

The Body and Desire

Gregory of Nyssa's Ascetical Theology

Raphael A. Cadenhead



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“O degli altri poeti onore e lume . . .”

—Dante, *Inferno*

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The Body and Desire

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To my parents

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	x <i>i</i>
Introduction	1
<i>Setting the Scene</i>	1
<i>The Structure of the Study</i>	3
<i>Resisting the Charge of Anachronism: Semantic and Terminological Clarifications</i>	6
<i>The Renaissance of Scholarly Interest in Gregory of Nyssa: From Obscurity to Approbation to Eisegesis</i>	12
Prelude	19
<i>Christianity after Constantine's Conversion</i>	19
<i>The Burgeoning Monastic Movement</i>	22
<i>The Asceticism of Gregory's Family</i>	25
<i>Conclusion</i>	28
PART ONE. THE EARLY PHASE, 371–SEPTEMBER 378: THE INTEGRATIVE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BODY IN THE LIFE OF VIRTUE	29
1. Marriage, Celibacy, and Pederasty	33
<i>Marriage and Celibacy</i>	33
<i>Pederasty and Celibacy</i>	44
<i>Conclusion</i>	52

2. The Integration of the Virtues	53
<i>Sexual Lust in the De virginitate</i>	53
<i>The Reciprocity of the Virtues</i>	55
<i>The Proliferation of Vice and the Example of Gluttony</i>	57
3. Gregory's Emerging Theory of Desire	62
<i>Erotic Desire</i>	62
<i>The Criterion of Need</i>	62
<i>The Passions</i>	64
<i>Moderation</i>	65
<i>Satiety versus Fulfillment</i>	66
<i>The Moral Evocations of Male and Female Characteristics</i>	68
<i>Conclusion</i>	70

PART TWO. THE MIDDLE PHASE, SEPTEMBER 378–387:

THE ASCETICAL AND ESCHATOLOGICAL MIXTURE
OF MALE AND FEMALE

	71
4. A Worldly Life of Desire: Marriage, Children, Money, and Sex	75
<i>The Problems of Marriage</i>	75
<i>Physical Fecundity</i>	77
<i>The Particular Challenges of Sexual Vice</i>	83
<i>The Moral Evocations of Male and Female Characteristics</i>	84
5. The Death of Siblings	88
<i>"No Longer Male and Female . . . in Christ Jesus"</i>	89
<i>Sexual Morphology: Anthropological and Eschatological Perspectives</i>	96
<i>Refinements in Gregory's Theory of Desire</i>	104
6. Doctrinal Controversies: Christological and Trinitarian	107
<i>The Diachronic Unfolding of the Spiritual Life: Christological Reflections</i>	107
<i>Gregory's Doctrine of God: Intra-Trinitarian Relationships and the Ascetic Life</i>	112
<i>Conclusion</i>	115

PART THREE. THE LATE PHASE, 387–394: EROTIC INTIMACY
WITH CHRIST AND THE MATURATION OF DESIRE

	117
7. Spiritual Maturation: Virginité and the Narrative of Progress	123
<i>Recasting Virginité</i>	123
<i>The Diachronic Train of Moral and Spiritual Progress</i>	125

8. Male and Female: Diachronic Exchanges	138
<i>Male and Female in the Late Period</i>	139
<i>Intimacy with Christ</i>	147
<i>Conclusion</i>	152
Conclusion	155
<i>Overview</i>	155
<i>The Challenges Posed to Contemporary Ethical Discourse</i>	157
<i>Appendix</i>	163
<i>Abbreviations</i>	179
<i>Notes</i>	181
<i>Bibliography</i>	219
<i>Index</i>	255

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Introduction

SETTING THE SCENE

The reception of the Eastern Father of the late fourth century Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335–94) has been variable over the centuries and often overshadowed by his so-called Cappadocian counterparts, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus. The mid-twentieth century witnessed a profound awakening of interest in his thought that has continued somewhat unabated in Western scholarship to this day.¹ One particularly rich train of interpretation drew its inspiration from Jean Daniélou's treatment of desire in Gregory's writings.² These studies, which emerged within predominantly Anglo-American circles, sought to bring Gregory's thought into counterpoint with postmodern discussions of gender and sexuality. One unfortunate effect of these otherwise exciting scholarly developments has been their often unchallenged Freudian and Foucauldian interpretations of asceticism. The pioneering late antique historian Peter Brown³ was instrumental in the world of Anglo-American scholarship in reigniting interest in asceticism, and its power in society. Many other historians and cultural critics followed his lead, including those like Elizabeth Clark,⁴ who added an analysis of gender into her sophisticated account of Christian asceticism. There is, I believe, something missing in these discussions—namely an examination of the theological motivations of ascetics themselves, however odd they may seem to modern sensibilities. Alongside late antique studies stands patristic scholarship, offering a more avowedly theological treatment of Gregory's works.⁵ But the development of his ascetical thinking, especially during significant moments of transition in his life and episcopal career, has arguably received insufficient attention.

There are, therefore, significant lacunae in the reception history of Gregory's thought despite the multiple perspectives that have been brought to bear on it. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to mark a new moment in the interpretation of Gregory's ascetical theology. Its overarching aim is to look afresh at the developments of his thinking and to give renewed focus to the theme of diachronic maturation in the spiritual life. In doing so, I shall make some important advances in the study of Gregory's thought that deserve, for now at least, a brief elucidation.

First, by examining Gregory's vision of the ascetic life within the context of his theological commitments, we will expose the theoretical overdetermination at play in some recent readings of his thought. Theories of power, subversion, normalcy, and fluidity will give way in this study to discussions of protology, eschatology, spiritual ascent, sin, and purity. Second, the findings of this study will highlight the dangers of imposing postmodern presumptions about gender onto Gregory's descriptions of erotic spiritual growth. Detailed analysis of the interplay of male and female characteristics in Gregory's works will reveal a spiritual horizon of meaning at work, which finds little correspondence in the secular taxonomies of contemporary discussion. Third, what has most eluded recent commentators is Gregory's insistence that ascetical transformation must occur in a set order. There has been considerable room for confusion about these stages of maturation. Some commentators have fastened preemptively onto Gregory's theorization of the heights of spiritual ascent, where with much *élan* they have discovered fascinatingly labile descriptions of gender. However, this approach overlooks the importance of ascetical self-mastery, without which, Gregory duly cautions, people will misguidedly search for representations of disordered fleshly desire in spiritual texts.

The methodology of this study involves examining Gregory's corpus in chronological order.⁶ It represents the first attempt in the literature to offer a comprehensive explication of Gregory's ascetic theory with reference to the developments of his thinking over the course of his life. In establishing a chronology of Gregory's writings, I began by reading and analyzing works whose dating has been generally agreed upon. The *De virginitate*, the *De anima et resurrectione* (henceforth *De anima*), the *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*, the *De hominis opificio*, the *In Canticum canticorum* (henceforth *In Cant*), and various letters belong to this category. I was then able to note thematic trajectories in Gregory's thought and adjudicate between scholarly disagreements on more contested works. A detailed justification for the chronology proposed in this study is provided in the appendix, along with a summary of scholarly views on the dating of each of Gregory's works.

One potential objection to this methodological approach is that discussions on dating are circular. It may be argued that commentators have interpretive biases or views that lend support to a particular idea of progression or development in Gregory's thought. They then arrange Gregory's writings to fit within their selected framework of development, grouping texts together based on perceived thematic

convergences. The chronology is subsequently used to justify developments in Gregory's thought, thereby making the argument circular. To this objection, I offer two responses. First, the chronological phase to which a text belongs is taken here to be more significant than its exact date. From this perspective, there is considerable agreement among scholars, despite differences in thematic concerns. Second, by adopting this methodological approach, I was compelled to adjudicate between different scholarly views on dating from the perspective of trends in Gregory's ascetic theory. Whilst this does not completely remove elements of subjectivity from the equation, it provides another set of criteria for dating and thereby prevents an undisciplined or vicious circularity.

A final word on methodology: the diachronic method of exegesis is, I suggest, the corollary of Gregory's construal of spiritual ascent (*anabasis*) as constant progress (*prokopē*) in the moral life and in one's relationship with Christ.⁷ By incorporating the theme of perpetual progress into the methodological nexus of this study, it is hoped that we will appreciate Gregory's ascetical theology as itself an evolving, mutable (*treptos*) intellectual project, subject to change (*metastasis*) and growth (*auxēsis*) over the course of his life. The convergence of maturational theory and methodology is not, of course, logically necessary, since Gregory could have advanced the notion of perpetual progress without changing his mind on certain theological issues. Nonetheless, the diachronic method allows us to see how Gregory adjusts and refines his thinking over time whilst highlighting the limitations of an overly systematizing analysis of his views on the body and desire.

The methodological approach of this study also opens Gregory's ascetical theology up to further development beyond its inevitable limitations (*horoi*) in time and history. In the conclusion of this study, I shall offer some suggestions of how his novel and challenging insights can contribute a new way of thinking to contemporary Western discussions about gender and sexuality. I do so, however, by gesture and intimation, mindful that this second phase of theorization deserves more thorough and detailed analysis than can be afforded here.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The main substance of this study is divided into three parts, each relating both to a separate chronological phase of Gregory's life work and to a unifying thematic principle within that phase: Part One—the early phase (371–September 378); Part Two—the middle phase (September 378–387);⁸ and Part Three—the late phase (387–394).⁹

Part One, "The Integrative Significance of the Body in the Life of Virtue," examines Gregory's early ascetical theology, covering a span of roughly seven years—from the composition of the *De virginitate*, his earliest work (371), to the death of his brother, Basil of Caesarea, in September 378.¹⁰

Chapter 1, “Marriage, Celibacy, and Pederasty,” begins with an analysis of Mark Hart’s essay on Gregory’s *De virginitate* and advances the case for the integrative view of the virtues in the life of virginity. I argue that for Gregory, virginity is emblematic of the angelic life and the privileged point of entry into the life of virtue, but Christians who pursue the life of virginity must also eschew all other vices. This leads onto an area of discussion that has been subject to considerable misunderstanding—the difference between the Platonic ideal of the chaste love of a man for an adolescent boy and Christian virginity. For Gregory, celibacy replicates the spiritual outcomes of Platonic pederasty but removes the need for a physical example of beauty, the beloved, to redirect erotic desire toward the Form of Beauty.

Chapter 2, “The Integration of the Virtues,” highlights a potential methodological problem in recent commentaries on Gregory’s theorization of desire in which his discussion of sexual desire is treated as a self-contained area of moral reflection. According to Gregory’s rendition of the doctrine of the reciprocity of the virtues, the moderation of one’s sexual desires is placed within an overarching project of moral and spiritual transformation in which, as in Plato, physical sexual desire for other people is set in a spectrum of transformative possibilities en route to desire for the divine. I argue that the reciprocity of the virtues in Gregory’s thought is motivated not by an abstract deliberation on the nature of the virtues (as some have suggested) but by the demands of uncompromising spiritual fidelity to Christ, which is the goal of the ascetic life.

Having placed sexual abstinence within the larger context of the virtuous life, I proceed in chapter 3, “Gregory’s Emerging Theory of Desire,” to outline key concepts in Gregory’s theory of desire: passion; moderation; the criterion of need in assessing whether a bodily desire is legitimate; and the disjunction between satiety and fulfillment. The chapter ends with some reflections on the moral evocations associated with the language of effeminizing or womanish passion and manly strength.

Part Two, “The Ascetical and Eschatological Mixture of Male and Female,” examines the significance of two major life events—the death of his siblings, first Basil and then Macrina—on Gregory’s theological and philosophical reflections. Here, also, I examine some of the doctrinal controversies with which Gregory contended as bishop of Nyssa.

Chapter 4, “A Worldly Life of Desire: Marriage, Children, Money, and Sex,” begins with a recapitulation of the ascetic themes of the early period and charts their development in the middle phase of Gregory’s literary career. It highlights Gregory’s application (and adaptation) of Plato’s account of mixed pleasures, which he uses to characterize human life after the Fall. This leads onto an analysis of the sufferings of the ascetic life, which Gregory portrays as a counterweight to the pursuit of worldly pleasure. I argue that whereas the *De virginitate* presents the life of virginity as an ascetic release from the worldly burdens of marriage, Gregory

in the middle period highlights the sufferings that accompany lifelong celibacy (such as loneliness). What then follows is a discussion of sexual hierarchy in marriage, which Gregory appears to support on the basis of biblical authority, and his contempt for worldly manifestations of female vice.

In chapter 5, “The Death of Siblings,” I turn to the much-disputed question of the restoration of genitalia in Gregory’s account of the general resurrection. I argue that he is operating with two rival anthropologies (one based on Genesis 1:27a–b; the other, on Genesis 2), which offer different perspectives on the eschatological finality of sexual differentiation. Looking at his writings diachronically reveals why these two anthropologies came into contact with each other during the middle phase of his literary career and why they do not reach a point of resolution or synthesis in his theorization on the restoration of human genitalia. These discussions of embodied difference lead us to an analysis of their spiritual and moral associations. I show that for Gregory, male virility needs to be renounced in the moral life just as much as female passion (in semantic usages to be discussed). I do so by drawing attention to the neglected figure of Naucratius, one of Gregory’s brothers, who overcame his manhood to make advancements in the moral life. For Gregory, the fallen characteristics of both male and female need to be chastened and transformed through the bodily disciplines of the ascetic life.

Chapter 6, “Doctrinal Controversies: Christological and Trinitarian,” examines Gregory’s doctrine of God as it developed in the context of the Eunomian controversy, particularly focusing on how he resists the language of activity and passivity (and thus, by cultural association, male and female, respectively) from being applied to the Godhead. The full relevance of Gregory’s doctrine of God for the ascetic life is then discussed in depth. I argue that for Gregory, the *imitatio Dei* summons the ascetic to a life beyond the fallen associations of male and female because the persons of the Trinity cannot be described as either passive or active depending on their relationship to each other.

Part Three, “Erotic Intimacy with Christ and the Maturation of Desire,” sees the aging bishop, in the late phase of his literary career, retreat from ecclesiastical affairs and focus more intensely than ever before on the implications of diachronic progress in the spiritual life.

In chapter 7, “Spiritual Maturation: Virginité and the Narrative of Progress,” I show that “virginité” now denotes purity of heart in a general moral sense and can therefore be applied to married Christians—as long as their desires are chastened and transformed through the practices of prayer and virtue. The disjunction opposing *parthenia* to *porneia* is used to contrast the life of virtue and vice (more generally understood), not simply sexual abstinence and sexual vice. Gregory also applies the theme of maturation to the conjugal life—a point so far overlooked in the secondary literature and one that provides new insights into his understanding of the order (*taxis*) of love in the life of virtue. The chapter ends with a detailed elucidation

of Gregory's diachronically theorized account of spiritual maturation, which highlights the essential incorporation of erotic desire into the practice of contemplation.

In chapter 8, "Male and Female: Diachronic Exchanges," I highlight a new development in Gregory's thinking. His immersion in the Song of Songs, with its descriptions of the Virgin Bride longing for her Bridegroom, allows him to view the cultivation of the *imago Dei* as more than just a mixture of male and female virtues (as in the middle period). He now argues that the soul's shifting identifications with male and female characteristics take place in a particular order. This diachronic progression begins with the life of vice and passion (identified as womanish), which is replaced through ascetical discipline by the virtuous (manly) life, and then finally superseded by the soul's identification with the passionate Virgin Bride of Christ.

So much by way of introduction to the central structure and argument of this study. As will be clear, my focus on erotic transformation still puts interest in what we now call "sexuality" (and attendant subjects) at the heart of discussion for the purposes of correcting misinformed accounts of Gregory's ascetical theology. However, in continuing that focus, I am also deeply concerned to show how these issues fit into the wider context of the transformation of desire more generally. Some important further methodological remarks are now in order. Let us turn our attentions first to some vital terminological caveats.

RESISTING THE CHARGE OF ANACHRONISM: SEMANTIC AND TERMINOLOGICAL CLARIFICATIONS

This study is framed by two central themes, and in both cases I am importing terms that Gregory does not himself use but whose application here is, I believe, justified. The first is erotic transformation; the second is ascetical theology.

Erotic Transformation

When I refer to erotic transformation, I do not wish to suggest that there is a stand-alone sphere of ethical and spiritual reflection that can be separated from Gregory's wider discussion of ascetical transformation. In fact, one of the very first findings of this study is that erotic transformation is integrated within the broader moral summons to practice all the virtues. In other words, the moderation of sexual desire has a significant influence on the myriad other aspects of the moral life. Likewise, ostensibly nonsexual ascetical practices, such as fasting and the renunciation of wealth, help to rechannel erotic desire (in its generalized sense) toward its true goal in Christ.

Although Gregory never explicitly speaks of erotic transformation in the way that I do in this study, it is the best overall term for his ascetical project. Even so, the term "erotic transformation" needs to be placed within a wider framework still—the explication of Gregory's whole approach to the management and transformation of the body and desire. It is here that I have found the term "ascetical theology"

indispensable for the purposes of this study. Here, also, it has to be acknowledged that this language has its own complications.

Ascetical Theology

There are two major difficulties with the expression “ascetical theology”. The first is that the term “asceticism” is a modern construct.¹¹ No equivalent term can be found in Gregory’s linguistic repertoire. Second, to speak of ascetical theology as a concretized category and to use it to describe Gregory’s often unsystematic thought could be seen to be potentially distorting. Let me address these points in turn while also defending the use of the language of ascetical theology in this study.

The first point lays this study open to the charge of anachronism by highlighting potential disjunctions between contemporary terminology and the language that Gregory himself uses. Gregory never refers to an ascetic person (*askētēs*). What is more, the substantive *askēsis* (“exercise,” “practice,” “training”), from which the modern term “asceticism” derives, appears no more than five times in total in Gregory’s writings,¹² and never with the technical meaning of a disciplined bodily practice. Although the verb *askein* appears much more often by comparison—seventeen times in total—it describes a wide range of practices. Some of the practices to which it refers inculcate virtue (*aretē*), piety (*eusebeia*), and justice (*dikaiosynē*).¹³ It is also used in reference to the practice of abstention from meat and wine,¹⁴ as well as the exercise of moderation in self-control (*enkrateia*).¹⁵ In these instances, we may be justified in speaking of ascetical practices. However, in the vast majority of cases, the verb *askein* describes various sorts of training, without spiritual or moral connotations, such as physical exercise,¹⁶ dancing monkeys(!),¹⁷ wool work,¹⁸ pedagogy,¹⁹ and the schooling of a child.²⁰ Gregory also uses the verb to describe the act of pouring new wine into old wineskins, following Matthew 9:17.²¹ Finally, on only one occasion, it refers to intentionally evil practices²² (rather than sins of omission in which one neglects, say, to practice justice).²³

If the language of asceticism is not in the forefront of Gregory’s mind, how then does he speak of the bodily disciplines of the life of virtue? His use of vocabulary is inconsistent, indeed sometimes exasperatingly so. Gregory refers on one occasion to the training (*paideia*) of “the chaste [*enkratēs*] and austere [*katesklēkōs*] and sensually unpleasant way of life” (*De tridui spatia*, GNO IX/1 296:19–22).²⁴ The use of *paideia* here is evocative of the pagan *paideia* of the philosophers of ancient Greece.²⁵ For Gregory, the life of monastics, whom he describes in the *Vita Sanctae Macrinae* as philosophers (*hoi philosophountes*, 37:8),²⁶ replaces the tradition of the *vita contemplativa*. He, therefore, describes active withdrawal from worldly affairs in the *De vita Moysis* as “a greater philosophy” (*De vita Moysis* I:19).²⁷ The training of the philosophic life is compared with, and ultimately superseded by, the ascetic undertakings of the monastic life, and thus is described in similar terms. In other references to ascetical practice, Gregory speaks of the need to exercise (*progymnazein*) oneself

through the ethical propaedeutics of the Book of Proverbs (*In Ecclesiasten*, GNO V 277:5).²⁸ Furthermore, in the *De vita Moysis*, Gregory refers to “the rough way of life according to self-control” (*hē tracheia diagōgē kat’ enkrateian*, *De vita Moysis* II:187)²⁹ and “the disciplined [*sōphronesteros*] life” (*De vita Moysis* II:279)³⁰ characterized by self-control (*enkrateia*) rather than self-indulgence (*tryphē*, *De vita Moysis* II:286).³¹ These references to ascetical discipline are by no means exhaustive. Many more terms and expressions will arise in the course of this inquiry. For now, we should simply be cognizant of the richly variegated language that Gregory uses in his writings, language that I have shown to be subsumable within the category ascetical theology for the purposes of this study.

A further difficulty with the language of asceticism is created by the fact that Gregory does not limit the worth and significance of ascetical practice to the monastic life. Everyone who pursues the life of virtue needs to discipline the flesh through bodily practices. Some terminological clarifications may be helpful at this stage. Even though Gregory never uses the term “monk” (*monachos*), he sometimes speaks of “the life of virginity” (*ho tēs parthenias bios*) as the lifelong pursuit of celibacy among monastics. At the same time, “true virginity” (*hē alēthēs parthenia*) refers to not just sexual self-restraint but the felicitous integration of sexual temperance (which enjoins lifelong celibacy onto monastics) with the whole cohort of virtues. The life of virtue (*hē kat’ aretēn politeia*) calls for sexual temperance (*hē sōphrosynē*), which requires total abstinence in celibacy and moderation in marriage. I shall therefore use expressions such as “the ascetic life,” “asceticism,” and “ascetical practice” in a generalized sense to refer to bodily practices undertaken by all Christians, not just monastics.

Now I turn to the second potential objection—that extracting certain themes from Gregory’s writings and subsuming them under the category of ascetical theology is an artificially systematizing endeavor. Gregory “disliked”³² the systematized syllogistic thinking that characterized Aristotle’s writings.³³ Even in his more “didactic and systematic” works—such as the *Oratio catechetica magna* (henceforth *Oratio catechetica*), the *Contra Eunomium*, and the *In illud: Tunc et ipse filius*—Gregory is “tempered by his rhetorical fervor” and “prefers to yield to the impulse of the moment.”³⁴ There is no treatise specifically on asceticism that conveniently systematizes his thinking in one place. Although Werner Jaeger believes that the *De instituto Christiano* is Gregory’s attempt “to expound his philosophy of the ascetic life as a whole,”³⁵ it does not in fact offer an exhaustive account of Gregory’s ascetical theology. Given that ascetical themes permeate most of his writings, it has been necessary in this study to examine his entire corpus for the sake of comprehensiveness.

How, then, may we counter the charge of imposing false systematicity onto Gregory’s thought? It is true that in discussing his ascetical theology, we are creating order out of a largely unsystematic constellation of ideas. However, a redress to the potential charge of anachronism may be sought in the distinction popularized

by anthropologists between “etic” analysis,³⁶ which “utilizes the investigator’s categories in explanation,” and “emic” analysis, which uses “native categories in explanation.”³⁷ These terms were derived from “phonetic” and “phonemic” by the American linguist and anthropologist Kenneth L. Pike in 1954.³⁸ The etic/emic distinction enables us both to attend to the particularities of Gregory’s rich and varied vocabulary and to offer a detailed, systematic presentation of his views on the body and desire without falling prey to distorting anachronisms.

So why retain the term “ascetical theology” at all? I do so in part because it has been used for centuries to denote a branch of Roman Catholic theology that has dealt with the practices of virtue and the mortification of bodily vice. It is thus a term of convenience that gives thematic unity to a range of concerns germane to this study’s interests in the body and desire. Another reason is that some of Gregory’s writings have been regarded as primarily ascetical in content. Jaeger places the *De instituto Christiano*, the *De professione Christiana ad Harmonium* (henceforth *De professione*), the *De perfectione Christiana ad Olympium monachum* (henceforth *De perfectione*), the *De virginitate*, and the *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*³⁹ under the heading *Opera ascetica* (GNO VIII/1), largely though not entirely following J. P. Migne’s *Patrologiae cursus completus (series Graeca)*, volume 46.⁴⁰ So by referring to Gregory’s ascetical theology, I am following a well-established tradition in the scholarship of his thought whilst also broadening its scope by examining Gregory’s entire corpus, not just those writings commonly labeled “ascetical.”⁴¹

There has been a particularly influential tendency in the literature to differentiate between Gregory’s ascetical and his mystical writings.⁴² This distinction, which is normative in Roman Catholic theology, first emerged as late as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,⁴³ and was popularized by the Italian Jesuit Giovanni Battista Scaramelli (1687–1752) in his two treatises *Direttorio ascetico* (1752) and *Direttorio mistico* (published posthumously in 1754).⁴⁴ In this study, however, the use of the term “ascetical theology” does not derive its rationale from a false disjunction between mysticism and asceticism.⁴⁵ The ascetical themes of inquiry are firmly situated within the context of Gregory’s theological commitments, including his core conviction that spiritual intimacy with Christ is inexorably linked to ascetical self-mastery.

Gender and Sexuality

The title of this study refers to the body and desire, and not to gender and sexuality, in order to avoid a range of theoretical associations in contemporary political and ethical discourse. Let me outline some of the difficulties that these two terms present.

There was a period in the 1960s and 1970s when “gender” was clearly distinguished from “sex” in Western second-wave feminism.⁴⁶ “Sex” referred to the biological/genital distinction between male and female, whereas “gender” referred to

cultural interpretations of sexual morphology in which masculine and feminine are assigned complementary characteristics. Notwithstanding the worth of this distinction as a political strategy in a particular period of the emancipation of women in the twentieth century, it is important for our present purposes to recognize that the registers of meaning upon which Gregory's linguistic repertoire operates are essentially distinct from the secularized categories of contemporary parlance.

For Gregory, "male" (*arrēn*) and "female" (*thēlys*), "man" (*anēr*) and "woman" (*gynē*), primarily denote physiological differentiations. He is influenced by the diversity of use of these terms in the Bible and in pagan sources, as we will soon see. The word *genos*, moreover, refers to one or other of the separate sexes in Gregory's *œuvre*—the division *kata genos* is the division of humanity into male and female. But Gregory is also interested in the moral and spiritual evocations of male and female characteristics that are not exclusive to one or the other sex. In other words, women can acquire male moral characteristics and vice versa. The adjectives *gynaikeios* ("womanish," "effeminate"), *malakos* ("soft," "effeminate"),⁴⁷ *anandros* ("cowardly," "wanting in manhood") describe various forms of vice, whereas the adjectives *andreios* ("manly," "courageous") and *andrōdēs* ("manly") refer to acts of virtue or virtuous dispositions. Gregory uses a range of verbs, such as *malakizesthai*, *thryptein*, and *katamalassein* (among others), which mean "to soften," "to make effeminate," "to enervate." To introduce the language of gender here is, I believe, misleading. Gregory never contrasts biology with culture as the modern reader is wont to do. The theological question at stake, for Gregory, is how fleshly desire, originally received in anticipation of the Fall as part of our animalistic nature, is redeemed in the spiritual life. The implications of that question for sexual morphology are considerable. If sexual desire is linked to embodied difference *qua* male and female, given to humanity for the purposes of reproduction in anticipation of the Fall, what will become of human genitalia at the general resurrection, when erotic desire will be refashioned in the service of contemplation?

Furthermore, the changes in male and female characteristics with which the soul variously identifies at different stages in spiritual ascent suggest that the term "gender" (as a unitary or stable category) is overall unhelpful in our discussions of Gregory's thought. A more detailed examination of male and female characteristics, both fleshly and spiritual, awaits us in the main body of this study. All that needs to be said now is that Gregory's theorization of the body and desire cannot be straightforwardly compared to the sex/gender disjunction popularized in Western second-wave feminism. Nor, indeed, does it map onto the more recent ideological blurring of these terms adopted by Judith Butler and others in her stead.

The language of sexuality poses similar challenges. Again, if we uncritically use the language of contemporary parlance, we risk introducing anachronistic theoretical presumptions into our field of inquiry. There is, for example, no equivalent term in Gregory's linguistic repertoire for sexuality, which in popular contempo-

rary usage denotes a diverse range of sexual experiences, practices, and phenomena. Even more problematic is “sexual orientation” (along with its associated terms, “heterosexuality,” “homosexuality,” and “bisexuality”), which refers to a settled and exclusive, or at least predominant, sexual desire for one or other sex, or indeed both. It has been widely acknowledged since the work of Michel Foucault that homosexuality is a modern construct. To impose it onto late antique descriptions of same-sex desire or practices is, therefore, at least potentially anachronistic. It is one of the more remarkable aspects of late antique thinking that desire is regarded as labile in a manner quite at odds with the typological notion of desire at play in the modern conception of sexual orientation. An area of potential misunderstanding is Gregory’s expostulations against effeminacy (in semantic usages discussed above), which has nothing to do with what we now call “homosexuality.” It refers to the weakening of one’s resolve against sin, and the succumbing to bodily pleasure as an immediate and false goal.

Gregory has a whole stock of words available to describe sexual desires and practices. The most obvious of these is *erōs* and its adjectival form *erōtikos*, whose usage is inspired by the Platonic dialogues, particularly the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. Key to these texts is the idea that erotic desire propels the soul toward the eternal Form of Beauty, and that the soul must be progressively purified before entering the divine realm. Other terms used by Gregory include *epithymia* (“desire,” “yearning”), *pothos* (“longing”), *epithymētikos* (“desiring,” “coveting,” “lusting after”),⁴⁸ *erasmios* (“beloved,” “lovable,” “lovely,” “love,” “desire”), *erastēs* (“lover”), *lyssa* (“craving”), *prospatheia* (“passionate attachment”), *pathos* (“passion”). These terms have a wider range of meaning than that of specifically sexual desire. They also describe fleshly cravings for food, money, fame, and wealth—and the soul’s erotic yearning for God.

Sexual intercourse is denoted by the following terms: *mixis* or *anakrasis* (“mixing,” “mingling”), *synapheia* (“combination,” “connection,” “union,” “junction”), *genesis* (“generation”)—hence *hē gennētikē tēs physeōs dynamis* (“the generative faculty of nature”)—*homilia* (“sexual intercourse”), and *syzygia* (“union,” “coupling,” “copulation”). The procreation of children is occasionally described as *paidopoiia*. Nuptial language pervades Gregory’s writings: *gamos* (“wedding,” “marriage”) and its adjectival form *gamikos* can refer to physical marriage and spiritual marriage with Christ. Gregory also uses *philandria* to describe marital love in a generalized (not exclusively sexual) sense.

In his discussions on desire as a general phenomenon, Gregory employs a range of terminology, though often inconsistently. For the purposes of clarity, I have divided some of Gregory’s most prominent terms into five categories. As with *erōs*, each word mentioned below can have both spiritual and harmartiological connotations depending on the context of usage. The exception is (5), which is used in the former sense only.

1. The pleasure and gladness engendered by desire: *hēdonē* or *hēdys* (“pleasure”), *apolausis* (“enjoyment”), *euphrosynē* (“gladness,” “enjoyment,” “merriment”).⁴⁹
2. The movements or impulses of the soul: *kinēsis* (“motion”), *hormē* (“impulse,” “drive”), *rhōpē* (“impulse”).
3. Appetite/desire/conation: *orexis* (which is often roughly equivalent to *epithymia*)—and *epheis*.
4. Passion/affection: *pathēma* (“affection,” “feeling”), *prospatheia* (“passionate attachment”), *hēdypatheia*, *pathētikos*, *empathēs*.
5. Love: *agapē* and its adjectival form *agapētikos*.

It is striking to find so many studies lapsing into the kind of terminological anachronism I am seeking to eschew. It is the purpose of this study to cut across two dominant categories of interpretation in the study of Gregory that reflect a growing chasm between patristics, on the one hand, and the newly formed discipline of early Christian studies, on the other hand.⁵⁰ My overarching intention is to resist a reductively historical reading of Gregory’s ascetical theology in which his moral and spiritual demands are rendered impotent to the ethical dilemmas of our contemporary age. At the same time, this inquiry also reacts against what may be characterized as an exoticized reading of asceticism in which Gregory becomes the cultural icon of postmodern rupture and subversion. The former, it seems to me, offers an overly contextualized reading of Gregory—so much so, in fact, that it contributes very little to contemporary philosophical and ethical discussion. The latter takes Gregory out of his late antique context and uses his ascetical theology to uphold nonascetical goals.

Since this study seeks to cut creatively across these two approaches, it is necessary to offer a brief genealogy of Western twentieth-century scholarship on Gregory to understand why his thought was brought into counterpoint with contemporary discussions of gender and sexuality.

THE RENAISSANCE OF SCHOLARLY INTEREST IN GREGORY OF NYSSA: FROM OBSCURITY TO APPROBATION TO EISEGESIS

The modern renaissance of research on Gregory of Nyssa has elevated the youngest and last of the Cappadocian Fathers from obscurity—or, at best, sporadic periods of interest—to contemporary approbation. Although Gregory now holds a special kind of renown within the Western academy for his contributions to discussions on gender, apophaticism, and desire, dramatically transforming how we think about the theology of the Church Fathers, this has not always been the case. In fact, Gregory’s Christology aroused suspicions of heterodoxy over the centuries,

because it could be equally cited by monophysites and dyophysites; his espousal of the doctrine of universal salvation (*apokatastasis*) was also problematic.⁵¹ These suspicions continued long into the twentieth century. Gregory's Christology has been described as "crude and tentative"⁵² and "basically Nestorian in tendency."⁵³ His famous Trinitarian analogy, which compares human nature to the divine essence and individual persons to the Trinitarian persons, has been viewed as "unfortunate" because of its "inescapably tritheistic" tendencies.⁵⁴ And his use of the language of mingling (*mixis*, *krasis*, and related cognate terms) in his Christology raised a number of concerns, not least at Chalcedon, for its associations with the very Apollinarianism that Gregory himself sought to condemn, causing it to be sidelined by Western histories of the development of dogma.⁵⁵

For many decades, Western scholarship treated Gregory as a (somewhat unwilling) dogmatician—and a bad one at that. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers such as Adolf von Harnack,⁵⁶ Friedrich Loofs,⁵⁷ Reinhold Seeberg,⁵⁸ and Karl Holl⁵⁹ tended to regard the period of the fourth century, including the thought of the Cappadocian Fathers themselves, in a very restricted dogmatic sense.⁶⁰ The whole venture of charting the history of dogma across the centuries, in which these scholars were involved, meant that the Cappadocian Fathers were perceived not as thinkers with varied theological and philosophical interests but chiefly as opponents of heresy, who contended against Arianism, Sabellianism, Eunomianism, Macedonianism, and so forth. In these studies, Gregory was considered second in importance to Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus, and moreover not nearly so sophisticated philosophically.⁶¹ By supposedly acquiescing to Greek philosophy, Gregory was thought to be one of many patristic theologians involved in what von Harnack called the Hellenization (*Hellenisierung*) of Christianity.⁶²

It is against this background of interest in dogma as well as Gregory's purported collaboration in the Hellenization of Christianity that a new phase of scholarship burgeoned in the mid-twentieth century. Three seminal studies from this period reveal an interest not in writing a *Dogmengeschichte* but in spirituality and mysticism: Jean Daniélou's *Platonisme et théologie mystique* (1944)—the most celebrated and influential of studies in this area of discussion; Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Présence et pensée* (1942); and Endre von Ivánka's *Hellenisches und christliches im frühbyzantinischen Geistesleben* (1948). These works and related monographs published at around the same time⁶³ explored the intersections between Gregory's account of spirituality and what may be regarded, in rather generalized terms, as Platonism or Neo-Platonism.⁶⁴ They represented a watershed in scholarship by offering a positive perspective on the influence of Greek thought on Gregory's theology.⁶⁵ Until then, as I have already remarked in the case of von Harnack, the *communis opinio*—against which there had been some objection⁶⁶—was that Gregory uncritically acquiesced to Greek thought. The tide of opinion was now beginning to change. Whereas Harold Cherniss had argued that Gregory "merely

applied Christian names to Plato's doctrine and called it Christian theology,⁶⁷ Daniélou was now claiming that Gregory had transformed his philosophical patrimony.⁶⁸

Of the three authors mentioned above, it was Daniélou (1905–74) whose work, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, became the seminal study on Gregory's mysticism.⁶⁹ Original to *Platonisme et théologie mystique* was its delineation of "les grands traits de la doctrine spirituelle,"⁷⁰ which include "la vie spirituelle," "les sens spirituels," "la théologie spirituelle" and "l'expérience mystique."⁷¹ Although Daniélou himself described "les sens spirituels"⁷² and *epektasis*⁷³ as "doctrines"—which no doubt owed something to Karl Rahner's treatment of the doctrine of the spiritual senses in the thought of Origen⁷⁴—the nature of Daniélou's inquiry differed substantially from the dogmatic focus of patristic scholarship at the time.

