. But the Trinity is essential to it. Why did Christians not recognize them as “essential,” if without the Ideas and “real attributes” there would presumably be no Trinity?


117 - R. Williamson suggests that for Philo “the beginning and end of happiness is to see God” Who in Himself is beyond all rational comprehension; thus, the ascent to God and the ultimate visio Dei is possible for men only
insofar as “He has expressed His inward thought in His Logos which, among other things, is the World of Ideas” (Jews in the Hellenistic World: Philo, p. 106).

118 - “Adam Kadmon,” The Jewish Encyclopaedia (vol. 1). London, 1901, 181f. Philo’s “heavenly man” is “closely related” to the Adam Kadmon of the Zohar which conceives the “primordial man” as the “embodiment of all divine manifestations” (Loc. cit.). Gershom Scholem calls Philo’s “heavenly man,” a “kabbalistic concept” (“Adam Kadmon.” Encyclopedia Judaica [vol. 2]. New York, 1971, 248). See M. Idel, Kabbalah: New Perspective. New Haven, 1988. Nevertheless, the basic source of Philo’s “heavenly man” is the Midrash. Raphael Patai noted the affinity between Philo and the Midrash tadshe (The Hebrew Goddess. New York, 1978, p. 82). According to Ginzberg (“Adam Kadmon,” loc. cit.) the Midrash, not Philo, is the source of St Paul’s “Messianism.” But the Apostle differs with the Midrash in several ways: although agreeing that the Messiah is the “heavenly Adam,” Paul insists upon the historicity of both Christ and the first man, the progenitors of the human race. In addition, the Midrash speaks of the Messiah (in whom Philo has little interest) as the first Adam who existed before the creation; but He is also the second Adam “in so far as his bodily presence followed the creation, and inasmuch as he, according to the flesh, is the posterity of the [first] Adam. Finally, for St Paul “the heavenly man,” “the second Adam,” “the last man,” is the incarnate Logos, a teaching found neither in Philo or the Midrash. Christ had no human or created nature before the Incarnation.

119 - Présence et pensée, 89.


121 - The “moulded” Adam must have been made, therefore, in the “image” of the “Image of God.” “After a manner” (De nobilit., 3 LC), then, the created Adam was made in the “image” of the Logos, the treasury of all Ideas, of which the “heavenly Adam” is one. See F.R. Tennant, The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin. New York, 1968, pp. 131–142.

122 - Philo (vol. 1; LC), 345.

123 - Etienne Gilson believes “that practically every Christian philosophy makes room for the Platonic doctrine of Ideas. So much so that rather than indwelling God, they are God. To quote but a few great names, St Augustine, St Anselm, St Bonaventura and St Thomas Aquinas all agree on this fundamental point” (The Christian Philosophy of St Augustine, trans. by L. M. Lynch. New York, 1960, p. 57). Such theologians do not belong to the patristic tradition. They are the successors to Augustine of Hippo, the prototype of the medieval
Latin theologian and philosopher, it is gratifying that Gilson does not list the Fathers among “the great names.” He is sufficiently astute to recognize the vast difference between eternal Ideas in the Essence of God according to the Scholastics and, for example, the logoi of St Maximus the Confessor, which are different modes by which created beings participate in the creative Energies of God. Thus, in the “philosophy” of St Maximus (and one might suspect all the Fathers interested in such things), the logoi are immanent and creative principles of the divine Logos kata economias, in His Providence, acts which He is not obliged to perform by virtue of His Nature (as the eternal Ideas would require of Him); neither does it belong to His Essence or Hypostasis to become flesh (See the discussion in Lars Thunberg, Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological anthropology of Maximus the Confessor. Lund, 1965, p. 80f.). Too many patrologists for too long, including Thurnberg, have neglected the patristic teachings on the Uncreated Energies of God which, in part, explains and perpetuates their misunderstanding of the holy Fathers (See Lossky, The Mystical Theology..., pp. 97–113).

124 - Lossky, p. 95.
125 - St Macrina, St Gregory’s grandmother (for whom his sister was named), was instructed in Christian doctrine by St Gregory the Wonderworker, Bishop of Caesarea in Pontus (d. c. 275), himself a pupil of Origen. Both St Basil and his friend, St Gregory the Theologian, attended the school founded by Origen at Caesarea Maritime. They completed their intellectual training in Athens. The future Bishop of Nyssa seems not to have pursued the same course of study. What inference may be drawn from these facts? Do we conclude that he learned his “Origenism” from St Basil and, perhaps, St Gregory the Theologian? St Basil has never been accused of “Origenism,” and, although St Gregory the Theologian is said to have found some aspects of “Origenism” attractive, historians have not painted him and the Bishop of Nyssa with the same brush. There is no certainty about the education which St Gregory may have received at their hands. Rather his interest in Origen was, according to Professor G. Barrois, acquired by “the ambiance of family and friends” (“The Alleged Origenism of St Gregory of Nyssa.” St VTHR XXX, 1 (1986), 7).

126 - “Gregory, like his mentor, Origen, could not altogether escape the dominance of Platonic philosophy,” writes Jaroslav Pelikan. For example, “in form and even in content his treatise on the soul repeatedly betrayed its ancestry in the Phaedo...” (The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine (vol. 1): The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600). pp. 50–51). On reading St Gregory's De Anima et Resurrectione (to
which the Phaedo is ordinarily compared), one may wonder why the comparison is made. Plato has no doctrine of creation, nor of the resurrection of the body, nor of grace, sin, nothing of a divine Savior. To be sure, the Saint agreed with Plato that the soul contaminated with the passions of the body “cannot attain to the divine nature” (Phaedo. 82c: De an. et res.. PG 46 156D); but Gregory’s doctrine is perfectly Biblical and patristic. Both conceived the soul as simple and the body as complex; and, also, that death has no dominion over the soul – Gregory by virtue of divine Grace, Plato, on account of the soul’s natural immortality, including its pre-existence and transmigration (Phaedo 75c; 88a; De an. et res., PG 46125C, 156D). St Gregory’s world contained, as we have seen, no transcendent Ideas or Forms from which the soul learned the pattern of its existence, and the means by which the soul discovered truth (Cf. Phaedo 102b). To repeat, whatever may have been St Gregory’s penchant for expressing himself in the language of Greek philosophy, that philosophy was not the source of his religious doctrine. In addition, he believed, as the other Fathers, that the truths of Hellenism were a “preparation for the Gospel,” an idea first given public voice centuries before by St Justin Martyr (See V. Lossky. The Vision of God, trans. by A. Moorhouse. Clayton (Wis.), 1963, pp. 70–74.).

127 - “Gregory of Nyssa’s Doctrine of the Resurrected Body,” SP XXII. ed. by E.A. Livingstone. Leuven, 1989, 28–34. Apparently, Plato was the source for Origen’s conception of the hereafter; but Plato seems to have taught the eternity of punishment for the reprobate (Phaedo 113f; Gorgias 525c; and the Republic X 615). Plato used not the word aion, nor even alonios, but oupote.

128 - Origen confessed the doctrine of Christ has been “handed down in unbroken succession from the Apostles (which) is still preserved and continues to exist in the churches to the present day (and) we maintain that only it is to be believed as truth which in no way conflicts with the tradition of the Church and the Apostles” (De Princ. pref. 2 B). In the next paragraph (3), he demurred slightly. “The holy Apostles, when preaching the faith of Christ, took certain doctrines, namely those which they believed to be necessary, and delivered them in the plainest terms to all believers, even to such as appeared to be somewhat dull in the investigation of divine knowledge.” He was now free to become the “innovator” which Western scholars relish.