This shift in the portrayal of Gregory from dogmatician to mystical theologian faced considerable opposition from Ekkehard Mühlenberg,⁷⁵ whose views were largely followed by Ronald Heine.⁷⁶ Mühlenberg chastised Daniélou as well as von Balthasar and Walther Völker for thinking that Gregory has a notion of mystical experience whose origins could be traced back to the tradition of Platonic mysticism. Mühlenberg argued that the relationship between Gregory's theology and classical metaphysics is in fact agonistic. He also claimed that Daniélou had anachronistically conflated the doctrine of *epektasis* with descriptions of mystical union in the writings of later medieval theologians.⁷⁷

Daniélou's focus on "la théologie spirituelle" and "l'expérience mystique" has also been criticized for relying on potentially distorting and anachronistic taxonomies. The fraught term "mysticism," for instance, has no direct terminological equivalent in Gregory's works. Although he uses the adjective *mystikos* (from which "mysticism" derives), it does not carry the level of systematicity that Daniélou seems to think it does.⁷⁸ Furthermore, all efforts to isolate "la mystique grégorienne" as a distinct area of theorization seem to reflect what some have described as a "modern . . . separation" between philosophy (specifically, epistemology) and so-called spirituality.⁷⁹

Notwithstanding the legitimacy of these concerns—as well as the continued interest in the doctrinal⁸⁰ and philosophical⁸¹ coherence of Gregory's thought—the influence of Daniélou's study on scholarly perceptions of Gregory should not be underestimated. He released Gregory from the straitjacket of dogmatics and elicited a *frisson* of excitement in Gregory's theorization of spiritual desire. We may, at this juncture, wonder: What were Daniélou's original motivations for studying Gregory's account of desire in spiritual ascent? How do these motivations differ from late twentieth-century interests in Gregory's theology that emerged in predominantly Anglo-American scholarship? The movement that came to be known as *Nouvelle Théologie* offers some clues that enable us to answer the first of these questions.⁸²

The followers of the *ressourcement* movement challenged the neoscholastic disjunction between nature and supernatural grace that had reigned supreme in Roman Catholic theology since the promulgation of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* in 1879. Rejecting the neo-Thomistic scholasticism of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, these *nouveaux* theologians embarked upon a program of repristination known as *ressourcement*. They reexamined patristic and medieval texts to develop a sacramental ontology in which Grace permeates nature.⁸³ Henri de Lubac (1896–1991), one of the main protagonists of the movement, condemned the secularism thought to be implied in the notion of *pura natura*,⁸⁴ describing it as “Pelagian.”⁸⁵ He reread Thomas Aquinas⁸⁶ and argued that there is, for Thomas, a natural human desire for the vision of God.

If we look at the critical stance that *Nouvelle Théologie* took against the neo-Thomist interpretation of the relationship between Grace and nature, we begin to develop a clearer understanding of Daniélou's interests in Gregory.⁸⁷ Gregory's conviction that spiritual ascent is propelled by a desire rooted naturally in the soul was attractive to Daniélou because it seemed to undermine the neo-Thomist disjunction between Grace and nature. It is no surprise, therefore, that Daniélou wrote in *Platonisme et théologie mystique* that “l'expérience de la douceur de Dieu, du parfum divin est le fruit normal du progrès de la vie de la grâce en nous.” Gregory's description of a desire “from below” that abides in “la vie normale de la grâce sanctifiante” and gives rise to “le développement normal de la grâce sanctifiante” in the spiritual life led Daniélou to conclude that “l'expérience mystique” is not totally discontinuous from “la vie spirituelle normale.”⁸⁸ Gregory's mysticism and spirituality remain to this day, at least for some, the most captivating aspects of his theology.⁸⁹ But I am more interested here in how Daniélou's original interest in spiritual desire, shaped by the *ressourcement* movement, led to an unintended development—the Anglo-American fascination in Gregory's rendition of erotic desire for God and its attendant gendered imagery.

One problematic aspect of this strand of Anglo-American scholarship has been its sidelining of the role of ascetic discipline in shaping desire for God. This is not to say that Daniélou himself overlooked ascetical themes in Gregory's writings. In “la première partie” of his study, entitled *La lumière; ou, De la purification*,⁹⁰ Daniélou adumbrates Gregory's ascetical vision in relation to “la purification des passions,” “la conquête de l'apatheia,” “les tuniques de peau,” “la lutte contre les tentations,” and “la parrhésie.” But what primarily fascinated Daniélou was Gregory's mystical vision, especially its rendition of spiritual desire (*erōs* and *agapē*)⁹¹ and “l'amour extatique.”⁹² It is this emphasis that most exercised Anglo-American scholarship, in part because of coalescing influences at the time.

Two major strands of influence in the late twentieth century led to renewed fascination in the topic of asceticism in late antique studies.⁹³ The first was Foucault's three-volume *Histoire de la sexualité*, which highlighted the entanglements of power,

sexuality, and desire in late antique asceticism as well as modern-day psychoanalysis and was counterpoised by a number of critical voices, including that of Pierre Hadot.⁹⁴ The second strand of influence was the work of Peter Brown in general but particularly his book *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (1988), which underlyingly relied on Freudian and post-Freudian theorizations of erotic desire for its analysis of gender and sexuality in early Christian asceticism.⁹⁵ Equally influential was his work on the holy man,⁹⁶ which interpreted the extreme practices of Syrian ascetics⁹⁷ in light of the late antique patronage system. Brown's distinctive contribution to the study of asceticism was to regard the bodily disciplines of the ascetic life as an analytic tool⁹⁸ for understanding the cultural shifts in the fourth and fifth centuries of the Roman Empire, following in part the inspiration of Mary Douglas's work on the body and purity.⁹⁹ In doing so, Brown catalyzed what has been dubbed the "cultural turn"¹⁰⁰ in late antique studies, which was in part an intentional supersession of theological and patristic analyses of asceticism.

If we return in a more focused way to the twentieth-century reception of Gregory's thought, it is worth noting that he was initially derided by early feminist¹⁰¹ theologians for his supposed espousal of patriarchal ideals¹⁰² and viewed as only a slight improvement on Augustine,¹⁰³ who had generally become a disparaged figure in feminist theology. However, a more positive stance was taken by scholars such as Verna Harrison, Sarah Coakley, and Virginia Burrus, who were predominantly interested in Gregory's rendition of spiritual ascent, his use of male and female imagery, and his portrayal of erotic desire for the divine. All concerned sought to explore, albeit in sometimes quite different ways, Gregory's potential contributions to feminism and gender theory. This strand of scholarship seemed to draw on Daniélou's earlier compilation of excerpts from Gregory's mystical writings, translated into English by Herbert Musurillo in 1961 (in the U.S.A.) and 1962 (in the U.K.),¹⁰⁴ which facilitated greater access to these seminal texts within the Anglophone world. What was significant about *From Glory to Glory* and indeed *Platonisme et théologie mystique* was the attention they gave to the *De vita Moysis* and the *In Cant*, texts that became crucial for Verna Harrison, Sarah Coakley, and Virginia Burrus in their work on gender. So it is Daniélou's interests in spirituality and mysticism that first drew scholarly attention to Gregory's rendition of desire. That interest then came into confluence with a range of theoretical associations in the study of gender and sexuality that had begun to flourish in the Anglo-American academy in the late twentieth century.

One particularly interesting reading that self-consciously draws Gregory into contemporary theory is that of Virginia Burrus—but he is, I believe, drawn into a conversation that is anachronistic to his own. The problem with *Begotten, Not Made*, her most influential work, is that it subscribes to a libertine ethic of erotic and gender fluidity. Burrus uses various anachronistic expressions, such as "sublimated homoerot-

icism,”¹⁰⁵ “androcentrism,”¹⁰⁶ and “androgyny’s fluidity,”¹⁰⁷ without qualification. By her own reckoning, she seeks to produce “multiple and fluid” readings of the Church Fathers that will lead to “still queerer encounters.”¹⁰⁸ In the course of this study, I shall demonstrate that many of these predominantly Anglo-American studies—of which Burrus’s is arguably the most problematic—have fastened onto a mature stage of spiritual ascent, represented in Gregory’s most celebrated work, the *In Cant*, in which gender appears to be most fluid. In doing so, they have sidelined the ascetical implications of erotic transformation.

In this brief overview of scholarship on Gregory of Nyssa, I have described some salient currents of thought in the twentieth century. My aim has been to show that modern interests in gender and sexuality are indebted to the rediscovery of Gregory as a writer on spirituality and mysticism. But to get to grips with what Gregory says about the body and desire, it is important first to lay aside some contemporary Western presumptions that have animated scholarly discussion over the last few decades. To counter these anachronisms, I shall now attend to Gregory’s historical context by situating his thinking within the late antique milieu.

Prelude

The purpose of this prelude is to outline the political, ecclesial, and social context in which Gregory developed his ascetical theology. It is impossible to give an exhaustive description of that context. All I can undertake is a sketch of its defining contours in order to provide the historical backcloth to Gregory's theorization of the body and desire. I shall do so by examining the political and ecclesial situation that emerged in the aftermath of Constantine's conversion, the burgeoning monastic movement in the late fourth century, and the influence of Gregory's pioneering ascetical family on his thinking.

CHRISTIANITY AFTER CONSTANTINE'S CONVERSION

The fourth century was a key moment of transition in the history of Christianity. Once condemned by imperial might, the Church—in the wake of the conversion of Constantine—was now institutionally integrated within the Roman Empire. So recent was this development that the painful memory of persecution had not yet been set aside. Gregory's paternal grandfather and grandmother, Macrina the Elder, were themselves subject to the terrors of imperial oppression under Maximin Daia (ca. 306–13: *Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 2:1–8),¹ and Gregory's maternal great-grandfather died a martyr in the Decian persecution, “executed by the imperial wrath” (*Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 20:11–12).²

In the political and religious world in which Gregory lived, however, Church and empire were basically coterminous—and this often led to periods of enormous destabilization, especially in the later phases of the Arian Controversy. Disagreements sometimes arose between emperors and bishops, as in 356, where

Bishop Ossius of Cordoba chastised Constantius II (quoting Matthew 22:17–21) for trying to dictate a solution to the Christology debates. What was at play, here and on other occasions, was the disjunction between spiritual affairs and the earthly affairs of political leadership. This should not, however, be anachronistically confused with the separation of Church and state in contemporary political discourse.³

The incorporation of the Church into imperial life had several consequences. In the first instance, the empire's elites were absorbed into Christianity, which had become the official religion of the empire—and so, too, were their preoccupations with family lineage and prestige,⁴ with which Gregory took issue. Equally problematic was the retention of the late antique system of patronage. Wealth was redistributed from the traditional pagan religions to the Church in order to support its ceremonies, buildings, and newly enlarged clergy.⁵ Holy orders were also now imbued with imperial authority and prestige. The esteem in which bishops were held in the imperial Church sat “uneasily”⁶ with the value of humility in the Gospel proclamation—so much so, in fact, that the Church in its curial duties sought to curtail careerism, as we may put it today, by preventing bishops from translating from one see to another as a kind of promotion.⁷

The Church inherited the machinery of imperial power and wealth, and its clergy were sometimes enamored with the glamour of imperial glory. Such was the context in which Gregory's ascetical vision was formed. Gregory was morally and spiritually alarmed by the effects of imperialization on the Church. He thus sought to bring the ethos of the desert into critical counterpoint with a society that was only ever in the process of Christianization and never fully Christianized.⁸ It is no coincidence that in *Epistle XVII*, Gregory summons the presbyterate of Nicomedia to find a fitting successor to Bishop Patricius by eschewing the “high birth,” “wealth,” and “worldly luster” of potential candidates. None of the apostles, Gregory remarks, were “of consular rank or generals or prefects or noted for rhetoric and philosophy.” They were “poor and common folk who began in the humbler occupations” (*Ep. XVII:10*). Gregory also says that the Church of Rome was established by “Peter the Fisherman, who had none of this world's trappings to attract esteem,” and not by “some high-born and pompous senator of consular rank” (*Ep. XVII:13*).⁹ For Gregory, therefore, the possessions of worldly success—slaves, property, luxury, wealth—are as nothing in comparison with the spiritual riches accrued by Peter, the first bishop of Rome. To succumb to such facile obsessions with glory contradicts the apostolic ministry entrusted to bishops. In the same vein, Gregory in the *De vita Moysis* derides the self-indulgence (*tryphē*) of certain priests (*De vita Moysis II:287*)¹⁰ and condemns ambitious men who despite living a disciplined life selfishly and arrogantly thrust themselves into God's ministry (*De vita Moysis II:279*).¹¹ Here, too, one senses Gregory's contempt for clerics who overassimilated the ethos of the imperial state into their ministry.

We have discussed the moral predicaments posed by the imperialization of the Church—but what were their repercussions on the enforcement of the doctrine of the Church across the empire during this same period? In the study of what Harold A. Drake calls the “coercive turn” in the history of late antique Christianity,¹² many commentators have tended to view the conversion of Constantine in 312 as an event that ushered in a period of intolerance.¹³ Imperial power, it has been argued, was used to suppress the traditional religions of the Graeco-Roman world, inaccurately and inaptly called “paganism.”¹⁴ On this view, pagan tolerance, so called, was displaced by Christian intolerance.¹⁵

However, Drake has persuasively inveighed against the received historiography on the “coercive turn”. Although Constantine intervened on ecclesial matters in the case of the Donatists and Arius, his actions were always circumscribed by the Edict of Milan’s guarantee of religious liberty.¹⁶ His primary concern, therefore, was not to secure complete homogeneity of belief, as Diocletian had once sought and failed to accomplish, but to establish and guard “the safety, stability and security of the Empire.”¹⁷ As meritorious as this aspiration was, the execution of religious policies was not always peaceable. Constantine resorted to violent coercion in the case of Arius and other heretics; and by the end of the fourth century, Theodosius I withdrew support from state cults to establish Christianity, in its Nicene expression, as the imperial religion to which all Christian subjects owed allegiance.¹⁸ Crucial, too, in this period was Gratian’s disavowal of the title *pontifex maximus* in 392 (which Constantine had appropriated without demur) and his refusal to fund traditional cults.

The imperialization of the Church and the concomitant enforcement of the faith to the exclusion of other religious practices was a gradual process, which was not yet complete by the late fourth century.¹⁹ For this reason, the Council of Nicaea (325), at which the word *homoousios* was formally endorsed in its creedal statement, was a decisive moment in the history of Christianity. Not only did it purport to have wider than local authority, thus becoming the litmus test of orthodoxy within the empire. It also represented a “turning point”²⁰ in Christianity because of the emperor’s significantly increased involvement in proceedings: first, by convening the council, then financing it and lavishly providing for the bishops in attendance; and second, by ratifying its ecclesial anathemas by implementing disciplinary, imperial penalties. But, as is well known, the council was “singularly ineffective”²¹ in settling disagreements in Trinitarian theology across the empire,²² leading to a further century of disputes during which the Cappadocian Fathers were key players. These disputes culminated in further imperially sanctioned creedal elucidations at the Council of Constantinople (381), which Gregory himself attended. From the perspective of the political and ecclesial context of the fourth century, therefore, Gregory was writing during a period of considerable flux and transition. The same is true of monasticism also.

THE BURGEONING MONASTIC MOVEMENT

Notwithstanding the methodological value in differentiating between monasticism and asceticism,²³ we should not overlook the influence of the burgeoning monastic movement on Gregory's ascetical theology. Monasticism, as discussed above, distinguished itself from the worldly excesses of imperial wealth and glory in order to forge a new *modus vivendi*. It did so against the backdrop of a Church that was in danger of becoming "a pillar to carry the shaky structure of the old state and society."²⁴ Monasticism protected the Church "against individualistic dissolution" and gave it "a power which could be and was used against the State whenever it tried to interfere with the internal problems of the Church."²⁵ However, these ecclesiopolitical outcomes are only apparent in retrospect and arguably never took precedence over the intended aims of monastics themselves—that is, withdrawal from society, ascetic discipline, and contemplation. As Gregory himself puts it in the *De vita Moysis*, monastics live "a solitary life" among those of "like disposition and mind" (*De vita Moysis* II:18)²⁶ but always return to society to instruct the multitudes, as Moses had done, after "a long and exacting training" (*De vita Moysis* II:54):²⁷ "practical philosophy" (*praktikē philosophia*), Gregory says, "must be joined to contemplative philosophy [*theōria*]" (*De vita Moysis* II:200).²⁸

By the late fourth century, monasticism was gaining ground and influence in the Church, with centers in rural Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. But it was an "evolving phenomenon,"²⁹ in a state of flux and transition. At first a fringe and "predominantly peasant movement of the Egyptian deserts,"³⁰ it now started to become visible to the general urban populace. It also became more settled and institutionalized in the coenobitic life—a sequestered, self-sufficient form of monasticism that was later promoted in canonical legislation at the Council of Chalcedon, in 451.

A wealth of scholarship has sought to detail the evolution of monasticism in the early Church. Whilst it is not possible to reproduce all its insights, I have chosen to highlight three crucial developments in the history of monasticism for its relevance to Gregory's ascetical theology: the turn from the eremitic way of life to the coenobitic life, the relocation of monastics from the desert to the city, and the gradual incorporation of monasticism into the Church.

The mid-fourth century witnessed a shift in the expression of monasticism from the solitary life of the anchorite (eremiticism) to a life structured around the common life of a community (coenobitism). The two purported founders of monasticism—Anthony (ca. 254–356) and Pachomius (ca. 292–346)—represent *in nuce* the outworking of these two types of monasticism in an inchoate phase of its development in the deserts of Middle and Upper Egypt. It is the coenobitic (or, more accurately, semicoenobitic) style of monasticism, developed under Pachomius, that eventually gained precedence by the fourth century. However, these two figures were not the only significant monastic leaders at the time. Other well-

known coenobitic founders at this time, described by some as “semi-eremitical,”³¹ include Macarius the Egyptian (ca. 300–391), who established monasteries in Scetis, and Ammoun (ca. 295–353), who established monasteries in Nitria and Kelli.³² Nor, indeed, is it correct to assume that Anthony and Pachomius were associated in a clear-cut way with eremitic and coenobitic forms of monasticism, respectively; in fact, they share “many common roots.”³³

Notwithstanding the varieties of monasticism that were burgeoning in the third and fourth centuries, it was Gregory’s brother Basil of Caesarea who marked a watershed in its historical development by pioneering and systematizing ordered coenobitic monasticism. In his *Asketikon* (which is divided into the *Longer Rules* [the *Regulae fusius tractatae*] and the *Shorter Rules* [the *Regulae brevius tractatae*])—a collation of *ad hoc* rulings written in response to ascetics who had asked him how best to lead an ascetic life in community³⁴—Basil opposed dissipatory forms of the eremitic life (*RBas.* 3/LR 7; *RBas.* 70:3/SR 38),³⁵ describing solitude as “difficult and dangerous” (*RBas.* 3/LR 7),³⁶ possibly in opposition to Eustathius and his followers, who were condemned at the Synod of Gangra (340/1).³⁷ Basil’s solution was to set up monastic communities separately for men and women as well as some double monasteries, in which each community enjoyed real autonomy. Members would wear distinctive dress (*LR* 22/*RBas.* 11:1–31),³⁸ voluntarily renounce wealth (*SR* 85/*RBas.* 29),³⁹ and take lifelong vows to remain within the monastery (*LR* 14/*RBas.* 7:14–15).⁴⁰ Gregory refers to Basil’s monastic regulations in the *De virginitate* as “the particular counsels of such a life.” Gregory’s treatise focuses on the “more general precepts,” he says, without neglecting the finer “details” of the philosophic life (*De virginitate*, prologue 2:5–11).⁴¹ Basil’s *Asketikon* was therefore important for Gregory’s own thinking on the life of virginity.

The second development in monasticism is its geographical shift from the desert—the original “ascetic space” of Egyptian monasticism⁴²—to the city.⁴³ In the case of Basil’s monastic “experiment,”⁴⁴ as Peter Brown puts it, monastic communities settled in villages and cities, or their hinterlands, serving the poor in the urban environs. Related to Basil’s monastic experience, though distinct from it, was the establishment of the *Basileiados* or *Basileias* (as it would later be called) or *ptōchotropheion* (“poorhouse”), a neologism of Basil’s making.⁴⁵ The *Basileiados*, a colony in close proximity to the city whose purposes were to feed and provide refuge for the destitute poor,⁴⁶ was established shortly after Basil’s accession to the bishopric.⁴⁷ It functioned as a *xenodocheion* (“hospice”) and *katagōgion* (“rest house,” “dwelling place”). Although the *Basileiados* was distinct from the community of monastics that Basil established in the Pontus on the banks of the river Isis, its existence reveals Basil’s concerns for the poor and his desire to bring monasticism closer to the urban populace.

The relocation of monasticism from the desert to the city resulted not only in “a blurring of frontiers”⁴⁸ but also in an increase in the number of those wishing to

embrace the monastic life.⁴⁹ This, in turn, precipitated a shift in the social demographics of monastics. Monasticism, which had once drawn its members from “a predominantly rural and peasant recruitment pool,” now included “members of the noble and wealthy urban classes,”⁵⁰ to which Basil, Macrina the Younger, and Gregory—and indeed most bishops in the fourth century⁵¹—notably belonged.⁵²

A third, and final, consideration for our discussion of the early development of the monastic movement is the gradual incorporation of monasticism within the institutional fabric of the Church. The impetus for this was the growing authority and influence of monks, whose counsel and instruction were sought after by local communities of believers. Monasticism constituted a considerable locus of power,⁵³ a point brought into acute if at times distorting⁵⁴ focus by Peter Brown’s influential work on “the holy man.”⁵⁵ Monasticism also became implicated in doctrinal debates that at times threatened the unity and cohesion of the imperial Church.⁵⁶ The influence that monks yielded in unofficial (nonordained) capacities sometimes led to antagonisms between monks and their priests and bishops.⁵⁷ Despite the resistance of those like Pachomius to ordination, monks eventually accepted ordination as deacons and priests,⁵⁸ but to what extent this occurred in the East is still unclear.⁵⁹ It was the Council of Chalcedon, in 451, that definitively and legislatively curtailed the authority of monks by granting bishops greater powers of supervision over them.⁶⁰

Basil belonged to a group of leaders who, like Athanasius and John Chrysostom,⁶¹ brought monasticism into the ambit of the imperial Church. One of the ways Basil achieved this was through a “landmark”⁶² piece of monastic legislation in the *Regulae fusius tractatae*. Here he insists that monks, like consecrated female virgins, should profess their vows before a bishop (*RBas.* 7:4/LR 15).⁶³ Note, also, that in *Epistle CXCIX*, Canon 19, those who enroll in the order of monks but later renounce their celibate vows are “subjected to the punishment of fornicators.”⁶⁴ In *Epistle CCXVII*, Canon 60, the matter is treated more seriously, the penalty now being equivalent to adultery, just as in the case of a woman who professes virginity but later breaks her vow.⁶⁵ Breaking monastic vows, therefore, carried very serious penalties, because the profession of celibacy among men had become, under Basil’s influence, more formalized.

One of the results of the assimilation of monasticism into the Church was the reconciliation of ecclesial leadership with the life of contemplative withdrawal (*anachōrēsis*) among monks, an accomplishment that Gregory of Nazianzus attributes to Athanasius.⁶⁶ This meant, in effect, that monks were now overseen by bishops, and that monastic and ascetic values were incorporated into the episcopacy.⁶⁷ Gregory was a key player in this development. Though never a monk,⁶⁸ Gregory brought the asceticism of the desert with all its wealth of insight and the practices of the monastery into the context of his episcopal ministry. He also sought to inculcate among ordinary married Christians a greater awareness of the transformative capabilities of ascetical practice, as we will soon see.

Gregory learned a great deal about monasticism and the ascetic life from Basil's fraternity (*adelphotēs*) and the ascetical community (also called *adelphotēs*), comprising both men and women, established by Macrina the Younger in Annisa.⁶⁹ It is to these distinct groupings of ascetics that I now turn in the final section of this prelude.

THE ASCETICISM OF GREGORY'S FAMILY

Gregory was part of an aristocratic family whose ascetical prestige was well known. I have already highlighted Basil's considerable influence on Gregory's ascetical thinking. Another source of influence was the family's early association with Eustathius of Sebaste, with whom they were acquainted whilst resident in Neocaesarea,⁷⁰ which later became, for Gregory and his family, a source of embarrassment.

Eustathius had a large following, which spread across northern Anatolia from Constantinople to Armenia during the late 330s. The teaching of Eustathius and his followers was excoriated for its ascetical excesses by the Synod of Gangra, metropolis of Paphlagonia, in 340/1.⁷¹ These excesses included (among other things) an abhorrence of marriage and married Christians, blanket condemnations of the consumption of meat, claims that married presbyters could not perform valid sacraments, calls to abandon the family in pursuit of the ascetic life (women would leave their husbands, parents their children, children their parents), and the mixing of sex roles (for instance, women would wear men's apparel and cut off their hair). Eustathius was also subject to ecclesial sanctions in Neocaesarea, one of which deposed him by the decision of Eusebius, bishop of Constantinople, "for unfaithfulness in the discharge of certain duties."⁷² The teachings of the Synod of Gangra had a considerable influence on Basil's *Asketikon* and Macrina's community at Annisa.⁷³ Gregory, as we shall later see, seems at times to distance himself from the ascetical excesses of the teaching of Eustathius. Indeed, the family's condemnation of Eustathius may owe some of its intensity to their embarrassment for having associated with the heretic in the first place.⁷⁴

Let me now say something about Gregory's education, his initial career as a rhetorician, and his conversion to the life of asceticism after the death of his wife. At one point, Gregory claims that he was "apprenticed to [his] brother [Basil] only a short time" and could not therefore claim a "munificent supply in the instructions of [his] teachers" (*Ep. XIII:4*)⁷⁵—but this may be an exaggeration on Gregory's part. The reality is that Gregory's writings reveal a sophisticated level of knowledge of classical literature, especially the works of Homer and the writers of the Second Sophistic, as well as Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Plotinus, Posidonius, and indeed many other philosophers. Gregory also had a solid grasp of medicine,⁷⁶ evidenced by his familiarity with the works of Galen as well as the thought of

Hippocrates and the physiological writings of Plato and Aristotle.⁷⁷ It has even been suggested that Gregory may have studied medicine for a while.⁷⁸

Gregory takes pagan philosophy as stock-in-trade. However, as will become apparent in this study, even though he often alludes to various rival possibilities from ancient philosophy, he refuses at the same time to be defined by any of them, always giving biblical authority the final word. For Gregory, philosophy never trumps the Bible, because, as he vividly puts it in the *De vita Moysis*, pagan education is “always in labor but never gives birth” (*De vita Moysis* II:10).⁷⁹

After Gregory completed his studies in the ancient *paideia*—possibly in both Neocaesarea and the city of Caesarea⁸⁰—his sister Macrina embraced “the philosophic and immaterial way of life” (*Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 11:6)⁸¹ at the family estate at Annisa—a double monastery in which Macrina (*hē megalē*, lit. “the great one”) was the founder and Peter headed the male side of the community (*Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 37:11–12).⁸² Naucratus, another of Gregory’s siblings, lived a life of solitude and voluntary poverty in the neighboring forests (*Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 8:1–34).⁸³ He died tragically in a hunting accident.

Basil, in contrast to Naucratus, was not an initial convert to the ascetic life. He had undertaken the classical *paideia* in Athens and gained considerable oratorical skill, for which he attracted widespread acclaim. When he returned to the new family home in Pontus in 357 or 358,⁸⁴ he discovered that it had become an ascetic community. He was upbraided by his sister for intellectual arrogance and pride. He then underwent a conversion, renounced his worldly career, and joined the family monastery for a short time. He withdrew by himself to reflect upon the worldly pomposity of his life’s labors (*Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 6)⁸⁵ and afterwards resolved to pursue a life in the Church. He was ordained to the presbyterate of Eusebius of Caesarea in 362 and elected to the See of Caesarea in 370. It is clear, therefore, that Gregory’s theorization of the disciplines of the ascetic life emerged from what Anna Silvas calls “the domestic ascetic movement,” which had gained considerable ground in Anatolia and throughout the Mediterranean.⁸⁶ But Gregory was not a monk and often felt estranged from the philosophic way of life.

Despite the ascetic, spiritual, and ecclesial prestige of those nearest to him in his family, Gregory—initially at least—sought a different path in life. He became a rhetorician and was admonished for doing so by Gregory of Nazianzus.⁸⁷ Gregory did not, however, lose all ties with the Church. Whilst embarking upon a worldly career, he exercised the office of reader, a nonclerical position in the Church.

Gregory’s decision to marry placed him at some distance from the way of life that he would later come to appreciate and desire more than anything else. In a revealing passage in the *De virginitate*, Gregory claims that knowledge (*gnōsis*) of virginity is now (*nyini*)—personally, “for me” (*emoi*)—vain (*anonētos*) (*De virginitate* III:1:5–7).⁸⁸ This statement is probably hyperbolic; a few lines later, Gregory claims that “some special knowledge of virginity” may yet be acquired, albeit indi-

rectly, by those who are not virgins (*De virginitate* III:1:16–20).⁸⁹ Despite being separated from “the boast of virginity to which one cannot return” and having embarked upon “the worldly life” (*De virginitate* III:1:11–14),⁹⁰ Gregory uses the first person plural and claims that “we” came to recognize (*gnōrizein*) the beauty of virginity only *post factum* (*hysteroboulia*, *De virginitate* III:1:20–21).⁹¹ “We” are mere spectators (*theatai*) and witnesses (*martyres*) who behold the blessings of virginity from a distance (*De virginitate* III:1:14–16).⁹² There is little doubt that Gregory is referring here to bodily virginity and not, in some wider spiritual sense, to unalloyed desire for God. This is apparent from his invocation of the memory of the “saints who have gained their glory in celibacy [*agamia*]” (*De virginitate*, prologue 2:13–14),⁹³ who are exemplars of virginity.

Gregory appears to have regretted his decision to marry, which is potentially indicated by the use of the dative *moi* in the following excerpt: “Why—in relation to me—are you so curious [*Ti moi polypragmoneis*]; about those who have had intentions along these lines but have faltered, and why, for this reason, do you despair on the ground that it is not practical?” (*De virginitate* XXIII:7:1–3).⁹⁴ Likewise, in chapter IX, Gregory speaks passionately of those “who, from an early age, appeared to be lovers of moderation, whose participation in what seemed lawful and acceptable pleasures was the cause of their living a sordid life” (*De virginitate* IX:1:22–26).⁹⁵ Could this, too, be a candid recognition of his failure to moderate sexual pleasure in marriage?

Some commentators have speculated that Gregory’s wife was the same Theosebeia mentioned in Gregory of Nazianzus’s *Epigram* 154.⁹⁶ If so, it would mean that after becoming bishop, Gregory lived with his wife as a sister by disengaging from sexual relations. A more plausible proposal, based on Gregory of Nazianzus’s *Epigrams* 161 and 164, is that Theosebeia was his “celibate, ascetic sister, who lived in close association with him at Nyssa.”⁹⁷ It has also been argued that the Cynegius of *Epistle* XIII:3 was Gregory’s son,⁹⁸ but this is far from certain. Gregory could be referring to a spiritual sort of sonship,⁹⁹ as at *Epistle* VIII:4,¹⁰⁰ where Gregory’s friend Alexander is also called “son.” Silvas suggests that the detailed description of the death of a child in the *De virginitate* reflects Gregory’s residual feelings of anguish for his deceased child.¹⁰¹

A word of caution is in order here. Despite Silvas’s bold and impressive reconstruction of the events of Gregory’s life, in which she believes that the deaths of Gregory’s wife and child are alluded to in chapter III of the *De virginitate*,¹⁰² we know *in re* surprisingly little of Gregory’s personal history. While his use of the first person plural may be a periphrasis for “I” (the slippage from the first person singular to the first person plural in the opening of chapter III of the *De virginitate* would seem to support this proposal), it is precarious to rely on this alone to develop an account of the life of Gregory. As Silvas herself admits: “We are in the realm of informed guesswork.”¹⁰³ At the same time, it is overstated to argue, as Michel

Aubineau does, that reading any personal significance in the *De virginitate* is an “erreur d’interprétation.”¹⁰⁴ Aubineau underscores the rhetorical genre employed by Gregory in the *De virginitate*, in which the ordeals of marriage are recalled according to the conventions of a diatribe.¹⁰⁵ However, Aubineau’s assessment—I would agree with Silvas here—imposes a rather undeserved charge of “insincerity”¹⁰⁶ onto Gregory’s treatise.

So what happened to Gregory’s wife? Gregory’s vivid description of conjugal misfortune (*symphora*) and reversal of fortune (*metabolē*) in the *De virginitate* cannot be treated as an unassailable source of biographical information. After all, just as he describes the heartbreak of losing one’s wife, so also does he describe the profound sense of abandonment felt by one whose husband has died—an experience he could have known only at second hand (*De virginitate* III:6:19–35).¹⁰⁷ Of course, it was not unusual in the fourth century to hear of Christians devoting themselves to a life of sexual abstinence after marriage.¹⁰⁸ The funeral oration of Gregory of Nazianzus for his sister, Gorgonia, for instance, relates that she consecrated herself wholly to God after bearing children and won over her husband to a life of sexual continence (*Oratio* VIII:11).¹⁰⁹ Nor, indeed, was this a uniquely Christian trend at the time. Note, for instance, the praise that Emperor Julian the Apostate receives from the pagan historian Ammianus Marcellinus (ca. 330–91) for embracing celibacy at the age of twenty-eight when his wife died (*Res Gestae* 25:4:12). It is perhaps significant that Gregory’s wife makes no appearance in any of his writings as this may give further poignancy to his descriptions of spousal death in chapter III of the *De virginitate*. But any reconstruction of Gregory’s personal history, which largely rests on *argumenta ex silentio*, can only ever remain at the level of conjecture.

CONCLUSION

This brief discussion of the ecclesial, political, and monastic context in which Gregory lived will suffice as an overview of the historical framing of his ascetical theology. At relevant junctures in this study, I shall refer to our discussions in this section to seek clarification on the historical and social context of the fourth century. With these insights in hand, we are now well placed to begin our inquiry in earnest, starting with the early phase of Gregory’s literary career.

PART ONE

The Early Phase, 371–September 378

*The Integrative Significance of the
Body in the Life of Virtue*

OUR DISCUSSIONS OF THE EARLY PHASE of Gregory's literary career will be focused, for the main part, on the much-contested meanings of marriage and virginity in Gregory's very first writing, the *De virginitate*. This is partly because of the *De virginitate*'s uniqueness within the pagan and Christian worlds, and partly because it represents the theological touchstone, for Gregory, of a distinctive set of reflections on the body and desire. After I have headed off significant misinterpretations of the *De virginitate*, I find myself returning to this early treatise when discussing other ascetic themes, otherwise not ostensibly related to that of erotic transformation. As will become clear, our discussion of the body and desire would be incomplete if we focused exclusively on sexual renunciation. Doing so would close us off to the richness of Gregory's integrationist ethic, in which the various bodily disciplines of the ascetic life are reciprocally interdependent.

Part One will be structured in the following way. First, I shall discuss the *De virginitate* and its teaching on marriage and virginity, and explain why, for Gregory, the life of virginity is intended to supersede the chaste pederasty elaborated in Plato's writings. Second, I shall situate Gregory's attitudes toward sexual desire within the wider context of his reflections on bodily vices and virtues. Third, as a postscript to Part One and a transition to Part Two, I shall adumbrate Gregory's emerging theory of desire in counterpoint with these foregoing areas of reflection.

Marriage, Celibacy, and Pederasty

MARRIAGE AND CELIBACY

Why Is Marriage Problematic?

The comparative worth of marriage and virginity in Gregory's *De virginitate* is a highly contested area of discussion.¹ Mark Hart's thesis that Gregory's descriptions of the trials of marriage are ironic has been particularly influential. For Hart, "marriage" and "virginity" must not be taken literally. The former signifies a life of "passionate attachment" to material pleasures, whereas the latter represents a life of "nonattachment" and thus undivided devotion to God.² As such, physical marriage is compatible with the life of contemplation as long as spouses have virginal desires for God. Hart goes so far as claiming that the conjugal life can bear a "greater resemblance to divine life than celibacy in its role as benefactor and provider for the community and its willingness to assume bodily burdens."³

Without reproducing all the arguments that inveigh against Hart's reading of the *De virginitate*, I wish here to make two exegetical observations that call his thesis into question. First, Gregory's remarks at the start of chapter XVIII—"Therefore, let what has been said here by the Lord ['Be wise as serpents and guileless as doves' (Matthew 10:16; Luke 10:3)] be the conviction in the life of everyone, *especially* among those who are approaching God through virginity" (*De virginitate* XVIII:1:1-3; emphasis mine)⁴—indicate that there is a specific subset of Christians who have embraced physical virginity. Virginity is not, therefore, so capacious in its application that it includes anyone who practices detachment from material pleasure. Second, I believe Hart misreads a crucial passage from the *De virginitate* (IV:1:8-17) to support his thesis that marriage is a "metaphor for passionate attachment in general," just as

virginity supposedly refers to “a general attitude of nonattachment possible also in marriage.”⁵ A close reading of the text reveals that Gregory is not identifying marriage with “human evils . . . greed, envy, anger, hatred, the desire for empty fame, and all such things,” but placing marriage alongside these other forms of worldliness.

The mistake Hart makes is to overstate Gregory’s insistence on the wider demands of moral purity in the life of virginity. Hart is not wrong to emphasize the importance of this theme for Gregory. Even if “eagerness for virginity” is “the foundation for the life of virtue,” the ultimate goal is to ensure that “*all* the products of virtue” are built upon it (*De virginitate* XVIII:1:27–29; emphasis mine).⁶ Physical virginity is not, in other words, an end in itself, but the means of accruing the virtues *in toto*: “it is fitting for the one aiming at the great goal of virginity to be uniformly virtuous and for purity to be evident in every aspect of his life” (*De virginitate* XVIII:5:9–12).⁷ For Gregory, moral purity is more than just bodily continence—but this is not to say, as Hart does, that virginity no longer refers to lifelong sexual abstinence and can be applied to married Christians. To claim, as Hart does, that virginity and marriage are metaphors undermines the specific demands and difficulties associated separately with marriage and celibacy in the *De virginitate*. This is an area of discussion to which I now turn.

The Moral Challenges of Marriage

As noted in the prelude, Gregory admits to not having fulfilled the goals of virginity in its classic sense. No sooner does he mention his inadequacy in this regard than he discusses the sundry calamities that assail marriage. So what is problematic about marriage? Whereas Peter Brown thinks that Gregory’s concerns are primarily linked to his preoccupation with death,⁸ I think that this is one concern among many. It is equally false to claim that Gregory’s espousal of virginity is an avoidance of family life, in which there is “one darn thing after another” and thus no time or space for “contemplative quiet.”⁹ In this section, I shall enumerate the full range of moral and spiritual challenges of marriage and then show that for Gregory, these challenges are not totally insurmountable.

One of Gregory’s worries about the conjugal life relates to the transience of human life, which constantly threatens the companionship of spouses. Unlike Clement of Alexandria,¹⁰ Gregory sees companionship, not procreation, as the principal purpose of marriage: “Truly, what is chiefly [*to kephalaion*] sought after in marriage is the joy of living with someone [*sympiōsis*]” (*De virginitate* III:2:7–9).¹¹ It was Musonius Rufus (ca. 30–62 C.E.), the Roman Stoic philosopher of the first century, who argued that “perfect companionship [*sympiōsis*] and mutual love of husband and wife” are the primary goals of marriage. He reasoned that children could be born from “any other sexual union, just as in the case of animals” (*Discourses* XIIIa).¹² However for Gregory, whilst *sympiōsis* is a source of joy in marriage, it is also problematic. Whoever seeks security and stability in human

symbiōsis, rather than the “incorruptible Bridegroom” (*De virginitate* III:8:19),¹³ will be disappointed. A man’s wife may die, resulting in turmoil and discontent (*De virginitate* III:6:19–8:13).¹⁴ If one simply concedes the possibility of such misfortune, one cannot even look at the face of one’s spouse without feeling dread for the future (*De virginitate* III:3:24–41).¹⁵ Children may also die in tragic circumstances (*De virginitate* III:5:3–28).¹⁶ Confronted with the transience of life, Gregory believes that one’s only hope is in the life hereafter. At least there, the torments of the body will be overcome, and widowhood (*chēreia*) and orphanhood (*orphania*) will be no more (*De mortuis*, GNO IX/1 37:5–6). The life of virginity, by contrast, is immune to all these tragedies (*De virginitate* III:8:17–25).¹⁷

The second difficulty with marriage is that it competes with God for one’s time and energy. At one point, Gregory asks, “How is it possible for anyone passionately in love [*prospathein*] with anything in this life finally to achieve what he longs for [*pothein*]?” (*De virginitate* IV:7:12–13).¹⁸ Later he asserts, “we should not squander our power of desire [*epithymia*] on any of the things that distract us and are considered beautiful” (*De virginitate* XI:3:2–4).¹⁹ The problem is that everything but God is mutable (*De virginitate* IV:8:1–4),²⁰ including one’s spouse. The desire for mutable things takes our attentions away from loving God. When one’s concerns for mutable things gain precedence in one’s life, “the measure of desire”—as Gregory later remarks in the *In Basilium fratrem*—is “reduced from God to material things” (11:23–25).

Michel Aubineau argues that Gregory’s discussion of the tragedies of marriage is a sophistic rhetorical strategy. But Michel René Barnes takes an altogether different tack. He believes that Gregory is not exaggerating the ordeals of marriage and that he has firsthand experiences of its manifold difficulties.²¹ Barnes also argues that Gregory is cognizant of a debate between Musonius Rufus, who thought that married men could embark upon the philosophic life, and Musonius’s student Epictetus, who thought that they could not be both philosophers and spouses. For Barnes, Gregory “accepts the Stoic diagnosis of marriage as invasive and intrinsically material, but supplies one other fact, a fact clear for Musonius Rufus but lost by Epictetus: marriage is in itself an occasion—or at least an opportunity—for comfort and joy.”²² It is precisely this mixture of joy and pain that makes marriage so tragic. It is made up of “a constant mingling of opposites,” Gregory writes: “laughter moistened by tears, grief mingled with joy, death, everywhere present, fastening itself upon each of our pleasures” (*De virginitate* III:3:21–24).²³

However, I believe Barnes is mistaken on two accounts. First, Gregory, it seems to me, is exaggerating the ordeals of marriage, though never to the point of sounding unrealistic. I shall return to this point in the next section. Second, it is Paul, not Epictetus, who leads Gregory to present “the life of virginity” as a “nobler state” (*De virginitate*, prologue 1:2–6),²⁴ as evidenced by the remark that “He who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, whereas he who is married is concerned about things of the world” (*De virginitate* IX:2:17–18; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:32–33).²⁵

Barnes never refers to the part played by 1 Corinthians 7 in the *De virginitate*, even though the letter that prefaces the treatise opens with a warning of “the many distractions associated with what the divine apostle calls ‘the married life.’”

There are several other passages in the *De virginitate* that reveal the importance of 1 Corinthians 7 in Gregory’s thinking. For Gregory, a person who has “turned to this world in his thought, and who worries about it, and busies himself with being pleasing to man” will not be able to fulfill “the first and great commandment of the Lord,” namely that one should “love God with your whole heart and strength” (*De virginitate* IX:2:9–14; cf. Matthew 22:37 = Mark 12:33; Luke 10:27; Romans 12:1).²⁶ Later in the same treatise, Gregory differentiates between two types of marriage—spiritual and physical (*De virginitate* XX:3:13–14)²⁷—and claims, on the basis of 1 Corinthians 7:32–33, that one cannot participate in both simultaneously. Even if we accept that the discussion between Musonius and Epictetus on marriage in the contemplative life inflects Gregory’s thinking on marriage and celibacy, it should be ranked second in priority to 1 Corinthians 7. It is Paul, then, who sets the precedent for regarding marriage as a distraction from spiritual affairs.

This leads us to the third difficulty that Gregory associates with marriage—namely its entanglement in family honor, prestige, and inheritance, which rest upon the sins of envy (*phthonos*) and pride (*hyperēphania*). Gregory’s statements in this regard sometimes seem absolutist and unnuanced:

1. The desire to excel other people: this difficult disease of pride . . . has marriage as its original cause (*De virginitate* IV:2:11–15).²⁸
2. It is not possible for the ambitious man not to blame his children for his misery, or for the man with a mad desire for fame, or a lover of honor not to refer to his family as the cause of his difficulty, in order not to seem inferior to his ancestors and in order to be considered important in the future, leaving behind accounts of his career for his descendants (*De virginitate* IV:3:1–6).²⁹
3. The other weaknesses of the soul, envy and malice and hatred and any other such thing, . . . go along with the distraught aspects of married life (*De virginitate* IV:3:6–11).³⁰

These passages need to be read within the context of the progression of the treatise in which Gregory’s descriptions of the ordeals of marriage are exaggerated and then later moderated—a point to which I shall shortly return. A less hyperbolic expression of these sentiments is found in the *De beatitudinibus*. Here, disordered pride in one’s family is placed alongside the boast of riches and fame, which Gregory describes as “things in which human honor consists” (PG 46 1217:42–46).³¹ Pride in one’s family is not, therefore, the cause of other sinful practices, which is what the *De virginitate* at times seems to imply.

Fourth, and finally, marriage is entangled in the fraught task of producing and rearing children. Procreation, Gregory argues, functions as an antidote to death,

but it ultimately exacerbates the problem that it seeks to overcome by creating children who will, at some point, die: “the bodily procreation of children . . . is more an embarking upon death than upon life for man” (*De virginitate* XIV:1:3–5).³² Virginité, however, puts an end to the succession of death, replacing physical fecundity with spiritual fecundity. Since bodily generation (*genesis*) will end at the resurrection (*In inscriptiones* II:53),³³ it is important, Gregory says, to appreciate a different kind of procreation (*paidopoiia*, *De mortuis*, *GNO* IX/1 63:17)—that is, spiritual fecundity (*GNO* IX/1 63:19–27), which he discusses in more detail in chapters XIII and XIV of the *De virginitate*.

An important clarification is in order here. For Gregory, the worldly entanglements of marriage are neither inevitable nor insurmountable. What he has done is exaggerate these ordeals in the early part of the *De virginitate* to challenge his readers’ presumptions about both virginité and marriage. To substantiate this point (and thus to return to my first point of disagreement with Barnes), I shall demonstrate that for Gregory, virtuous marriage is compatible with the life of contemplation. Then I shall examine his rhetorical intentions in exaggerating the ordeals of the conjugal life.

The Compatibility of Marriage and Contemplation

Various pieces of evidence can be adduced in favor of the view that for Gregory, marriage can and indeed should coexist with the life of contemplation and prayer.

It is striking, first, that Gregory appeals to the lives of Isaac and David, both married, to highlight the value of ascetic discipline. The patriarch, Isaac, is praised for deferring marriage until late in life, because in doing so he prevented marriage from becoming a deed of passion (*De virginitate* VII:3:7–14).³⁴ Furthermore, although various scriptural passages attest David’s having had several wives³⁵ and concubines,³⁶ Gregory is nonetheless content to portray him as one who “saw that incredible and incomprehensible beauty in a blessed ecstasy.” He was “released from the limitations of the flesh” and came to “the contemplation of the incorporeal and intelligible through thought alone” (*De virginitate* X:2:3–9).³⁷ Gregory does not mention David’s conjugal status, but he could hardly have been ignorant of it. The portrayal of Isaac and David as exemplars of moral virtue in a treatise on virginité suggests to me that virtuous marriage can replicate the spiritual outcomes of virginité.

Another passage—outside the *De virginitate* and from the middle phase of Gregory’s literary career—later confirms that physical virgins are not alone in enjoying the spiritual outcomes of virginité. In the *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*, Gregory mentions the widow Vetiana, who “made the great Macrina the guardian and guide of her widowhood, and stayed much of her time with the virgins, learning from them the life of virtue” (28:5–8).³⁸ Gregory does not explicitly say whether people who are married can enjoy the same degree of proximity to the virgins as

Vetiana did. But what is clear is that someone who is not a virgin can learn about the life of virginity and appropriate its manifold blessings.

If I am right to think that virtuous marriage can mirror the moral and spiritual outcomes of the life of virginity, this begs the question how ascetic discipline can be incorporated into the conjugal life. In one particularly illuminating passage in the *De virginitate*, Gregory refers to the requirement of married Christians to moderate the pursuit of sexual pleasures and prioritize spiritual concerns (*De virginitate* VII:3:3–7).³⁹

We, on our part, know this about marriage, that the zeal and the desire for divine things come first, but that one should not scorn the moderate [*sōphronōs*] and measured [*memetrēmenōs*] use of the duty of marriage.

The expression “the duty of marriage” seems to refer to sexual intercourse and perhaps also to 1 Corinthians 7:5, in which Paul forbids the arbitrary refusal of sexual intercourse in marriage. How, then, do we decide whether sexual intercourse is “moderate and measured”? For Gregory, “the function [*ergon*] of bodily union [*sōmatikē synapheia*]” is “the creation of mortal bodies” (*De virginitate* XIII:3:9–11).⁴⁰ Whether or not Gregory restricts sexual relations to procreation is unclear from this passage alone, even though he clearly thinks reproduction is the function of sexual intercourse.

Another (albeit rather elusive) passage may yield some further insights on this issue (*De virginitate* VIII:1:15–21; emphasis mine):⁴¹

Since there is need in life [*chreia tōi biōi*] also for the succession [*diadochē*] of one thing from another, if someone uses reproduction similarly [*houtōs*], while spiritual considerations hold priority, exercising his desire [*epithymia*] for such things sparingly [*pheidōlē*] and under restraint because of the shortness of time [*hē tou kairou systolē*], that person will be a wise farmer, cultivating himself in wisdom according to the injunction of the apostle.

Clearly what Gregory is criticizing in this passage is sexual excess. His argument draws on the Platonic irrigation motif (the “wise farmer” directs water to a certain place in proportion to the amount of water required) as well as 1 Corinthians 7:29, in which Paul exhorts Christians to remain as they are, whether married or unmarried, because “the time has grown short” (*ho kairos synestalmenos estin*). Two further points of significance may be gleaned from this excerpt. First, the clause “if someone uses reproduction similarly” uses the adverb *houtōs* to link the use of the sexual faculties in marriage to that “need in life”: that is, the *chreia* for a “succession” (*diadochē*). The implication is that sexual activity must occur only sparingly, in order to fulfil its procreative “function” (*ergon*). Second, the excerpt above bears remarkable resemblance to Soranus’s *Gynaecia*. Soranus notes that sexual intercourse (*mixis*) is consistent with “the common principle of nature” according to

which both men and women ensure “the succession [*diadochē*] of living things” (I:32:3:2–4). If Gregory is alluding to (or at least mindful of) Soranus’s *Gynaecia*, then it seems likely that here, in the excerpt above from the *De virginitate*, procreation is primarily in view.

All this suggests that Gregory restricts sexual intercourse to procreative acts and regards this as “the moderate and measured use of the duty of marriage.” Gregory, therefore, rules out onanism or *coitus interruptus*,⁴² as well as other contraceptive practices in line with early Christian theologians⁴³ and Stoic moral philosophy⁴⁴ in the late antique period. What is distinctive about Gregory’s tacit prohibition here is that it is linked not to an aversion to the spilling of seed, as was the case among certain other Christian theologians in the late antique period such as Clement of Alexandria,⁴⁵ but to the principle of moderation.

Spouses can also imitate the life of virginity by embracing prayer. Prayer, Gregory says, must be the prerequisite to any undertaking, including marriage, as it protects us from sin (*De oratione dominica* 206:27–32).⁴⁶ Gregory explains that prayer is expedient for both virginity and marriage. It guards our chastity (*sōphrosynē*: *De oratione dominica* 208:7) and functions as “the seal [*sphragis*] of virginity” (*De oratione dominica* 208:13)⁴⁷ as well as “a pledge of faithfulness in marriage” and “the wedding crown of the spouses” (*De oratione dominica* 208:13, 18).⁴⁸ Prayer is also “intimacy [*homilia*] with God and contemplation of the invisible” (*De oratione dominica* 208:19). It is not insignificant that the word *homilia*, used here to denote spiritual intimacy with God, refers to sexual intercourse later in the same work (*De oratione dominica* 230:1).⁴⁹ The implication seems to be that sexual *homilia* with one’s spouse in marriage is not necessarily incompatible with spiritual *homilia* with God in prayer.

The view that I am proposing here, in contradistinction to many other commentaries on the *De virginitate*, is that the practices of contemplation can be incorporated into the conjugal life despite its potential associations with worldliness. If this is true, why does Gregory speak in such an apparently disparaging way about marriage? It is here that an appreciation of the trajectory of the *De virginitate* will be instructive.

Train of Discussion in the De virginitate

It is surprising how many commentators on the *De virginitate* have concluded that Gregory accords very little worth to marriage, even if they acknowledge he is not against it *tout court*. On the whole, they have focused on his elevated praise of celibacy and his moral critique of the conjugal life. Aubineau, for instance, claims that “Grégoire donne à la virginité consacrée les apparences d’une evasion égoïste, inspirée par la crainte des responsabilités.”⁵⁰ Perhaps this is the impression one is left with after reading chapters III to VI of the *De virginitate*. But I believe that the whole treatise is liable to misinterpretation if we fail to appreciate its developmental train of discussion. It is Gregory’s first intention to promote physical virginity and

thus to show us everything that can go wrong in marriage. Then he provides a more moderate and appreciative discussion of marriage, which generates notes of caution to fissiparous celibates who regard themselves as morally superior to others.

Gregory's first rhetorical intention in the treatise is to persuade his audience of the advantages of physical virginity. He takes it for granted that marriage is divinely ordained. The problem is that we are so persuaded of its goodness that the ordeals of marriage elude us: "nature manages to have these things escape our notice" (*De virginitate* III:2:4–5).⁵¹ Since the common nature of man (*hē koinē tōn anthrōpōn physis*) automatically inclines toward physical marriage, it does not require additional argumentation to promote it. Marriage already has "sufficient support" (*autarkēs synēgoros*, *De virginitate* VII:1:3–13).⁵² Gregory offers a counterbalance to the perceived advantages of marriage and begins his analysis by highlighting the potential pitfalls of companionship (*sympiōsis*, *De virginitate* III:2:8).⁵³ This is not to say that *physis*, in its promotion of physical marriage, is evil. After all, Gregory appeals to the economy of nature (*hē oikonomia tēs physeōs*) to uphold its goodness (*De virginitate* VIII:1:5–6).⁵⁴ What he is saying is that *physis* engenders a one-sided and potentially distorting picture of the conjugal life. So, if Gregory's expostulations against marriage in chapter III seem overstated, it is because they function as a corrective to the persuasive pull of nature. Or, as he puts it in chapter XI, "the treatise has gently led us through examples to the thought of transforming ourselves to something better than we are" (*De virginitate* XI:5:1–3).⁵⁵ Only after he has overcome the natural allure of the conjugal life in chapters III to VI does he turn to a defense of marriage in chapter VII—"Let no one think that, for these reasons, we are disregarding the institution of marriage" (*De virginitate* VII:1:1–2; emphasis mine).⁵⁶ He even admits in chapter XV that his prior critique of marriage was an intentional exaggeration (*hyperbolē*, *De virginitate* XV:1:1).⁵⁷

Now that Gregory has affirmed the possibility of a spiritually productive marriage, he can examine the moral dangers of the celibate life. For one, celibacy can lead to self-indulgence and overreliance on the opinions of others. People who begin with the best of intentions easily succumb to vanity: they "deceived themselves", he writes, "through some craziness." Gregory castigates them as "the slothful" (Proverbs 15:19), who "strew their path with thorns" and "consider harmful to the soul a zeal for deeds in keeping with the commandments of God." They "do not eat their own bread with dignity, but, fawning on others, make idleness the art of life" (*De virginitate* XXIII:3:10–21).⁵⁸ Gregory mentions another group of celibates who are "dreamers" and "consider the deceits of dreams more trustworthy than the teachings of the Gospels, calling fantasies revelations" (*De virginitate* XXIII:3:22–25).⁵⁹ The third group of immoral celibates are "unsociable and brutish." They fail to acknowledge "the command of love" and have no knowledge of "the fruit of long-suffering and humility" (*De virginitate* XXIII:3:25–28).⁶⁰ Gregory's discussion of disordered forms of celibacy comes at the end of his treatise after challenging

his audience's overestimation of marriage. Only when celibacy has been valued above marriage is he prepared to consider abuses of physical virginity.

The developmental train of discussion in the *De virginitate* may offer some clues about the intended readership of the treatise, although this has not been definitively established. It is perhaps written in part for young men who are at a crossroads in deciding whether to marry or to embrace the celibate life.⁶¹ Given Gregory's expostulations against the maladroit practice of celibacy, he is also likely to be thinking of monks who have recently embarked upon the life of virginity. He may have wanted to counteract the temptation of these fledgling monks to idealize family life or pride themselves, through their zealous adherence to sexual abstinence, in their perceived moral superiority.

A question not yet answered in our discussion so far asserts itself at this juncture: Does the life of virginity or the life of marriage engender the greater hope of spiritual maturity? Which, in other words, is better?

*Assessing the Comparative Worth of
Virginity and Marriage*

As I move now to assess the comparative worth of virginity and marriage, I wish to express broad agreement with Valerie Karras's thesis that the *De virginitate* describes "two types of both marriage and virginity, one 'bad' and one 'good' for each" (emphasis hers),⁶² which are ordered hierarchically:⁶³

Good Celibacy

the virginal life entered into not from fear of lack of self-control but because of a single-minded orientation toward an eschatological life in God.

Good Marriage

marital life that is balanced and virtuous, a deconstructed marriage in terms of the values of late antique society.

Bad Celibacy

the virginal life chosen because of the person's acknowledgment that he or she is unable to control these passions and thus must not be exposed to passionate situations at all.

Bad Marriage

traditional marital life, consumed with the concerns of society and susceptible to the lower passions.

Notwithstanding the considerable sophistication and insight of Karras's reading of the *De virginitate*—especially as a counterbalance to Hart's thesis—there are a number of significant corrections that need to be made.

First, I think Karras is mistaken in thinking that the weak person's flight to celibacy is an example of bad celibacy. The passage in question is in chapter VIII. Here,

Gregory summons those who are “weak in disposition” to lifelong sexual renunciation (*De virginitate* VIII:1:26–29).⁶⁴ But there is no indication that this decision falls below the standard of moral excellence. On the contrary, “*it would be profitable,*” Gregory says, “to go through life without the experience of marriage, lest . . . the passions should make their entry against the soul” (*De virginitate* VIII:1:39–42; emphasis mine).⁶⁵ It is “advantageous,” he says elsewhere, for the weak to embrace celibacy (*De virginitate* IX:2:1).⁶⁶ To put it another way: their moral weakness is converted into moral strength through virginity, patterned on the Pauline theme of weakness in 2 Corinthians 12:9–11. Gregory is not suggesting that all celibates are morally weak. He is singling out for particular praise the person who is aware of his or her moral vulnerability and decides to embark upon the life of virginity as a means of transformation.

Not only do I think that Karras is mistaken in thinking that “bad celibacy” refers only to weak individuals. I also think it is false to place “bad celibacy” above “bad marriage.” Since (in the words of the title of chapter XVI) “whatever is outside of the realm of virtue is equally dangerous,”⁶⁷ morally disordered virgins ought to be ranked at the same level as those who practice “bad marriage” on account of the doctrine of the reciprocity of the virtues.

Another point that Karras appears to overlook is what I wish to call the *particularist* nature of the ascetic life in general. For Gregory, the demands of the ascetic life are shaped by one’s life circumstances and one’s moral constitution, as the following two examples in the *De virginitate* demonstrate. First, there are young men for whom marriage ought to be postponed until their youthful passions have subsided. Second, there are those (whom I have just mentioned) who have a weak moral constitution and are summoned to embrace celibacy to subdue the sinful inclinations of the flesh.

With regard to age, Gregory describes one’s youth as a time during which sexual desires are most intense. For this reason, he advises the young to undergo intense ascetical discipline lest their *nous* “inflare [the body] with excessive heat in its youthfulness” (*De virginitate* XXII:2:12–15).⁶⁸ He urges young men who wish to embrace the virginal life to do so with the assistance of “a good guide and teacher on this path.” This, it is hoped, will prevent them from entering upon “trackless places” and wandering away from “the straight road” because of inexperience and ignorance (*De virginitate* XXIII:3:1–6).⁶⁹

To young people intent on marrying, Gregory’s advice is to defer the decision to marry until they have reached a degree of physical and spiritual maturity, appealing to the example of Isaac (*De virginitate* VII:3:8–11).⁷⁰ Because the *pathē* are inflamed during one’s youth, even the licit exercise of sexual intercourse in marriage can unwittingly result in moral deterioration. One may end up living “a sordid life” (*rhyparos bios*), in which one’s “thought” (*dianoia*) is turned from the divine to “the lowly” and “the material” (*De virginitate* IX:1:22–33).⁷¹ Without

undertaking ascetical propaedeutics during one's youth and marrying later in life, the soul is vulnerable to the assaults of the passions.

The ideas that Gregory develops here have a rich patrimony in Scripture, particularly 2 Timothy 2:22, Paul's exhortation to "shun youthful passions [*tas neōterikas epithymias*]" in order to pursue righteousness, and 1 Timothy 5:11–12, in which Paul discourages young widows from enrolling as widows as they will probably want to marry again. Besides Scripture, Gregory may also have Plato's *Respublica* in mind, in which the aged Cephalus is said to have overcome youthful passions. Old age brings "tranquility" (*eirēnē*) and "a blessed release" (*eleutheria*): "the fierce tensions of the passions and desires relax" (329c). In Agathon's speech in the *Symposium*, we also read that *Erōs* "hates old age [*gēras*] by nature, and refuses to come within any distance of it." Instead, *Erōs* is "ever consorting with the young" (195b).

Now I turn to another piece of evidence that reveals the *particularist* nature of the ascetic life. As we have already seen, Gregory enjoins lifelong celibacy onto those who lack moral and spiritual strength. He speaks of "the one who is weak by disposition" (*ho . . . asthenōs diakeimenos*), who is "not able to withstand in a manly fashion [*andrikōs*] the onslaughts of his nature." Such a person must withdraw from marriage altogether rather than "enter a contest which is beyond his strength [*dynamis*]" (*De virginitate* VIII:1:26–29).⁷² He cannot arrive at "a point of balance" in the conjugal life and therefore should never marry lest "the passions [*pathē*] should make their entry against the soul" (*De virginitate* VIII:1:36–42).⁷³ The problem is that once he has experienced sexual "pleasure" (*hēdonē*) for the first time, he begins to think that there is no other good apart from the pleasures of the flesh. As a result, he becomes "a lover of pleasure" (*philēdonos*) instead of "a lover of God" (*philotheos*)—an allusion to 1 Timothy 2:3 (*De virginitate* VIII:1:29–36).⁷⁴ Celibacy is thus "a safe fortress" to which the "very weak" must flee "for refuge" (*De virginitate* IX:2:1–2).⁷⁵

Are we to presume here that Gregory is flagrantly contradicting Paul, who advises those who burn with lust to marry (1 Corinthians 7:9)? Peter Brown would say so, arguing that Gregory's views on virginity and marriage contrast with those of John Chrysostom, for whom marriage is intended to quench sexual passions and thus to eschew licentiousness, just as Paul intended.⁷⁶ However, it seems to me that Brown is constructing a false disjunction between Paul and Gregory. The group to whom Gregory refers—those "weak in disposition"—is not identical with those whom Paul characterizes as burning with lust. Gregory refers not to Christians already overwhelmed by passion (and therefore likely to commit fornication) but to those who would be overwhelmed by passion were they to participate, in an entirely licit way at first, in the sexual pleasures in marriage.

Concluding Remarks on Marriage and Celibacy

So, to recapitulate the main points of this chapter so far: I have sought to adumbrate the trajectory of argumentation in the *De virginitate*, in which Gregory first

intends to correct his readers' natural inclinations toward marriage with vivid reminders of the calamities that often assail the conjugal life. He does so before offering a more moderated view of both marriage and celibacy.

I have thereby revealed a striking new insight into Gregory's moral theory: although the life of virginity is thought to be better than marriage (only so long as sexual self-restraint is practiced alongside all the virtues), Gregory does not issue a blanket summons to virginity in the *De virginitate* but adjudicates the individual worth of each way of life according to the particularities of the individual. For Gregory, a person's age and level of moral resilience are significant factors in determining the kind of life that one should follow, whether marriage or celibacy. The ascetic life is manifested, applied, and appropriated in a variety of ways—so much so, in fact, that there is no single way in life that is an ideal fit for everyone. This whole train of thought, therefore, serves to underscore Gregory's integrationist ethic, in which the life of virginity is viewed as a wholesale moral undertaking: the moderation of sexual desire, in other words, is necessarily accompanied by—and reciprocally intertwined with—other virtuous undertakings and is not sought after in itself. This integrationist focus means that people who are married can emulate the spiritual and moral outcomes of virginity by moderating the sexual duty of marriage and prioritizing spiritual affairs.

I shall now turn to the subject of celibacy in more detail and consider the Platonic theory of desire that seems to convince Gregory so strongly of the spiritual superiority of virginity to marriage.

PEDERASTY AND CELIBACY

The purpose of this section is to show that one of Gregory's rhetorical intentions at this stage in his career is to argue that Christian celibacy is intended to replace—indeed to supersede—the Platonic ideal of the chaste love of a man for an adolescent boy. My proposal is that celibacy, for Gregory, shares the same spiritual outcomes as pederasty—fecundity and contemplation of the Form of Beauty—but differs from its pagan counterpart by removing the role of a young male, the *erōmenos*, in leading the older male, the *erastēs*, to contemplation.

An important clarification is in order first: when speaking of “pederasty,” the modern reader is likely to think of a type of person with deep-seated attractions to pubescent children. But it would be anachronistic to think that in the late antique period, sexual practices (as we are now inclined to think) were believed to be revelatory of the sexual identity of the person who enacts them. Thus, to say that celibacy displaces pederasty in the *De virginitate* is not to say that a certain type of person, whom we would now call the “ephebophile” or “hebephile,” is summoned to embrace the celibate life. It is rather to suggest that the spiritual outcomes of pederasty, understood in its specifically Platonic sense, are for Gregory

mirrored in the life of Christian virginity to a superior degree and with significant modifications.

To begin this line of inquiry, let me outline the salient features of Virginia Burrus's analysis of the *De virginitate*. My own account differs substantially from hers for reasons that will become clear.

In the first instance, Burrus describes virginity as a version of "same sex love." Referring to "the highly charged, sublimated homoeroticism," Burrus notes that the individual man is launched into "the infinite pursuit of the transcendent Man, of transcendence, of Manhood itself."⁷⁷ Her argument rehearses feminist critiques of androgyny in which the erasure of male and female through purported transcendence reinscribes a singular male sex onto the guise of androgyny.⁷⁸ As such, she derides Gregory's "gendered plurality," because (to quote Luce Irigaray) it "begets a singular—and singularly graceful—masculine subjectivity that derives its position of transcendent dominance 'from its power to eradicate the difference between the sexes.'"⁷⁹

Second, Burrus compares pederastic mental fecundity with spiritual fecundity in Gregory's *De anima*. Citing A. W. Price, she recognizes in Plato's *Symposium* "a natural connection between pederasty and pregnancy in soul," in which (as Burrus writes) "the goal of love is defined as a mental or sublimated procreation . . . between like and unequal minds."⁸⁰ She then—rather problematically—portrays Gregory as "one of Plato's responsive boys, accepting the seminal utterances of his teacher, bishop, and father and thereby conceiving right doctrine in the virginal womb of his soul."⁸¹ But, as I shall show, Plato's boys were not purely responsive, and Gregory does not endorse a "natural connection between pederasty and pregnancy in soul."

To speak now in more general terms: Burrus fails to acknowledge the profound critique of Platonic pederasty that tacitly undergirds Gregory's descriptions of Christian virginity. It is the burden of this section to bring this critique into greater consciousness. I shall proceed in two stages: first, by explicating Plato's advocacy of chaste pedagogic pederasty, showing how it differs from Athenian pederastic practices; second, by reflecting upon Gregory's description of the life of virginity in critical counterpoint with the version of pederasty commended by Plato.

Plato, Pederasty, and Athenian Society

Plato modifies Athenian pederastic practice in a number of ways. For one, he alters the hierarchical asymmetry that typically structured the relationship between the young beloved (the *erōmenos*) and the older lover (the *erastēs*) in Athenian culture. Sexual passivity was denounced for its associations with female sexual practice. As such, pederastic practices involving sexual activity elicited an attitude of ambivalence among the Greeks. This ambivalence is reflected in Pausanias's speech in the *Symposium*, in which, on the one hand, pederasty is regarded as an honorable part

of Athenian society (*Symposium* 182a–183c) but also, on the other hand, is treated with suspicion by fathers, who would do all they could to prevent a love affair between their son and an *erastēs*, and by friends of the *erōmenos*, who would mock him for yielding to the older man (*Symposium* 183c–d).

Plato forbids sexual activity from taking place within the pederasty arrangement. Whereas he admits an “innate necessity to sexual union” in relationships between men and women who live in close proximity (*Respublica* 458d), Plato refuses to believe that sexual activity is inevitable in pederasty. So what are the reasons behind Plato’s rejection of pederastic sexual practices?

One reason is that such activities are “contrary to nature” (*para physin*, *Leges* 636c; *Phaedrus* 251a). It is not entirely clear what the precise meaning of *para physin* is in these passages. A reasonable guess is that it refers to the intrinsically nonprocreative nature of pederastic sexual activity. In the *Leges*, Plato places nonprocreative intercourse with women alongside sexual acts between men (*Leges* 838e–839a) and describes them all as violations of “a natural use [*kata physin*] of reproductive intercourse” (*Leges* 838e7).

Another reason for Plato’s contempt for sexually active pederasty is that it forces the *erōmenos* to assume the role of the passive female: “it is right to refrain from indulging in the same kind of intercourse with men and boys as with women,” because it is “unnatural” (*to mē physei touto einai*, *Leges* 836c). He adds (*Leges* 836d–e): “As all men will blame the cowardice of the man who always yields to pleasures and is never able to hold out against them, will they not likewise reproach that man who plays the woman’s part with the resemblance he bears to his model?” One who indulges his pleasure in this way will end up courting an *erōmenos* who is “effeminate [*malthakos*], not virile [*stereos*], brought up not in the pure sunshine but in mingled shade, unused to manly [*andreios*] toils and the sweat of exertion but accustomed to a delicate and unmanly [*anandros*] mode of life” (*Phaedrus* 239c–d). Sexual practices of this sort also inexorably result in moral deterioration (*Phaedrus* 239a–b).⁸²

By removing sexual intercourse from the equation altogether, Plato is able to stave off the accusation that he is promoting sexual passivity.⁸³ What he advocates instead is a purely pedagogic pederastic relationship, in which the *erastēs* inducts the *erōmenos* into the life of virtue and thereby prepares him for male citizenship.

What is significant about this pederastic relationship—to return to my opening remark—is the erotic reciprocity between its participants. As Xenophon’s *Symposium* reveals, the *erōmenos* was not meant to derive pleasure from the *erastēs* (*Symposium* VIII:21).⁸⁴ By contrast, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates describes “a flood of passion” that overflows from the *erastēs* toward the *erōmenos*, so that “by the natural channel it reaches [the beloved’s] soul and gives it fresh vigor, watering the roots of the wings and quickening them to growth: whereby the soul of the beloved, in its turn, is filled with love.”⁸⁵ The *erōmenos* “possesses the counterlove that is the image of love, though he supposes it to be friendship [*philia*] rather than love

[*erōs*], and calls it by that name” (*Phaedrus* 255c–e). Plato is thus able to advocate erotic reciprocity without incurring shame upon the *erōmenos*—feared by Alcibiades in being seduced by Socrates (*Phaedrus* 217e–218b)—and without robbing him of his civic rights.⁸⁶ Hence, according to Alcibiades (*Phaedrus* 217c, 222b), Socrates elicited desire from boys who pursued him as if *he* were the *erōmenos*. But this reversal of roles is made possible, as we have said, only because *erōs* is never expressed sexually.

Whilst Plato condemns sexual activity in pederasty, he nonetheless permits overt affectionate behavior within the relationship: the *erastēs* may kiss and touch the *erōmenos* (*Respublica* 403b) but only “as a father would a son, for honorable ends,” going no farther than that in case he is “stigmatized for want of taste and true musical culture” (*Respublica* 403c). This explains why Socrates was able to play lovingly with Phaedo’s hair by Socrates’ prison bed (*Phaedo* 89b). Signs of affection are permitted, but that is as far as it goes.

One of the effects of turning pederasty into a pedagogic arrangement is to make philosophic fecundity one of its chief goals. In Diotima’s speech in the *Symposium*, *erōs* strives for the permanent possession of immortality and the Good, “engendering and begetting upon the beautiful” (*Symposium* 206e). The forms of offspring produced by the pederastic pregnancy of soul are prudence and virtue as well as sobriety and justice (*Symposium* 209c–d).

Rather counterintuitively, fecundity in the *Symposium* refers predominantly to male sexual arousal, not female pregnancy.⁸⁷ “Pregnancy” therefore refers to the condition in which a man is ready to ejaculate, and “childbirth” denotes ejaculation.⁸⁸ When Diotima claims that “the conjunction of man and woman is a begetting for both” (*Symposium* 206c), she is referring to the sexual arousal that is antecedent to female pregnancy. As such, she—and indeed Plato⁸⁹—follows the prevailing Greek view of procreation at the time, in which the male emission of seed was thought to constitute the birth of the child. Sexual intercourse, therefore, served simply to transfer the seed into the womb, the female receptacle.⁹⁰ For this reason, the significance of the preposition *en* in the statement—“it [nature] cannot [beget] upon [*en*] an ugly person, but only on [*en*] the beautiful” (*Symposium* 206c)—should not be underestimated, since it evokes the image of the implantation of male seed *into* the womb. That Plato speaks predominantly of male fecundity should come as no surprise if we consider the context of the *Symposium*—that of male pederasty. Of all the figures in the *Symposium*, only Aristophanes mentions sexual relationships between men and women (*Symposium* 191d–e). It cannot be said that Plato is inherently adverse to female imagery, because the *Theaetetus* makes reference to female pregnancy of soul, labor pains, birth, and midwifery (*Theaetetus* 148e–151d). Perhaps, then, the apparent marginalization of female imagery in the *Symposium* is a peculiarity of the *Symposium* itself and attributable to its all-male pederastic framing.⁹¹

It is clear that for Plato, the fecundity that emerges from the union of the *erastēs* with the Form of Beauty ultimately trumps pederastic fecundity. Whereas the latter generates “wisdom and other kinds of virtue” (*Symposium* 209a, e), these are mere images of virtue, not “true virtue” itself (*Symposium* 211e–212a):

But tell me, what would happen if one of you had the fortune to look upon essential beauty entire, pure, and unalloyed, not infected with the flesh and color of humanity and ever so much more of mortal trash? What if he could behold the divine beauty itself, in its unique form? Do you call it a pitiful life for a man to lead—looking that way, observing that vision by the proper means, and having it ever with him [*synontos autōi*]? Do but consider . . . that there only will it befall him, as he sees the beautiful through what makes it visible, to breed not illusions but true examples of virtue, since his contact is not with illusion but with truth [*hate ouk eidōlou ephaptomenōi, alla alēthē, hate tou alēthous ephaptomenōi*]. So when he has begotten a true virtue and has reared it up he is destined to win the friendship of Heaven; he, above all men, is immortal.

Here the *erastēs* is contemplating the Form of Beauty with his rational mind (cf. *Republica* 490b, 518c–519b), and contemplation is portrayed as an inexorably erotic practice. The verb *syneinai* can mean simply “to be with” or “to be in contact with,” but it also has sexual evocations, “to have intercourse with,” as at *Symposium* 206c, in which the substantive *synousia* appears.⁹² The verb *ephaptesthai* (“to touch”) may also have sexual evocations,⁹³ as at *Republica* 490b, where the lover of knowledge has intercourse with “the nature of true reality” and begets intelligence and truth.⁹⁴

The excerpt above also underscores Plato’s avoidance of the imagery of female pregnancy in the *Symposium*, although it still seems to lurk in the background, albeit pushed out of sight.⁹⁵ By avoiding the imagery of female pregnancy, Plato may be trying to eschew a conceptual difficulty: associating fecundity with female pregnancy would mean introducing mutability into the immutable Form of Beauty (*Symposium* 211b).⁹⁶

So far, we have adumbrated Plato’s criticisms of and adjustments to Athenian pederastic practice. What drew Gregory’s Christian attentions to Plato’s chaste version of pedagogic pederasty was its emphasis on philosophic fecundity and the contemplation of the Form of Beauty. We now turn to Gregory’s transformation of Platonic pederasty through Christian celibacy.