129 - Professor Barrois asks the question, “Was Origen an origenist?” Considering that some of his works have been lost or come down to us as fragments; that the Greek text of De Principiis is lost and that Rufinus of Aquileia’s edited Latin version, together with St Jeromés citations from it in his letter to Avitum, carry “doubtful reliability.” Also, observes Barrois,
“Origen himself had insisted on respect for the tradition of the Church, and had made express reservations with regard to the pre-existence of souls, a theory which remained conjectural in his own eyes.” Origen had ardent defenders in Pamphilus and Eusebius of Caesarea; and, of course, Rufinus (“The Alleged Origenism of St Gregory of Nyssa,” 8–9). Catholic scholars, such as DeLubac and Daniélou, are among his modem champions. Many think Origen to have been “original thinker” (Quasten), “innovator” (Heine), “the greatest mind among the Fathers” (Rashdall), “father of ecclesiastical science” (Harnack). Some, such as Cyril Richardson, view the “condemnation” of Origen by Justinian and the 5th Ecumenical Council which the Emperor convened, as illegal and politically motivated (“The Condemnation of Origen.” Church History IV (1937), 50–64). Whatever our knowledge or bias, the fact remains that scholarly judgments about Origen are based generally on his extant writings. For example, Barrois argues that Origen was uncertain about theories he propounded. He thought of himself as a faithful son of the Church. But for his opinions, Barrois depends upon statements made by Origen made in De Principiis. a work of “doubtful reliability.” In the Introduction to his English translation of De Principiis. G.W. Butterworth alludes to The irrefutable evidence of Jerome and the Emperor Justinian” (London, 1936, xv). He мая be correct; but we have chosen to trust the Church’s anathema of Origen. He was formally condemned by her Ecumenical Council whose judgment was confirmed by the “consciousness” of the Catholic Church.

- Balthasar (Présence, 40, 58f.) insists that St Germanos' was mistaken about the adulteration of St Gregory's works by heretics. The consistency of the apokatastasis doctrine with the rest of his system proves it. Therefore, when St Gregory speaks of πῦραίωνιον of the κόλασις αἰώνιος, one must understand that he refers not to “eternal fire” and “punishment,” but precisely to “a determinate and complete lapse of time.” Balthasar reminds us that St Gregory affirmed the redemption of the devils (e.g.. In Christi Res. I PG 46 609CD. 612A: Catech. Ora., 26; Sh). Considering what we know about the Bishop of Nyssa and the tradition to which he belonged, it is difficult to agree with Balthasar that “absolument vain douter Grégoire ait la doctrine de apocatastase...,” i.e., universal salvation. First, Balthasar мая not dismiss St Germanos cum sui so easily, for with the indictment of “universalist” must come the label of heretic. The Church has never attached this opprobrium to St Gregory. Also, as a matter of historical fact, not until the 6th century Origenist revival and the spread of the Monotheletism (monergism) was St Gregory accused of “Origenism” by his enemies. Second, if his critics, ancient and modern, are right, then, we must assume that in his “system” St Gregory consciously departed from the Church’s
teaching on Christ’s Redemption, and consciously gutted the divine Economy, including the emasculation of the Biblical prechments about God’s Justice; third, there are too many passages in which St Gregory denies universal salvation (e.g., Or. c. Us. PG 46 436B, 452A). The Greek text, as Srawley observes “does not exhibit perfect consistency of language on the subject.” He notes, too, that St Gregory employed the language of Scriptures to describe hell as a place of “the unquenchable fire” and “the undying worm” (Catech. Ora., p. 100 n. 7). Finally, let Balthasar account for his own bias, notably his great admiration for Origen.

131 - Daniélou, “L’Apocatastase chez Saint Grégoire de Nysse,” Recherches de Science religieuse XXX (1940), 336. Did St Maximus have in hand both editions of De Vita Moysis – one with and the one without the “incriminating passages?” If so, did he believe that, perhaps, the Orthodox had edited his works the way Rufinus edited De Principiis? If not, and if he had both editions, why did he favor one text over the other, namely, the manuscript with the “incriminating passages?” Some might argue that St Maximus found such passages to be more consistent with “Gregory’s system,” for instance, the idea, ostensibly taken from Origen, that if God is to be “all in all” In the Age to Come, evil must disappear (De an. et res., PG 46 104B). Hell is evil; therefore, it must disappear. But, as an act of divine Justice, hell is not evil; and, as Sherwood mentions, St Gregory understood that all in all refers to the transformation of the cosmos in the Age to Come, a transformation which, although Involving “the passing of sin into non-existence, is not the same as sinners passing into bliss” (The Earlier Ambigua of St Maximus the Confessor and His Refutation of Origenism. Rome, 1954, p. 218).But what of the devil, the evil one? If all evil disappears in the Age to Come, will not he become an angel of light once more? If all evil must vanish from “the new heavens and the new earth,” is not the apokatastasis inevitable? But as universal salvation contradicts the Christian soteriology. The idea of “limited” salvation is a mystery as is the existence of evil. I would not be surprised if St Gregory had been aware that human reason is helpless before them.

132 - Various passages of De Vita Moysis may be interpolations, to the effect that the Saint taught the disappearance of “the outer darkness of hell” with the apokatastasis (J. Daniélou, “L’Apocatastase...,” 328–347). In the 6th century Octateuch (PG 87 559C) of Procopius of Gaza, the passages in question are cited without the supposed changes, a fact which proves nothing. St Maximus may or may not have studied the Octateuch. He appears to have depended on Commentarius in Canticum Canticorum (PG 44 813C) for his
interpretation of Gregory's eschatology. In this, Maximus may have taken his cue from St Barsanuphius (d. 540). The latter knew that St Gregory had discussed apokatastasis, but wisely distinguished between the condemnable Origenist version and the teachings of St Gregory. “Clearly, he does talk about an apokatastasis,” exclaimed Barsanuphius, “but it is not the one which they (Origenists) preach: after a brief punishment the restoration of men to their ancient condition, that is, pure spirits” (Doctr. PG 86 900A).

133 - We are not accusing Origen of determinism, but contradiction. He taught that “it lies with us and with our own actions whether we turn away from blessedness or toward wickedness and loss (De Princ. I, v, 5). In more than one place, he declared that all things will be restored to God. He will be “all in all” (Ibid., Ill, vi, 2), for which reason there can be no hell. St Gregory likewise said that, in the Age to Come, God will be “all in all” and evil annihilated (De an. et res. PG 46 104B). Clearly if hell is evil, it must vanish, because, in the Age to Come, God will be “all in all,” and evil cannot “exist” within or somehow alongside the transfigured cosmos. Similarly, if all suffering is evil and hell is a place or condition of suffering, in the Age to Come, it must disappear. St Gregory, albeit confessing that God will be “all in all” in “the new creation,” did not follow this logic, for, as we have seen, he affirmed the existence of hell after the Resurrection. Thus, hell shall exist in the Age to Come, for some impious souls will remain recalcitrant, unable and/or unwilling to enjoy the Light of Glory. They will resist the divine Love, finding it less tolerable than “the darkness of their selfish pride.” In his “River of Fire,” Dr Alexandre Kalomiros shows that the Fathers (including St Gregory of Nyssa) do not regard hell as a place of divine punishment and vengeance. “Paradise and hell are one and the same River of God,” he writes, “a loving fire which embraces and covers all with the same benevolent Will.” For the saved, God’s Benevolence is “the element of life,” for the damned “eternal suffocation... scourged by His love...” (in The Orthodox Conference. 103–123). In this sense, Nicholas Berdiaev was right to say, “hell is in the damned, not the damned in hell... All rationalistic eschatologies (Augustine, Aquinas, Dante, Calvin, etc.) are a horrible nightmare” (The Destiny of Man, trans. by N. Duddington. London, 1954, p. 282).