Christian Celibacy: The Replacement of Pederasty

There are several pieces of evidence from the *De virginitate* to support the view that Christian celibacy for Gregory is meant to supersede Platonic pederasty. They can be divided into passages that (a) suggest that a comparison is being drawn between the two practices and (b) underscore their essential differences as part of what seems to be an underlying critique of Platonic pederasty in the *De virginitate*. Let us address these two sets of evidence in turn, beginning with (a).

First, both pederasty in its sexually active form and the virginal life are described as “against nature” (*para physin*). Although Plato does not describe chaste pedagogic pederasty in these terms, we have already seen that he condemns sexually active pederasty for violating nature. Gregory goes further than this: celibacy and pederasty both stand in opposition to nature, but in different ways.

In order to understand Gregory’s moral contempt for pederasty—which reflects the teaching of the Church at the time⁹⁷—we first need to look at a letter from the mature phase of his literary career, the *Epistula canonica ad Letoium*. It is here that one finds the most explicit reference to—and condemnation of—pederasty. Gregory castigates *paidierastia* alongside bestiality (*zōophthoria*) as “an adultery against nature” (*tauta physeōs esti moicheia*) (PG 45 228:41–43),⁹⁸ since “the injury is in regard to what is alien [*allogtrion*] and contrary to nature [*para physin*]” (PG 45 228:43–44).⁹⁹ According to Gregory, “there is only one legitimate union [*nomimos syzygia*], that of a wife with a husband, and a husband with a wife.” Any other sexual union transgresses “the law of nature” (PG 45 228:28).¹⁰⁰ By violating nature, one “lays claim to what is not proper to himself”: that is, “something alien [*allogtrion*]” to himself (PG 45 228:20–24).¹⁰¹ Gregory probably has Romans 1:26 in mind, which, like Plato’s *Leges*, condemns same-sex activity as *para physin*.¹⁰² So by expanding the definition of “adultery” to include any deviation from the only legitimate union between wife and husband, fornication (*porneia*) is then categorized as a kind of adultery (PG 45 228:18–20).¹⁰³

Given the profound hamartiological significance of the term *para physin*, it is striking that lifelong celibacy is also described by Gregory as against nature, except that the language he uses in this case is different from that used in condemnation of pederasty. The life of virginity is “beyond [or: “outside”] nature” (*exō tēs physeōs*, *De virginitate* VI:1:11)¹⁰⁴ and “somehow goes against nature” (*antibainei pōs hē parthenia tēi physei*, *De virginitate* VII:1:6–7).¹⁰⁵ The ascetical regimen (*diagōgē*) does not result in immediate progress, because it is foreign (*apexenōmenos*)¹⁰⁶ to *physis* (*De virginitate* XXIII:2:6–8).¹⁰⁷

So the life of virginity is against nature, and so too is pederasty, but for different reasons. Virginity opposes *physis* because it quells the rebellion of fleshly desire.¹⁰⁸ By contrast, pederasty opposes nature because it involves taking a partner who is alien to oneself in violation of the Creator’s plans. This may explain why Gregory does not use Paul’s *para physin* when discussing the life of virginity. To avoid confusion, he uses alternative phrases to highlight the ascetical subduing of brutish impulses in human nature.

The second item of evidence that highlights the continuity between pederasty and the life of virginity is the shared *telos* of these practices: the contemplation of the Form of Beauty, which for Gregory is synonymous with God. References to divine beauty abound in the *De virginitate*. Gregory speaks variously of “the truly beautiful” (X:1:2),¹⁰⁹ “that incredible and incomprehensible beauty” (X:2:5–6),¹¹⁰

and “intelligible beauty” (XI:1:25),¹¹¹ toward which human “desire” (*epithymia*) is directed (XI:3:13).¹¹²

Another similarity is the way in which both pederasty and the life of virginity are said to overcome death. We recall Diotima’s speech, in which philosophic fecundity is linked to immortality (*Symposium* 206e). Although immortality in this context is constituted by the replication of the mind of the *erastēs* in the *erōmenos* (which continues in perpetuity through subsequent pederastic arrangements),¹¹³ the virgin’s triumph over death is wrought through the cessation of physical procreation (*De virginitate* XIV:1:35–36).¹¹⁴ And what Mary, that death-defying human model of virginity, accomplished can be accomplished by all who practice virginity (*De virginitate* XIV:1:24–30).¹¹⁵

Now that I have outlined the similarities between Platonic pederasty and Christian celibacy, let me examine their differences. In the first instance, Gregory opposes the idea that bodily beauty instantiated in the form of an adolescent boy is needed to recollect divine beauty. A passage from the *De virginitate* is particularly illuminating in this regard (*De virginitate* XI:1:14–26):¹¹⁶

In the seeking of the beautiful, the person who is superficial in his thought, when he sees something in which fantasy is mixed with some beauty, will think that the thing is beautiful because of its own nature, his attention being attracted to it because of pleasure [*hēdonē*], and he will be concerned with nothing beyond this. But the man who has purified the eye of his soul is able to look at such things and forget the matter in which the beauty is encased, and he uses what he sees as a kind of basis for his contemplation [*theōria*] of intelligible beauty. By a participation [*metousia*] in this beauty, the other beautiful things come into being and are identified.

This excerpt resembles part of Socrates’ speech in the *Phaedrus* (249d–251c), in which sight is regarded as the primary means by which physical beauty is appreciated. Socrates also mentions corrupt individuals who give themselves up to pleasure when they behold bodily beauty. The *Phaedrus* and the *De virginitate* differ in how they describe the pure (*katharos*) person. For Socrates, the man “reveres the beautiful one as a god, and if he did not fear to be thought stark mad, he would offer sacrifice to his beloved as to an idol or a god” (*Phaedrus* 251a)—and the “beautiful one” here is “the boy,” whom he mentions slightly later (*Phaedrus* 251c). For Gregory, however, it is the whole of creation (not the *erōmenos*) that facilitates contemplation of the divine.

Gregory exchanges the pederastic pedagogic relationship for a nonerotic alternative: the relationship between an older ascetic and a younger ascetic (*De virginitate* XXIII:5–6).¹¹⁷ The purpose of this relationship is to prevent enthusiastic fledgling monastics from straying from the path of moderation. The older ascetic inducts the younger ascetic into the life of purity so that “the dignity of this life is distributed by the one who has succeeded in it to those who come near to him” (*De*

virginitate XXIII:5:13–14).¹¹⁸ This differs from Platonic pederasty in two respects. First, the older ascetic does not regard the younger ascetic as an instantiation of beauty whom he can use to contemplate the Form of Beauty. Second, the relationship is never portrayed as an erotic relationship.

Another difference between Plato's version of chaste pederasty and the life of virginity lies in how the language of male and female (and its attendant associations) is used. For Gregory, the erotic relationship between God and the soul is always described metaphorically as a male-female relationship, even when these identifications are flexible and labile: "the true lover of wisdom [*ho tēs sophias erastheis*] has as his goal the divine One, who is true wisdom; and the soul, clinging to its incorruptible Bridegroom, has a love [*erōs*] of true wisdom, which is God" (*De virginitate* XX:4:39–42).¹¹⁹ Here, the soul is simultaneously the man courting Wisdom and the Bride clinging to the incorruptible Bridegroom. Gregory's interest in human *erōs* for Wisdom is partly inspired by Plato, who speaks of the lover of wisdom (*Respublica* 485c), but it also has a biblical basis in Proverbs 4:6: "Love her [Wisdom], and she will safeguard you" (*De virginitate* XX:4:30–31).¹²⁰ Two further biblical passages are relevant: "there is neither male nor female" (Galatians 3:28), and Christ is "all things for all human beings" (1 Corinthians 9:22; *De virginitate* XX:4:38–39).¹²¹ On the basis of biblical authority, Gregory appears to replace the pederastic relationship, which marginalizes female imagery in favor of an exclusively male *erastēs-erōmenos* erotic relationship, with a male-female spiritual relationship. Burrus is therefore misguided in claiming that Gregory is espousing a version of same-sex love through virginity.

Further support for my argument here may be adduced from the fact that the Virgin Mary is frequently invoked in Gregory's discussions on virginity. Spiritual fecundity always refers to female pregnancy, even in its application to the male Christian—not, as in the case of Plato, to male sexual arousal and ejaculation. In one place, Gregory describes the fecundity of the soul in terms of the "virgin mother" who "begets immortal children through the Spirit" (*De virginitate* XIII:3:17–20).¹²² Furthermore, he remarks that the womb of the Virgin Mary "served the unblemished childbirth" and is "blessed on the grounds that the offspring does not destroy virginity." Virginity, he writes, "does not stand in the way of such begetting." Quoting Isaiah 26:18, Gregory confirms that her virginal womb is the receptacle from which "the spirit of salvation is born," since "the wishes of the flesh are entirely useless" (*De virginitate* XIX:1:43–45).¹²³

Mary is the human exemplar of fecund virginity, whom everyone must emulate (*De virginitate* II:2:18–22).¹²⁴ Although Christians cannot physically give birth to Christ as Mary did, they can do so spiritually: first, by cultivating certain spiritual dispositions, such as "wisdom, justice, holiness, and redemption" (*De virginitate* XIV:3:18–19),¹²⁵ as well as "life and incorruptibility" (*De virginitate* XIII:3:12),¹²⁶ which are names given to Christ in Scripture (1 Corinthians 1:30 and 2 Timothy

1:10, respectively);¹²⁷ second, by converting sinners to the faith (*De virginitate* 19:1:33–39).¹²⁸

A further, and final, point of departure between Plato and Gregory is how divine fecundity is respectively conceived. Whereas the Form of Beauty for Plato is fecund only in response to male initiative, Gregory argues that the Father and the Son are fecund in their own right (*De virginitate* II:1:2–9):¹²⁹

It is a paradox to find virginity in a Father who has a Son whom He has begotten without passion [*dicha pathous*], and virginity is comprehended together with the only-begotten God, who is the giver of incorruptibility, since it shone forth with the purity and absence of passion [*apatheia*] in His begetting. And again, the Son, conceiving through virginity, is an equal paradox. In the same way, one perceives it in the natural and incorruptible purity of the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of the *imitatio Dei* is relevant here. The intra-Trinitarian relations constitute the highest ascetic ideal of incorruptible purity, which can be mirrored by virgins through spiritual fecundity. Just as the Father eternally generated the Son without passion, so virgins generate spiritually without passion—a creaturely imitation of the inner life of the Trinity.

If we combine these insights with our earlier observation—that Christian virginity and Platonic pederasty share the same spiritual outcomes—it seems likely that a critique of pederasty is underlyingly at play in Gregory's *De virginitate*.

CONCLUSION

Let me now draw together the threads of this chapter. We have seen that Burrus overidentifies pederasty with virginity. Whilst Gregory incorporates the spiritual outcomes of pederasty into the life of virginity, he does so by transforming the means of obtaining those outcomes. He refuses to place erotic desire within the matrix of an exclusively male *erastēs-erōmenos* relationship and insists that fecundity refers to female pregnancy. It is worth recalling, at this point, my refusal to import the contemporary language of homosexuality and heterosexuality into the nexus of this inquiry, as discussed in the introduction. To do so here, in the context of our discussion of Platonic pederasty, would give rise to confusion and misunderstanding. In Gregory's account of human erotic desire, the object of desire, God, transcends the creaturely division between male and female. If we lose sight of this, we are likely to impose anachronistic and—perhaps more important—fleshly categories of interpretation onto Gregory's theorization of desire. In the next chapter, we will examine how he situates these discussions of sexual and erotic desire within the wider context of the transformation of desire more generally understood.

The Integration of the Virtues

To the modern reader, it may seem perplexing that Gregory's earliest work, the *De virginitate*, contains no extended treatment of the perils of sexual desire. Commentators widely agree that Gregory is not overly preoccupied with sexual lust because of his more prominent concerns about the ordeals of the conjugal life and his "first-hand familiarity with marriage," which "strongly influenced his matter-of-fact references to sexual function."² What is missing in the literature is a detailed exploration of Gregory's theological motivations for placing sexual desire within the wider context of moral transformation. It is to this task that we now turn.

SEXUAL LUST IN THE *DE VIRGINITATE*

Gregory's claim at the start of the *De virginitate* that he can never fully know the blessings of virginity suggests (at least at this stage in his thinking) that he regards the experience of sexual pleasure as itself an obstacle to perfect holiness. However, the more pressing overall concerns for Gregory are the worldly burdens and moral pitfalls of marriage. In fact, there are only a few explicit references to sexual desire and sexual intercourse in the *De virginitate*. On one occasion, Gregory describes the sexual longings (*pothoi*) of the bride for her bridegroom, a longing cut short by his death (*De virginitate* III:7:2–6).³ But here sexual *pothos* does not become the focus of moral reflection. On another occasion, he places "a love of the flesh" (*erōs sarkōn*) alongside "lifeless material things" and "honor, glory, and power" (*De virginitate* XI:2:10–12)⁴ as potential distractions from the pursuit of divine beauty. Sexual excess is, therefore, not singled out as particularly problematic and is embedded within broader discussions of vice.

The relative ease with which Gregory discusses sexual desire is distinctive compared with other early Christian thinkers. Let us take Augustine (354–430), whose thought Gregory never encountered, as a conversation partner on this topic. Although the key concept of *concupiscentia* has “a more general reference” in Augustine’s early works (particularly in the *De musica*, the *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, and the *De uera religione*),⁵ by the time of the composition of the *De Civitate Dei*, he primarily identifies *libido* as *concupiscentia carnis*—“the lustful excitement of the organs of generation” (*De Civitate Dei* 14:16).⁶ Whenever Augustine mentions *concupiscentia carnis*, it seems to elicit intense paroxysms of moral concern, being thought of as a “paradigm for other lusts.”⁷ It seems that Augustine was tormented, at least for a time, by the bonds of lust he continued to feel for his concubine. He would later describe his will (*voluntas*) as perverse, remarking that “lust indulged in became custom [*consuetudo*]; and custom not resisted became necessity” (*Confessiones* 8:5).⁸ Augustine’s uneasiness with *concupiscentia* is especially apparent in his reflections on the refusal of the genitals, in their postlapsarian state, to obey the biddings of the will (*De Civitate Dei* 14:17).⁹

In contradistinction to Augustine’s focus on *concupiscentia carnis*, Gregory—like Basil (*LR* 19/*RBas.* 9:1–22; *LR* 20; *LR* 21/*RBas.* 10:1–7)¹⁰—regards gluttony as the paradigm sin of satiety. Indeed, so prominent is the theme of gluttony in Basil’s thought that at one point he has to explain that self-control cannot be accomplished by dietary restraint only but by removing every obstacle to spiritual growth (*LR* 16:3/*RBas.* 8:19).¹¹ We appear to be dealing with a different tradition in this strand of Eastern Christian thought in which gluttony, not sexual vice, is the most dangerous sin.

Another area of moral concern found in the tradition of monasticism, but not in Gregory’s thought, is that of nocturnal emissions. Nocturnal emissions were a source of considerable moral anxiety among Egyptian monks,¹² prompting them to abstain from the Eucharist if they had had a nocturnal emission the previous day.¹³ Reacting against what may have seemed like excessive rigorism, Athanasius (ca. 296–373)¹⁴—and, later, Augustine¹⁵—explains why involuntary nocturnal emissions are not sins. John Cassian takes a different tack, treating nocturnal emissions as diagnostic tools for illuminating the desires of the otherwise inaccessible heart.¹⁶ For Gregory, the issue never comes to mind; nor is it mentioned in Basil’s *Asketikon*.

The reason I propose for Gregory’s distinctive approach to desire (sexual and other) is his integrationist ethic, already discussed above in relation to physical virginity. To understand how and why Gregory’s discussion of sexual desire is set within the wider context of moral transformation in general, let us now turn to what I have dubbed “the ethics of integration.” We will first examine the doctrine of the reciprocity of the virtues, before looking at the status of gluttony as the paradigmatic vice of satiety.

THE RECIPROCITY OF THE VIRTUES

The doctrine of the reciprocity of the virtues—a common theme in ancient philosophy¹⁷—states that the virtues are dependent upon each other: “where one . . . is present, the others will necessarily follow,” as Gregory puts it (*De virginitate* XV:2:17–18),¹⁸ and, conversely, where one virtue is removed, the others are also eliminated. The doctrine of reciprocity is distinguished from what has been called “the identity thesis,”¹⁹ in which the virtues, despite their apparent variety, are regarded as ontologically equivalent—a view espoused by the Socrates of the early Platonic dialogues (*Laches* 199d–e; *Protagoras* 349a–c, 361b)²⁰ and by the Stoics.²¹

A passage of seeming ambiguity on whether or not Gregory adopts the “identity thesis” appears in the fourth homily of the *De beatitudinibus*, where Gregory claims that the virtue of justice (*dikaiosynē*) stands for the other virtues. As Andrew Radde-Gallwitz has persuasively argued,²² we should not follow Cherniss²³ in thinking that *dikaiosynē*, for Gregory, is identified with the other virtues, but should rather incline toward the view that it is “a stand-in for any virtue.”²⁴ That much is clear. However, in spite of all that can be said in its favor, Radde-Gallwitz’s overall discussion presumes that the primary motivation behind Gregory’s espousal of the reciprocity of the virtues is an abstract philosophical analysis of the nature of the virtues themselves. It seems to me that what ultimately brings the virtues together, for Gregory, is spiritual fidelity to Christ, as I shall now demonstrate.

Gregory’s self-confessed indebtedness to Greek philosophy cannot, of course, be overlooked. He refers to experts, who think that “the virtues are not separate from each other” and that it is impossible “to grasp one of the virtues properly without attaining to the rest of them” (*De virginitate* XV:2:13–18).²⁵ Gregory also remarks, quoting 1 Corinthians 12:26, that “the harm to any of the [virtuous] elements in us extends to the whole life of virtue” (*De virginitate* XV:2:18–20).²⁶ Note, too, that for Gregory, it is pointless to accrue the virtues “if the soul is bereft of the one that is lost” (*De virginitate* XII:3:16–18).²⁷

Notwithstanding his indebtedness to philosophical experts, Gregory rearticulates the doctrine of the reciprocity of the virtues within a spiritual framework. He expands the meaning of *porneia* (“sexual immorality”) to include all vices, so that every sin amounts to spiritual infidelity against Christ. Virginité, Gregory avers, is not “confined to the body” but “pertains to all things and extends even to thought [*epinoia*], which is considered one of the achievements of the soul” (*De virginitate* XXIII:4:4–11).²⁸ Virginité therefore aspires to the purity (*katharotēs*) that knows no defilement (*miasma*) (*De virginitate* XV:1:6–12).²⁹ Summoned to love (*agapan*) the incorruptible Bridegroom, the soul must be spotless (*De virginitate* XV:1:12–21).³⁰

Gregory partly draws his inspiration for this line of argument from 1 Corinthians 6:12–20. Christian men are already one with Christ, Paul claims. How, then,

can they so flagrantly undermine this nuptial relationship by frequenting prostitutes? Gregory extends the meaning of *porneia*—understood by Paul in the context of 1 Corinthians as sexual laxity—to include anything “that is opposed to salvation” (*De virginitate* XV:1:17–18).³¹ Gregory also appeals to Wisdom 1:4 (“Into a soul that plots evil, wisdom enters not”) to argue that “the good Bridegroom cannot live with a soul that has anything passionate or malignant or any such fault in it” (*De virginitate* XVI:1:27–31).³² The uncompromising summons to moral purity is, therefore, the corollary of the ontological incompatibility between good and evil. Another scriptural passage that informs Gregory’s argument is 2 Corinthians 6:14—“Light has no fellowship with darkness” (*De virginitate* XVI:2:3)³³—which he cites to distinguish between fellowship with God and collusion with evil. This is an important verse for Gregory, later invoked in the *De instituto Christiano* to make the same point; here, too, sin is regarded as spiritual adultery against Christ (*GNO* VIII/1 56:14–57:5).³⁴ Gregory thereby Christianizes the pagan doctrine of the reciprocity of the virtues by embedding the virtuous life within the context of conjugal intimacy with Christ.

These insights have considerable bearing on the aim of this section: to explain why sexual lust is not the preeminent theme of the *De virginitate*. The implication of the reciprocity of the virtues is that disordered sexual desire is entangled in a range of other moral disorders, which are ostensibly nonsexual. Put simply, all the vices are—in words of the title of chapter XVI—“equally dangerous.”³⁵ This explains why Gregory is able to claim that any practice associated with the common life compromises one’s efforts to live a life of sexual purity. All pleasures, sexual or other, affect the moral core of the human person (*De virginitate* XXI:1:8–20).³⁶ As Gregory himself puts it, “What difference does it make if we sin in one way or another when the important thing is that either way estranges us from God, who is perfect virtue?” (*De virginitate* XVII:2:14–16).³⁷ Gregory’s integrationist ethic also undergirds his contempt for celibates, mentioned previously, who practice celibacy (*agamia*) as mere physical continence but fail to implement the wider forms of renunciation required by the ascetic life. Gregory’s message is clear: sought by itself, sexual temperance, dislocated from the cohort of other virtues, is a disordered undertaking. Indeed, physical continence cannot be classified as true virginity unless every stain of sin is expunged from the soul (*De virginitate*, prologue 2:1–2).³⁸

So far, we have seen that sexual vice is equally as pernicious as other forms of moral disorder but no more so. We have also seen that for Gregory, the mutually interdependent nature of vice is the converse of the doctrine of the reciprocity of the virtues, and that both are inexorably embedded in one’s nuptial relationship with Christ. We now turn to consider the dangers of gluttony, asking whether the attention it receives in Gregory’s thought can be squared with our discussions on the reciprocity of the virtues.³⁹

THE PROLIFERATION OF VICE AND
THE EXAMPLE OF GLUTTONY

The vice of gluttony is denoted variously by Gregory as *gastrimargia* (*De oratione dominica* 304:22),⁴⁰ *laimargia*, *lichneia*, the enjoyment of taste (*hē kata tēn geusin apolausis*),⁴¹ the indulgence of the palate (*hē peri ton laimon ascholia*, *De oratione dominica* 304:21),⁴² and the pleasures of the stomach and food (*hai peri gastera kai thoinēn hēdonai*, *In inscriptions* I:31).⁴³ Although Mark Hart draws attention to the significance of greed (*pleonexia*) in the *De virginitate*,⁴⁴ he does not consider the status of gluttony in the treatise (and indeed in Gregory's early ascetical theology as a whole) as itself a particularly emblematic manifestation of *pleonexia*. After all, gluttony is portrayed as if (*hoionei*) it were the mother of all that is forbidden (*mētēr tēs apēgoreumenēs*, *De virginitate* XXI:2:6).⁴⁵ It is the mother of each individual evil (*mētēr tōn kath' hekaston kakōn*, *De oratione dominica* 304:18–19)⁴⁶—so much so, in fact, that “indulgence of the palate is pretty nearly the root of the sins committed in the physical life” (*De oratione dominica* 304:20–21).⁴⁷

The doctrine of the reciprocity of the virtues does not, it seems, exclude the possibility that there may exist what Gregory calls “the sequence of evils” (*hē akolouthia tōn kakōn*, *De virginitate* XIII:1:21),⁴⁸ with a single vice responsible for an entire chain of sin. This sequence (*akolouthia*) can refer, as it does here, to the sins associated with the Fall. It also refers to the proliferation of present-day sins, the “temptations that flow in sequence [*akolouthia*]” (*De virginitate* IX:2:3–4).⁴⁹ Gregory speaks of a sequence (*akolouthia*, *De virginitate* IV:6:1)⁵⁰ and chain (*halyssis*, *De virginitate* IV:5:15, 17, 18, 24)⁵¹ of evil, which has its origins in gluttony. Gluttony, he says, engenders the incitement of all kinds of licentiousness (*akolasia*, *De beatitudinibus* PG 44 1240:10–12).⁵²

So, this leads me to ask: Why does gluttony, to borrow the language of the *In inscriptions*, rule “every material pursuit” (I:32)?⁵³ Why is it “the lowest” (*hoi andrapodōdesteroi*)⁵⁴ form of moral disorder (*De virginitate* XI:2:8–15)?⁵⁵ Why is it the vice that stands “above all” (*pro pantōn*, *De virginitate* XXI:2:4)⁵⁶ other vice? Why does it receive so much attention in a treatise on virginity? Several points need to be made in order to answer these questions.

First, for Gregory, gluttony is aetiologically linked to other forms of vice. It engenders “the necessity [*anankē*] for a surfeit [*koros*] of undesirable evils” in the body, which “begets many similar passions [*pathēmata*] among humans” (*De virginitate* XXI:2:8–10).⁵⁷ One of these *pathēmata* is sexual excess. Gregory describes “the one who is stupid” as someone who lives, “as cattle to pasture,” “only for the stomach and the organs nearby” (*De virginitate* IV:5:1–4; emphasis mine).⁵⁸ That is, the genitalia. The aetiological link between gluttony and sexual profligacy reemerges in the *De beneficentia*, in which Gregory draws attention to the eroticized practices that accompany lavish feasts: “dancing girls, every sort of licentious

performance, effeminate young boys [*paidēs thēlynomenoi*] with long hair, and shameless girls” (*GNO IX/1* 105:22–23). These activities are not merely addenda to gluttony but flow directly from it. They are the corollary of the pursuit of luxuriousness (*GNO IX/1* 105:8). All this resembles the description of gluttons in the *Respublica*: they have never been “really filled with real things, nor ever tasted stable and pure pleasure, but with eyes ever bent upon the earth and heads bowed down over their tables they feast like cattle, *grazing and copulating*, ever greedy for more of these delights” (*Respublica* 586a–b; emphasis mine). Furthermore, in Plato’s *Leges*, the “dictates of nature,” which restrict sexual intercourse to procreative activity, serve to keep men not only “from sexual rage and frenzy [*mania*] and all kinds of fornication” but also “from all excess in meats and drinks” (*Leges* 839a). The association between gluttony and sexual vice is also captured by Evagrius. Gluttony, he argues, “softens the heart in advance” and acts as “a furnace of lustful burning, an arranger of marriages with idols, unnatural activity, a form covered in shadows, a (sexual) intertwining wrought in the imagination, a bed of dreams, unfeeling sexual congress, bait for the eyes, immodesty of sight, dishonoring of prayer, shame of the heart, guide to ignorance” (*De vitiis quae opposita sunt virtutibus* 2).⁵⁹ Evagrius thinks that gluttony compromises one’s claim to be chaste (*De octo spiritibus malitiae* 2:11).⁶⁰ So, too, does Basil of Ancyra (died ca. 364).⁶¹

The second reason why gluttony stands out for Gregory as the paradigmatic vice of satiety is that it manifests the problems associated with the passions of satiety (*ta ek tou korou pathēmata*, *De virginitate* XXI:2:11)⁶² in a particularly vivid way. It reveals the frustrating circularity of desire, which is counterpoised for Gregory by spiritual hunger in the faithful. Much, here, recalls the thought of Socrates, for whom the desire for food and drink is “the most conspicuous” example of the *epithymiai* (*Respublica* 437d).

A third consideration is that most people succumb to the vice of gluttony at some point in their lives. “Pleasures connected with eating and drinking abound in immoderate consumption” (*De virginitate* XXI:2:6–7),⁶³ since it is the “most persistent” moral disorder (*De virginitate* XXI:2:5).⁶⁴ In the *De oratione dominica*, Gregory claims that humans live partly in “the sphere of soul and intellect, partly in that of the bodily senses” and stresses how difficult it is to avoid acquiescing to at least “one sinful passion.” Then, he asks rhetorically: “Who is a stranger to the brutish pleasure of gluttony [*tis tēs boskēmatōdous tautēs kata ton laimon hēdonēs allotrios;*]?” (*De oratione dominica* 303:23–304:3).⁶⁵ A word of caution is in order. Even though the vice of gluttony is commonplace, it does not afflict everyone with equal intensity, because no one’s *epithymiai* are identical. Some people are inclined to covet glory, wealth, or fame, whereas others indulge the palate (*De beatitudinibus*, *PG* 44 1233:23–28).⁶⁶

Fourth, Gregory argues that gluttony was the first act of human recalcitrance in the Garden of Eden. This stands in contradistinction to Philo of Alexandria

(ca. 20 B.C.E.–50 C.E.), whose works Gregory read.⁶⁷ For Philo, sexual desire (*pot-hos*) was responsible for the first transgression. It gave rise to bodily pleasure (*hē tōn sōmatōn hēdonē*) and the “beginning of wrongs and violation of the law” (*De opificio mundi* 152:5–7).⁶⁸ By contrast, Gregory describes the serpent in the Garden of Eden as “Eve’s counselor in matters of taste” (*De oratione dominica* 280:27–28)⁶⁹ and connects the vice that emerged from the primordial sin to the forms of vice that gluttony now engenders. If one succumbs to gluttony, Gregory avers, the reptile will be “clandestinely creeping toward covetousness” (*De oratione dominica* 282:29–30).⁷⁰ Gluttony leads to the accrual of paraphernalia to make the experience of eating more enjoyable. This relies on having an adequate income. And the accrual of financial excess is linked to the sufferings to the poor (*De oratione dominica* 284:4–9).⁷¹ Then one is led by the serpent to unbridled frenzy (*akolastos lyssa*), probably an allusion to erotic frenzy (*lytta erōtikē*) in Plato’s *Leges* (839a), which is “the lowest degradation of man” (*De oratione dominica* 284:12–13).⁷² So gluttony, for Gregory, is the “head” of the serpent, the “first assault of evil,” which leads to the proliferation of other vices (*De oratione dominica* 282:16–18).⁷³ In the *In inscriptions*, the inordinate craving for food also recapitulates the primordial transgression. Commenting on Psalm 57:7(58:6) (“God will crush their teeth in their mouth”), Gregory wonders “what sort of teeth” is denoted by the verse. “Clearly,” he writes, it is “those eaters of the fruit of disobedience, those servants of the pleasures of the belly that he called *weapons and arrows* in the preceding psalm [Psalm 56(57)] by which *the word of truth* is torn to pieces” (*In inscriptions* II:251; emphasis is Heine’s).⁷⁴ Gregory’s protological reflections echo the tradition of the Desert Fathers, in which the sin of Adam and Eve was thought to be “ravenous greed,”⁷⁵ as Peter Brown has shown. Gregory is also in agreement with Evagrius, for whom the primordial sin was gluttony (*De octo spiritibus malitiae* 1:10).⁷⁶

Fifth, the vice of gluttony is linked to an absence of eschatological hope and a preoccupation with material satiation (*De oratione dominica* 226:11–14).⁷⁷ Gregory claims that those who make the belly “the criterion of the good” look “to what is present” only (*In inscriptions* I:31).⁷⁸ Gregory is not, however, opposed to all consideration of the present. In the *De oratione dominica*, he defines prayer as “the enjoyment [*apolausis*] of things present and the substance of the things to come” (*De oratione dominica* 208:22–23).⁷⁹ Note, here, that eschatological hope accompanies, rather than competes with, the enjoyment of the present. Furthermore, in explaining the use of “this day” in the Lord’s Prayer, Gregory appeals to Proverbs 27:1 (“[we] know not what the day to come may bring”) and Matthew 6:34 (“Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof”), arguing that “He who gives you the day will give you also the things necessary for the day” (*De oratione dominica* 288:4–5).⁸⁰ He then summons his audience to distinguish between “what one must ask for today, and what [one must ask] for later.” We ask for bread in prayer because it represents “all our bodily requirements” (*De oratione dominica* 290:5–6)⁸¹ for today, but “everlasting realities” must

take priority, so that “the first necessity [*chreia*]”—that is, bread—“is put in its right place by the greater one” (*De oratione dominica* 290:6–11).⁸² The fulfillment of bodily *chreia* is affirmed as good, but eschatological hope should overcome the want of excess. Gluttony, therefore, amounts to a spiritual failure to see beyond the present and to desire the everlasting joys of the *eschaton*.

Before concluding this section on gluttony, some consideration of fasting is in order. Gregory’s discussions of the spiritual practice of fasting, which focus on exemplars of ascetic virtue such as Basil of Caesarea (*In Basilium fratrem* 16:11–26), Elijah (*In Basilium fratrem* 15:1–22), and Daniel (*In XL Martyres II*, PG 46 780:54–781:4), feature significantly in his middle-period works—but his views on fasting had already reached a sophisticated level of development in a work from the early period: the *De beneficentia*. This sermon was written roughly at the time of the invasion of Thrace by the Goths under the emperor Valens in ca. 376/7.⁸³ This may have intensified Gregory’s contempt for gluttonous self-indulgence, given that vast numbers of people were now uprooted, left destitute and starving as a result of the invasion. Gregory summons Christians to identify and desire the face (*prosōpon*) of Christ in the poor: “Do not despise those who lie at your feet as unworthy. Take them into account and realize their worth. They have put on the form [*prosōpon*] of our Savior. The one who loves humanity [*ho philanthrōpos*] bestowed upon them his own form [*prosōpon*] to shame those who are heartless and loathe the poor” (*De beneficentia*, GNO IX/1 98:23–99:2; my translation).

For Gregory, philanthropy of the sort described here cannot be separated from other moral concerns, especially dietary self-restraint.⁸⁴ Fasting, practiced in its spiritual sense (*De beneficentia*, GNO IX/1 94:6–8), is linked to feeding the hungry and loving the poor (GNO IX/1 96:11–16; quoting Isaiah 58:4, 6–7). Gregory presents the choice as a stark one: serve your brother, or serve your satiety (GNO IX/1 97:9–13). But this insight can be appreciated by Christians only at a mature stage in their spiritual development, as they start receiving the more advanced lessons from the leaders of the Church (GNO IX/1 93:13–16). For less mature Christians, it is enough that they appreciate the importance of abstaining from meat and wine (GNO IX/1 93:17–94:5). But the expectation for mature Christians is that they will fast in awareness of its wider social and ethical implications. Fasting, for Gregory, is not a guarantor of holiness. Someone who fasts in the narrow individualistic sense is, in ethical terms, no different from Judas, who fasted with the other Apostles but did not refrain from monetary greed when he betrayed Christ, or indeed from the Devil, who requires neither food nor wine (GNO IX/1 94:16–25). It is also striking that Gregory specifically identifies abstinence from meat (*kreas*) as a practice that cannot be separated from compassion for one’s brother and the poor (GNO IX/1 94:13–15). The followers of Eustathius had condemned those who ate flesh—a position denounced at the Synod of Gangra (Canon 2).⁸⁵ Gregory’s response to these disputes, if he has them in mind, is to shift the focus away

from the abstinence of specific kinds of food (by placing this preoccupation at an immature stage of moral growth) and toward the social outcomes of ascetic dietary practice when undertaken by mature Christians.

So, to conclude: we have seen that the integrative significance of various bodily urges—the desire for food being the most dangerous—is of supreme importance for Gregory. We began this section by discussing how sexual desire is chastened and transformed in marriage and celibacy, but we now find ourselves being pushed back to consider the wider context of the transformation of desire more generally understood. So, as a postscript, it falls to me to situate these insights within Gregory's emerging early theory of desire to gain a better understanding of that wider summons to ascetical transformation.

Gregory's Emerging Theory of Desire

EROTIC DESIRE

As I now pull together the threads of our foregoing discussion, it is abundantly clear that for Gregory in his early writings the goal (*skopos*) of the pure and divine love (*ho katharos te kai ouranios erōs*, *De virginitate* XX:4:44)¹ is Christ *qua* Wisdom and Bridegroom. Urging his readers to abandon earthly pleasures, Gregory explains that the soul must “transfer [*metatithenai*] its power to love [*erōtikē*] from the body to the intelligible and immaterial contemplation of the beautiful” (*De virginitate* V:1:19–21).² For Gregory, *erōs* needs to be redirected from material beauties—the love of the flesh (*erōs sarkōn*, *De virginitate* XI:2:10)³—to the true prototypical beauty of God (*De virginitate* XI:5:14–20).⁴ This, in effect, explains why virtuous celibacy is thought to be ultimately superior to virtuous marriage. It also underlies Gregory's rejection of pederasty as a means of recollecting the Form of Beauty through the beauty of an adolescent male. But what does that fundamental orientation of desire toward God mean for other desires? How do we assess whether a bodily desire is legitimate, or whether on the contrary it is excessive and thus to be avoided at all costs?

THE CRITERION OF NEED

At the heart of Gregory's moral theory is the conviction that desire must be circumscribed by need. In the *De mortuis*, Gregory explains that humans have an elemental appetite (*orexis*) created by God to serve basic human need (*chreia*) as its aim or goal (*skopos*). This *chreia* includes shelter, clothing, and food, as well as

other desiderata that sustain human nature (GNO IX/1 58:20–24). However, when one pursues pleasure (*pathēma*) instead of *anankē chreia* (literally, “necessary need”), immoderation abounds, leading to fornication and effeminacy (*malakia*, GNO IX/1 58:24–59:8), among other things.