135 - Florovsky, G. The Collected Works [vol. 7]: The Eastern Fathers of
the Fourth Century, trans. by C. Edmunds. Belmont [Mass.], 1987, p. 211. According to the Scriptures and the Fathers, Christ will return to judge the living and the dead. There follows the cessation of temporal ages or intervals, commonly divided into seven periods of time (St Gregory of Nysssa, De occur. Dom. PG 46 1153C). The ages are succeeded by one everlasting age, 'the Eighth Day.' On this Day, said St Gregory, man will strip off the deeds of 'the skins' (which the human race inherited as a result of Adam’s disobedience). On the Eighth Day comes 'the heavenly restoration, a recall from bondage and slavery to royalty” (De Beat., 8 PG 44 1292A). In De Octava (PG 44 609D–612A), St Gregory refers to the Eighth Day, as the Day of the Lord,” the Day after the seven ages of time. The “succession of numbers” has ceased and the “one” (μία) Day has come, a Day “never interrupted by the darkness of night, for the sun, the true Light, will shine forever, as the Apostle tells us. It will never set, but will surround all things by the power of Its illumination, and as the Gospel of Matthew declares, 'Then the righteous will shine as the sun...‘” (On the other Fathers, see Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, pp. 242–286). Origen allegorized “the Eighth Day.” “Just as the number eight,” he wrote, “is a symbol of the future age (ἡ ὡγδόη σύμβολον ἐστι τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰώνος), containing the force of the resurrection, so the number seven is a symbol of the cosmos” (Sel. in Ps. CXVII PG 12 1624BC). He had no idea of its contemporaneity. Unlike St Gregory, Origen, as we shall see, understood the Age to Come as only one in a multitude of ages, not the cessation of all ages; therefore the Christian dispensation as one of many. He may indeed have spoken of “universal salvation delayed,” but for Gregory the Eighth Day is eternity where there is no change, and everything has been resolved.


137 - St Theodore the Studite followed St Maximus. “The third (meaning) which is used more by St Gregory of Nyssa In his writings, is this: the future restoration of the spiritual powers which had fallen under sin to that state which they enjoyed at their creation. For it must be that just as all nature awaits in hope for the incorruption of the flesh at the Resurrection, so also should the fallen spiritual powers receive the same in the everlasting age; and passing through all the ages and finding no point of cessation, they come to God Who has no end. Although these powers will receive the knowledge but not the participation in good things, they will have been restored to the pristine state in order to show that the Creator Is not the cause of sin” (Ep. CLX PG 99 1500D–1501A). While applauding the loyalty of St Gregory’s defenders, one ought not approve their strained reconstruction of his thought. The Church teaches that
“to know God” in the Age to Come is precisely to share in the Life of the Blessed Trinity by grace (theosis, deification): “like knows like.” If that were not the case, then, the promises of God would not be fulfilled (Cf. I Cor. 13:12).


139. Florovsky was not the first to mention that while Origenist cosmology admitted to “cycles and a sort of rotation... he plainly rejected the iterative character of the successive ’cycles.’ There was an unresolved inconsistency in his system. The ’eternity’ of the world implied an infinite number of ’cycles’ in the past, but Origen was firmly convinced that this series of ’cycles’ was to come to an end, and therefore there had to be a finite number of ’cycles’ in the future. Now, this is clearly inconsistent. On the other hand, Origen was compelled to interpret the final ’con-summation’ as a ’re-turn’ to the initial situation ’before all times’” (“Eschatology in the Patristic Age: An Introduction.” GOTHR 1,1 (1956), 34).

140. The doctrine of the pleroma is found in St Paul – καὶ αὐτὸν ἔδωκε κεφαλὴν ὑπὲρ πάντα τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἡττις ἐστὶ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ πάντα ἐν πᾶσι πληρουμένοι (Eph. 1:22–23). Unlike certain modern interpreters of St Gregory (e.g., Vladimir Solov’ev and his follower), St Gregory did not confuse the Church and the creation (Cf. V. Lossky, The Mystical Theology..., p. 112f). In the Age to Come all creation will be united to Christ as His Body (In illud: Tunc ipse Fil. subj. PG 44 1317D–1320A). Although transfigured by the resurrection, Christ will retain His created, albeit now immortal, human nature; so, likewise, the cosmos, albeit recreated by Grace, will remain itself while partaking of the divine Nature. Apropos “the new heavens and the new earth,” St Gregory declared that “when the generation of men is completed, time will cease with it, and then will take place the reintegration of all things, and with this transfiguration of the cosmos shall occur the change of humanity from what is corruptible and earthly to what is without passion and eternal” (De horn. opif., 22 PG 44 205C). May we assume from this statement that every created being will belong to the the divinized pleroma after the Second Coming and the Judgment? If we answer in the affirmative, we have a contradiction. As Gregory stated, τελεσθείσης δὲ τῆς τῶν ἀνθρώπων γενέσεως, τὸ τέλει ταύτης συγλαταλήξαι τὸν χρόνον, meaning that human reproduction and diastemic time – linear intervals of time – will cease together (τελεσθείσης). How, then, shall “the whole lump” (τὸ φύραμα) of the human race (Con. Eun. II PG 45 533A) be equated with the pleroma, for, as he also taught, many will not enter the eternal Kingdom; and not all things shall deified, nor changed in the
“twinkling of an eye” (I Thess. 4:13–18) after the Judgment. If they are not, then, how is all created existence reintegrated and transfigured? To speak of “salvation delayed” is no solution. The divine Economy is consummated in the Judgment. Is it deferred until the devil and the wicked decide to join the Savior and His Saints in everlasting bliss? Does the completion of the pleroma, the totality of created being, wait for their “reintegration?” Where has Gregory taught such things? How, then, do we accuse the Bishop of Nyssa of teaching universal salvation in any form? He stated clearly that the devil and many humans, such as Judas, shall suffer infinitely. They will never enter the eternal Kingdom of God by virtue of their pride and the heinous character of the sins. Perhaps, the “damned” will join the pleroma later? Certainly not “later” in the diastemic or temporal sense. How, then? Nowhere does the Apostle Paul teach that the pleroma will be completed in stages. Nowhere does St Gregory teach it. Moreover, “universal salvation” is plainly not the teaching of the Church, not of her Scriptures, not of her Fathers. Therefore, to insist that St Gregory of Nyssa (“Father of Fathers”) held this heresy is simply incredible. If his critics are right, we must conclude either he did not know what he was doing, he did not care what Holy Tradition demanded of him, or that this Saint and Father of the Catholic Church consciously sought to radically change the Christian Economy for his own selfish purposes.

141 - Professor D. M. Kelly takes the position that St Gregory learned from his sister, St Macrina, the lessons of universalism, as evidenced by De anima et resurrectione. “In the latter,” he writes, “Gregory reveals that on her deathbed Macrina foresaw the eventual salvation of all people (the words suggest that this also may include the demons). She used the parable of the wheat and the tares to describe how God would destroy only the evil in men’s hearts...” (“Apokatastasis in the Early Church,” PBR IX, 1 (1990), 72). But “St Macrina” nowhere argued that God compels creatures of will and reason to share in the Good. God “offers to everyone participation in the good things which are in Him” – πᾶσι προθείναι τὴν μετουσίαν τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ καλῶν (De an. et. res., PG 46 152A). Thus, “she” declared, “It is clear from the holy Scriptures that God becomes home and dwelling... to them who are worthy” – καὶ τοῦτο δηλότι ἐστιν ἐκ τῶν θείων λόγων, ὅτι καὶ τόπος γίνεται θεός τοῖς αξίοις, καὶ οἶκος... (Ibid., 104B). “She” prayed, “Let not the dreadful chasm separate me from Thine elect” – μὴ διαχωρισάτο με τὸ χώσμα τὸ φοβερόν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐκλεκτῶν Σου (De vita. s. Macr., PG 46 984D). Aside from all this, one may not discount the Mystery of Baptism in the restoration of man’s image. Universal salvation renders the entire soteriological process, the life of virginity and virtue, superfluous. On the Coming of Christ and the institution of Baptism, see H.

142 - “Eschatology in the Patristic Age,” GOTHR II, 1 (1956), 27.
143 - On the centrality of Christology to all other aspects of Christian doctrine, see J. Daniélou, The Lord of History, pp. 183–202.
144 - Prayer, Origen said, ought not be made to anyone “begotten,” “not even Christ Himself, but only to God the Father of all” (De Ora XV, 1 ACW). The statement is remarkable, if only because it reinforces Origen’s deviation from traditional Christianity, which rests on a false triadology. Ignoring Christ in prayer, as he recommended, surely suggests the inferiority of the Son to God. Indifference to the Spirit’s role in prayer, if any, is part of the same wrong advice.
145 - Harnack questioned Origen’s treatment of the Holy Spirit. Origen used the right language in describing Him, saying all that was required by the Christian Tradition, “but in fact one cannot determine from Origen’s writings whether He is created or uncreated. He does not seem to be essential to Origen’s theology. He seems to have arisen from the Son and is related to Him as the Son is to the Father” (see De Princ. I, iii). The Trinity is not homogeneous, but “has degrees within it” (History of Dogma [vol, 2], trans. by N. Buchanan. London, 1910, p. 358). If Harnack is correct, here is another difference between Origen and St Gregory of Nyssa for whom the Holy Spirit is true God. We need only mention the Saint’s Sermo de Spiritu Sancto adversus Pneumatomachos Macedonianos. The Christian process of “sanctification” has not the same motive as the “pelagian” spirituality of Origen.
147 - According to Harnack, Origen believed that human souls “were created from all eternity, for God would not be almighty unless He had always produced everything.” He quotes De Princ. I, ii, 10 – ne omnipotens quidem Deus dici potest, sin non sint in quos exerceat potentatum: etideo ut omnipotens ostendatur Deus, omnia subsistere necesse est. Harnack also cited St Methodius of Olympus who also understood Origen to teach that there was never a time when something did not exist because an absolute beginning would make God changeable (History of Dogma [vol. 2], 360).
148 - Ibid., 385.
149 - Eros and Psyche: Studies in Plato, Plotinus and Origen. Toronto. 1964, p. 9. Rist explains Origen’s theology and cosmogony in exclusively philosophical terms. Although one may certainly agree that Origen was
enamoured of Greek thought and owed much to it, one need not explain Origenism entirely by it. His “system” had deep Christian, Jewish and Gnostic roots.

150 - Grillmeier (Christ in the Christian Tradition, pp. 168–170) asserts that in the thought of Origen the union of Logos and sær in Christ was possible only by the mediacy of the soul. Thus, the words, “God grows in the soul, and the soul dwells in God” (Cant. Can, [frag.] PG17 265C). Origen knew no uniting of God and man, writes Harnack, “but only an indwelling of the Logos in Jesus Christ, with which the indwelling of the same Logos in men began” (History [vol. 2], p. 370). R. Williams states that “the Logos is immutable and impassible and cannot as such unite with the flesh... Nous is able to mediate flesh and Logos..” (“Origen on the Soul of Jesus,” Origeniana Tertia., 133f.). C. Bigg states that Origen taught no communicatio idiomatum between the Logos and Christ's human nature, only between the Logos and His human soul (The Christian Platonists of Alexandria, p. 233f.). Balthasar's opinion that Origen’s christology is a declaration of a “compénétration ontologique de la créature et de Dieu” is misleading (“Le Mysterion D’Origéne,” 523). Cf. Con. Cel. IV, 18). Perhaps, too, Augustiné's reading of Origen influenced his christology (Grillmeier, p. 325). Although the Bishop of Hippo confessed, unlike Origen, the Logos to be God, he also would not allow Him any contact with the body save through the soul – Quomodo anima humana Verbi Dei copuletur... Verbum particeps carnis effectum est rationalis anima mediante (Ep. CXL. IV, 12 PL 33 542). Moreover, for Augustine the humanity and Divinity of Christ were united by grace, created grace (κάτα χάριν), not essentially (κατ' οὐσίαν). See the discussion in The Influence of Augustine on the Orthodox Church, pp. 228–231, 254 n. 16. Neither held a traditional Christology.

151 - Origen’s doctrine of Christ is ambiguous. In him мая be found the seeds of Nestorianism, Monophysitism and even Docetism. “De plus, on sait qui Origine conçoit Êunion christologique d’une manière a al fois nestorienne (Periarch 2, 6, 3) et semble-t-il, eutychienne,” writes Balthasar. “Cette confusion lui permet précisément de voir dans Êunion christologique le type de l’union de grâce a la fois “physique” et “morale.” Sur le “monophysisme” Origine s’imposeraient toutefois d’importantes restrictions” (“Le Mysterion D’Origéne,” 526). On account of such expressions as οἷον ζῶσ Kai γίνεται, Origen has been accused of Docetism, especially when combined with the words “and is described in physical terms, until he who has accepted Him in this form is gradually lifted up by the Logos and beholds, so to speak, the προηγουμένην μορφήν” (Con. Cel. IV, 1 PG 11 1048AB). The force of the accusation is not
diminished by his opinion that the Logos took “different forms” (διάϕορει οίνοει τοῦ λόγου μορϕαί). Apparently, He changes to accomodate the spiritual condition of His followers. Hence, not all the disciples were invited to see His transfiguration on Mt Thabor. Balthasar (ibid., 540 n. 6), nevertheless, rejects the charge of Docetism, arguing that Origen never denied that the Logos took a genuine body. Henry Chadwick mentions that Origen, against his opponents, denied that the form and nature of the resurrected human body was accurately described in the Gospel narratives. He permitted no comparison between it and the resurrected Christ. He insisted that the body of Jesus was sui generis, as is immediately apparent from the Virgin Birth, His transfiguration on Mt Thabor and, after the Resurrection, His passing through locked doors. Chadwick concludes that Origen “was perhaps well on his way towards docetism” (“Origen, Celsus and the Resurrection of the Body,” HlHR XLI, 1 (1948), 100. Chadwick later modified his opinion. From the writings of Origen, one thing is certain: his dualism is at once historical, christological, ecclesiological, scriptural, mystagogical and, in some sense, theological. On the other hand, St Gregory of Nyssa offered a “chalcedonian” world-view: the humanity of Christ “commingled” (ἀνάκρασεως) with His Divinity (Con. Eun. V PG 45 705B–708A) as the form of all created reality. Thus, in his letter to the sisters Eustathia, Ambrosia and Basilisa, St Gregory wrote that by virtue of the Incarnation (οἰκονομία) “the indivisible Divinity which had been blended once and for all (ἀπαξ ἀπάκραθεισα) with Christ was never separated from body nor from the soul,” neither on the Cross, nor in the grave, nor in Paradise (Eg. Ill. PG 46 1021 CD). St Gregory of Nyssa was neither a Nestorian nor a Monophysite. His insistence upon the “commingling” of Christ’s two natures is perfectly Orthodox: humanity and Divinity united with separation or confusion. With the Church, he postulated only a divine Hypostasis in the Savior. According to Fr Meyendorff, “The human hypostasis or the human individual or the ’person’ is done away with and replaced by the divine characteristics – wisdom, power, holiness, impassability (Adv. AdoI. PG 45 1276D).” As there is only one Person in Christ manifested in two natures, “there is no longer any cause to speak of two sons. The human elements in Christ are no longer shown as natural properties [PG 451277BC]... All is filled with the glory of the Godhead” (Christ in Eastern Christian Thought. Washington, DC., 1969, p. 376). With the union achieved between the flesh and the Godhead, Gregory explained, names were communicated and given to each mutually in such a way that the Divinity is described in human terms and the humanity of Christ in divine terms. Thus Paul called Him Who was crucified on the Cross “the Lord of Glory” (1 Cor. 2:8); “and He Who is adored by the whole creation above, and
the earth below, he called Jesus” (Adv. Apol., PG 45 1277B). In other words, communicatio idiomatum presupposes the mutual interpenetration of the two natures, an idea intolerable to Nestorians, and insufficient for Monophysites.