Greed reigns supreme when material satiety (*koros*) is delusively regarded as a kind of necessity (*anankē*, *De virginitate* X:2:8–10;⁵ cf. *De beatitudinibus*, PG 44 1237:24–28).⁶ The virtuous person therefore opposes the conflation of necessity and satiety, partaking instead of “the requirements of life only so far as necessary” and refusing to be “softened by the luxuries of the body” (*De oratione dominica* 254:10–3).⁷ Such a person will instead restrain *orexis* within the boundaries (*horoi*) delimited by *chreia* (*De mortuis*, GNO IX/1 58:24–59:8). Desire must not be allowed to spill over into excess; otherwise, it will give rise to a variety of disordered impulses (*hormai*), which include pleasures (*hēdonai*), riches (*ploutoi*), love of glory (*philodoxia*), power, anger, pride, and other such things (*ta toiauta*, GNO IX/1 61:11–13).

By distinguishing between *chreia* and *anankē*, Gregory is freely drawing on a long-established distinction between necessary and unnecessary appetites in the moral philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Porphyry.⁸ This emphasis on *chreia* and *anankē* also reflects Basil's *Asketikon*, in which necessity governs dietary practice (*LR* 16:2/*RBas.* 8:17; cf. *RBas.* 9:16) and monastic dress (*RBas.* 11:1–31 *passim*).⁹ This is no coincidence if we consider how indebted Gregory's ascetical thinking is to this early codification of monastic practice, as discussed in the prelude. For Basil, as for Gregory, desires must be moderated according to need.

There is a remaining unanswered question that needs to be addressed at this juncture—How, for Gregory, is desire circumscribed by need? Part of the answer, it seems, lies in the exercise of free will (*proairesis*): desire (*epithymia*)¹⁰ requires free will¹¹ in order to reach its proper goal (*skopos*)—human *chreia* (*De mortuis*, GNO IX/1 59:20–22). Or, as Gregory puts it earlier in the *De mortuis*, *epithymia* needs to be constantly altered or modified (*metatithesthai*) in accordance with the Beautiful (*to kalon*, GNO IX/1 46:5–6). Note, parenthetically, that Gregory so combines the ascetical and the spiritual that the passionate pursuit of Beauty (which we mentioned earlier) is equivalent to the disciplined pursuit of bodily need.

Reason also plays an important role in moderating desire. According to Gregory, the soul comprises “reason [*logistikē*] and desire [*epithymētikē*] and the faculty [*diathesis*] aroused by grief [*lypē*] and anger [*orgē*]” (*De virginitate* XII:3:38–40),¹² a tripartite division popular in the eclectic philosophical sources of his milieu, including Plato's charioteer analogy (*Phaedrus* 246a–254e; cf. *Respublica* 441e–442b). It is the exercise of the faculty of reason over the other two that provides the basis for transformation (*De beatitudinibus*, PG 44 1216:38–44).¹³ But reason does not ride roughshod over the soul. In fact, for Gregory, all the component parts of the soul are considered as friends, and “all look to the beautiful and the good and do everything for the glory of God” (*De virginitate* XII:3:41–44).¹⁴

These discussions form the backcloth to a key passage from the *De virginitate* (VI:2)¹⁵ in which the mind is likened to a stream.¹⁶ The stream, Gregory says, can flow in a disorderly fashion into sensual pleasures, or it can be funneled in an upward direction, forming a torrent toward laudable spiritual ends. Self-control (*enkrateia*), the means by which the stream of desire is directed, acts as a kind of pipe forcing the stream upward toward the truth of reality, thereby engendering “a desire [*epithymia*] for what is above” (*De virginitate* VI:2:23–26). The imagery Gregory uses here recalls Plato’s *Respublica*, in which the philosopher diverts the stream of desires (*epithymiai*) toward the pleasures of the soul rather than the body through the channel of learning (*mathēmata*, VI:485d–e). For Gregory, however, the practices of the Christian life—the reading of Scripture, liturgy, the teaching of the Church, and especially the ascetical practices of monastic life—replace pagan *mathēmata*.

THE PASSIONS

Much here in our discussion of desire and its ascetic rechanneling toward God relates to Gregory’s early consideration of the role of the passions in the life of virtue. I say this not simply because the passions are, for Gregory, profoundly related to desire—so much so, in fact, that “when the passions [*pathē*] disappear, desire [*epithymia*] withdraws from our nature” (*De mortuis*, GNO IX/1 57:10–11)—but also because the passions (like desire) must be not extirpated from human nature but transformed and redirected toward their true goal in God.

Because Gregory has yet to develop his sophisticated account of the differentiation between (morally neutral) impulses and (morally disordered) passions (as indeed he will do in the middle period), it may seem on occasion that for Gregory human nature needs to get rid of its elemental impulses (which he sometimes also confusingly calls “passions”). At one point, he says that the *pathē* are wholly alien to human nature. Because the first man was made in “the image of God” (Genesis 1:27), Gregory explains, he did not have the elements of passion (*to pathētikon*) “essentially and naturally in himself from the beginning” (*De virginitate* XII:2:4–7).¹⁷ But Aubineau is quite right to say that *apatheia*—a key term in Gregory’s writings—“ne consiste . . . plus à détruire les passions, mais à les redresser, les mieux orienter, les sublimer.”¹⁸ The passions have an important role to play in the moral life, so long as they are correctly ordered toward the pursuit of virtue.

Anger, for instance, may be used to resist sin, and grief may be used as an expression of repentance (*De virginitate* XVIII:3:5–17).¹⁹ To this end, Christ’s prohibition against wrath (*orgē*) in Matthew 5:21–12 is not, according to Gregory, intended to forbid it completely, because “sometimes one may lawfully turn such an emotion [*hormē*] also to good use; what the precept abolishes is to be angry with one’s brother for no good reason” (*De beatitudinibus*, PG 44 1276:3–6).²⁰ The passion of

fear (*phobos*) also has its place in the moral life (*De virginitate* XIX:1:32; cf. Isaiah 26:18),²¹ even though it was regarded as problematic for the Stoics.²² Christ never exhorts his followers to live “in complete isolation from the passions.” This is because “it is impossible to secure a perfectly immaterial and passionless mode of life within the confines of a material existence.” Gregory explains that complete absence of passion (*apatheia*) would go against human nature;²³ a just lawgiver, such as Christ, would never command what is impossible. What is commanded is moderation and meekness (*De beatitudinibus*, PG 44 1216:8–30).²⁴

The idea that one should not extirpate the passions but transform and master them is a feature of Stoic philosophy in which certain desires are singled out as laudable and virtuous.²⁵ It seems that Gregory is cognizant of that tradition in moral philosophy while also borrowing considerably from the Platonic tradition.

MODERATION

Gregory's use of *chreia* as the criterion by which legitimate appetites are adjudicated underpins his summons to ascetical moderation in chapter XXII of the *De virginitate*. Here, Gregory appeals to the wisdom of “a certain physician” (whom Aubineau thinks is Alcmaeon of Crotona)²⁶ and claims that the principles that guarantee the health (*hygieia*) of the body must also apply in an analogous sense to the health of the soul. The body, he argues, must avoid imbalance (*ametria*) by eschewing excess (*plēsmōnē ametros*, literally, “immoderate satiety”) as well as deficiency (*endeia*). Such equilibrium (*isokrateia*, *De virginitate* XXII:2:1;²⁷ cf. XXII:1:16 [*recensio altera*])²⁸ is also required in the moral life. Desires must be held in balance, avoiding one extreme or another, in order to protect the soul from sin. As such, neither excess (self-indulgence) nor deficiency (excessive asceticism) is advised. Extreme asceticism, for which Eustathius and his followers were known, is characterized by its undue valorization of “toil and the wearing out of the flesh” (*De virginitate* XXII:1:8–9).²⁹ For Gregory, one should be focused instead on “the efficient working of the instruments of the soul” rather than “the suffering of the body” (*De virginitate* XXII:2:25–28).³⁰ With regard to marriage, as we have already seen, he advocates moderate and measured sexual practice (*De virginitate* VII:3:5–7; cf. VIII:1:17–19).³¹

Gregory's emphasis on moderation resonates with Plato's *Respublica*, in which Socrates, in dialogue with Glaucon, describes the wise man as one who seeks moderation by “attuning the harmonies of his body for the sake of the concord in his soul” (591c–d). Besides the themes of bodily equilibrium and moderation at play in this passage from the *Respublica*, Socrates' contempt for making bodily health one's “chief aim” also resonates with Gregory's characterization of the virtuous celibate man as one who does not “busy himself with his bodily strength or his appearance or with exercising his body or fattening his flesh, but quite the opposite;

he will perfect the power of the spirit in the weakness of the body” (*De virginitate* XX:417–20).³² Gregory thereby adds a Christological flavor to the remarks from Socrates on moderation by appealing to 2 Corinthians 12:9, in which bodily weakness is rendered spiritually efficacious in Christ.

SATIETY VERSUS FULFILLMENT

Why does Gregory insist on curtailing desire according to *chreia*? A key reason for renouncing excess in the arena of material pleasure is to avoid the frustratingly cyclical nature of satiety, in which pleasure is added to pleasure without ever procuring full satisfaction (*De beatitudinibus*, PG 44 1244:22–24).³³ It is characterized as the desire for more (*hē tou pleionos ephesis*, *De virginitate* IV:5:26);³⁴ an evil person is one who lusts for more (*ho . . . to pleon echein epithymōn*, *De oratione dominica* 218:28–29).³⁵ By contrast, the practices of temperance (*sōphrosynē*) and purity (*katharotēs*) engender lasting joy (*euphrosynē*, *De beatitudinibus*, PG 44 1244:45–49).³⁶

It would be instructive now to look at a key passage from the *De beatitudinibus* in order to distinguish material desire that exceeds the bounds of *chreia* (A) from the steadfast possession (*ktēsis*) of virtue (B; *De beatitudinibus*, PG 44 1244:52–1245:5).³⁷

[A.] Satiety [*koros*] stops the greed of the glutton, and the drinker’s pleasure [*hēdonē*] is quenched at the same time as his thirst. And so it is with the other things. They all require a certain interval of time to rekindle the desire [*orexis*] for the delights, which enjoyment [*hēdonē*] carried to satiety [*plēsmonē*] has caused to flag.

[B.] The possession [*ktēsis*] of virtue, on the other hand, where it is once firmly established, is neither circumscribed by time nor limited by satiety [*koros*]. On the contrary: it always offers its disciples the ever-fresh experience of the fullness [present participle active of the verb *akmazein*] of its own delights. Therefore God the Word promises to those who hunger for these things that they shall be filled [*plēsmonē*], and in being filled [*plēsmonē*] their desire [*orexis*] will be not dulled but rather kindled anew.

The disjunction between *koros* and *plēsmonē* is crucial: the former refers to being filled in an ultimately unfulfilling way through material *hēdonē*³⁸—what Plato would call “the pleasures of the body” (*Respublica* 442a), as does Gregory³⁹—whereas the latter denotes unending plenitude, the overabundance of virtue.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, as we see from excerpt A, Gregory uses *plēsmonē* in the negative sense of material satiety, and so he is not always consistent in distinguishing between *koros* and *plēsmonē*.

Desire for virtue therefore needs to be abundant. It never tires out: satiety (*koros*) can “never blunt” the attraction of the Good (*De beatitudinibus*, PG 44 1233:31).⁴¹ If anything, *plēsmonē* (of the virtuous sort) gives rise to an intensified

desire (*epitasin poiei tēs orexeōs*, PG 44 1245:19);⁴² Gregory's use of the substantive *epitasis* ("stretching," "tightening") evokes the language of Philippians 3:13. Virtue can be a possession (*ktēsis*, PG 44 1245:20–22),⁴³ whereas material pleasures constantly elude the pursuer (PG 44 1245:11–13).⁴⁴ The problem with material pleasures is that they are insubstantial and transient. Referring to the pleasures of the stomach in the *In inscriptiones*, Gregory remarks that zeal for material pleasures never achieves its goal because these pleasures are by nature momentary (I:32).⁴⁵ Likewise, Socrates in the *Respublica* argues that "that other pleasure than that of the intelligence is not altogether even real or pure but is a kind of scene painting" (*Respublica* 583b).⁴⁶ A pure pleasure, by contrast, is one that does not require the satisfaction of appetite: it is the eternal pleasure of the *phronimos*.

It is worth reflecting again on gluttony as the vice of satiety *par excellence* but now focusing specifically on eating (*brōsis*) and drinking (*posis*). These activities are problematic for Gregory because they rely on the alterations of emptiness (*hē kenōsis*) and fullness (*hē plērōsis*) in the body (*De mortuis*, GNO IX/1 31:20–23). For Gregory, this oscillation, ceasing only at death, underscores the mutability of postlapsarian human nature, which for Gregory hinders our participation in the Good (GNO IX/1 33:26–34:7). Bodily enjoyments, which rely on this dialectical activity of emptiness and fullness, are contrasted with spiritual *apolausis*, which is "not subject to this life's changes." On the contrary, "it always remains full and can never be satiated," for spiritual delight "is never burdensome nor experiences satiety [*koros*]" (GNO IX/1 36:2–5). By speaking of the dialectic of emptiness and fullness, Gregory is alluding to Plato's *Philebus*, in which the pleasures of eating and drinking are inferior to other pleasures—such as pleasures in beauty, sight, and sound—because they are constantly caught between emptiness and fullness. The stomach, Socrates remarks, generates bodily pleasure (understood here as the cessation of pain) not when it is satiated but in the process of getting replenished (34c–35c; 35e).⁴⁷ In Plato's *Respublica*, there are countless references to the analogy between philosophic desire and the human appetite for food or drink (437b–439e, 475b–c, 585a–e), and Socrates is a self-acclaimed glutton in philosophy (354b). It is also worth remembering that for Aristotle philosophic desires need not be tempered or moderated (quite unlike the pleasures of the body), because the study of philosophy is never at risk of becoming excessive (*Ethica Nicomachea* 1117b). Thus, for both Aristotle and Gregory, an abundance of virtue is lauded—but an excess of material pleasures is condemned. And for both Plato and Gregory, mutability is presented as a negative aspect of bodily existence.

Whilst Gregory underscores the body's dangerous capacity for moral error because of its inherent mutability, he also affirms its indispensability for spiritual growth. He claims that "whatever now pertains to the body—death, old age [*gēras*], youth [*neotēs*], infancy [*nēpiotēs*], formation of the fetus—they all resemble green shoots, grain, and stems, and order [*akolouthia*] and power [*dynamis*]"⁴⁸ that

contribute to the final goal” (*De mortuis*, GNO IX/1 51:24–52:1). That goal (*skopos*) is the resurrection itself, the restoration (*apokatastasis*) of our original likeness (*homoioōsis*) to God (GNO IX/1 51:16–18). It is therefore false to suppose that Gregory is disparaging the body *tout court* in the *De mortuis*.⁴⁹ It has been argued that Gregory develops an appreciation of the role of embodiment in his understanding of moral transformation over the course of his life.⁵⁰ While the transformative potentiality of the body is undeniably an important theme in his later works, it is, I hope, by now abundantly clear that already in his earliest works, Gregory extricates mutability from its Platonic associations with imperfection and recasts it as a positive (indeed necessary) factor in the process of moral maturation.⁵¹

THE MORAL EVOCATIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE CHARACTERISTICS

So far, I have made passing allusions to the moral evocations of male and female characteristics in our discussion of the early phase of Gregory’s lifework. At this stage in our inquiry, I wish to make two clarifying observations.

First, Gregory at this stage in his thinking is rehearsing typical late antique presumptions about manly courage and female weakness. In the *De beatitudinibus*, Gregory insists that one should resist the impulse of passion (*hē tou pathous hormē*) in a manly way (*andrikōs*) by defeating passion with reason (*logismoi*, *De beatitudinibus*, PG 44 1216:26–30).⁵² This idea that manly reason overcomes womanish passion has its origins in Stoic philosophy. Seneca’s *De constantia sapientis*, for instance, opens by contrasting Stoics, who are regarded as manly, with other philosophers: “Stoici, virilem ingressi viam” (I:1). It also permeates the thought of Philo.⁵³

There are other occasions, however, when the moral associations of male and female characteristics are not explicit. In the *De mortuis*, for example, the noun *malakia* is placed alongside *pleonexia* as well as a phalanx of other sins of excess—here, *malakia* describes the lives of those who are enslaved by pleasure (*De mortuis*, GNO IX/1 59:4). It refers in the *De beatitudinibus* to the weakness or languor wrought by sin yet overcome by Christ when the faithful ascend “the mountain of the Lord” (*De beatitudinibus*, PG 44 1196:8; cf. Isaiah 2:3).⁵⁴ In the *De oratione dominica*, Gregory says that an evil person is lazy and effeminate (*malakos*, *De oratione dominica* 282:33), “the son of deserting maidens,” which is an allusion to Judith 16:12.⁵⁵ Although Gregory may be holding standard associations of effeminacy in mind—that is, the effeminate succumbing to passion—he does not spell them out in these particular texts.

Sometimes *andreia* refers to the virtue of fortitude or courage without being contrasted explicitly with effeminacy. It is portrayed as the mean (*mesos*) between deficiency (*elleipsis*) and “excess [*pleonasmos*] of boldness” (*De virginitate* VII:2:3–

5).⁵⁶ It is listed as a virtue in the *De beatitudinibus* (PG 44 1241:44).⁵⁷ Furthermore, *andreia* is coupled with *tharsos* (“courage”) in Gregory’s elucidation of the characteristics of the pure soul (*De virginitate* XVIII:3:10–11).⁵⁸ At this juncture, it is worth mentioning Cora Lutz’s discussion of Musonius Rufus, the Roman Stoic, and his use of *andreia*.⁵⁹ She observes that Musonius expends considerable energy on justifying its application to women. For this reason, she argues, *andreia* must carry gendered (male) connotations. Lutz also appeals to Plutarch’s treatise, *Mulierum virtutes*, which deliberately avoids using *andreia*. Plutarch prefers instead to use the word *aretē* most likely because it does not have the same gendered import as *andreia* and could therefore be applied to women without difficulty.⁶⁰ Likewise, in Gregory’s writings, *andreia* is regarded as a stereotypically male attribute, although he does not elaborate on this in any detail.

It is apparent that references to manly and womanish behavior do not carry sexual evocations but refer to general moral qualities. This includes the adjective *malakos*, although it sometimes denotes the male passive partner in pederasty in writings that precede those of Gregory.⁶¹ This leads us onto our second locus of inquiry: effeminacy (and its associated terms) must not be confused with contemporary typological accounts of sexual identity, especially that of homosexuality.

To stave off potential anachronisms in this regard, let us recall him regarded as “weak by disposition” (*ho . . . asthenōs diakeimenos*), who is summoned by Gregory to lifelong celibacy. If such weak people marry, they will not be able to moderate sexual pleasures “in a manly fashion [*andrikōs*]” (*De virginitate* VIII:1:27).⁶² It is sexual pleasure within marriage, between a man and woman, that spells destruction for those weak in disposition: that is, the effeminate. The modern association between effeminacy and homosexuality, therefore, finds no place in Gregory’s thought.

It may be argued that Gregory’s discussion of moral weakness resonates with Clement of Alexandria’s argument that true manhood is shown not in celibacy but in the training of marriage (*Stromateis* VII:12:70).⁶³ However, for Gregory, although marriage requires manly self-control to resist sexual excess, overall it has a softening—effeminizing—effect on one’s moral constitution. Gregory claims that Elijah and John the Baptist would not have “reached that height” of spiritual maturity if “they had grown soft [*katamalassein*] because of the pleasures of the body in marriage” (*De virginitate* VI:1:36–38).⁶⁴ Also, in the *De oratione dominica*, Gregory writes that the person who acquiesces to the assaults of the passions is “softened [*malakizesthai*] by the luxuries of the body” (*De oratione dominica* 254:10–1).⁶⁵

So to sum up: the person who is already manly does not turn sexual intercourse in marriage into a deed of passion, but he is nonetheless effeminized through his exposure to sexual pleasure. The person who is weak at first and refuses marriage on account of his weakness develops moral strength (*De virginitate* VIII:1:41–42)⁶⁶ and becomes more manly as a result.

CONCLUSION

Let me end this section with a recapitulation of our discussion of the early period.

We opened this first major section of the study with a clear purpose—to eschew an approach to Gregory’s theorization of desire that focuses on sexual lust in isolation from the manifold forms of desire that are just as (if not more) pernicious. We came away with two basic insights. On the one hand, we saw that Gregory’s integrationist ethic underpins his description of the life of virginity, which is viewed as a wholesale moral undertaking—the moderation of sexual desire is therefore necessarily accompanied by other virtuous undertakings. This integrationist focus means that the conjugal life is capable of emulating the spiritual and moral outcomes of virginity by moderating the sexual duty of marriage and prioritizing spiritual affairs above all else—but those who are married are never explicitly identified with virgins at this stage in Gregory’s thinking. We also saw that one’s age and moral capabilities determine what kind of life (marriage or celibacy) one should follow. There is no single form of life that is ideal for everyone. So long as one pursues all the virtues, one’s relationship with Christ will remain secure. On the other hand, while sexual vice is on a par with other forms of vice, we also saw the importance for Gregory of the erotic framing of the relationship between the individual and Christ, which rests on the transformative reshaping of erotic desire through reason and free will. Sexual laxity, of course, poses a threat to that spiritual relationship—but so, too, does every other form of vice.

It has also been my intention in this section to insist on placing pederasty and celibacy on a continuum in order to understand the full significance of Gregory’s theory of erotic desire—a suggestion that is doubtless liable to misinterpretation. The distinction between pederasty and celibacy is worth underscoring again here. Gregory repudiates the exclusively male (*erastēs-erōmenos*) erotic relationship of pederasty, in which female imagery is marginalized (even to the point of excluding female pregnancy), and structures erotic desire within the imagery of male-female relations. It has also been the burden of this section to point out that for Gregory, this imagery does not refer to ontologically male or female referents. In fact, he freely draws on a range of male and female imagery in describing the soul’s relationship with Christ. The soul’s capacity to identify with both male and female characteristics highlights its transcendence of these fixed categories of worldly association.

Equipped with these insights from the early phase of Gregory’s lifework, we now turn in the following chapter to the middle period of his thought.

PART TWO

The Middle Phase, September 378–387

*The Ascetical and Eschatological Mixture of
Male and Female*

IN OUR DISCUSSION OF THE MIDDLE PHASE of Gregory's literary career, I shall first recapitulate some of the major themes discussed in Part One and chart their development during this period. These themes include the worldly entanglements of marriage, physical and spiritual fecundity, and the moral evocations of male and female characteristics. We will discover that Gregory's disapproval of the confusion of the sexes—inspired by the canons of the Synod of Gangra—is counterpoised by another set of remarks about the spiritual malleability of male and female characteristics in the ascetic life. So, on the one hand, Gregory holds sexual hierarchy in marriage in high regard. But on the other hand, when he celebrates and reflects upon the lives of his sister Macrina and his brother Naucratius, it becomes apparent that he develops—and indeed goes on developing throughout his life—an awareness of the soul's shifting identifications with male and female characteristics.

We will then examine why Gregory and other late antique thinkers regard disordered passion as womanish. This will lead us to consider the importance of grief in Gregory's theorization of desire. It is in response to the loss of his siblings Basil and Macrina that the passion of grief understandably becomes an area of particular interest during this period in Gregory's literary career. How grief relates to and is transformed by desire for God is the ineluctable issue at stake in this period. Gregory's combined reflections on grief, death, eschatology, and male and female characteristics compel him to reconsider the much-disputed question of whether genitalia will be physically restored at the general resurrection. His discussion of these and other associated concerns also result in new inflections of his theory of desire that I shall discuss *intra*.

Finally, I shall look at the two central doctrinal controversies with which Gregory contended as bishop of Nyssa. Although Gregory fought against a number of heresies—such as Pneumatomachianism and Antidicomarianism—I shall focus on his expostulations against Apollinarianism and Eunomianism because of their specific implications for the ascetic themes of this inquiry. What emerges from our analysis is a Christologically theorized account of diachronic maturation that sheds fresh light on the moral growth of individual Christians and a renewed insistence on removing the fleshly concepts of male and female from the Godhead.

A Worldly Life of Desire

Marriage, Children, Money, and Sex

It is the purpose of this chapter to recapitulate the nexus of associations that arose out of our discussion of the early period and chart their train of development in the middle period. Key shifts and developments in Gregory's thinking include a more nuanced account of the problems of marriage and childrearing, a broadened construal of spiritual fecundity to include baptism and free will, and a more in-depth discussion of the distinctive qualities and dangers of sexual vice. I shall end this chapter with a discussion of the influence of the Synod of Gangra on Gregory's thought and his acceptance of the subordination of women to men in marriage based on biblical authority. Since this last point has been largely overlooked by some recent commentators on Gregory's theology, it will be my aim to bring the underlying rationale of these attitudes into view.

THE PROBLEMS OF MARRIAGE

In the middle period, as in the *De virginitate*, marriage is regarded as a fraught enterprise. In the *Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam*, the fear of widowhood is, for Gregory, an incentive for resting one's hopes on spiritual marriage with the "true bridegroom" (GNO IX/1 466:17–19; cf. *De virginitate* III:3:1–41).¹ In addition to the fear of death, Gregory portrays "the cares of rearing children" (*phrontidōn paidotrophia*) as an arduous undertaking (*Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam*, GNO IX/1 466:26–467:2). In the middle period, these ordeals are considered to be features of the "corporeal life" as a whole (GNO IX/1 466:19–21). So while Gregory's emphasis on the entanglement of marriage in worldliness is not much different from the insights of the early period, he now offers a more nuanced treatment of marriage—at least as compared with the *De virginitate*.

So, for Gregory, does celibacy always elude the misery of humanity's fallen state? The answer, for the main part, seems to be yes. Gregory insists that "He Who took our nature was pure from both these feelings" (*Oratio catechetica* XVI:32–33): that is, sexual pleasure and the impulse to vice. This is because "His birth [*genesis*] had no connection with sensual pleasure [*hēdonē*], and His life none with vice [*kakia*]" (*Oratio catechetica* XVI:33–34).² The overcoming of vice (and, presumably, all its associated maladies and ordeals) in the person of Christ is linked to the absence of sexual pleasure in the virginal conception. In the *De tridui spatio*, Gregory claims, though only as a probability (*eikos*), that Mary did not suffer labor pain (*ponos*) precisely because she did not experience sexual pleasure (*hēdonē*, GNO IX/1 276:5–9)³—a theme that also emerges in the *Oratio catechetica* (XVI:29–32)⁴ and later in the *In Cant* (GNO VI 388:21–389:12).⁵ On account of her virginity, Mary did not experience labor pains, which were originally bestowed onto Eve and therefore all humanity as a consequence of the first transgression (Genesis 3:16). She also defeated death (another postlapsarian phenomenon) through her virginal purity (*De virginitate* XIV:1:24–30).⁶

The problem that Gregory is trying to address is that pleasure, in a postlapsarian context, is ineluctably mixed with the evil of pain: the pleasure of taste is accompanied by hunger; sexual desire, by longing; and so forth. It was God's original intention to allow humans to enjoy "the good things unmixed [*amiges*] with evil," because God had "forbidden to join the experience of evil to what was good"—a reference to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. However, in a postlapsarian world, "human nature must now always live in both, and share in sorrow as well as in joy" (*De beatitudinibus*, PG 44 1229:50–1232:1).⁷ The fallen world is thus characterized by the "constant mingling of opposites [*tōn enantiōn hē synchysis*]" (*De virginitate* III:3:20–21):⁸ "grief and pleasure [*hēdonai*], courage and fear, hope and desire [*epithymiai*]" (*Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam* 466:21–22). This *coniunctio oppositorum* means that earthly pleasure cannot be disarticulated from suffering and distress. Only with purity of heart, as Gregory earlier remarked in the *De virginitate*, can one behold "the divine and unmixed pleasure" (*De virginitate* V:1:29–30).⁹

Much of this discussion has its roots in Book IX of Plato's *Respublica* (583c–587a), in which mixed pleasure—what results from the cessation of pain—is contrasted with pure pleasure, which is pleasurable in itself. In the *Philebus*, Plato highlights the inferiority of bodily pleasures, such as the mixed pleasures for food and drink (46a–47b, 50e–52a), to unmixed pleasures (51a–52b, 53b–c; 66b), such as learning (52b). Although Gregory relies on Plato's distinction, he weaves it into a range of theological reflections on protology, eschatology, and divine transformation, and lauds Mary as the ascetic *par excellence* whose life was untouched by the mixture of pleasure and pain.

Gregory also argues that just as the absence of sexual pleasure entailed the absence of pain in childbirth in the case of Mary, so also the acceptance of pain in

the ascetic life overcomes the false glamour of worldly pleasure. In the *De beatitudinibus*—a work from the early period—Gregory claimed that “a man who suffers cannot enjoy pleasure.” For this reason, “as sin entered through pleasure, it is exterminated by the opposite” (*PG* 44 1297:44–46).¹⁰ Similarly, in the middle period, ascetical practices are described as “the struggles of piety” (*agōnes tēs eusebeias*), in which one’s “troubles” (*tarachai*), associated with temptation and sin, are conquered through “long suffering” (*makrothymia*, *Contra fornicarios*, *GNO* IX/1 217:15–20). The quest for chastity (*sōphrosynē*) is invoked by Gregory as an example of an ascetical undertaking that requires suffering. Drawing on Paul’s description of the spiritual life as a kind of race or exercise (1 Timothy 4:7–10; 2 Timothy 2:5, 4:7), Gregory describes Joseph as “an athlete [*athlētēs*] experienced in chastity [*sōphrosynē*]” for fleeing from the Egyptian mistress (Genesis 39:12) and resisting her guiles (*GNO* IX/1 215:21–22). Joseph, therefore, ought to be emulated for how he athletically embraced suffering for the sake of virtue. Gregory offers some sobering thoughts to those who feel overwhelmed by the painful demands of asceticism: “the more life is made miserable with sadness, the more occasions for joy accumulate in the soul. Self-control [*enkrateia*] is gloomy; humility is dreary; being punished is a grief; not being equal with the powerful is a reason for sorrow; but the one who humbles himself will be lifted up [Luke 14:11]” (*In Ecclesiasten*, *GNO* V 389:13–17).¹¹

If we combine these insights with Gregory’s comments on the Virgin Mary, we discover two different definitions of pain at play here: one refers to postlapsarian misery; the other refers to the strenuous, yet transformative, demands of ascetical self-mastery.

Up until this point, I have shown that the life of virginity requires spiritual suffering, which differs from the worldly ordeals of marriage. On one occasion, however, celibacy is associated with postlapsarian misery. In the *In Ecclesiasten*, Gregory decries “lonely celibacy” alongside “the burdensome marriage,” “the troublesome multitude of children,” and “sterile childlessness” (*GNO* V 387:10–13).¹² So for Gregory, celibacy, if practiced as a fissiparous form of individualism, is liable to worldly suffering in the form of loneliness. Even so, the *In Ecclesiasten* lists three challenges in marriage, but only one challenge in relation to celibacy, which suggests that married Christians are more vulnerable to the troubles of the corporeal life. A particularly problematic aspect of marriage is physical fecundity. This is the next area of discussion, to which I now turn.

PHYSICAL FECUNDITY

Childrearing

In the *De virginitate*, physical fecundity posed two potential challenges: the prospect of the death of one’s child and—if the child grows to maturity—pride in one’s offspring. In the middle period, Gregory adumbrates a wider set of difficulties

associated with childrearing, but as before he insists that procreation is a gift from God and must not be despised.

One of the main problems with childrearing for Gregory during this period in his life is its entanglement in assessments of human worth based on ancestry and lineage. On numerous occasions, when discussing the lives of those who have just died, he intentionally focuses on their virtue and piety, not their ancestry according to the flesh (*kata sarka*, *De vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi*, PG 46 900:1–4).¹³

Why does Gregory find the late antique preoccupation with genealogy and lineage so objectionable? For one, he is alarmed by the futility and circularity of human generation: “Why are we surprised if generation [*genea*] goes and generation [*genea*] comes [Ecclesiastes 1:4], and this cycle [*dromos*] does not leave aside its natural rhythm, as the generation of men [*genea tōn anthrōpōn*] constantly arriving expels its predecessor, and is expelled by the one succeeding?” (*In Ecclesiasten*, GNO V 286:24–287:3).¹⁴ Gregory is also intent on facing off the sin of pride. A person’s noble birth (*eugeneia*), fatherland (*patris*), and lineage (*genos*) often become the criteria that people use to adjudicate human worth. It is not insignificant that Basil is praised by Gregory for his virtue (*In Basilium fratrem* 24:46–25:16) rather than worldly success. This is because worldly success and glory distract us from the transformative possibilities of the spiritual life. We lose sight of the fact that our souls should be ascending heavenward (*In Basilium fratrem* 24:26–37). We also forget that it is the proper exercise of free will, not worldly acclaim, that will make us co-heirs to the heavenly kingdom (*De vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi*, PG 46 896:28–36).

For Gregory, procreation also participates in the intergenerational transmission of wealth. The accruing of wealth is regarded as a self-indulgent undertaking. It has its origins in the insatiable desire for more, a desire that exceeds the bounds of necessity: “Many who have no heir, nor any hope of one, for the great wealth that they have laboriously gained, rear a countless brood within themselves of wants instead of children, and they are left without a channel into which to convey this incurable disease, though they cannot find an excuse in any necessity for this failing” (*De infantibus praemature abreptis*, GNO III/2 91:4–8).¹⁵ Although Gregory in this passage suggests that childrearing is one way of avoiding a worse moral fate, in which one rears “wants instead of children,” he is also alarmed by the transmission of wealth from one generation to another: “most declare that they give play to their cravings for more [*hai tou pleionos epithymiai*], in order that they may make their offspring all the richer” (GNO III/2 90:24–91:2;¹⁶ cf. *De virginitate* XX:4:1–5).¹⁷

So how, for Gregory, does one avoid the problems associated with procreation and childrearing? The answer, it seems, is to prioritize the demands of the spiritual life over biological ties, as exemplified by Abraham. Not only did Abraham quell his fatherly affections toward his son by being prepared to offer him up to God in sacrifice. He also abandoned his concerns for Isaac’s future, especially with regard to marriage (*De Deitate filii et spiritus sancti et in Abraham*, PG 46 568:53–569:3).

Motherly affections must also be displaced by higher spiritual demands. In the *In XL Martyres Ib* (PG 46 769:8–48), Gregory praises “that mother [of one of the Forty], that worthy root for a martyr.”¹⁸ Her ability to let go of maternal attachments seems to be patterned on the mother of the seven brothers in 2 Maccabees 7:20–21 who bore their martyrdom “with good courage because of her hope in the Lord” and “reinforced her woman’s reasoning with a man’s courage.” The mother mentioned in the *In XL Martyres Ib* resisted *ta splanchna* (PG 46 769:24)—her affections (literally, “inward parts”)—and in doing so, outstretched her female nature: “she braced herself beyond her strength [*hyper tēn physin*], or rather, she was braced by the Spirit. She herself lifted her son on the chariot together with the others and with a shining face escorted the athlete” (PG 46 769:45–48).¹⁹ Gregory artfully reinterprets 1 Timothy 2:15 so that the mother is saved by giving birth (1 Timothy 2:15), by rearing children who would become holy martyrs. She made amends for the common nature of women by disowning and overcoming what God had created in her: her motherly affections. Only then could she proclaim: “You are not my child, not the fruit of my labor during childbirth. Since you have received God, you were born in God” (PG 46 772:33–39).²⁰

Children are also called to prioritize spiritual affairs above their relationships with their parents. In the *In XL Martyres Ib*, Gregory summons young people to subordinate their ties to their parents and their acquaintances to that one good, which is Christ himself (PG 46 765:18–26). Gregory also praises martyrs for their willingness to reject family ties for God (PG 46 765:26–27). In the *In XL Martyres Ia*, Gregory reflects upon the commandment to honor one’s “earthly parents” (*tēs sarkos . . . pateres*; cf. Exodus 20:12, Ephesians 6:2) and wonders what this means when one’s earthly parents have departed this life. Gregory underlines the continuing validity of the commandment by spiritualizing biological relations, so that one’s true family is constituted by the members of the Church. As such, elderly men in the congregation become fathers to whom one owes respect (PG 46 751:44–752:44).

In a rare appeal to Genesis 2:18, in which Eve is described as the helper of Adam, Gregory again places considerable importance on cultivating spiritual and moral relationships within the community of the Church. He refers to Genesis 2:18 not, as one might expect, to discuss appropriate relations between men and women in the conjugal life but to underscore the equal capacity of men and women in the Church (as he puts it, the “entire host of witnesses”) to pursue virtue and holiness: “both [*hekaterōthen*] share a yoke that consists of tenderness. . . . Both [*isē*] share the same gift,” since “no one is inferior” (*Oratio funebris in Flacillam imperatricem*, GNO IX/1 478:20–479:21; emphasis mine).

Despite Gregory’s repeated warnings about parenthood and family life, he insists that neither procreation nor the generative faculty should be despised. Several reasons are given for this.

First, “the progeny of children” is part of a “twofold” gift from God, a divinely ordained antidote (*antidosis*) to the phenomenon of death, which entered the world alongside sin (*Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam*, GNO IX/1 471:24–472:2).

Second, physical fecundity is open to a range of transformative possibilities. Even though Gregory warns of the pitfalls of wealth and inheritance in the *De infantibus praemature abreptis*, he avers in the same work that the lives of virtuous parents operate “to the advantage of their children” by inculcating virtue in them (GNO III/2 93:3–8).²¹ So Gregory seems to suggest that if one gives prime place to the moral and spiritual life in marriage, it too—like celibacy—can have rich spiritual outcomes: an increase in the number of saints.