152 - “Everything historical was for him (Origen) but transitory and accidental,” wrote Fr Florovsky. “Therefore, the historical Incarnation had to be regarded as a moment in the continuous story of the permanent theophany of the divine Logos – a central moment, in a sense, but still no more than a central symbol. In the perspective of a continuous Divino-cosmic process, there was no room for a true historical uniqueness, for an ultimate decision, accomplished in time by one major event. No event in this perspective could have an ultimate meaning or value, by itself as an event. All events were to be interpreted as symbols or projections of some higher, super-temporal and super-historical reality. The historical was, as it were, dissolved into the symbolic. The whole system of symbols was something provisional, to be ultimately done away. One had to penetrate behind the screen of symbols. This was the major exegetical principle or postulate of Origen...” (“Origen, Eusebius and the Iconoclastic Controversy,” CH XIX (1950), 87–88).

153 - Allegory and Event, p. 355. Origen assumed, Hanson writes elsewhere, “that the Incarnation was no more than a symbolic means of achieving our salvation, an enactment upon the stage of history of eternal truths the understanding of which brings us salvation” (ibid., p. 329).

154 - E. DeFaye (Origéne, sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée [vol. 3]. Paris, 1928, p. 230) wrote that Origen believed the Cross to be “comme une sorte d’annexe de sa doctrine générale.” Hans Koch agrees, saying, “der Gedanke an eine Versöhnung kann in der theologie des Origenes kein organisches Glied gebildet haben” (Pronola und Paideusis. Berlin/Leipzig, 1932, 74). Koch is wrong to suggest, however, that Origen’s failure lay in his view of Christ’s victory over the devil and death (cf. In Matt, XVI, 8 PG 131397AB). DeFaye and Koch, like H. Rashdall (The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology. London, 1925), are disturbed by the absence of a “vicarious punishment” or “atonement.” They seem unprepared to accept the doctrine of man’s salvation by Christ’s “ransom” to (and, therefore, conquest of) the devil, keeper of the grave, despite the declarations of Hos. 13:14; Matt. 20:28; I Tim. 2:5–6; Heb. 2:14, etc. and the Fathers. This “classical idea of the Atonement,” as Gustaf Aulén calls it, stresses the indissoluble bond between the Incarnation and the Redemption. “God in Christ overcomes the hostile powers which hold man in bondage. At the same time, these hostile powers are also the executants of God’s will. Patristic theology Is dualistic, but it is not an absolute dualism. The
deliverance of man from the power of death and the devil is at the same time his deliverance from God's Judgment. God is reconciled by His own act in reconciling the world to Himself” (Christus Victor. London, 1931, p. 75). In other words, on the Cross Christ was not punished in the place of mankind. He died not to assuage the wrath of an angry God, but to overcome the devil and death by His death and, consequently, cleansed the creation of sin. Purged of sin and death, it became worthy once more of fellowship with God. The “new creation” offered to the Father in Christ Who presented Himself as its first-fruits, as the type of the new humanity (Cf. In Bapt. Christ. II PG 46 504B).

155 - Hanson’s comments are important here. “Origen certainly displays interest in every minute, movement and gesture of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, but not because he is Interested in the Jesus Who lived as an individual in history, but because he is interested in the theological or philosophical truths or the features of religious development of the contemporary Christian of which he imagined these movements and gestures to be symbols. In history as event, in history as the field of God's self-revelation par excellence, Origen is not in the least Interested” (Allegory and Event, p. 276). Hanson brings to our attention Origen’s question, τι οὖν πρὸς ἐμὲ αὕτη ἡ ἱστορία; (Hom. in Jer. I, 2 PG 13 256C).

156 - Intent upon an Origenist interpretation of St Gregory’s philosophia, Schaff and Wace translate the phrase (Cat. mag., 8 PG 45 33B), “under the disguise of an historical manner” (NPNF [vol. 5]. New York, 1893, p. 482. See also pp. 14–23). Similarly, Hardy and Richardson render the phrase, “a story in a veiled manner” (LCC [vol. 3]: Christology of the Later Fathers. Philadelphia, 1954, p. 283). J.H. Srawley, more careful about the Greek grammar, provides, “after the manner of history and in a veiled manner.” This editor alludes to Num. 12:8 and I Cor. 13:12 as the explanation for his translation (Catech. Ora., p. 43 n. 14). St Gregory hoped to distinguish “history” from the αἰνίγμα (“dark saying”) related to it. He showed a relation between the literal and spiritual senses by the use of kai, with the comparative of the adjective (-τερον) and μέν.


158 - According to Koch, “Für Origenes war die Kirche war die philosophischen Schulen für andere Gelehrte seiner waren.” She is a “school” in which “the mystery of piety” is filled with “true gnostic.” The purpose of their “education” is the return of souls to the primordial state (Pronola 79). Unlike him, St Gregory took very seriously the historical institution of the Church. Salvation does not occur in some supertemporal realm, but is an
historical process (See footnote 59 below), beginning after the Crucifixion and with the Resurrection (In Deum Lum., PG 46 577C). For St Gregory the Church is already becoming the new cosmos. She leads the lover of truth through things observable to the knowledge of things infinite: “According to the apostolic word, He made by His Incarnation things invisible visible, revealing them through the constitution of the Church” (Con. Eun. XIII PG 45 949B). Not so incidentally, Gregory defined the visible Church, outside of which there is no salvation, as composed of anyone “initiated” through baptism, while for Origen “the body of Christ” is “the souls of those who have reached perfection” (Song of Songs IV, 15; FC). The ecclesiology of Origen led Bigg (The Christian Platonists of Alexandria, p. 268) to conclude that Origen denied the necessity of the visible or historical Church for salvation. The Professor seems unimpressed by Origen’s Extra hanc donum, id est ecclesiam, nemo salvatur (In Jos. horn. Ill, 5 PG 12 811C-812A). “Men might belong to the visible Church (as Origen remarked), and yet be dead in trespasses and sins,” Bigg writes. “They might be cut off from the visible Church, and yet be true brothers of Christ.” J. A. Lyons agrees. Origen’s doctrine of the Church, he insists, is a dimension of his cosmology, that is, the Church comprehends more than “a terrestrial assembly of Christ’s followers.” The Church of Christ is more than the Church of history; beyond the latter is “the heavenly Church of the first born” (De Princ. IV, ill, 8). Beyond Christ’s Body is every race of men which belong to Him, “perhaps the totality of creation” (The Cosmic Christ in Origen and Teilhard de Chardin: A Comparative Study. Oxford, 1982, p. 140). Cf. quia corpus Christi sumus, hominum genus, imo fortassis totius creaturae universitatis corpus est (Hom. in Psa., 11 PG 12 1330A).

159 - Grillmeier says that in Origen’s Christ there is no intrinsic unity of natures. One finds rather what Fr Grillmeier calls a “natural unity, that is to say, a unity like the unity between two constituent parts which go together to form one reality.” Consequently, Origen lacks full appreciation of the Lord’s humanity. “Even the essential act of the human Christ, His redemptive death, has been said to be devalued” (Christ In Christian Tradition [vol. 1 ], p. 148).