A third point of interest comes from a largely overlooked passage from the *In sanctum Pascha* in which divine creativity in physical procreation is compared to God’s restorative work at the resurrection. Just as semen (*to sperma*) is transformed by the ineffable skill of God into the child, so too the dead body, although it becomes dust, will be restored again by God to its original incorruptible state—“just as he originally came into existence from it” (GNO IX/1 258:21–259:4).²² Gregory’s biological presumptions are broadly Aristotelian. For Aristotle, there is only one fertile seed in sexual intercourse, the male seed, which provides the form of the child. The woman provides incubation for the seed, and the matter for its growth and development (*Metaphysica* X:9:1, *De generatione animalium* I–IV).²³ If Pseudo-Plutarch is to be trusted (*Placita philosophorum* V:5:1), Democritus seems to have espoused the contrary position, namely that both men and women contribute seed to the generation of offspring—so too do Galen (*De semine* II:4:24)²⁴ and Hippocrates (*De semine*; *De natura pueri* 6–7). Whilst Gregory refers to the male seed only, he does not engage in further biological speculation and instead attributes the creation of a new human life to the handiwork of God. So what the aforementioned passage from the *In sanctum Pascha* underscores is God’s creative agency in both physical procreation and the resurrection. As noted earlier, Gregory does not associate the generative process with shame or guilt in the same way that Augustine does later. This is particularly apparent in chapter XXVIII of the *Oratio catechetica*, where Gregory in his defense of the Incarnation provides his most positive evaluation of human genitalia. He insists that genitalia should not be condemned as worthless or wicked. On the contrary, they must be viewed as more worthy of honor than any other bodily member because of their role in the continuation of our race.²⁵

A fourth, and final, observation about physical procreation: Gregory contrasts the goodness of procreation with the wicked practice of usury, which had been condemned at the Council of Nicaea (Canon 17).²⁶ At first blush, the link between usury and sexual procreation may seem puzzling—until one realizes that the word *tokos* could mean both “childbirth,” “parturition,” and (metaphorically) “produce

of money lent” as well, and hence “interest.” By condemning the practice of usury, Gregory follows in the footsteps of his brother Basil (*Homilia in Psalmum 14*), whose death, according to Daniélou,²⁷ compelled Gregory to write the *Contra usurarios* in Lent 379. Basil’s sermon is mentioned at the beginning and end of the text (GNO IX/1 195:20–23; 207:4–7), which supports the hypothesis that it was written in close proximity to Basil’s death.

In his sermon, Basil contrasted the goodness of physical procreation with the sinfulness of usury, which he disparaged as “interest upon interest [*tokos epi tokōi*], the wicked offspring of wicked parents” (*Homilia in Psalmum 14*, PG 29 273:35–41),²⁸ by playing on the twofold meaning of *tokos* as “parturition” and “usury.” Gregory develops Basil’s comparison by claiming that it is a “misuse of words” to describe usury—a “kind of robbery or bloodshed”—as *tokos*. It is, Gregory says, an “evil union [*syzygia*], what nature [*physis*] knows not” (*In Ecclesiasten*, GNO V 344:11–15).²⁹

Gregory also drives a wedge between the created division of the sexes into the male and the female (*to arren kai thēly*, Genesis 1:27), imbued with the capacity for procreation (Genesis 1:22, 28), and the disordered marriage and resulting pregnancy of the child (*tokos*) of gold, which he believes to be condemned in Psalm 7:14–15 (“Behold, he was in labor with injustice; he conceived toil and gave birth to wickedness”). “This,” he says, “is that child [*tokos*] with which greed was in labor, and to which wickedness gave birth, and whose midwife is miserliness” (*In Ecclesiasten*, GNO V 344:16–345:7).³⁰

These stringent condemnations of usury appear to be at least partly animated by Aristotle’s contempt for the practice. Aristotle distinguishes between a natural birth (physical procreation) and a birth that is against nature (*para physin*). For Aristotle, compared with other ways of obtaining money, usury is the most (*malista*) contrary to nature. The underlying presumption is that *tokos* denotes: “a yield arising out of money itself, not a product of that for which money was provided. Money was intended to be a means of exchange; interest represents an increase in the money itself. We speak of it as a yield, as of a crop or a litter, for each animal produces its like, and interest is money produced out of money” (*Politica* 1258b5–8).³¹ However, for Gregory, physical procreation is not the supreme good that replaces the evil of usury. In the *Contra usurarios*, it is virtue that displaces the degenerate motherhood of moneylending, which gives birth to usury (GNO IX/1 195:9–14). In other words, while sexual differentiation and procreation are affirmed together as good in contrast to the practice of usury, Gregory looks to the motherhood of virtue (not physical motherhood) as its true replacement.

In fact, Gregory describes various types of spiritual motherhood; the motherhood of virtue is just one type among many. In the *De Deitate filii et spiritus sancti et in Abraham* (PG 46 574:22–25) and also in the *In Basilium fratrem* (20:10–13), the

Church is said to be the mother whose womb represents the regeneration of baptism and whose breasts feed the faithful with her doctrines (cf. *De vita Moysis* II:12).³² Moreover, free will (*proairesis*) is described as a mother, as we read in the *In Ecclesiasten*, in which Gregory appeals to Isaiah 26:17–18 and Galatians 4:19 (*GNO* V 379:23–380:6).³³ The theme of the motherhood of free will returns later in the *De vita Moysis*, as we shall see in chapter 8 below. Remarkably, God is also compared to a mother in the *Contra Eunomium*: “the divine Power . . . like a tender mother who joins in the inarticulate utterances of her babe, gives to our human nature what it is capable of receiving” (II:419:6–11).³⁴ And—to anticipate—the theme of God’s motherhood will appear again in the *In Cant*, in which Gregory argues that God transcends male and female. It will suffice to point out, at this juncture, that there is a rich variety of spiritual alternatives (free will, Church, God) to the evil mother of interest. But in the *Contra usurarios*, it is the motherhood of virtue that is regarded as the supremely appropriate replacement for moneylending.

Having discussed the drawbacks of physical fecundity, let us now reflect a little further on the significance and worth of spiritual fecundity in the middle period of Gregory’s literary career.

Spiritual Fecundity

In the early period, Gregory focused on two forms of spiritual fecundity—evangelism (giving birth to converts) and the accrual of virtue. By the middle period, Gregory becomes interested in baptism and free will as forms of spiritual birth.

With regard to baptism, Gregory affirms the creative presence of God in both physical generation and baptismal regeneration. He refers to “the impulses [*hormai*] of the parents,” which give rise to *gennōmenon* (meaning, “the one to be born”) by the power of God even though they do not explicitly invoke God in prayer, being overwhelmed during the sexual act by sexual impulses (*hormai*). So, he writes, “How much more will the object be accomplished in that spiritual mode of generation [*posō mallon en tōi pneumatikōi tēs gennēseōs tropōi*], where . . . God has promised that He will be present in the process?” (*Oratio catechetica* XXXIV:20–30).³⁵ Gregory therefore affirms the creative power of God in the sexual act (despite the absence of prayer) whilst also underscoring the superiority of “that spiritual mode of generation” (because God is explicitly invoked through prayer). In the *In sanctum et salutare Pascha*, Gregory will again elevate spiritual fecundity in baptism above bodily generation (*GNO* IX/1 310:15–18).³⁶ Likewise, in the *De tridui spatio*, Gregory appeals to John 1:13 to distinguish between the spiritual life and the bodily life (*GNO* IX/1 278:2–11).³⁷ The common theme in all these passages is that spiritual fecundity supersedes bodily generation in every respect.

Our discussion of fecundity has revealed considerable thematic convergences between the *De virginitate* and Gregory’s middle-period works, although Gregory appears to have expanded the scope of spiritual fecundity beyond the *De virgin-*

itate's focus on evangelism and the proliferation of the virtues. Physical fecundity is consistently displaced and superseded by spiritual forms of fecundity. But he also maintains the goodness of God's creation, which includes the division of humanity into male and female for the purposes of physical reproduction—a sort of consolation for the phenomenon of postlapsarian death.

THE PARTICULAR CHALLENGES OF SEXUAL VICE

As we have already seen in Part One, it is an important feature of Gregory's ascetical theology that discussions on sexual vice are not treated in isolation from the wider transformation of desire. In the middle period, Gregory devotes focused attention in the *Contra fornicarios* to sexual vice and its unique features, though without ever sidelining his integrationist ethic.

For the first time in Gregory's literary career, sexual vice is singled out as different from other forms of vice, because it blurs the distinction between agent and effect. Gregory argues on the basis of 1 Corinthians 6:18 that sexual immorality (*porneia*) corrupts the agent who has perpetrated the sin (*Contra fornicarios*, GNO IX/1 212:14–214:7) and sullies “the majesty [*semnotēs*] of the body” (GNO IX/1 213:20). If we allow continence (*sōphrosynē*) to guard the flesh from sexual corruption—if we allow purity (*katharotēs*) to dwell in our bodily members—then, on Gregory's account, we respect the body as the temple of the indwelling Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:19; GNO IX/1 217:4–13). Sexual continence, therefore, acknowledges and affirms the created majesty of the body; by contrast, sexual vice is responsible for its denigration.

It is by now clear that for Gregory, all the vices are reciprocally interconnected. One form of evil inexorably leads to another. Gregory's reflections on *porneia* in the *Contra fornicarios* continue to draw on this theological analysis of sin, but he now highlights the unique features of sexual vice. Although “the wicked character of an impure person” can be traced to the mind—and is not, therefore, necessarily manifest (*prodēlos*) and plain (*saphēs*) for all to behold—sexual immorality is the mother (*mētēr*) of a variety of related evils that are visible (GNO IX/1 214:8–18).

Not only is sexual vice the cause of other sins; it is also itself often the corollary of excessive drinking. Gregory avers in the *In Ecclesiasten* that “the unlawful heinous act of incest” between Lot and his daughters was the result of immoderate drinking (GNO V 329:13–330:11).³⁸ Much here resembles the teaching of Methodius of Olympus, whose works, especially the *Symposium*, were well known to Gregory.³⁹ Methodius does not allow consecrated virgins to indulge in “the fruits of the plant of evil” because of “its natural propensity to produce drunkenness and intoxication” (*Symposium sive Convivium decem virginum* V:5:12–14).⁴⁰ Citing Deuteronomy 32:32–33, Methodius also argues that drunkenness induces sexual impropriety between men: “The inhabitants of Sodom, gathering their vintage

from these vines, were provoked to an unnatural [*para physin*] and fruitless [*akarpōs*] passion [*orexis*] for men” (V:5:29–30).⁴¹ Gregory, by contrast, never links immoderate drinking aetiologically to the desire (*orexis*) for men. Instead, he argues that it leads to incest and other manifestations of moral disorder, such as licentiousness (*akolasia*) and an abundance of pleasures (*hēdonōn chorēgia*, *In Ecclesiasten*, GNO V 328:18–329:13).⁴²

Now that the aetiology of sexual profligacy has been brought into view, it is important to take a step back and look again at Gregory’s treatment of bodily virtues and vices. As we saw in the early period, he draws on a late antique discourse in which moral weakness is effeminate and moral strength is manly. I now turn to consider the significance and portrayal of these evocations in the middle period.

THE MORAL EVOCATIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE CHARACTERISTICS

It is important, first, to note that Gregory’s understanding of female weakness is twofold: it is both physical and moral. Inspired by 1 Peter 3:7, in which women are described as the weaker sex,⁴³ Gregory regards women as physically weaker than men. This is his rationale for discouraging women from going on pilgrimage (*Ep. II:6:3–7:1*):⁴⁴

It is impracticable for a woman to pursue so long a journey unless she has a conductor, for on account of her natural weakness [*physikē astheneia*] she has to be put on her horse and be lifted down again, and she has to be steadied in rough terrain. . . . Whether she leans on a stranger or on her own servant, she fails to observe the law of modesty [*ho tēs sōphrosynēs nomos*].

Likewise, in the *De vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi*, Gregory refers undisparagingly to the natural weakness (*hē fisikē . . . astheneia*) of women, who in the time of Gregory the Wonderworker were coerced, along with other Christians, by one cruel law to submit to idols (*PG 46 945:40–44*).⁴⁵ It is apparent, therefore, that female weakness is not always indicative of moral failure. But Gregory, on other occasions, explicitly draws out the harmartiological significance of female weakness and underscores the importance of keeping men and women separate.

As we have already seen in our discussion of the early period, womanish behaviors are characterized by an absence of rational control over brutish impulses. This theme continues in the middle period. Describing pleasure as a wild animal that prowls around one’s senses (cf. 1 Peter 5:8), Gregory asks: “Why do you let womanly softness [*ekthēlynein*] take over a manly nature [*andrōdes tēs physeōs*]?” (*In Ecclesiasten*, GNO V 311:6–11).⁴⁶ To have a manly (*andrōdes*) or youthful (*neanikos*) constitution, as opposed to being lazy (*blakōdēs*) and weak (*eklytos*), one must prevent the pleasures from softening (*malattein*) one’s senses (*In Ecclesiasten*, GNO V 431:1–7).⁴⁷

In the *Contra fatum*, Gregory criticizes those who are “characterized by effeminate behavior [*apothelynesthai*]” (GNO III/2 34:3–4). He associates women with the passion of fear, specifically the fear of suffering and persecution, which is unbecoming of the pursuit of Truth; only *faithful* Christian women can overcome it (*Contra Eunomium* I:135:2–3).⁴⁸ Gregory describes John the Baptist as one who “railed against every type of delicate [*thryptein*]⁴⁹ soft [*malakos*] manner of life” (*In Basilium fratrem* 13:13–5). He did what was patient and manly (*to karterikon kai andrōdes*) in life, inculcating discipline within himself “by fasts [*nēsteiai*] and self-control [*enkrateiai*],” and embracing poverty (*In Basilium fratrem* 13:15–31).

Gregory also thinks women are untrustworthy. Abraham’s refusal to inform Sarah of God’s instruction to sacrifice Isaac is, for Gregory, based on the assumption that women are “untrustworthy [*anaxiopistos*] in counsel.” After all, “Adam certainly did not profit from accepting Eve’s counsel” (*De Deitate filii et spiritus sancti et in Abraham*, PG 46 569:9–11). Abraham ensured his wife knew nothing about it so that she would not suffer “any feminine [*gynaikeion*] and material passion” or “shake Abraham’s strict and pure love of God” (PG 46 569:11–14). If Sarah had known about it, her passionate nature would have prevented Abraham from following the divine will (PG 46 569:16–20).

In the conjugal life, Gregory insists that women should be subordinated to men. In the *In Ecclesiasten*, Gregory claims that women should remain silent in Church, following the Pauline injunction in 1 Corinthians 14:35. He argues on the basis of Ecclesiastes 3:7b that there is a right time (*eukairia*) to speak—that is, after Church and to her husband (GNO V 409:20–410:3). In the *Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam*, Gregory makes the same point but refers this time to Abraham’s wife, who would not have allowed Isaac to be slain. He describes women, in moral terms, as “the weaker part of human nature” (*to asthenesteron meros tēs anthrōpinēs physeōs*, GNO IX/1 468:18–20).⁵⁰ He then insists that a woman should be instructed by a man “concerning divine things,” because “she does not acknowledge the hidden life as better than appearances and would not entrust the care of her son to a man” (GNO IX/1 468:20–23). Elsewhere, Gregory derides the gullibility of old women (*graōdes*), who are captivated by the deceitful syllogisms (*sylogismoi*) of the Eunomians (*Contra Eunomium* III:6:54:9–12).⁵¹ He also regards Jezebel’s control (*andrapodon*)⁵² over her husband, Ahab (cf. 1 Kings 16:31), as a sin, albeit one among many. Through manly contempt (*hyperopsia*) for his body, Elijah acted as a kind of compensation⁵³ for the proliferation of sin during that time (*In Basilium fratrem* 5:7–24).

The wider ecclesial context that informs Gregory’s insistence on the subordination of women to men is the Synod of Gangra, in which Canon 17 anathematizes those who cut their hair as a way of flagrantly renouncing their subordination to men (and particularly their husbands). Among the Eustathians, women cropped their hair (Canon 17)⁵⁴ and wore men’s clothing (Canon 8)⁵⁵ to demonstrate their

transcendence of sexual differentiation. In condemnation of these practices, the bishops of Gangra appeal to 1 Corinthians 11:10—where Paul argues that women’s long hair is intended by God to be a reminder of their subordination to men—and the prohibition on cross-dressing in Deuteronomy 22:5.

We are faced here with an inconsistency in Gregory’s thought. With regard to slavery, Gregory opposes human lordship over others as a deviation from God’s protological intentions: each human being is made in the *imago Dei* and is therefore self-governed (*autexousios*, *De oratione dominica* 308:29–310:5).⁵⁶ Since humans share a basic kinship with each other (*In Ecclesiasten*, *GNO V* 337:18–338:14),⁵⁷ Gregory challenges the legitimacy of calling oneself a master (*kyrios*) of another’s life (*De beatitudinibus*, *PG* 44 1205:52–59).⁵⁸ Slavery also blurs a distinction in creation by treating humans like animals (over whom humans have divinely ordained authority). By keeping slaves, one therefore overrides the limits (*horoi*) of human authority (*exousia*, *In Ecclesiasten*, *GNO V* 335:11–335:5).⁵⁹ But Gregory does not import this critique of human lordship into his discussions of marriage. He believes that the husband is the legitimate master of his wife: “according to the divine plan, the wife does not govern herself but has her place of refuge in the one who has power over her through marriage; if she is separated from him for even a short time, it is as if she has been deprived of her head [Ephesians 5:23]” (*De virginitate* III:6:19–22).⁶⁰ This passage is situated within Gregory’s diatribe against marriage, where the potential loss of one’s spouse is an abiding concern. Following the logic of his argument, he might have concluded that male headship contributes to or is constitutive of the worldly entanglements of the conjugal life. But instead he affirms sexual hierarchy in marriage as godly—“according to the divine plan”—and does not seek to challenge it. So, when we compare Gregory’s reflections on slavery and marriage, it seems that lordship is condemned as hubristic and egregious in one respect, but affirmed as divinely ordained in another.

A related area of discussion is Gregory’s disapproval of the confusion of the sexes. In the *In Ecclesiasten*, Gregory condemns cross-dressing—“boys [*paidēs*] dressed like women [*thēlynomenoi*] through the world”—as one of the markers of a licentious lifestyle (*GNO V* 348:2–3).⁶¹ But Gregory’s disapprobation for the confusion of the sexes extends beyond the wearing of certain types of apparel. In *Epistle* II, Gregory expresses concern for sexual impropriety resulting from the mixture of the sexes: “A mark of the philosophic life is propriety [*euschēmosynē*]. But this is accomplished by an unmixed [*amiktos*] and separate life, in which nature is not mixed up [*anepimiktos*] and confused [*asynchytos*]. Neither are women bolting for the safeguards of propriety among men, nor men with women” (*Ep.* II:5:2–6:1).⁶² This is consistent with Gregory’s condemnation in the early period of male celibates who live openly with women, “calling such a living together ‘brotherhood’ and thinking that they are avoiding suspicion by this pious term” (*De virginitate* XXIII:4:4–11).⁶³ Moreover, the ascetic community in Pontus is separated

“according to sex” (*kata genos*) in everything but worship (*Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 37:8–13).⁶⁴ The reason for separating men and women may have been motivated by a desire to minimize the risk of impropriety. Plato’s view that there is a sexual inevitability in relations between men and women who live in close proximity (*Respublica* 458d) may be underlyingly at play here.

Gregory’s emphasis on separating the sexes extends to his discussions on sin and soteriology. In the *De tridui spatio*, Gregory suggests that men and women are differentially responsible for original sin. They have been allotted a separate day for their redemption in the days between the death of Christ and his Resurrection. Evil, he says, had a threefold genesis: the serpent, the woman, and the man (*GNO IX/1* 285:7–10). There is an order (*taxis*) of good that corresponds to the order (*taxis*) of evil (*GNO IX/1* 285:11–12). So the disease of sin is abolished in three consecutive days, “one day being allotted to the healing of each kind of those infected with evil” (*GNO IX/1* 285:14–19).⁶⁵

Finally, Gregory is no emancipator of women in the realm of work. In the *Contra Eunomium*, he asserts that different jobs are assigned to men and women: “it is He Who hath set man [*anthrōpos*] over the arts [*technai*] and given to woman [*gynē*] her skill in weaving and embroidery” (II:184:3–6).⁶⁶ Gregory seems to draw his inspiration from Job 38:36 (trans. LXX): “Who gave to women the art of weaving or skill in embroidery?” He also, in the *Oratio funebris in Flacillam imperatricem*, affirms the male prerogative in inheritance, saying that the greater part (*to pleon*) is left to a man (*anēr*, *GNO IX/1* 488:14–489:3)—though without providing a clear rationale for his view.

My intention in this short section has been to correct recent readings of Gregory’s thought that have focused disproportionately on his description of spiritual ascent and its positive reclamation of female imagery. Commentators such as Verna Harrison and Sarah Coakley have overlooked Gregory’s contempt for the worldly manifestations of female vice and his disapproval of the mixture of the sexes. But his discussion of the ascetic life is not limited by these themes. As will be apparent in the next chapter, certain key events in the middle period (such as the deaths of his two siblings Macrina and Basil) led to new inflections in Gregory’s theorization of sexual morphology and its worldly associations.

The Death of Siblings

The final set of reflections in the previous chapter highlighted Gregory's disapprobation of the confusion of the sexes. In what follows, we will discover that a certain mingling of the sexes is in fact possible, albeit only in a spiritual sense, as he starts to read Galatians 3:28 ("there is no longer male and female . . . in Christ Jesus") through the lens of his admiration for his ascetic siblings. This is a period of intense reflection for Gregory. The loss of Basil in September 378 and Macrina on 19 July 379¹ produced a transformation in Gregory's understanding of the eschatological finality of sexual morphology and its associated meanings in the worldly sphere. Their deaths led him to entertain the possibility that the resurrection body, reflected *ex-ante* in the lives of ascetics, will no longer be physically differentiated into male and female. Some of these themes were already partly developed in the *De virginitate*—but Gregory's response to the deaths of his siblings allowed him to develop his theorization of sexual morphology and ascetical transformation in fresh and imaginative ways.

In this chapter, I shall give focused attention to a cluster of texts composed shortly after the deaths of his beloved siblings: *Epistle XIX ad Joannem*, the *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*, the *De anima*, the *De hominis opificio*, and (albeit infrequently) the *Apologia in Hexaemeron*. The first three works, arranged in chronological order,² chart Gregory's final formative interactions and discussions with Macrina. The *De hominis opificio* and the *Apologia in Hexaemeron* intentionally extend Basil's treatment of the Six Days of Creation in his *Hexaemeron*, fulfilling all that may have been lacking in that treatise (*De hominis opificio*, prologue, PG 44 125:38–39;³ cf. *Apologia in Hexaemeron*, PG 44 68:29). Gregory's willingness to take up the mantle of his brother's theological career compelled him to grapple more systematically with the doctrine of Creation.⁴

My line of inquiry in this chapter will begin with an examination of the ascetical appropriation of all the virtues, whether stereotypically male or female. I shall then explicate Gregory's discussion of sexual morphology in relation to the resurrection body, only to discover that he is not totally certain whether genitalia will be restored at the *eschaton*. Third, as an addendum, I shall explore new inflections of Gregory's theory of desire in the middle period.

"NO LONGER MALE AND FEMALE . . .
IN CHRIST JESUS"

Gregory's descriptions of the lives of Macrina and Naucratius suggest that he is operating with a strikingly labile understanding of male and female characteristics. When we compare these descriptions with Gregory's condemnation of the confusion of the sexes, it seems apparent that he is issuing one set of instructions to married Christians (to maintain the subordination of women to men) and another set of instructions to ascetics (to appropriate and combine male and female virtues). The purpose of this section is to examine how Gregory develops and justifies this idea of the ascetical appropriation of male and female virtues.

*Macrina: The Female Ascetic Who Overcame
Womanish Passion*

For Gregory, Macrina imitated "the life of angels in a human body" (*Ep.* XIX:7–8)⁵ and foreshadowed the resurrection: "the flesh," he writes, "did not seek its own, the stomach [*gastēr*]," but had "finished with its own impulses [*hormai*]" (XIX:9).⁶ Much here resembles the language of the *De virginitate*, where he summoned ascetics to imitate "the regimen [*to dynaton*] of the incorporeal powers, among whom there is neither marriage nor giving in marriage" (*De virginitate* IV:8:10–11)⁷—an allusion to one of Gregory's favorite verses, Matthew 22:30 (and parallels). He went on to describe "the pursuit of virginity" as "a certain art [*technē*] and faculty [*dynamis*] of the more divine life, teaching those living in the flesh how to be like the incorporeal [*asōmatos*] nature" (*De virginitate* IV:9:6–8).⁸

In the middle period, Gregory wonders whether it is accurate to call Macrina a woman (*gynē*), since she surpassed that nature (*physis*, *Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 1:14–17).⁹ The implication seems to be that Macrina's angelic transcendence of the flesh overcame, if only spiritually (that is, not—yet—corporeally), the distinction between male and female. This begs the question how Macrina surpassed female nature.

One way she did this was by adopting a variety of male roles. She is characterized as a teacher (*hē didaskalos*, *Ep.* XIX:6:1),¹⁰ a male appellation juxtaposed with the feminine definite article. She acted not only as a spiritual mother to Peter but also as his father.¹¹ Macrina also spiritually transformed female roles. For example, when Emmelia died in late 370 or early 371,¹² Macrina became "a mother in place of [a]

mother” (*Ep.* XIX:6:1–2)¹³ for her family and for Gregory personally (*moi, Ep.* XIX:10).¹⁴ She was also a mother to the ascetic community at Pontus (*Ep.* XIX:7:2–3)¹⁵ and identified on her deathbed with the Bride of Christ (*Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 23:2–7).¹⁶ Furthermore, the format of the *De anima* seems to model Macrina on the priestess Diotima in Plato’s *Symposium*.¹⁷ This, I would stress, is not—as Burrus has argued, inspired by David Halperin’s essay “Why Is Diotima a Woman?”¹⁸—a reinscription of what Irigaray would call homosexual love, in which masculine erotics¹⁹ reign supreme. Burrus’s argument proceeds in the following manner: just as Diotima is Macrina and Gregory is Socrates, so also, when Gregory becomes the weeping virgin in the *De anima*, then Macrina must be Socrates after all.²⁰ Throughout, we are dealing with men or men disguised as women—or so Burrus argues. However, Macrina is in fact portrayed as equally competent in both male and female roles. She was not merely a man disguised as a woman but transformed both sets of characteristics.²¹

Arguably the most important female role that Macrina adopted is that of the Bride of Christ. At the beginning of the *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*, Gregory explains why Macrina decided to embark upon the life of virginity. She was betrothed to a man, but after his death she wanted to fulfill her obligations to her husband—not unlike Penelope, wife of Odysseus, in Homer’s *Odyseia*.²² When Macrina’s parents brought her proposals of marriage from other suitors, she objected, arguing that it is “out of order and unlawful not to be loyal to the marriage that has been authorized once and for all for her by her father and to be put under pressure to consider another, since by nature marriage is but once only, as there is one birth and one death.” Her desire to remain forever joined to her fiancé was thus motivated by her steadfast hope in the resurrection; in her eyes, he is still alive to God (*Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 5:12–5).²³

No doubt her underling anxieties about marrying another man reflected widespread contempt for digamy among Christians at this time.²⁴ But perhaps more interesting, Macrina’s understanding of her bridal identity seems to mature over time. Macrina’s younger—and arguably less spiritually mature—motivation for embracing virginity eventually gave way to a more mature identity, that of the Virgin Bride, as indeed Arnaldo Momigliano points out.²⁵ Macrina’s conjugal attachment to her earthly fiancé is thus transformed and replaced by the superior desire for Christ, “the one for whom she longed” (*Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 23:5).²⁶ This is the first intimation in Gregory’s works that the maturation of the ascetic life shape the male/female roles with which soul identifies over the course of time and therefore represent a significant development in Gregory’s thinking. In the *De virginitate*, the soul simultaneously identifies with the male courting Wisdom and the Virgin Bride clinging to the incorruptible Bridegroom. What is more, Gregory claimed that *erōs* for (female) Wisdom persists into old age (*De virginitate* XXIII:6:17–20 [*recensio altera*]).²⁷ There is no suggestion that male *erōs* needs to be displaced by the passionate yearning of Virgin Bride for her Bridegroom at a later

stage of spiritual growth. In the middle period, however, we see Macrina's identity as the bride developing over time from a worldly attachment to her fiancé to spiritual love for her Bridegroom. It is not yet the fully schematized set of exchanges between male and female characteristics that we will later see in the *In Cant*, but it nonetheless represents a development in Gregory's thought when compared with the *De virginitate*.

So far, we have seen that Macrina adopted male roles and transformed otherwise worldly female roles. To all this, we should add that Macrina eschewed "the tragic passions—those passions of women" (*ta tragika pathē, hosa ek gynaiκōn, Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 3:10–11),²⁸ which characterize the literature of the curriculum of classical pedagogy.²⁹ Macrina preferred to devote herself to the reading of the Psalter. Gregory goes to considerable lengths to admonish womanish passion, and he does so in the middle period primarily through the lens of grief, the chief passion with which he had to contend during this time in his life.

Grief was regarded by the Stoics as a kind of effeminacy,³⁰ and one of the four hardest passions to convert into virtue.³¹ For both Gregory and Macrina, grief needs to be moderated and transformed into spiritually beneficial dispositions. Grief is thus often situated within a liturgical context, as Derek Krueger has already argued.³² For example, when Macrina dies, Gregory upbraids the virgins for their outpouring of grief and disorder (*ataxia*), urging them to "look at [Macrina] and remember her instructions, by which she taught [them] to be orderly and seemly at all times." He summons them to "exchange the wailing of our lamentations for psalmody suiting the occasion": that is, "at the time of prayer" (*Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 27:1–11).³³ The second outbreak of disordered grief occurs at Macrina's funeral. One woman cries out impulsively, troubled by the thought of Macrina's absence, which affects the other virgins, resulting in a disorderly confusion and the disruption of "the orderly and sacred character of the psalmody." Gregory struggles to regain order, but as the cantor begins to intone "the phrases customary in the church," everyone returns to prayer (*Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 34:26–34).³⁴ What is operative in these two public outpourings of grief is the distinction Gregory earlier adumbrated in the *De mortuis* between worldly grief and spiritual grief—that is, grief according to God (*kata theon*)—a distinction based on 2 Corinthians 7:10 (GNO IX/1 67:24–68:1). In the two examples of grief discussed here, liturgical psalmody is the transformative vehicle through which grief is chastened and reoriented toward spiritual goals.

Gregory's treatment of grief is fairly consistent across the early and middle periods. There are many occasions, especially in the early period, when Gregory argues that grief can be put to good use, especially in the case of repentance (*De virginitate* XVIII:3:15–17).³⁵ For Gregory, the grief of repentance is a vehicle for purification, implanted into human beings by God as a remedy (*ephodion*) against evil (*De mortuis*, GNO IX/1 68:1–5). In the *De beatitudinibus*, Gregory identified the sorrow of repentance as the remedy (*pharmakon*) for sin (PG 44 1221:31–32).³⁶ But he argued

that this interpretation cannot exhaust the meaning of Matthew 5:4 (“Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted”). The text itself suggests to Gregory that we are called to a continual state of mourning rather than punctiliar expressions of repentance. This led him to reflect on human *penthos*, “a painful sensation caused by the privation of what is present” (PG 44 1224:33–35).³⁷ Gregory then linked the sorrow mentioned in Matthew 5:4 to our postlapsarian sojourn (PG 44 1228:44–1229:2).³⁸ Spiritual sorrow is, therefore, an incentive to pursue “the true Good” (PG 44 1228:42)³⁹ and overcome the deceits of this fallen world.

The middle period develops these reflections in the early period by focusing specifically on the theme of bereavement. In the middle period, Gregory argues that it is appropriate to participate in lament or mourning (*thrēnos*) for the dead (*In diem luminum*, GNO IX/1 223:7–8)⁴⁰ and admits to being overwhelmed by grief (*lypē*) on account of the loss of Meletius, bishop of Antioch (*Oratio funebris in Meletium episcopum*, GNO IX/1 442:13–15).⁴¹ He wonders whether his grief is unreasonable but concludes, early in this oration, that he has not yet expressed “the full extent of our loss” (GNO IX/1 444:10–12),⁴² appealing to the Israelites who bewailed the loss of the patriarch Jacob, and encourages yet further mourning (GNO IX/1 445:1–13).⁴³ Later in the treatise, Gregory restrains himself: he recognizes that he is “playing the woman [*gynaikizein*] more than is necessary [*dei*]” (GNO IX/1 454:3–4).⁴⁴ So he first incites catharsis, then inculcates reasoned restraint. What this highlights to me is the diachronicity of moral transformation. Sorrow is progressively transformed, step by step, into joy, as Gregory puts it: *eis charan ta lypēra methar-mozetai* (*In sanctum et salutare Pascha*, GNO IX/1 310:10).⁴⁵ In a similar vein, in the *Oratio funebris in Meletium episcopum*, Gregory quotes Jeremiah 9:17 (“Call the mourning women”) and then remarks: “In no other way can the burning heart cool down, swelling as it is with its affliction [*pathos*], unless it relieves itself by sobs and tears” (GNO IX/1 451:13–16).⁴⁶ It is important to grieve properly. Only after that has happened can the intellectual faculty cool the fires of sorrow.

How one mourns is, for Gregory, an inescapably moral issue, as evidenced in the *Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam*, where Gregory claims that weaker souls cannot follow Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, because they are unable to transcend (*hyperbainein*) nature (GNO IX/1 465:17–19). Motivated by moral concern, Macrina seeks to deliver Gregory from the temptations of preemptive grief. As Gregory relates in the *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*, “it almost seemed to me that my soul was elevated by her words above human nature and set down through the guidance of her discourse within the heavenly sanctuary” (17:27–30).⁴⁷ Her concerns revolve around his lack of hope in the resurrection: “One ought not to grieve for those who have fallen sleep, for this is the passion only of those who have no hope [cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13]” (*De anima*, PG 46 13:2–4).⁴⁸ Gregory’s retreat at this early point in the dialogue into Epicurean materialism provokes Macrina’s rebuke. She argues that without hope, humans will inevitably succumb to amoral hedonism (PG 46 19:26–33).⁴⁹

For this reason, she attempts to correct his errant (pagan) doubts in the resurrection and inculcate a firm belief in the Christian prospect of eternal life.

The efficacy of Macrina's pedagogy in converting womanish grief into spiritual grief is also apparent in Gregory's discussion of the death of Naucratius (*Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 9:16–10:21).⁵⁰ Macrina comforts her grieving mother, Emmelia, whose "reason yielded to passion" and who "collapsed on the spot, like some noble athlete felled by an unexpected blow". Macrina assuages her mother's grief through discursive pedagogy as well as the pedagogy of her own example. On the one hand, she "raised up her mother . . . by her reasonings." On the other hand, Macrina "placed her [mother] beyond passion, guiding her by her own example to steadfastness and courage." Pedagogy was also part of Gregory's appeal to the virgins grieving the death of Macrina, to which I already referred. Gregory reminds the virgins of Macrina's training (*paideuein*) to be "orderly and decent in everything" (*Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 27:1–11).⁵¹ Notice that pedagogy and prayer are simultaneously invoked to convert womanish weeping into psalmody.

So far, it seems that Macrina's transcendence of the restrictive fallen characteristics of female nature, especially womanish grief, is a source of hope for all Christians. This way of life, Gregory argues, can be accomplished with patience only by learning from those already skilled in the ascetic life and by turning to liturgical prayer for consolation. But the ascetic maturity of Naucratius, whose short life was somewhat overshadowed by Macrina, evinces a distinctively male ascetic undertaking: the overcoming of male virility. This apparently overlooked insight sheds fresh light on Gregory's construal of progress in the spiritual life.⁵²

Naucratius: The Male Ascetic Who Overcame Male Virility

Gregory's admiration of Naucratius stems from the latter's disavowal of "the distractions that come from either military service or the rhetoric of the law courts" as well as "the din that commonly besets this human life." Instead, Naucratius ministered to the elderly, who lived together in poverty and infirmity in the hinterland of society. Naucratius is also described by Gregory as "taming his own youth [*neotēs*] . . . by [ascetical] exercises, . . . subduing his youth [*neotēs*] both by his toils and by his diligence on his mother's behalf" (*Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 8:17–34).⁵³ In what follows, I shall argue that the language of "youth" carries with it evocations of male vice. This, then, leads us to conclude that Naucratius overcame the vices of youth and by implication sexual excess associated with male virility.

In a crucial passage from the *De virginitate*, Gregory exhorted older ascetics to imitate the strength (*rhōmaleos*) and vigor (*drastērios*)⁵⁴ of younger men in a spiritual sense (XXIII:6:10–17 [*recensio altera*]):⁵⁵

Imitate the old age [*gēras*] in his youthfulness [*neotēs*] and the youthfulness [*neotēs*] in his old age [*gēras*]. For when he is approaching old age [*gēras*], time does not dim the

strength [*rhōmaleos*] and vigor [*drastērios*] of his soul, nor is his youth [*neotēs*] distinguished by the activities in which youth [*neotēs*] usually engages, but there is some wonderful mixture [*mixis*] of opposites in each age [*hēlikia*], a release [*hypallagē*] from what is peculiar to each, his power for good being young [*neazein*] in his old age [*gēras*], and his youthfulness [*neotēs*] in adolescence [*meirakion*] doing nothing connected with evil.

These themes then reappear in the middle period in the *In Ecclesiasten* (GNO V 377:17–378:5):⁵⁶

As in the course of human life advanced age is weak, whereas immaturity is undisciplined, and the mean [*mesos*] between the two is the best precisely because it avoids the undesirable features of both sides and in it the strength [*dynamis*] of youth [*neotēs*] is displayed separated from its indiscipline [*ataxia*], and the wisdom [*phronēsis*] of age [*gēras*] detached from its feebleness [*adrania*], so that strength [*dynamis*] is combined with wisdom [*phronēsis*], equally avoiding the weakness [*adrania*] of age and the rashness [*thrasys*] of youth . . .