160 - As mentioned, St Gregory of Nyssa taught that the “coats of skins” of Gen. 3:21 (“Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord make coats of skins and clothed them”) were the symbols of man’s fallen nature (De an. et res. PG 46 148Cf.). Following the distinction made by St Paul, he conceived the “skins” to be “flesh,” not the “body” (Catech. Ora.. 8 Sr). In the resurrection, the “coats of skins” will be discarded, that is, the earthly body will be transformed, partaking by Grace in the immortality of the deified Christ. Origen, however,
arguing that the spirit or soul is consanguinetatem quandam ad Deum (De Princ. IV, iv, 10), equated the body into which the soul had fallen with “the coats of skins.” After death, the body becomes a “spiritual body,” perhaps a subtle and luminous thing altered for the new creation (See L.R. Hennessy, “Gregory of Nyssa’s Doctrine of the Resurrected Body,” SP [XXII]. ed. by E.A. Livingstone. Leuven, 1989, 28–34).

161 - G. Mueller observes that the Origenist Heilgeschichte is based on two principles: Greek cyclicism and a personal understanding of Christ and His Mission. Thus, Origen distinguished between “eternal life” (which everyone possesses) and “life in Christ” (Comm. on Rom. VI, 5–6 PG 14 1067AC: Contra Cel. Ill, 78). When Origen declared that everyone will live eternally, he meant eventually vitiam aeternam in Christo Jesu. Therefore, he offers “ein rein christologische begründete Apokatastast-Lehre” (“Origenes und die Apokatastasis,” Theologische Zeitschrift XIV (1958), 187–188). The Christian doctrine of salvation teaches ’’eternal life” for all who belong to Christ and obey all whatsoever He commanded the Apostles to teach the nations (Matt. 28:19).

162 - According to B. L. Balás, St Gregory did not need to adopt “Platonic realism” to explain the empirical unity of the human race in the historical Adam or the historical Christ. The progeny of Adam issued from his substance; thus, the inheritance of death and corruption. All who are baptized into Christ will eventually partake in the human ousia of the deified Lord as “one man”: the Church is that “one man” (“The Unity of Human Nature in Basil’s and Gregory of Nyssa’s Polemics Against Eunomius,” SP [vol. 14]. ed. by E. Livingstone. Berlin, 1976, 275–281). See De Bapt. PG 46 420C.Unlike Origen, Gregory held that “Adam” was the Adam of Genesis, the anti-type of Christ Whose existence and mission were in the foreknowledge of God “before the foundations of the world,” even as the humanity that will form in the Body of Christ. Gregory rejected the idea of the pre-existent Jesus and souls. Philip Schaff conceded, ”...we know that Gregory not only abandoned it, but attacked it with all his powers of logic in his treatise De Anima et Resurrectione: for which reason he receives the applause of the Emperor Justinian” (Intro. to NPNP [vol. 5], p. 17).

163 - In the writings of St Gregory (and, indeed, the other Fathers, Latin or Greek, African, Syrian and Russian), there is no “original sin” in the Origenist or Augustinian sense (See The Influence of Augustine of Hippo..., pp. 73–127). In Origenist thinking, “original sin” was the pre-mundane act of turning away from the contemplation of God, the consequence of which was to fall into a
body (De Princ. I, viii, 4; Hom. on Lev. VIII, 3; FC). In the teachings of Augustine, the “original sin” was an historical act of rebellion by Adam and Eve against God, the consequence of which was the transmission of the guilt for their disobedience to their posterity (De pecca. merit. et remis. I, xi, 13 PL 34 116). St Gregory taught that Adam’s posterity inherited from our first parents not guilt, but mortality with its consequences: subjection to the devil through death and the passions. Schaff bemoans that “if strictly taken,” the language of St Gregory on “infant Baptism... seems to imply a denial of original sin; but it is perhaps not intended to be so” (NPNF [vol. 5], p. 519 n. 14). Because the Augustinian Idea of “original sin” has been part of the “Christian doctrine of man” for so long and among so many, it is no wonder that Schaff uttered, not without a little incredulity, “but It is perhaps not intended to be so.” The Eastern Fathers had little knowledge of Augustine; they rejected Origen’s “original sin.” What the Latin Fathers knew of Origen, it is difficult to say (although some wish to make St Hippolytus and St Ambrose his students). Those Latin Fathers acquainted with the Alexandrian’s writings seem to have treated him much in the same as their Eastern brothers. Augustine was favorable to some of Origen theories. St Gregory, a monk who lived in Constantinople for nearly a decade, have read Origen; nevertheless, he was indebted to Sts John Cassian and Benedict for his articulation of the Christ world-view (See the valuable work by C. Straw. Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection. Los Angeles, 1988).

165 - “If Origen lays so little stress on the incarnation of the Word,” Daniélou remarks, “the reason is to be found in his peculiar attitude to the visible which he regards as no more than a sacrament of the invisible. That applies to the Saviour’s humanity as well: it is simply a means of approach to the Logos, who is the real food of the soul.” Inasmuch as the idea of the Church and her Mysteries presuppose the Incarnation (Comm. in John. X, 20 PG 14 569D–5672A. Cf. Cant. Cant [frag.] PG 17 265C), Origen placed “little stress” on their visibility and historical significance (ibid., 263–269). Moreover, if, as Balthasar (“Le Mysterion...,” 552) and many Catholic scholars (e.g., H. DeLubac, Histoire et Esprit. Paris, 1950, 355–363) affirm, Origen recognized the analogy between Christ and the Church, the Incarnation as well as the composition of man, letter and spirit in the Scriptures, only incredulity can be the reaction to their opinion that Origen accepted the “real presence” in the Eucharist.

166 - Cardinal Daniélou (Origen. p. 61f.) argues that, in opposition to
Protestants who have read their own “symbolic theory of the Eucharist” into the mystagogy of Origen, “Catholics have had no difficulty in showing that certain passages clearly state that Christ is really present in the Eucharist.” He appeals to Balthasar (Loc. cit.) who resisted the same Protestant arguments with any number of passages about the Eucharist in the writings of Origen which cannot be taken allegorically. Those who see nothing but allegory in connection with Origen’s teaching on the Eucharist, he said, have not come to grips with the peculiar point of view from which Origen looked at things (“Le Mysterion...,” 545). It may be that it is Dani6lou and Balthasar et al. who have failed to appreciate Origen’s “peculiar point of view.” Origen interpreted the Eucharist and the other Mysteries of the Church according to his own peculiar christology (See E.R. Redpenning, Origenes: Eine Darstellung sines Lebens und Seiner Lehre [bd. 1]. Bonn, 1841, 137f.). The best that can be said for Origen was a belief that eating of the bread and wine in the Eucharist gave a certain grace to the believer. His “understanding” of the relationship between matter and spirit would allow no more. If “his fundamental interpretation of embodiment makes it difficult for him to regard the body (of Christ or man) as an essential part of human nature,” as L.G. Patterson writes (“Origen’s Place in Early Greek Christian Theology,” SP XVII. ed. by E. Livingston. Oxford, 1982, 936), it is difficult for us to imagine that the physical aspects of his Eucharist would be essential to his definition of Sacrament.

167 “Transelementation” (μεταστοιχείωσις) or “change of elements” is not the Scholastic “transubstantiation” which involves the Aristotelian system of “substance” and “accidents.” Gregory is closer to St John Chrysostom’s “re-form” (μεταφροσυνή ἡ ραθήνα), the “change” (μεταβολή ἡ σοφία) of St John of Damascus, the “mutation” (mutare) of St Ambrose. There is no attempt here to define the Mystery of the holy Eucharist, but merely to indicate that something miraculous and paradoxical has taken place whereby God communicates His deified humanity to the Faithful.Bigg (The Christian Platonists of Alexandria, p. 267) makes the curious remark that “Origen cannot have held the doctrine of transubstantiation in any shape whatever.” I say “curious” because, as a historian, Bigg should have known that a philosophical understanding of the Eucharist did not exist in the early Church. As a Platonist, it is unlikely that Origen would have adopted it if he had known it. If, however, he means that Origen denied a real and supernatural change of the bread and wine in the Sacrament, Bigg is correct. Origen, like Augustine, believed the Eucharist of bread and wine to have been a signum of the Lord’s ”presence” (See R.A. Markus, “St Augustine on Signs,” in Augustine: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by R.A. Markus. Garden City, 1972, pp. 61–65). Bigg is also right to
suggest that Origen denied the literal eating and drinking of Christ in the Eucharist. Origen did indeed reserve “the ordinary interpretation of the Eucharist” to “the simple,” whereas “those who have learned deep things” took the Eucharist to mean “the nourishing word of truth” (Comm. In Matt. XI PG 14 952A). No wonder Origen avoided the kind of stark language found in St Gregory – “the sacrificial body would be inedible if it were alive” (In sanct. Pascha PG 46 612C).


169 - In the Canon of the Metalepsis of the divine Liturgy of the Orthodox Church, the eating and drinking of the Eucharist brings either healing or destruction (“fire”). Thus, the “real presence” of Christ in the Eucharist is not dependent upon the faith of the communicant; it is objectively there either as soul-healing or soul-destroying. The moral condition of the recipient determines, of course, whether he is visited by sanctification or “fire.” The Church premises this belief on the fact that “God is a consuming fire,” and that Christ is God and Christ is in the Eucharist. Origen taught that He is “present” in the Eucharist as He is in the Scriptures, each a “phase” of the Incarnation (See H. Crouzel, “Origène et la Structure du Sacrement,” in Bulletin de Littérature Ecclesiastique LXIII (1962), 81–104). Also, writes K. Hein, Origen, contrary to the teachings of the Church, “never connects the Eucharist with the resurrection of the dead – a connection so much a part of early patristic polemics in its struggle against the Gnostics.” He had no reason to do so, because “the present body will not be subject to the resurrection.” The eschatological character of the Eucharist and all the Sacraments are minimized by his salvific universalism (Eucharist and Excommunication: A Study in Early Christian Doctrine and Discipline. Frankfort, 1973, p. 309). In view of these facts, argues Hein, Origen has no doctrine of the “real presence.” In de Oratione, 27, he uses the word “bread” for the Eucharist to describe it, and declares that it gives “eternal life.” In his thirteenth Homily on Exodus, he used the expression corpus Domini for the Eucharist; and in the ninth Homily on Leviticus, he spoke of sanguinem verbi and carnes et sanguinem verbi Dei (10 PG 12 523C). When such phrases appear, however, they always refers to the “life-giving doctrine of Christ.”

170 - Strictly speaking, St Gregory’s “redemptive history” never ends. Redemption is a process which begins with Baptism and continues into the
Eighth Age. The Sacraments of the temporal Church, sacramenta futuri, types of the Age to Come, will expire with the realization of the Kingdom. The effects of the Redemption will never cease, for the saved grow in perfection eternally “from glory to glory“. At the same time, without the historical Church and her Sacraments “perfection” (i.e., deification) is impossible. They prepare us for the eternal Kingdom.

171 - “Allegory and Mysticism in Origen and St Gregory of Nyssa.” JTS XXII. 2 (1971), 363. E. DeFaye wrote of Origen that “to propound a philosophical interpretation of Christianity he regarded as his life work” (Origen and His Work, p. 26).

172 - “Origen: His Place in Early Greek Christian Theology,” 930, 931, 932.

173 - According to Daniélou, Origen’s work marks a “turning-point,” because (1) the Scriptures became, for him, “the essential source of revelation” while tradition plays a secondary role; and (2) Origen laid the foundation of scientific exegesis, e.g., determining the right text by a comparison of Hebrew and Greek words (Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture, p. 273). One may wonder whether Cardinal Daniélou is unaware that the idea of Tradition and Scriptures as two sources of revelation belongs another milieu. If he is right, that Origen understood the Scriptures to be “the essential source of revelation,” then, Origen understood them as something outside and superior to the Apostolic Tradition; and one begins to understand the reason for Origen’s peculiar teachings. The fact that Origen may have been a pioneer of scientific exegesis was only part of his attempt to give a complete and rational account of the Christian Faith (See Chapter IV (3) of De principiis.

174 - Origen opens the Homilies on Leviticus comparing the Incarnation of the Logos with the writing of Scripture (See the discussion in G, W. Barley’s introduction to Fathers of the Church [vol. 83]. Washington DC, 1990 edition, p. 15f.). The words of Balthasar are pertinent. “La présence de la Parole dans le monde doit être représentée par un symbole déterminé: la sainte Écriture comprendra, à côté de ce symbolisme transcendant, un symbolisme immanent qui lui donnera “âme,” “corps,” “esprit” et “lettre.” Parole parlante et parole parlée. Le formulas d’Origène restent sobres; Il évite de parler d’une “incarnation,” il dira qu’avant Íincarnation le Christ était déjà présent dans le monde par l’Écriture.” And later; “De même que l’humanité du Christ est le signe visible que Dieu s’est rapproché de nous et qu’il nous a sauvés, de même l’Écriture est le symbole matériel de sa Parole au fond des cœurs pendant tout le cours de l’histoire. Et Origéne, en parlant de ce signe, n’a pas avant tout en
vue le livre matériel, mais ce monde de sens divins et mystérieux, cette second creation qui, dans le coeur des fidèles, dans les travaux des docteurs et surtout dans la prédication de l’Église ne cesse d’avoir une vie feconde et multiple” (“Le Mysterion...,” 545–546).

175 - See R.J. Daly's Introduction to Origen's Treatise on the Passover (ACW, 54), p. 10f.

176 - Allegory and Event, p. 242.

177 - Ibid., p. 243 n. 2. R.E. Heine observes the same, “Origen makes little discernable distinction between typological and allegorical interpretation” (Introduction to the 80th volume of the Fathers of the Church translation of Commentary of the Gospel to John, p. 15). We recall, too, Origen’s remarks about the value of typology, “We must not suppose that historical things are types of historical things, and corporeal of corporeal. Quite the contrary: corporeal things are types of spiritual things and historical of intellectual” (Comm in John. X, 110). Apparently, Origen believed he was pursuing “the rule which has always been used in Jesus Christ’s heavenly Church since the time of the Apostles” (De Princ. IV, ii, 2).Daniélou defends the orthodoxy of Origen although knowing that the Alexandrian’s Scriptural exegesis views human history as the umbra of the heavenly exemplar of things. He seems to have convinced himself that the historiosophy which Origen took from Platonism was “entirely transformed by the two essential categories of Christian thought, the subjective (the value of the person) and the historical” (Origen. p. 153). Later in the same book (p. 165), Daniélou makes the astonishing statement that “the first distinctive feature of Origen’s typology is its predominantly spiritual tone, its bearing on the inner life.” But typology is concerned with history, with persons and events – whatever moral implications they may have. And again, Origen “saw the Bible as a world of symbols, which it was his task to explore” (Ibid., 172). See Hanson’s criticism of Daniélou in Allegory and Event., pp. 97–129.

178 - According to G.W. Butterworth (translation of First Principles, p. 309, note 7), Origen made much more of “the eternal Gospel” than Rufinus’ translation permits the reader to see. Origen, St Jerome informs, believed “the eternal Gospel to be as superior to our Gospel as the preaching of Christ is superior to the rites of the old law...” Jerome quoted Origen to the effect, says Butterworth, that the Economy of Christ needs to be perfected “by the truth of that gospel which in the Apocalypse of John is called 'the eternal gospel’, that is, in comparison with the gospel of ours, which is temporal and was preached in a world and an age that are destined to pass away” (Ep, ad Avitum. 12;
The words of Fr Louis Bouyer are instructive. He writes that the most primitive Christian mysticism, far from being a legacy of pagan mystery-religions or of Neo-Platonism, was the experience of “the Mystery,” about which we have spoken already. The realization of that experience came first with meditation upon the Scriptures. “For the first use of the word mystikos (μυστικός) in Christian literature is always in connection with a special understanding of the Scriptures…” Even in the writings ascribed to Dionysius the Areopagite, “so obviously influenced by Neo-Platonism,” the word “mystical” is defined in connection with the Scriptures; also the word was used in connection with the Mysteries (Liturgical Piety. Notre Dame [Ind.], 1955, p. 225).