The adjectives *rhōmaleos* (“strong”) and *drastērios* (“active,” “efficacious”) in the *De virginitate*, which correspond to *dynamis* (“strength”) in the *In Ecclesiasten*, do not automatically or necessarily connote male characteristics. But there is reason to believe that erotic desire, or more specifically male virility, is primarily in view in both passages.

In the *In Ecclesiasten*, Gregory mentions manly (*andrōdes*) and youthful (*neanikos*) dispositions in the same breath—they are equally liable to being softened (*oklazein*), indeed effeminized, by the passions (GNO V 430:17–431:5).⁵⁷ The *De virginitate* also suggests that youthfulness is inexorably associated with erotic desire. Immediately after the excerpt above from the *De virginitate*, Gregory remarks: “even if you are searching for lovers [*erōtes*] of that age, imitate the steadfastness and fire of the divine love [*erōs*] of wisdom, which increases from youth and persists to old age” (*De virginitate* XXIII:6:17–20 [*recensio altera*]).⁵⁸ Gregory also argues that those who are overwhelmed by the seemingly unattainable goodness of older ascetics should try to emulate virtuous young men who have “a more steadfast and forceful love [*erōs*] of wisdom than of bodily pleasures” and listen attentively “to the one who said that wisdom ‘is the true of life to those who grasp her’ [Proverbs 3:18]” (*De virginitate* XXIII:6:15–20).⁵⁹ The disjunction between the *erōs* for Wisdom and the *erōs* for bodily pleasures reveals what is at stake in the *De virginitate*: erotic desire for God (associated with mature ascetical self-mastery) and sexual bodily desires (characteristic of youth) are rival forms of desire. When the older man imitates youthfulness, he desires God with an intensity otherwise associated with bodily, sexual pleasures. When the young person imitates the older ascetic, he seeks to quell the passions and convert sexual excess into spiritual *erōs* for God. This, I believe, is precisely what Naucratus accomplished. He overcame male sexual lusts and contemplated the divine with no less intensity.

Youth is frequently characterized by Gregory as a time of excessive sexual passion. In the *In illud: Quatenus uni ex his fecistis mihi fecistis* (a work from the early phase), Gregory draws attention to the arduous battle involved in achieving continence: “Let us ask youths if continence [*sōphrosynē*] is easy or the free rein of desires is effortless; then we will cling [to] that which is sweet and easy” (GNO IX/1 125:15–17). Cognizant of the strenuous demands of sexual self-restraint, Gregory praises “the nature of the youthful man”—that is, Joseph—who resisted the sexual temptations of the Egyptian woman in Genesis 39:11–12 and overcame the “pleasure [that is] so characteristic of his age” (*hēlikia philēdonos: Contra fornicarios*, GNO IX/1 214:19–23). The example of Gregory the Wonderworker is similar: though youthful (*neos*), he was “adorned with a restraint [*sōphrosynē*] unlike anyone else in the city” (*De vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi*, PG 46 901:49–51). Other young men indulge their sexual appetites when they travel to a city and are far from their parents’ rebuke (PG 46 904:53–905:7). But Gregory the Wonderworker subjugated “his youthful nature [*neotēs*] to reason [*logismos*] as a tame animal has mastered all natural passions” (PG 46 905:9–11). Furthermore, in the *In Ecclesiasten*, Gregory urges young people to exchange fleshy lusts with the love of God: “In the heat of the passions that belong to its time of life [*tēs hēlikias pathē*], youth says that it is the moment for it to love the things that are dear to youth. But the Ecclesiast replies to youth by setting a different moment for pure love [*kathara philia*], implying that the mistaken disposition of the soul toward bad things is not love” (GNO V 421:1–6).⁶⁰ Some types of love, Gregory claims, such as “the sordid affection of youth” (*to rhyparon tēs neotētos*), need to be restrained at all times—there is no right moment. The one exception is “love for the only Lovable” (GNO V 421:11–14).⁶¹

These passages suggest that youthfulness and male sexual passion are associated themes. What Gregory does not spell out is whether Macrina had to renounce stereotypically male sexual drives; there is certainly no mention of her doing so. Perhaps male ascetics first renounce male vice, whereas female ascetics first renounce womanish passion. But men, too, as Gregory highlights throughout his works, are capable of succumbing to passion. Whether men and women begin the ascetic life with different forms of renunciation is not something Gregory specifically addresses. What is clear is that all ascetics must appropriate male and female virtues. How, then, may we describe this twofold appropriation of characteristics? I suggest that the language of “mixture” is appropriate here.

With respect to age, Gregory speaks of “some wonderful mixture [*mixis*] of opposites in each age, a release [*hypallagē*]⁶² from what is peculiar to each” (*De virginitate* XXIII:6:14–16)⁶³ He summons “young persons [*neoi*] in the full flower of manhood [*andres*]⁶⁴ to emulate the martyrs (*In XL Martyres II*, PG 46 773: 25–27) whose “mature demeanor [*polia ēthōn*] present in the prime of their youth [*en hēlikias neotēti*]” elicits evil intent from the Adversary (*In XL Martyres Ib*, PG 46 760:34–37). Likewise, though Gregory never says it in quite this way, the ascetic’s

hypallagē from male and female vices gives way to the mingling (*mixis*) of male and female virtues. The mixture of old age and youth—and the mixture of male and female characteristics in the angelic life of virginity—are therefore analogues of each other. In both, the *coniunctio oppositorum* represents the ascetic ideal. But Gregory does not use the language of “mingling,” as I have, possibly because of its associations with the confusion of the sexes among the Eustathians. The mixture of male and female characteristics in this life raises a question of eschatological significance: Will the resurrection body manifest the angelic transcendence of male and female accomplished spiritually in the ascetic life? This is the next area of discussion.

SEXUAL MORPHOLOGY: ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND ESCHATOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

During the latter part of the twentieth century, Gregory’s anthropological reflections on sexual morphology evinced considerable interest for their complex, if at times controversial, implications for the meaning and worth of sexual differentiation. An early generation of scholarship took it as read that for Gregory, the resurrection body is degeneralized and that sexual differentiation is itself protologically “only second in the order of [God’s] intention.”⁶⁵ These views elicited enormous consternation among a number of early feminist theologians. Rosemary Radford Ruether, for instance, castigates Gregory’s belief in what she describes as “non-sexual monism,” although she does not think it quite as bad as Augustine’s identification of “maleness with monism,” which makes “femaleness secondary.”⁶⁶ Ruether’s contempt for Gregory’s theological anthropology reflects the wider protestations of second-wave feminism at the time, in which both asexuality and androgyny were regarded as an insidious guise for patriarchy, for the tacit instigation of masculinist ideals, or—in Ruether’s own words—as representative of something other than “true androgyny” (emphasis mine).⁶⁷

Kari Elisabeth Børresen is similarly critical of Gregory. She argues that the eschatologically degeneralized body “severs the traditional link between theomorphic humanity and exemplary maleness”—and thereby places Adam “on the same secondary level as derived woman”—but she is suspicious of Gregory’s espousal of “castrational equality” for reasons similar to Ruether’s.⁶⁸ Although regarding male and female as alien to divinity may help to correct “andromorphic God-language,” it ends up excluding both from “perfect humanity,” so that Adam and Eve are “not properly human beings, but hybrid creatures, with angel-like, spiritual image quality and beast-like, sexually differentiated corporeality.”⁶⁹

Until recently, this reading of Gregory’s eschatological anthropology reigned supreme in academic scholarship; it was called into question in an article by John Behr in 1999.⁷⁰ Expanding Mark Hart’s (contested) interpretation of the meaning of

“celibacy” and “marriage” in Gregory’s *De virginitate*,⁷¹ Behr argued that sexual differentiation is, for Gregory, protologically intrinsic to human nature and also, concomitantly, retained in the incorruptible body of the resurrection, even though sexual activity will cease at the *eschaton*. Behr avers that according to Gregory, we would fail to be properly human—the mean (*meson*, *De hominis opificio* XVI:9, PG 44 181:29)⁷² between the animal and the divine—without sexual differentiation. The fact that humans are divided into male and female evidences our sharing in “the irrational life of brutes” (*De hominis opificio* XVI:9, PG 44 181:32–38).⁷³ As a result, Gregory—on Behr’s reading—imagines “a restored use of human sexuality, an exercise of sexuality under the full autonomy of reason, in an angelic mode, in which the human being fulfils its purpose in creation of uplifting and integrating the life of the body and the senses with reason and the divine”⁷⁴—a body, in other words, no longer primed for physical procreation but still, it seems, divided into male and female.

Behr’s reading has not gone unchallenged. J. Warren Smith disagrees with Behr, whom he accuses of imposing coherence onto Gregory’s speculative thought.⁷⁵ Warren Smith draws attention to the incongruity in Gregory’s thought between “his account of the resurrection body and his view of the soul’s angelic participation in God.”⁷⁶ So, for Warren Smith, Gregory leaves open to speculation the possibility of the restoration of genitalia at the resurrection. Valerie Karras also finds Behr’s analysis wanting. However, unlike Warren Smith, she claims that Gregory “envisions an ontological abolition of physical sexual differentiation in the resurrection while retaining the positive characteristics of a noetic sense of gender emancipated from the limitations of physical sex.”⁷⁷ The two aspects—physical sexual differentiation and “noetic gender”⁷⁸—must be disarticulated from each other. She also accuses Behr of ignoring the “progressive teleology inherent in Nyssen’s anthropology and soteriology,” in which the return to the original state of humanity is not (as Behr would have it) a return to Eden in which Adam and Eve are sexually differentiated but to God’s original plan in the first creation.

In what follows, I shall seek to demonstrate that Gregory does not himself have a clear answer to the question of whether human genitalia are restored at the *eschaton*, and that recent attempts to produce a systematized overview of Gregory’s views on sexual differentiation are mistaken. By gaining a clearer picture of the chronological development of Gregory’s thought, we will begin to see that Gregory is in fact trying to harmonize (though not altogether successfully) certain tensions in Scripture itself. The key scriptural passages are: “God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27a–b); “the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21); “For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Mark 12:25 [cf. Matthew 22:30, Luke 20:35]); and “there is neither male nor female; for you are

all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Gregory’s theological anthropology is thus largely determined by how a certain text is prioritized or read in the light of others.

The middle phase of Gregory’s literary career has been unduly prioritized by most commentators; in particular, the *De hominis opificio* has drawn the most intense interest. As a result, commentators have overlooked a critical development in Gregory’s thought in which the doctrine of double creation is introduced for the first time—and not unproblematically—in the middle period of his literary career, then unsystematically and (one may add) haphazardly brought alongside his exegesis of the Genesis narrative. I shall eschew a synthetic reading of Gregory’s eschatological anthropology (for the reasons Behr posits),⁷⁹ in which Gregory’s interpretation of the “tunic of skins” (Genesis 3:21) is brought to bear on the *De hominis opificio*, which contains no reference to that otherwise crucial verse. But I shall also show that Behr’s isolated examination of the *De hominis opificio* is itself problematic. Both approaches, I shall argue, fail to attend to the developments in Gregory’s theological anthropology.

By undertaking a detailed diachronic analysis of Gregory’s early and middle-period works in the way that I have suggested, our attentions will be brought to bear on the following points:

1. The doctrine of double creation—comprising the atemporal creation of the sexually undifferentiated plenitude of humanity in the divine mind (*the first creation*) and the historical implementation of God’s plans, which includes the creation of sexual differentiation (*the second creation*)—is introduced into Gregory’s thought in the middle period in the *De hominis opificio*. The early period, by contrast, focuses exclusively on the historical narrative of Creation and Fall in Genesis 2–3, in which paradisaical sexual differentiation is presupposed.
2. In the early period, the “tunic of skins” (Genesis 3:21) denotes animal passions but not sexual differentiation; in the *De hominis opificio*, the second creation encompasses the passions as well as sexual differentiation.

My proposal is that with these two protological accounts equally in play in the middle period, Gregory remains unclear as to whether human beings will be restored to the (nongenitalized) conditions of the atemporal first creation or to the prelapsarian conditions of (sexually differentiated) Paradise. Let us begin this exegetical undertaking by exploring the early period of Gregory’s thought.

Adam and the imago Dei

In Gregory’s early works, there was no reference to the doctrine of double creation.⁸⁰ It is only in the *De hominis opificio* that he mentions the doctrine at all. There, he acknowledges that the doctrine of double creation belongs to the precarious realm of “conjectures and inferences” (*De hominis opificio* XVI:4, PG 44

180:31–32).⁸¹ Gregory invokes the doctrine to address an apparent paradox in the nature of humanity: “How . . . is man, this mortal, passible, short-lived being, the image of the nature that is immortal, pure, and everlasting?” (XVI:4, *PG* 44 180:27–29).⁸² The doctrine schematizes these apparently contradictory aspects of humanity into two protological parts: the first creation, which is atemporal⁸³—that is, in the divine mind—and the second creation, which is the historical execution⁸⁴ of God’s creative plan, the unfolding and development of the *plērōma* according to a fixed order (*taxis*, *Apologia in Hexaemeron*, *PG* 44 113:36–40). The first creation, Gregory explains, refers to the creation of “the human being” (*anthrōpos*) in Genesis 1:27, in which “the entire plenitude [*plērōma*] was included by the God of all, by His power of foreknowledge” (*De hominis opificio* XVI:17, *PG* 44 185:32–34)⁸⁵ The *plērōma*—the total finite (*De anima*, *PG* 46 128:24–25) number⁸⁶ of human beings⁸⁷—is made in the *imago Dei* (*De hominis opificio* XVI:17, *PG* 44 185:35–36).⁸⁸ Because God is neither male nor female (cf. Galatians 3:28), Gregory insists that the *plērōma* is also devoid of sexual differentiation.

In the early period, however, the *imago Dei* was linked not to the generic man (*anthrōpos*) of the first creation but to the particular individual, Adam, reflecting Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 11:7, in which Adam is said to be made in the *imago Dei*: “being like the divine is not our function, nor is it the product of human ability, but it is part of the generosity of God, who freely, at the birth of the first man [*euthys hama tēi prōtēi genesei*], gave our nature a likeness to Himself” (*De virginitate* XII:2:66–70).⁸⁹ The *imago Dei* was protologically linked by Gregory to the fashioning of Adam into the image of the divine from clay (Genesis 2:7: *De oratione dominica* 212:1–4;⁹⁰ *De beatitudinibus*, *PG* 44 1228:3–18).⁹¹ But nowhere in these early works was there any mention of the doctrine of double creation. Moreover, the eschatological restoration of the *imago Dei* represented, for Gregory, the return to historical Paradise (cf. *De oratione dominica* 212:2–8; *De virginitate* XII:4:1–23).⁹²

What, then, is to be made of Gregory’s use of the word *anthrōpos* in the following excerpt from the *De virginitate* (XII:2:4–10):⁹³

This creature, the human being [*anthrōpos*] . . . did not have the elements of passion and mortality essentially and naturally in himself from the beginning. For it would not have been possible for the meaning of the word “image” to be preserved if the copied beauty were different from the archetype. It was only later, with the first Fall, that sin came upon man, and thus it crept in.

Could this have referred to generic humanity, the plenitude (*plērōma*), the first creation of the *De hominis opificio*, not the individual Adam? The answer, it seems, is no. When Gregory spoke in this passage of “the beginning,” he was referring historically to Paradise, in which “the first man on earth” (*ho prōtos ek gēs anthrōpos*, *De virginitate* XII:2:35–36)⁹⁴ is Adam.

Gregory did not, therefore, draw out the significance of Genesis 1:27a and 1:27b in his deliberations on protology in his early works. It seems that Genesis 2 was in the forefront of his mind, and to the extent that he discussed Genesis 1 at all, it was read through that lens. Now we turn to an alternative protological account that he develops in the middle period in the *De hominis opificio*.

The Doctrine of Double Creation

If Gregory in the early period did not develop the doctrine of double creation, how then does he later relate Adam, as a sexually differentiated individual, to the *plērōma* of the first creation in the middle period? He does so in the following statement: “the Image of God, which we behold in universal humanity, had its consummation then [at Genesis 1:27a]; but Adam as yet was not” (*De hominis opificio* XXII:3, PG 44 204:39–41).⁹⁵ The creation of Adam is, therefore, essentially distinct from the “first creation.” The creation of “the human being” (*anthrōpos*) in Genesis 1:27 denotes “not the particular, but the general name” (*De hominis opificio* XVI:16, PG 44 185:20–21).⁹⁶ that is, the *plērōma* of humanity, not Adam in particular. Gregory also explains that “the whole race was spoken of as one man” (*De hominis opificio* XVI:18, PG 44 185:46–47) in Genesis 1:27a because “the entire *plērōma* of humanity was included by the God of all, by His power of foreknowledge” (*De hominis opificio* PG 44 185:32–34). The *plērōma* is discussed in Scripture “as it were in one body” to convey the message that “the image is not in part of our nature, nor is the Grace in any one of the things found in that nature” but that “this power extends equally to all the race: and a sign of this is that mind is implanted alike in all” (*De hominis opificio* XVI:17, PG 44 185:36–40).⁹⁷

Although there is a distinction between the first creation and the second creation—and concomitantly a split between nongenitalized and sexually differentiated human beings—that distinction exists only from the perspective of the mind of God. No such distinction ever existed *in concreto*. Primed for physical procreation in anticipation of the Fall, human beings were always historically speaking differentiated into male and female from the very beginning. As such, the creation of sexual differentiation is interpreted as God’s afterthought in anticipation of the Fall, not something that emerged in time (*De hominis opificio* XXII:4, PG 44 205:2–11).⁹⁸

Let me, at this juncture, say a bit more about the purposes of sexual differentiation for Gregory. The procreative function, he says, belongs not to the Divine but to the irrational element, since (or so he reasons) the words “increase and multiply” (Genesis 1:28) were also used in reference to the irrational creatures (Genesis 1:22). For this reason, the animal and irrational form of reproduction “befits those who had fallen into sin” (*De hominis opificio* XVII:4, PG 44 189:41–46);⁹⁹ humanity’s “community and kindred with the irrational” is therefore a “provision

for reproduction” (*De hominis opificio* XVI:9, PG 44 181:40–41).¹⁰⁰ “Added” to humanity (*De hominis opificio* XVI:18, PG 44 185:53–55),¹⁰¹ the procreative faculties guaranteed that “the multitude of human souls might not be cut short by its Fall from the mode by which the angels were increased and multiplied” (*De hominis opificio* XVII:4, PG 44 189:39–40).¹⁰² Note here that there is no indication (as Behr would have us believe) that sexual differentiation serves any other inherent function apart from procreation. Nor is there any suggestion that our affinity with the animals makes sexual differentiation normative to human nature. As Karas argues, our “composite, mediatorial nature” is merely “inclusive” of sexual differentiation.¹⁰³

To these protological remarks, Gregory adds an eschatological point of great importance. The second creation, Gregory says, is “a departure from the Prototype”—that is, Jesus Christ, for whom there is “no longer male and female” (Galatians 3:28; cf. *De hominis opificio* XVI:7, PG 44 181:13–15).¹⁰⁴ This represents the outworking of Origen’s equation of protology and eschatology,¹⁰⁵ in which the resurrection is the restoration (*apokatastasis*) of the first creation, atemporal and unsexed. However, this differs essentially—if we recall—from Gregory’s earlier claim that the eschatological restoration is a return to Paradise.

The Explanatory Scope of the “Tunic of Skins”

So far, we have seen that in the *De hominis opificio*, Gregory offers a protological description of the twofold nature of humanity, consisting of the divine aspect (the *imago Dei*) and the animal aspect (the passions). He does so by developing the highly speculative doctrine of double creation, schematizing creation as a twofold process—with Genesis 1:27a–b as his guide. This consists of the atemporal (non-generationalized) creation of all human beings in the mind of God and the historical unfolding of God’s creational plans, in which human beings were always sexual differentiated.

In the early period, however, the anthropological conundrum with which Gregory was then preoccupied (the presence of divine and animal aspects in humanity) is answered differently—in terms of the creation of Adam in the *imago Dei* out of clay and the postlapsarian acquisition of the “tunic of skins” (Genesis 3:21). The tunic of skins comprises “all the properties belonging to an irrational nature”—that is, the “irrational passions” that belong to “irrational beasts” (*De mortuis*, GNO IX/1 55:18–23, 56:1–7). These properties include “pleasure, anger, gluttony, greed, and similar tendencies that allow human beings to choose between virtue and evil” (*De mortuis*, GNO IX/1 55:20–21) as well as—as we now learn in the middle period—“sexual intercourse [*mixis*], conception, childbearing, sordidness [*rhypos*], breastfeeding, nourishing, excretion, gradual growth to maturity, the prime of life, old age, disease, and death” (*De anima*, PG 46 148:46–149:2).¹⁰⁶

In a revealing passage in the *De virginitate* (XII:4:1–23),¹⁰⁷ Gregory pondered the moral and spiritual conditions under which the Fall may be overturned through the practice of virtue. Four successive steps were enumerated:

1. At “a kind of early stage of the journey,” one must embrace celibacy, because “the point of departure from the life of Paradise was the married state”;
2. The second step is withdrawal from “the earthly wretchedness in which man became involved after his Fall”;
3. Then, “in addition,” those wishing to return to Christ must “put off the coverings of the flesh, the garments made of skin: that is, they must put aside the thought of the flesh”;
4. Then, “after they have rejected the concealments of their shame, they must no longer stand in the shade of the fig tree of the bitter life.”

After the Fall, therefore, the sexual instinct *qua* “the thought of the flesh” appeared for the first time in the history of humanity, and with it came the institution of marriage. But male and female (indicated here by the use of the third person plural in reference to our primordial parents) preexisted the Fall.¹⁰⁸

It is curious that Gregory, unlike Augustine,¹⁰⁹ never discusses the account of the origins of sexual differentiation in Genesis 2. Nor indeed does he ever mention Eve when speaking protologically of the *imago Dei*.¹¹⁰ So a crucial question naturally asserts itself: does Eve, as Paul suggests in 1 Corinthians 11:7, derive her affinity to the divine, the *imago Dei*, from Adam? On this point, Gregory is silent. It is clear that Gregory thinks that Eve is genitally distinct from Adam and that sexual differentiation existed before the acquisition of the tunic of skins (cf. *De oratione dominica* 280:28;¹¹¹ *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium*, GNO III/1 135:13; *De vita Moysis* 22:256).¹¹² Gregory also refers separately to the sins of the woman (*gynē*) and the man (*anēr*) as well as the serpent in Eden (*De tridui spatium*, GNO IX/1 285:7–10).¹¹³ Nevertheless, he falls short of saying explicitly that Adam and Eve were both created in the *imago Dei*. For example, in the *De anima*, he claims that before the Fall humanity was divine: “human nature was something divine before [*prin*] our humanity succumbed to the impulse of vice and all these things beset us along with the entry of vice” (PG 46 148:7–9).¹¹⁴ This passage raises some important questions: if human nature was indeed divine before the Fall—and if the divine nature, as Gregory so often says, is neither male nor female—could this passage suggest that Adam and Eve were nongenitalized in Paradise? And if, as Macrina says, “the resurrection is the restoration of our nature to its original condition” (*De anima*, PG 46 148:1–2; cf. 156:30–32),¹¹⁵ could the resurrection be a return to Paradise conceived as a nongenitalized existence? This may be a logical conclusion, but Gregory always seems to assume that Adam and Eve were sexually differentiated in Paradise.¹¹⁶

This is not the only perplexity with which we are confronted. There are two areas of incompatibility between the account presented in the *De virginitate* (and

replicated elsewhere) framed by the narrative in Genesis 2 and 3, and the doctrine of double creation as elaborated in the *De hominis opificio*. According to the latter, sexual instinct and sexual differentiation are treated *in simul*; they are both associated with the second creation. According to the former, sexual differentiation (*qua* Adam and Eve) is disarticulated from the emergence of animal passion.¹¹⁷ It is therefore no coincidence, as Behr has already observed, that the tunic of skins makes no appearance in the *De hominis opificio*. This is because the tunic of skins does the same work in the early period (and other works also) as the second creation does in the *De hominis opificio*; both attempt to explain the origins of animal passions in humanity.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, the eschatological restoration is conceived of differently in each account. In the former, the restoration would indeed, as Behr has said, imply the restoration of genitalia, but without the corrupting influence of disordered sexual passion. In the latter, the restoration is conceived of as a return to a protological situation that never existed historically, not even in Paradise—it is the return to the first creation, in which there is neither male nor female.¹¹⁹ Karras is therefore correct to critique Behr's presumption that the original state (to which human beings will return at the *eschaton*) is a return to "the prelapsarian life in Eden."¹²⁰ But she is wrong to suggest that Gregory is thinking solely of a return to the first creation. This is because, as we have seen, both interpretations of restoration exist, one beside the other, in unresolved tension in the middle period of Gregory's literary career.

One way Gregory could have reconciled these two rival accounts would have been to draw a sharp exegetical distinction between the creation of the nongenitalized human being in Genesis 2:7 and the creation of sexual differentiation—Adam and Eve—at Genesis 2:22–25. In this way, the eschatological return to Paradise (conceived as a return to Genesis 2:7) would indeed cohere with the eschatological return to the first creation envisaged in the *De hominis opificio*. However, as we have already seen, Gregory seems to make nothing of the account of the origins of sexual distinction in Genesis 2. What is more, he is adamant that the first creation is atemporal and therefore essentially distinct from the historical creation of Adam.

So, to sum up: I have sought to demonstrate that Gregory is working creatively with two conflicting accounts of protology and eschatology. One account is ostensibly based on the narrative in Genesis 2 and 3; the other (developed in the *De hominis opificio*) is based on Genesis 1:27a–b. These two accounts are not synthesized in Gregory's thought, even though they engender apparently irreconcilable conclusions to the question of the restoration of genitalia at the *eschaton*.

In closing this section, I wish to draw attention to Gregory's tacit admission that he is unable to tidy matters up conceptually. Near the end of the dialogue in the *De anima*, Gregory vocalizes his concerns about the restoration of genital members at the resurrection (*PG* 46 144:41–145:10):¹²¹

If the organs for marriage exist for the sake of marriage, then when this is no more, we shall have no need of those organs for this purpose. . . . If those things that are going to contribute nothing to that other life ought not to be about the body, then surely none of the parts that now make up our body would exist at all? The life then would subsist in other ways, and one could no longer call such a state resurrection in which each of the members does not rise along with the body because of their uselessness in that life. But if the resurrection is to be effective in all these members, then the author of the resurrection will be fashioning parts in us that in that life are vain and meaningless. And yet it is necessary that we believe that there is a resurrection, and that it will not be vain.

In response, Macrina appeals to divine mystery (PG 46 145:30–33):¹²²

The true rationale of these things is still laid up in the hidden treasures of Wisdom [cf. Sirach 1:25, 4:18; Proverbs 8:21] and will not come to light until we are taught the mystery of the resurrection by the deed.

Gregory himself admits through Macrina that he is unable to give a definitive answer to the question of whether human genitalia will be physically restored at the resurrection. We—like Macrina and Gregory—are better off acknowledging an inconsistency in Gregory's thought, played out between two rival accounts of pro-ology, rather than synthesizing his writings into one neat solution.

REFINEMENTS IN GREGORY'S THEORY OF DESIRE

It is the purpose of this final section in this chapter to situate Gregory's theorizations of the ascetic life in the middle period (with all its implications for the transformations of male and female characteristics) within his evolving understanding of desire, the passions, and reason. Two doctrinal works—the *De anima* and the *De hominis opificio*—present the most systematized account of his theory of desire in his entire *œuvre*. It is necessary at this point to bring two main ideas in Gregory's thought into focus: first, the distinction between the impulses (*hormai*) and the passions (*pathē*); second, the doctrine of the *imago Dei* as an explanation for the rational characteristics of the human soul.

As we now reflect on the first of these two ideas, it is worth noting that Gregory tends to follow the Stoic¹²³ philosophers Hierocles (second century C.E.) and Seneca (4 B.C.E.–65 C.E.) by differentiating the *hormai* (morally neutral, instinctual “impulses” aroused by sense stimuli)¹²⁴ from the *pathē* (evil passions).¹²⁵ Gregory sometimes adopts this terminological differentiation in his works,¹²⁶ but he is often inconsistent. On one occasion, for instance, he speaks as though the *pathē* are in fact *hormai* (*De anima*, PG 46 61:8–13).¹²⁷ On another occasion, Gregory distinguishes between a movement (*kinēsis*) of the soul intended for good ends by the Creator and drives (*aphormai*), which are movements misapplied to the service of

evil (*In Ecclesiasten*, GNO V 427:15–428:6). Notwithstanding the frustrating inconsistencies of Gregory’s terminological usage, it is my intention in the interests of clarity to use the first set of terminological distinctions—*pathē* and *hormai*—in the remainder of this section.

For Gregory, all *hormai* are types of *epithymia* (“desire”)¹²⁸ or *thymos* (“irascibility”, *De anima*, PG 46 56:19–28).¹²⁹ Grief (*lypē*) and the thought of pleasure (*to kath’ hēdonēn noēma*) are a combination of both (*De anima*, PG 46 56:28–36).¹³⁰ As in Evagrius,¹³¹ *epithymia* and *thymos* are morally neutral. They acquire moral status depending on “the use to which they are put.” If that use is virtuous, the *hormē* is laudable; if evil, the *hormē* is disordered—it is described as a passion (*De anima*, PG 46 67:31–68:5).¹³²

Macrina’s reaction to Basil’s death in the *Vita Sanctae Macrinae* demonstrates this point *in concreto*. According to Gregory, she “suffered in soul at so great a privation” (14:10–12). Though sympathetic to her reaction (14:12–14), Gregory nonetheless highlights Macrina’s strength in preventing her distress from degenerating into passion: “she continued firm, like an unconquerable athlete, not buckling at any stage before the assaults of misfortune” (14:27–28).¹³³ Macrina is described here as a spiritual athlete because she exercised reason over her impulses, thereby converting them into virtue. This leads us to the second *locus* of reflection in this section: the creation of the soul in the *imago Dei*.

The rational human soul, Gregory repeatedly claims, reflects the *imago Dei* (Genesis 1:27b) and as such comprises various fields of cognition. First, the soul has the capacity of self-governance (*autexousia*, *De hominis opificio* IV:1, PG 46 136:25–26),¹³⁴ a property of God (*De mortuis*, GNO IX/1 54:1–3), which refers to the ability to be “swayed autocratically by [one’s] own will” (*De hominis opificio* IV:1, PG 46 136:26).¹³⁵ It is basically equivalent to the more widely used term *proairesis* (“free will”), which according to Gregory is seated in the liberty (*eleutheria*) of thought (*dianoia*, *Oratio catechetica* XXX:33–35).¹³⁶ The rational soul is also made up of the capacities of reasoning (*logos*)¹³⁷ (*De hominis opificio* V:2, PG 44 137:31–32),¹³⁸ discrimination (*diakritikē*),¹³⁹ and contemplation (*theōrētikē*¹⁴⁰ or *epoptikē*,¹⁴¹ *De anima*, PG 46 57:23–24),¹⁴² although Gregory does not employ these terms consistently throughout his *œuvre*. The capacities of the rational soul enable human beings to distinguish the good from the bad (*De anima*, PG 46 57:29–30). Since vice, as Gregory will later say explicitly, is the result of misjudgment (*Epistula canonica ad Letoium*, PG 45 224:39–47, 47–53),¹⁴³ the proper exercise of these rational capacities is of supreme importance in the pursuit of the life of virtue.

Much here is indebted to the Greek Stoic philosopher Chrysippus (ca. 279 B.C.E.–ca. 206 B.C.E.), who described the *pathē* as forms of erroneous belief (*doxa*) or judgment (*krisis*)—indeed, sometimes supposition (*hypolēpsis*).¹⁴⁴ They result in a violent movement in the mind¹⁴⁵ that disrupts the calm that is otherwise secured by reason. Philosophical pedagogy was, for Chrysippus, the means by

which correct judgments and beliefs are inculcated into the philosopher with the goal of reaching *apatheia*.¹⁴⁶ We have already seen the outworking of these ideas in our analysis of Macrina's instruction to Gregory and Emmelia, both of whom had at separate times been caught up in the throes of grief. In both instances, it was Macrina's transformative pedagogy that corrected their errant beliefs and instilled in them a steadfast hope for the resurrection.

In this section, I have highlighted the development that Gregory's theory of desire underwent in the middle period. In the early period, we were confronted with a fairly straightforward description of the appetite (*orexis*), which is capable of being reoriented through the exercise of free will toward the minimal demands of human need (*chreia*). Now, in the middle period, Gregory elaborates the rational operations of the soul in a more systematic fashion and sets out, more clearly than before, the distinctions between impulse and passion.¹⁴⁷

Doctrinal Controversies

Christological and Trinitarian

Much of the literature produced on the topic of Gregory's Christology and Trinitarian theology¹ has, for the main part,² failed to look at how his doctrinal reflections led him to accentuate some new notes in his ascetic doctrine during the middle period of his literary career. In what follows, I shall highlight two doctrinal areas of interest that have a considerable bearing on the ascetic themes of this inquiry. First, I shall demonstrate that Gregory's confrontation with the Apollinarianism of his day led him to develop a Christologically theorized account of the transformation of desire in which Christ rehearses all the passions during the course of his earthly life in order to cleanse and purify them of their worldly associations. Second, in response to the Eunomian controversy, I shall show that Gregory sought to define intra-Trinitarian relations in a way that removed activity and passivity (and, by cultural association, male and female, respectively) from the concept of divine generation.

THE DIACHRONIC UNFOLDING OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE: CHRISTOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

The Diachronic Transformation of Christ's Humanity

One particularly rich aspect of Gregory's Christology is its emphasis on the transformation of Christ's human nature over the course of his earthly life. Of crucial importance is the distinction between divine immutability and human mutability, as evidenced in Gregory's discussion of the *communicatio idiomatum* in the *Contra Eunomium*: "since the Divine Nature [*to theion*], whatever it is believed to be, always remains the same, being above all augmentation and incapable of diminution, we are

absolutely compelled to refer this saying [Luke 2:52] to the Humanity [*to anthrōpinon*]” (III:4:62:6–63:1).³ The distinction adumbrated here is key to Gregory’s understanding of Luke 2:52 (“Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and favor”)—a widely contested passage in the Christological debates of the patristic era. Gregory elsewhere argues that Christ’s humanity undergoes change for the better, being altered “from corruptible to incorruptible, from mortal to immortal, from short-lived to eternal, from corporeal and formal to incorporeal and formless” (*Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarianum*, GNO III/1 223:2–10). While insisting on the mutability of Christ’s humanity and its malleability to divine transformation, Gregory denies that Christ became more divine over time “by a kind of progress [*prokopē*] and sequence [*akolouthia*].” He appeals to Luke 2:52 and argues that “the Lord truly came to be in our composition.” There was, in other words, no “phantasm cloaking itself in bodily form” but rather “a true Theophany” (*Ep.* III:16:1–17:1).⁴ What inspires Gregory’s discussion here is his disagreement with the Apollinarianism of his day, which argued that the Word assumed a truncated version of human nature, thereby replacing the functions of the higher human soul. In response, Gregory appeals to Luke 2:52 to show that all aspects of human nature were assumed by the Word, including the diachronic development of the human mind.

Yet Gregory does not restrict Christ’s human transformation to his human mind: “the infant matured little by little, soon came to the age of adolescence, and was already a boy in flower of youth, at the height of his beauty, giving his parents the sweet sight of his beauty, advancing toward the prime of life, developing the excellences of the spirit along with the beauty of the body” (*De Deitate filii et spiritus sancti et in Abraham*, PG 46 568:1–6; translation modified). Christ’s moral life was, therefore, enriched by deeper appropriations of virtue over the course of time. The same idea presents itself in the *Oratio catechetica*, in which Gregory denies that there is anything vicious (*kakia*) about Christ’s growth (*auxēsis*) or his “progress to the perfection of his nature” (IX:23–26).⁵ It is false, Gregory insists, to presume that Christ’s growth in virtue implies that he succumbed to vice. Gregory inveighs against the view that bodily change—a weakness (*pathos*)—necessarily engenders wickedness. Otherwise, one would have to conclude that the Son could not have both assumed weakness in the Incarnation and remained sinless (XVI:1–5).⁶ Gregory distinguishes *pathos* that is vice (*kakia*) from another sort of *pathos*, “a chain [*heirmos*] peculiar to itself of successive stages . . . as, for instance, birth [*gennēsis*], growth [*auxēsis*] . . .” (XVI:9–12)⁷ The Son, he explains, did not enter a state of vice but embraced the “natural movement” (XVI:17–18),⁸ which represents the growth and development of the body. So, for Gregory, there was not an immediate transformation of Christ’s humanity at the moment of conception, as for Cyril of Alexandria (ca. 376–444), whose identification of the personhood of Christ with the preexistent Logos tended to downplay the Lukan attestation of Christ’s human development. On the contrary, Gregory simultaneously maintains

that Christ's humanity was diachronically transformed by his divinity and that Christ was at all times sinless.⁹

So far, I have argued that Gregory's confrontation with the Apollinarianism of his day helped him to develop a diachronically theorized account of the transformations and maturations of Christ's humanity. But it now falls to me to tease out the ascetical corollaries of this Christological doctrine. In what follows, I shall look in more detail at the theme of aging to see whether it is possible to link the transformation of Christ's humanity to diachronic transformation in the ascetic life.

Spiritual Maturation and Physical Aging

Gregory seems to be in two minds about old age. On the one hand, aging is regarded as a tragic state of affairs, part of the postlapsarian condition of humanity, which comprises "sexual intercourse [*mixis*], conception, childbearing, sordidness [*rhypos*], breastfeeding, nourishing, excretion, gradual growth to maturity, the prime of life, old age, disease, and death" (*De anima*, PG 46 148:46–149:2).¹⁰ On the other hand, the longer one lives, the more opportunities one has to grow in virtue. Let me address these points in turn.