St Gregory knew that Origen had written a Commentary on Song of Songs: he may have read it. His purpose in writing it was not, as some have suggested, to imitate his “mentor.” Neither did the Saint consider the writing of his own commentary on this book as a display of his learning (φιλομαθείας), but rather a response to them who, in the churches, without warrant, restricted the exegesis of Scriptures to the literal sense (Cant. Can., prol., PG 44 764C).

To express the relation between the seen and the unseen, whether of Christ, the Church, body and soul, the Scriptures, etc., St Gregory employed the term akolouthia. It indicates, writes DaniéIou, the historical process of deification which necessarily involves the liaison between “the natural and supernatural orders.” St Gregory borrowed the word, ἀκολουθία, from Aristotle, who used it to explain the laws governing physical change and motion (See The Lord of History, pp. 241–252).

Contra Severum PG 92 1649A. The Monophysite, Severus, had impugned the Orthodoxy of St Gregory.

Iambi de varii argumentis. LXXIV PG 90 1800B.


Not a few scholars believe that the accusation of “Origenism” against
St Gregory involves interpolations of his works. For example a passage from De Vita Moysis. In Migne (II PG 44 349B): Εἰ δὲ μετὰ τὴν τριήμερον ἑν σκότῳ κακπάθειαν γίνεται καὶ τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις ἡ τοῦ φωτὸς μετουσία. Τάχα τι ἀπὸ τούτων ὅρμωμεν, πρὸς τὴν ἀπὸ κακίας πρὸς ἄρετην δι’ ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ σταυρωθέντος καὶ μετανοίας μετάστασιν τῶν πρίν κατὰ τὸν βίον Αἰγυπτιαζόντων ἄγαγοι τὸ νόημα. Τὸ γὰρ ψηλάφητον ἐκείνο σκότος, καθὼς φησίν ἡ ἱστορία, πρὸς τὸ τῆς ἁγνοίας καὶ ἀμαρτίασκότος πολλὴν ἐν τῷ τῷ ῥήματί καὶ τῷ νοήματι τὴν συγγένειαν. Sources Chrétienne I. 54 (Paris, 1955) and Jaeger’s edition, Gregorii Nysseni Opera. 57–58 (VII. 1. Leiden, 1967) have: Εἰ δὲ μετὰ τὴν τριήμερον ἑν σκότῳ κακοπάθειαν γίνεται καὶ τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις ἡ τοῦ φωτὸς μετουσία. Τάχα τις ἀπὸ τούτων ὅρμωμεν πρὸς τὴν ἀποκατάστασιν τὴν μετὰ ταῦτα ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν ὑώρανων προσδοκωμένην τῶν ἐν τῇ γεένῃ καταδεδικασμένων ἄγαγοι τὸ νόημα. Τὸ γὰρ ψηλάφητον ἐκείνο σκότος, καθὼς φησίν ἡ ἱστορία ἐξ ἐξωτερον σκότος πολλὴν ἐν τῷ τῷ ῥήματί καὶ τῷ νοήματι τὴν συγγένειαν ἔχει. The passage from Migne has no reference to “the restoration of all things,” but contains expression which might be understood as Origenist: “from evil to virtue through knowledge of the Cross and repentance” (ἀπὸ κακίας πρὸς ἄρετην δι’ ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ σταυρωθέντος καὶ μετανοίας). Of interest, too, are references in SC to the “restoration,” “hell” and “the outer darkness” which are absent in Migne. With the words after [according to] these things (μετάταυτα) those who have been condemned to hell may perceive what shall take place in the Kingdom of the heavens, St Gregory compared the distress of the Egyptians to the damned. The first had a glimpse of the Light which led the Israelites, as the second will glimpse the eternal Kingdom. The Egyptians were no more part of the Exodus than the reprobate will inhabit the Kingdom of the heavens (On the Exodus as a patristic type of salvation in Christ, see J. Daniélou. From Shadows to Reality, pp. 153–174). The translators of The Life of Moses for The Classics of Western Spirituality series (New York, 1978), A.J. Malherbe and E. Ferguson employ the Jaeger version (p. 73). The introduction and the notes of this volume suggest that the editors seem to take what has come to be the ordinary scholarly attitude towards St Gregory, that is, as a Christian teacher of universal salvation. But Malherbe and Ferguson are not without their doubts. For instance, they point to the verses following the paragraph in question, where St Gregory interprets the outstretched hands of Moses as the sign of deliverance from pain and punishment. But the Saint begins the paragraph with the words, If anyone is truly an Israelite, a son of Abraham... (PG 44 349D), meaning that deliverance comes to God’s Own. Malherbe and Ferguson are obliged to admit that “there are passages where Gregory implies a permanent lost condition” (p. 168).

189 - Given the understanding that the Christian Economy in the action of a loving God, that koinonia in His Life, although initiated by Him, depends on human response (synergy), that union with God presupposes His grace; and, if we define “union with God” (by grace in Christ) as “mysticism,” then, looking for the roots of Christian mysticism in Plotinus or any other pagan or secular source is nonsense. Also that theory is misleading which declares Christian mysticism to have been “first fully laid out by Origen in the third century and to have found institutional embodiment in the new phenomena of monasticism in the fourth century” (McGinn, The Foundations of Mysticism, xvi). The “mysticism” of Origen was as heretical as it was Greek, or rather heretical because it was Greek. He did not speak for the Church, no matter his contributions to her life and theology. Furthermore, monasticism was not a “new phenomena” of the fourth century, but is, as it was, a necessary part of the Christian life, whether in its communal or hermetic form. The Prophets Elias and John the Baptist are its Hebrew prototypes. Christ Himself spoke of those who made “eunuchs for heaven’s sake” (Matt. 19:12). Asceticism, the life of perfection or “virginity,” existed from the beginning of the Church, but as a reform and social movement monasticism was a reaction to the fourth century mating of the Church and the Roman Empire (G. Florovsky, “Empire and Desert; Antinomies of Christian History.” GOTHRIII, 2 (1957), 133–159).


191 - See V. Lossky, The Vision of God, op. 61–74. That the vision of the glorified Christ is the privilege of the saved separates St Gregory and the Fathers from both Origen and the Greeks. Likewise, his teaching that union with God in love by grace is the purpose of the created and mortal soul’s (and body’s) ascent, not theoria (which is only a stage in man’s return to His Creator) divides them. Even more, the involvement of the body in “mystical” experience of the Uncreated Energies, is indicated by such words as “sweetness” and “warmth,” etc. Again man’s response to God is not with discursive reason, baffled by its futile attempts to understand the Divine, but with the heart. To “see God” means not the apprehension His Essence, but “to follow Him wherever He leads” ICant. Can.. VI PG 44 888A). In particular, St Gregory spoke of the continual longing of the soul for God (epektasis), his
“alternative to a doctrine of ecstasy” (See Louth, A., The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys. Oxford, 1983, p. 90). Moreover, the Fathers do not ignore the sacramental life of the Church in the human journey to deification. They Integrate devotion and gnosis, dogma and spirituality, faith and reason. That some Fathers refer to the Presence of God as Light and others (St Gregory among them) as Darkness is no contradiction, but different dimensions of the same experiences. The Greeks gave the Fathers a tongue, nothing more.
St. Gregory of Nyssa and the tradition of the Fathers
Michael Azkoul

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Abbreviations

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1. Primary sources:
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