In Part One, I discussed the spiritual benefits enjoyed by older ascetics who are exemplars of virtue for fledgling ascetics. However, in the latter part of the middle period, old age—referred to variously as *presbytikos*, *gēras*, *palaiotēs*, or *polia* (grayness of the hair)—is now more often linked to enfeeblement. It is "unsuited for fawning" (*Ep.* VIII:3:4),¹¹ results in unfortunate prattling and bleariness of the eyes (*Ep.* XI:7:3–4),¹² and is characterized by physical decline (*Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam*, GNO IX/1 465:26–466:12; cf. *Ep.* XVII:2:6–7,¹³ a letter assigned to the late phase). Gregory is acutely aware of his own aging: "What, then, of me, the old man? . . . You see how we babble on about matters that are not at all fitting for the elderly!" (cf. *Ep.* XI:4, 7).¹⁴ In the *De infantibus praemature abreptis*, Gregory compares himself to an aged horse now outside the race course. "But," he says, "though old age may compel a horse to remain away from the race, it may often happen that the din of the trampling racers rouses him into excitement, that he lifts his head with eager looks, that he shows his spirit in his breathings, and prances and paws the ground frequently, though this eagerness [*prothymia*] is all that is left to him, and time has sapped his powers of going" (GNO III/2 67:10–17).¹⁵ Despite his old age, Gregory is still able to participate in the ecclesial and theological contests of his day (GNO III/2 68:2–6).¹⁶ Furthermore, in the same work, he remarks that his addressee, Hierius, though elderly, has astonishing spiritual sight (GNO III/2 68:11–69:8).¹⁷ These two examples demonstrate what Gregory calls that "embarrassing yet harmonious mixture of opposites" (GNO III/2 68:9–10).¹⁸

Despite the impediments of old age, therefore, the spiritual life need not diminish or dissipate. In the *In suam ordinationem*, Gregory claims that if he, in his old age, is able to participate in spiritual contests, then younger people ought to do the

same (GNO IX/1 331:18–33). Again, in *Epistle XV*, addressed to John and Maximian, two young Christian students of “the sophist” (Libanius), Gregory says that he has sent them a copy of his book, probably the *Contra Eunomium*,¹⁹ as “an invitation . . . to hearten those who are in the full vigor [*akmē*]²⁰ of youth to do battle with our adversaries, through stirring up the boldness of youth by the eagerness of old age” (*Ep. XV*:3:6–4:1). The aged Gregory is able to elicit in others the characteristics of youth as they battle against heresy. In *Epistle XI*, Gregory claims that Eupatrius the Scholastic, who entertained Gregory “in youthful fashion with . . . brisk and sprightly language,” will “restore youth to our old age, supporting the feebleness of our length of days by this beautiful care for the aged” (*Ep. XI*:8:1–4).²¹

The spiritual youthfulness of the elderly can also be manifested physically. In a letter addressed to the sophist Stagirus, youthful reinvigoration roused Gregory to “skip about” and to “dance” (*Ep. XXVII*:3:1–4).²² Easter itself, as Gregory claims in the *In sanctum Pascha*, has such a transformative effect that “the old man [*presbytēs*] runs like a young man [*neos*] to take part in the merriment” (GNO IX/1 249:15–16).²³ Likewise, in the *De Deitate filii et spiritus sancti et in Abraham*, Gregory discusses Sarah’s miraculous pregnancy in old age (cf. Genesis 21:7) and the youthful spiritual vigor of both Abraham and Sarah (PG 46 565:31–568:1). Sarah’s full and swelling breasts and the transformation of gray hair are indicative, Gregory says, of their ageless hope in God. Old age is no barrier to God, who can transform sterility to fecundity. (Cf. *Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam*, GNO IX/1 468:1–7.) Despite these rare suggestions that spiritual youthfulness can be expressed physically in the lives of the elderly, Gregory more often contrasts spiritual youthfulness with age-related physical decline. He remarks that “gray [hair] conceals the soul’s youth” (*In suam ordinationem*, GNO IX/1 335:13–16) and that virtuous elderly Christians “have the appearance of old age, seem venerable, are splendid in gray hair [*polia stilbontes*]” but at the same time “have power against spirits [cf. Matthew 10:1], effect results solely by their deeds, and resist demons not by syllogisms but by the power of faith” (GNO IX/1 338:2–8).

So far, I have shown that old age is presented as a lamentable condition that is nonetheless open to spiritual transformation. Gregory also argues that the process of aging provides opportunities for moral development—a theme that first appeared in the *De mortuis* but now receives focused attention in the middle period. In his reflections on the premature death of infants, Gregory insists that it is better to partake in life than to die early (*De infantibus praemature abreptis*, GNO III/2 74:22–75:23).²⁴ His unnamed interlocutors claim that “not partaking in life at all will be a happier state than living.” They presume that if a child were to live a normal life instead, he would get “the pollution of evil necessarily mingled more or less with his life, or, if he is to be quite outside this contagion, it will be at the price of much painful effort.” Following this argument to its logical conclusion would mean that the hard-fought possession of virtue is of no value. So Gregory

insists that one's growth in physical maturity should be seen an opportunity for moral transformation and therefore preferable to an early death, even if, in death, one is unable to sin (*GNO III/2* 84:21–85:6).²⁵

Besides offering new opportunities for moral growth, physical growth also engenders different desires at different stages of maturation: “one thing is good in youth, another in the prime of life, another in middle age, and yet another in retirement, and another again in old age, when one is bent down toward the earth” (*In Ecclesiasten*, *GNO V* 313:5–8).²⁶ Gregory here is referring to material desires, which gratify only for an instant. The Good, by contrast, remains constant. In contradistinction to the variegated material desires, which sway us in one direction or another, the desire (*epithymia*) for the Good intensifies over time (*GNO V* 313:13–18, 21–22).²⁷

Despite the permanence of the Good, the changes and developments of physical maturation pose different challenges at different stages in one's life. Indeed, we have already mentioned in our discussion of the early period that sexual lusts are prominent during one's youth and must be overcome. But Gregory now insists that one must pass through youthful passion in order to understand its challenges and deepen one's practice of virtue. In the *De vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi*, Gregory writes: “Having forsaken all those activities typical of youth [*to neon tēs hēlikias*] such as equestrian pursuits, hunts, self-embellishment, clothes, dice, food, it then behooves such a person to acquire virtue once [*kathexēs*] he has experienced those youthful activities” (*PG* 46 900:45–49). The implication here is that one must pass through these youthful activities, discover how pointless they are, and then renounce them.

A subtly different tack is taken in the *In Ecclesiasten*, in which Gregory comments on Ecclesiastes 2:1–2, “I said to my heart, ‘Come hither, I will test you in merriment, and also in good,’ and this too is futility.” Gregory argues that the Ecclesiast “descends to things considered agreeable to the senses not because he is drawn down to them by passion, but in order to investigate whether the sensual experience of them makes any contribution to the knowledge of true Good” (*GNO V* 310:3–6).²⁸ One therefore needs to investigate whether worldly passions contribute anything valuable to the pursuit of virtue and discover their utter futility for oneself.

The difference between this passage from the *In Ecclesiasten* and the aforementioned excerpt from the *De vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi* is that in the former the descent into the passions takes place “after training himself . . . and achieving in his character the severity and determination through which the lessons of wisdom come most readily to those who pursue them” (*In Ecclesiasten*, *GNO V* 309:23–310:3).²⁹ In the *De vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi*, by contrast, Gregory seems to suggest that the passions and activities that accompany youth must be confronted during one's youth and then rejected. Nonetheless, these two passages share the conviction that the experience (*peira*) of futile pleasures is morally instructive. One does not “merely theoretically observe the passionate and irrational deception

of mankind in the matter of bodily enjoyments” but recognizes their futility through experience (*In Ecclesiasten*, GNO V 307:10–14).³⁰

In light of these discussions, we may be prompted to ask: What is the relationship between the diachronic transformation of Christ’s humanity and the diachronic transformation of the individual Christian in the ascetic life? Gregory links the two together through his doctrinal insistence that the Word assumes all that makes us human. But the specific moral corollaries of Gregory’s Christological doctrine of diachronic transformation for the individual Christian are not clearly delineated. What is implicit here—namely the conjunction between Christ’s moral maturation and the ascetic’s moral maturation—will be rendered explicit in Gregory’s later works, as we will see in Part Three.

Let us now turn to our final set of reflections in this section by examining the intra-Trinitarian relationship between the Father and the Son, and its implications for the ascetic life.

GREGORY’S DOCTRINE OF GOD: INTRA-TRINITARIAN RELATIONSHIPS AND THE ASCETIC LIFE

Much in Gregory’s thinking here developed in reaction to the thought of Eunomius, for whom the Father, the unbegotten (*agennētos*), is senior (*presbyteron*) to the Son, the begotten (*gennēma*), the junior (*neōteron*), whom He generates. The Father and the Son are thus separated from each other by a certain interval (*diastēmati tini*, *Contra Eunomium* I:344:2–4).³¹ Despite the variety of doctrinal concerns with which Gregory contended as bishop of Nyssa, it is Gregory’s reaction against Eunomius that has the greatest import for some of the ascetical *foci* of this study.

In what follows, I shall explore the implications of Gregory’s doctrine of God—forged in the context of the Eunomian controversy—for the ascetical life, looking specifically at the themes of bodily purity, sexual hierarchy, and physical procreation. We are by no means in new territory. The conjunction between Gregory’s doctrine of God and the ascetic life (the corollary of the doctrine of the *imitatio Dei*) is already present in the *De virginitate*. Those who pursue the life of virginity were called to imitate the incorruptibility of God and the passionless generation of the Son through their spiritual fecundity. The purpose of this section is to see how these themes are developed yet further at this crucial time in Gregory’s later theorization of the intra-Trinitarian relations.

Human and Divine Generation

Gregory reflects on the utility and limitations of the language of generation (*gennēsis*) when applied to the intra-Trinitarian relationship between Father and Son. Gregory believes that Eunomius misunderstands *gennēsis* on two accounts:

first, by failing to see that creaturely *gennēsis* implies a continuity of nature (*physis*) so that, when applied to the Godhead, there has to be an equal sharing of essence (*ousia*) among the Persons of the Trinity; second, by erroneously importing the fleshly associations of *gennēsis* into the Godhead. Eunomius errs, therefore, both for failing to understand the similarities between creaturely *gennēsis* and divine *gennēsis*, and for failing to acknowledge their differences.

In the first instance, Eunomius mistakenly believes that the inferiority of the Son necessarily follows from the notion of *gennēsis*. Gregory retorts that even animal procreation—whose nature of generation (*ho tou tokou tropos*) is shared by humans despite the difference (*diaphora*) in species (*Contra Eunomium* I:465:4–466:1)³²—does not imply that the generated is inferior to the one who generates. Eunomius fails to appreciate that in the case of creaturely generation, offspring are “of the same type as their progenitors” (*Contra Eunomium* I:215:1–216:8).³³ The divine *ousia* can be compared to human nature (*hē anthrōpinē physis*), which remains undiminished by the succession of posterity. Human progeny share all the special properties of human nature: “man is begotten of man, and the nature of the begetter is not divided.” The same, Gregory says, is true of the divine *ousia* (*Refutatio confessionis Eunomii*, *GNO* II/2 58:4–61:2).³⁴ By comparing divine generation to creaturely generation, Gregory rejects the Eunomian suggestion that there is an ontological hierarchy between the Persons of the Trinity.

In the second instance, Gregory chides Eunomius for overidentifying divine *gennēsis* with creaturely *gennēsis*. Eunomius avers that “the things begotten are generated by passion [*kata pathos*], and those that beget naturally have an action that is not pure, by reason of their nature being linked with passions of all kinds” (*Contra Eunomium* III:2:1:13–2:1).³⁵ For Gregory, however, there are crucial differences between the two types of generation. What makes the Son’s eternal *gennēsis* from the Father distinct from material forms of *gennēsis* is the absence of passion in the former. Divine *gennēsis* is not characterized by “affections [*pathē*] and dispositions [*diatheseis*] and the cooperation of time, and the necessity of place—and, above all, matter [*hylē*]—without all which natural generation [*hē . . . gennēsis ek tēs physeōs*] here below does not take place” (*Contra Eunomium* III:6:36:12–37:1).³⁶

Divine Fatherhood must, therefore, be excised from any material suggestion of bodily pollution (*sōmatikos rhypos*), so that “what properly belongs to matter [*hylikē*] may be completely purged away, and the transcendent generation may be clear not only from the idea of passion [*empathēs*] but from that of interval” (*Contra Eunomium* III:1:78:4–8).³⁷ For Gregory, Eunomius dishonors the generation of the Son by human notions, which are unseemly (*aprepes*) and fleshly (*sarkōdes*, *Contra Eunomium* III:2:161:1–162:5).³⁸ It is irreverent to think that God is subject to passion (*pathos*, *Contra Eunomium* II:420:1–5).³⁹ By referring to the virginal conception, Gregory also counters the Eunomian claim that there is no impassible form of generation (*Contra Eunomium* III:2:25:6–27:10).⁴⁰

Gregory appeals to John 6:63 (“It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless”) or indeed possibly John 3:6 (“What is born of flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit”) (*Contra Eunomium* III:2:9:1–10:4)⁴¹ to dissuade his readers from identifying fleshly forms of generation—namely “what is subject to passion [*empathēs*] and pollution”—with the type of generation that is “pure and Divine” (*Contra Eunomium* III:2:4:11–5:1).⁴² Gregory points out that the language of “father” and “son” does not appear in John 1:1 because the Fourth Evangelist did not want to confuse the childish (*nēpiōdes*) and the untrained (*apaideuton*), those who are of the more carnally minded (*tōn sarkōdesterōn*), by the use of such appellations. Otherwise, the intra-Trinitarian relationships would be falsely conceptualized in terms of fleshly generation. Instead, the Fourth Evangelist refers only to the Word, “lest any, hearing of the Son, should humanize the Godhead by an idea of passion” (*Contra Eunomium* III:2:19:1–20:1).⁴³

So much by way of summary of Gregory’s theology of the Trinity—but how do these reflections deepen our understanding of erotic transformation? The answer, it seems, is that the passionless generation of the Son from the Father provides a doctrinal context within which Gregory can theorize about passionless fecundity in the ascetic life. Let me now turn to the doctrine of the *imitatio Dei* to explore this further.

The Ascetic Life: An Imitation of the Inner Life of the Trinity

Gregory explicitly compares the eternal generation of the Son with the spiritual fecundity of Christians to disarticulate passion from the idea of generation. He distinguishes corporeal generation “of blood and of the will of the flesh” (John 1:13) from spiritual generation, which is “from above” (John 3:5) and belongs to “the true and blessed life” (*Contra Eunomium* III:2:59:1–60:1).⁴⁴ He then argues that spiritual generation, which is inexorably linked to “a life of purity,” is distinct from “the generation that is through the flesh of a life of passion” (*Contra Eunomium* III:2:61:1–6).⁴⁵ The implication is that a life of fecund impassibility is an imitation of “the passionless character [*apathēs*] of the Divine generation” (*Contra Eunomium* III:2:114:5–115:1).⁴⁶

Gregory also claims that the intra-Trinitarian relations cannot be described in terms of “passivity” (*to paschon*, literally, “the thing having something happen to it”)—or “passive potency” (*pathētikē dynamis*)—or “activity” (*energētikē* or *energoun*, literally, “the thing in action”). These remarks emerge in critical counterpoint with Eunomius’s claim that “nothing can come into being without passivity [*pathos*] and activity [*energeia*] concurring to produce it” (*Contra Eunomium* III:2:69:2–4),⁴⁷ and this, he argues, includes bodily generation (*Contra Eunomium* III:2:66:5, 66:9–67:1)⁴⁸ as much as it includes divine generation. Gregory agrees that bodily generation requires passivity and activity, but he does not think that these categories are applicable to divine generation. For Gregory, Eunomius is

inconsistent. On the one hand, he wants to declare that “the active and the passive are to be defined as mutually akin in respect of nature,” but on the other hand he insists that the Son is alien to the Father (*Contra Eunomium* III:2:69:5–71:8).⁴⁹

The Eunomian claim is that the Father is active and the Only-Begotten Son is passive, “molded in accordance with the motive energy that gives Him His subsistence” (*Contra Eunomium* II:373:10–374:1).⁵⁰ The problem with this view for Gregory is that the Son, as the passive subject upon which the Father acts, is inevitably and erroneously regarded as no different from the rest of creation. He ends up being passible, just like creation (*Contra Eunomium* II:376:2–377:5).⁵¹

Gregory’s descriptions of activity and passivity (albeit placed on the lips of Eunomius) recall Aristotle’s *De generatione animalium*, which compares a carpenter (active) sawing wood (passive) with the physical procreativity of a human father (730b5–32). Aristotle, like Eunomius, asserts the interdependence of activity and passivity: “When the agent and patient meet in the way appropriate to the potency in question, the one must act, and the other be acted upon” (*Metaphysica* 1048a5–7). Crucially, for our present purposes, Aristotle’s *De generatione animalium* links what is passive (*to pathētikon*) and what is active (*to poiētikon*) to female and male, respectively: “the female . . . provides the matter, and the male . . . provides the principle of movement” (*De generatione animalium* II:740b21–25). Gregory does not discuss the sexual hierarchy in the *Contra Eunomium*, but I believe that its associations with activity and passivity, as in Aristotle’s *De generatione animalium*, are nonetheless implied. After all, Eunomius links bodily generation to the conjunction of activity and passivity, undertaken respectively by the man and the woman, and applies this dynamic to the Godhead. Gregory’s refusal to incorporate the passive/active asymmetry inherent in sexual intercourse into the Godhead suggests that he also wishes to disarticulate the Godhead from sexual hierarchy. Although Galatians 3:28 is never cited in Gregory’s *Contra Eunomium*, it cannot be far from his mind.

CONCLUSION

It has been one of the most remarkable and overlooked aspects of Gregory’s doctrine of God in this period that notions of male activity and female passivity are disarticulated from the Godhead. This prompts us to reflect again on Gregory’s endorsement of the sexual hierarchy in the conjugal life, as noted earlier in this study. He seems on the one hand to abandon sexual hierarchy in the Godhead and in the ascetic life but on the other hand to insist on its divinely ordained status in marriage.

Gregory, I suggest, regards marital relations as unavoidably entangled in sexual hierarchy—and indeed divinely ordained to that end, albeit as a consequence of the Fall. Like many other aspects of marriage, sexual hierarchy is lamentable. As

we read in the *De virginitate*, the widow is left behind without her head. The implication is that male headship in marriage cultivates dependency on an ultimately transient head whose lordship is nothing in comparison to the everlasting headship of Christ, the incorruptible Bridegroom. Nonetheless and in spite of the manifold challenges of marriage, widowhood has its opportunities for ascetical transformation, as Vetiana demonstrates by staying with the community of virgins established by Macrina in order to learn about virtue. Note, also, that it is because she no longer has a human head that she can serve God more freely than she might otherwise have been able to do.

Even if Gregory regards male headship as fallen (he does not say so explicitly), he never entertains the possibility that the nonsubordinationist intra-Trinitarian relationships could in some way be reflected in marriage through the overcoming of sexual hierarchy. Only the virginal life, for Gregory, is capable of anticipating that angelic form of embodiment in which there is neither male nor female. Only a life that has been fully extricated from the realm of sexual activity—from its inescapable entanglement in activity and passivity—is truly extricated from sexual hierarchy.

PART THREE

The Late Phase, 387–394

*Erotic Intimacy with Christ and the
Maturation of Desire*

AS WE APPROACH THE FINAL PHASE of Gregory's literary career, the theme of spiritual and moral maturation reaches its richest and most sophisticated articulation. A key passage from the *In Cant* sets the tone for these final two chapters, revealing the centrality of diachronic maturation in Gregory's theorization of spiritual ascent (*GNO VI* 458:17–459:4):¹

[Human nature] does not achieve its perfect state again all at once, as at its first creation. Rather does it advance toward the better along a road of sorts, in an orderly fashion, one step after another, and rids itself bit by bit of its susceptibility to what opposes its fulfillment. For when it was first created, since evil did not exist, there was nothing to prevent the race's perfection from going hand-in-hand with its birth, but in the process of restoration, lapses of time [*diastēmatikē paratasis*] necessarily attend those who are retracing their way toward the original good. Hence our mind, which because of its vice is locked into a passionate attachment to materiality, scrapes away, bit by bit, with the help of a cunning discipline [*dia tēs asteioterās agōgēs*], the wrong that has grown together with it like a tree bark that encloses it.

In this excerpt, Gregory adumbrates the diachronic character of moral transformation, highlighting the lapses of time (*diastēmatikē paratasis*) required to make progress. Although this is a pervasive theme in Gregory's earlier writings, it reaches a crescendo in the mature period—and this, I believe, is no coincidence. For it is during Gregory's final years that he begins to reflect on his past and what he perceives to be its moral and spiritual inadequacies. Released from “administrative burdens and the heat of theological controversy” in which he had been embroiled during his episcopacy, Gregory now embraces “the life of the spirit.”² His “deeper

personal experience of true freedom of spirit” thus shapes the tenor of his later works, which are primarily concerned with “the experience of man’s spiritual growth and coming of age.”³ I do not, however, wish to suggest that Gregory straightforwardly turned his attentions from theological controversy to spirituality, so called, as Daniélou argues, because this presupposes a modern disjunction between spirituality and theology. Gregory’s later works are no less theological for being spiritual than are his earlier works, even if there are considerable differences in genre, audience, and indeed maturity.⁴

It is Gregory’s experiences in old age that I believe inspired his most in-depth reflections on the maturation of the ascetic life. In the *De vita Moysis*, Gregory contrasts his age with that of a young man, possibly a monk,⁵ who requested a treatise on the perfect life (*ho teleios bios*).⁶ Not long afterward, Gregory makes a candid admission. He concedes that despite the length of his life and its many opportunities for moral growth, he cannot show others through his own example what the perfect life looks like (*De vita Moysis* I:3).⁷ He is consoled by the fact that he is not alone. Many who excel in virtue also end up having to admit how unattainable (*anephiktos*) the perfect life is. Gregory then converts his personal admission of moral inadequacy into a discussion of the nature of moral progress. The boundless expanse of virtue is the corollary of the goodness of God, which knows no limits (*De vita Moysis* I:5–10).⁸ From this, Gregory concludes that moral progress is endless (*De vita Moysis* II:225–30).⁹ The line of argument is as follows (*De vita Moysis* I:6, 9–10):¹⁰

Our statement that grasping perfection with reference to virtue is impossible was not false, for it has been pointed out that what is marked off by boundaries is not virtue. I said that it is also impossible for those who pursue the life of virtue to attain perfection. The meaning of this statement will be explained. . . .

Although on the whole my argument has shown that what is sought for is unattainable, one should not disregard the commandment of the Lord that says, *Therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly father is perfect* [Matthew 5:48]. . . . We should show great diligence not to fall away from the perfection that is attainable but to acquire as much as is possible: To that extent let us make progress within the realm of what we seek. For the perfection of human nature consists perhaps in its very growth in goodness.

Another work from the same period, the *De perfectione*, adopts a similar line of argument. Gregory first bemoans his inability to offer deeds rather than words as an instruction for the perfect life. He admits that his life is not in tune with his words. For this reason, “I do not yet see myself as one whose life could be offered to you as an example in place of a treatise” (GNO VIII/1 173:1–14).¹¹ Despite this, Gregory does not altogether despair. At the end of the treatise, we stumble upon the core theological novelty of Gregory’s mature thought—the conversion of creaturely mutability

(the object of contempt in the early period) into a moral good: “For this is truly perfection: never to stop growing toward what is better and never placing any limit on perfection” (*GNO VIII/1* 214:4–6).¹² If we compare these excerpts from the *De vita Moysis* and the *De perfectione*, it becomes clear that from the perspective of perpetual progress, the language of bodily old age or youth, when used to describe spiritual ascent, needs to be refashioned in ways that may seem paradoxical or counterintuitive at first. This is because no one is truly old in the pursuit of virtue; everyone is young in the ascent to God. If perfection is defined as perpetual progress, the only way one can make sense of Gregory’s admissions of moral inadequacy is if he is claiming not to be growing in virtue at all. A more plausible interpretation is that Gregory, for a short time at the start of both works, employs the finite construal of perfection that his audience is likely to have in mind in order to replace it later in his discussion with the idea of perpetual progress.

With all this in mind, let me now outline the sequence of discussion in these final two chapters. Chapter 7 will proceed first by examining Gregory’s rendition of “virginity” in his late works. We will discover that virginity no longer refers to lifelong physical continence as in the *De virginitate* but to moral purity—the common ascetic pursuit of celibate and married Christians. Then I shall consider Gregory’s mature adumbration of spiritual development, noting that the prime of one’s bodily life is now the preferred analogue for spiritual maturity (and not, as before, the mixture of old age and youth). In chapter 8, I shall examine the implications of spiritual maturation for the conjugal life as well as the male and female characteristics that the soul appropriates at different stages in spiritual ascent. Finally, I shall offer some thoughts on the theoretical underpinning to the divine and human transcendence of male and female. I shall suggest that the mingling of characteristics between the incorruptible Bridegroom and the Virgin Bride, which never results in the obliteration of the distinction between the Creator and the creature, helps us to understand Gregory’s use of nuptial imagery in describing spiritual ascent.

Spiritual Maturation

Virginité and the Narrative of Progress

RECASTING VIRGINITY

In our discussion of the early period of Gregory's literary career, we saw that physical virginity was ultimately privileged above physical marriage. As we now turn to Gregory's late writings, it is possible to detect a shift in his thinking toward a more spiritualized rendition of virginity *qua* moral (virginal) purity before God. It is the burden of this section to show that married Christians can be elevated to the spiritual status of virgins so long as their desires are chastened and transformed before God.

It is striking that when Gregory refers to Christ's virginity, he does not issue a summons to celibacy but invites his audience to embrace moral purity understood in its broadest sense. In the *De perfectione*, Gregory discusses the influence of Christ's example (*hypodeigma*) on Christians, enabling them to discover "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), a life in the flesh (*en sarki*) but not according to the flesh (*kata sarka*). Crucial to the *hypodeigma* of Christ is the fact that he was a virgin (*parthenos*, GNO VIII/1 195:5–10)¹—but the literal significance of *parthenos* as one sexually abstinent seems to recede into the background. So when Gregory claims that Paul had become an "imitator of Christ" (*mimētēs tou Christou*), quoting 1 Corinthians 4:16, this is not, for Gregory, because Paul renounced the conjugal life but because he pursued the life of virtue (*ho bios kat' aretēn*, GNO VIII/1 196:14–15).²

Again, in the *De instituto Christiano*, "virginity" takes on an expanded range of meaning and becomes a category of general moral import. Gregory offers an elucidation of 1 Corinthians 7:34, "The virgin thinks about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy in body and in spirit" (GNO VIII/1 49:13–15). He then claims that the summons to flee (*pheugein*) from all sin is Paul's (GNO VIII/1 49:15–16); but no

such exhortation, in the exact formulation Gregory offers, can be retrieved from the Pauline corpus. Gregory may be referring to 1 Corinthians 6:18, in which the verb *pheugein* appears. However, Paul here summons his readers to flee from sexuality immorality (*porneia*), not sin (*hamartia*). If we take 1 Corinthians 6:18 as the passage to which Gregory alludes, he seems to be expanding the meaning of *porneia*, as in the *De virginitate*, so that any form of *hamartia* compromises one's virginal (that is, moral) purity before God. Since "the goal [*skopos*] of the soul that honors virginity is to be filled with God and to become the bride of Christ" (*GNO VIII/1 49:18–20*),³ *hamartia* is therefore spiritual adultery against Christ. For this reason, "it is necessary for the soul that is going to ascend to the Divine and be joined to Christ to drive out from itself every sin that it has definitely committed through deeds—I mean theft, plunder, adultery [*moicheia*], greed, fornication [*porneia*] . . ." (*GNO VIII/1 50:9–13*).⁴ In this passage, Gregory urges his readers to avoid adultery (*moicheia*) as well as sexual immorality (*porneia*), which, in the *Epistula canonica ad Letoium*, refers specifically to fornication (*PG 45 228:16–41*, especially 35–41).⁵ Since the prohibition against *moicheia* makes sense within the context of the conjugal life, it follows that for Gregory, married Christians can be virgins of Christ if they govern their desires in accordance with God's holy laws. Following Richard Norris,⁶ therefore, I agree that Gregory in his homilies on the Song of Songs takes for granted that some members of the congregation are married, a point to which I shall shortly return (*In Cant*, *GNO VI 121:16–122:18*).⁷ This highlights Daniélou's misjudgment in considering the *In Cant* a work of mysticism,⁸ which, he argues, could not possibly have been preached to the ordinary Christian faithful. On the contrary, Gregory makes it clear that his homilies are delivered to the assembly during the days of fasting (presumably Lent). The suggestion that his intended audience consists of monastics seems unlikely.

My final piece of evidence comes from the ninth homily of the *In Cant*, in which Gregory, appealing to Mark 3:35, argues that anyone who does God's will is Christ's brother, sister, and mother as well as "the hallowed virgin who is betrothed to the Lord." Such a person, he continues, who has a place in "the undefiled [*achrantos*] marriage chamber," is rightly called "bride" (*GNO VI 263:1–7*).⁹ For Gregory, therefore, the privilege of becoming the Virgin Bride of Christ in the Song of Songs is not restricted to those who live the celibate life. It includes all who do God's will.

In light of this, how does the construal of virginity in the *In Cant* compare with its construal in the *De virginitate*? Although the *De virginitate* suggests that Christians who are married can reflect the spiritual outcomes of virginity (though never as comprehensively as those who have embraced lifelong celibacy), it is only in Gregory's late writings that virginity is explicitly applied to those who, married or not, have cultivated pure desires for Christ. The argument of the *De virginitate* required Gregory to define virginity as physical continence, which necessitates the ascetic chastening of all desires (sexual or other). If Gregory had argued that married Chris-

tians can also be virgins, this would have undermined the effectiveness of his exhortations to pursue physical virginity. Now that Gregory immerses himself in the Song of Songs in the mature phase of his life, he becomes especially attuned to the imagery of the Virgin Bride's erotic longings for the Bridegroom, which leads him to locate virginity within a spiritual register of meaning. My suggestion, therefore, is that the widened import of virginity in Gregory's late writings is linked to shifts in his perspective and focus—from exhortations to young men and fledgling monastics to embrace physical virginity to a deepening fascination with the Song of Songs.

A pressing question still remains unanswered: Is the virtuous celibate, for Gregory, a member of the spiritual elite, whose intimacy with Christ surpasses all others? There is nothing to suggest that Gregory later modified his earlier view, enunciated in the *De virginitate*, that virtuous celibacy is more meritorious than virtuous marriage. What is clear, however, is that the spiritual outcomes of virtuous marriage are closely aligned to the outcomes of virginity. How close marriage gets to virginity is, however, never spelled out in detail. My reading of Gregory is that marriage gets very close to virginity without ever becoming its equal. This is because (a) conjugal sexual relations, for Gregory, as we saw earlier, are inexorably entangled in the asymmetry of activity and passivity, which is alien to the Godhead; and (b) there will be no marriage or sexual intercourse in the life hereafter.

So, as at all other stages of Gregory's literary career, his more outré transformative vision of the ascetic life applies to the celibate rather than the married person. Nonetheless, the impact of these mature works does somewhat modify the paradoxical duality with which we were confronted in the middle period, in which there was one sort of message for the married (that marriage succumbs to patterns of fallen sexual hierarchy) and another sort of message for virgins (that they can be elevated above worldly male and female characteristics). Although this duality is not completely resolved in the mature phase of Gregory's literary career, it is softened considerably. The very fact that the Song of Songs is addressed to the fleshly minded and to Christians who are married (as we will soon see) suggests that everyone, not just virgins, can open themselves up to the divine refashioning of male and female characteristics, even if, in the context of the conjugal life, the hierarchy of the sexes remains operative.

Let us now turn to consider the moral and ascetical transformations that occur in Gregory's more refined and detailed theorization of the maturation of the spiritual life.

THE DIACHRONIC TRAIN OF MORAL AND SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

It has long been acknowledged that Gregory's account of spiritual ascent sets forth a developmental process of growth that never ends,¹⁰ even when the soul becomes

the Bride of Christ at the very heights of ascent.¹¹ The corollaries of this diachronic train of progress for ascetical practice have arguably received far less attention. What has also generally been overlooked is the Christological dimension to spiritual and moral maturation, which I discussed only briefly in Part Two. Before I begin to address these lacunae, I first need to provide an outline of Gregory's diachronically theorized account of spiritual maturation in his mature thinking.

Gregory's Construal of Spiritual Maturation

The scriptural backcloth to Gregory's theorization of spiritual progress includes a number of Pauline passages, notably 1 Corinthians 3:2 ("I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready") and Hebrews 5:14 ("But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil").¹² Gregory frequently appeals to these verses throughout his literary career—*De infantibus praemature abreptis* (GNO III/2 83:4–84:5);¹³ *De beneficentia* (GNO IX/1 93:3–16); *De Pythonissa* (GNO III/2 106:15–107:14)—to demonstrate that different stages of spiritual development engender different levels of receptivity to the divine epiphany, as Gregory puts it in the middle period work *Ad Theophilum adversus Apollinaristas* (GNO III/1 123:1–5).

Gregory's interests in spiritual maturation inform his understanding of Scripture as a means of moral and spiritual improvement. Following Origen,¹⁴ who was influenced by the early rabbis,¹⁵ Gregory schematizes the Solomonic corpus so that Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs correspond to ethics, physics, and epoptics, respectively.¹⁶ In his other words, Gregory does not restrict his descriptions of spiritual ascent to a threefold division.¹⁷ So the various degrees or stages of spiritual maturity must be viewed as not a rigidly delineated sequence but "moments in the soul's approach to God"¹⁸ or permanent markers of endless progress in ascent.¹⁹

The philosophical backcloth to this tradition of studying Scriptures is the curriculum of the Neoplatonic schools, in which texts were studied in a certain order as "spiritual exercises" (as Pierre Hadot put it).²⁰ The pedagogical purpose of the Platonic corpus is made explicit from Iamblichus onward (and is taken up by Proclus and others): the first, *Alcibiades*, with its *skopos* as self-knowledge, was regarded as the first dialogue for students who would ascend the ladder of virtue. What is more, Porphyry published his edition of Plotinus's treatises in the fourth century according to a set order—modeled on the threefold division of the sciences into ethics, physics, and epoptics—with the intention of escorting the reader from the material world to the divine Intellect and the One.²¹

Equipped with these contextual insights, we are now prepared to discuss Gregory's rendition of the threefold division of the Solomonic corpus. This schematization of the Solomonic corpus will be used to illustrate Gregory's interests in the diachronic character of spiritual ascent.

Gregory already discussed the significance of the progression from Proverbs to Ecclesiastes in the *In Ecclesiasten*. Here he remarked that the teaching of Proverbs is “an exercise that trains our souls and makes them supple for the struggle with Ecclesiastes” (*GNO V 277:3–278:17*).²² The Book of Proverbs, Gregory later says in the *In Cant*, is suited to those who are still “tender” and “malleable” (*GNO VI 18:14–15*)²³ in their spiritual development, who require “a mother’s precepts and a father’s admonition” (*GNO VI 18:15–16*).²⁴ Its purpose is to elicit and intensify the soul’s desire for virtue (*GNO VI 23:6–9*).²⁵ The next stage of spiritual development calls for Ecclesiastes. The *In Cant* devotes very little space to discussing Ecclesiastes, presumably because Gregory already developed an analysis of its key themes in his homilies, the *In Ecclesiasten*.²⁶ In brief, the purpose of Ecclesiastes is to cleanse the soul by highlighting the vanity of material things and redirecting the soul’s attention to eternal matters, to what is beyond the senses (*GNO VI 22:13–15*).²⁷ Thereafter, Solomon—whom Gregory believes is the author of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs—“initiates the mind into the innermost sanctuary” through the final book (*GNO VI 22:16–17*).²⁸ The Song of Songs teaches that “it is necessary for the soul, fixing itself steadily on the inaccessible beauty of the divine nature, to love that beauty as much as the body has a bent for what is akin to it” (*GNO VI 27:9–11*).²⁹

Even though the Song of Songs describes the soul as the Virgin Bride of Christ at the heights of spiritual ascent, it also for Gregory describes different levels of maturity. This enables the reader to learn about “the difference between the souls that look upon the Bridegroom” (*GNO VI 460:3–4*).³⁰ Commenting on Song of Songs 6:8—“There are sixty queens and eighty concubines and young maidens without number”—Gregory writes (*In Cant*, *GNO VI 459:4–5, 459:1–460:2*):³¹

This explains why we have learned that with the Father there are “many places to stay” [John 14:2]. . . . God receives each individual into the proper rank, in accordance with the many different sorts of choices that are made, and allots to all severally what corresponds to their desert, at once matching to the more advanced and measuring out to the less advanced the recompense of good things that is theirs.

The maidens, the concubines, the queens, and the Bride represent different levels of spiritual advancement. The young maidens (*neanides*) are those who “believe that the word of mystery is saving, but they do not possess the truth within themselves as it is established firmly by a kind of certain knowledge and by the full assurance accorded through the Word” (*GNO VI 460:17–19*).³² Although they are included among the saved, they are thought to be young in spiritual stature, possessing a “less rational bent of mind” (*GNO VI 461:2–4*).³³ The concubines are those who cultivate virtue but only refuse evil “out of the fear generated by threats” (*GNO VI 462:3–5*)³⁴ rather than out of fear of the loss of fellowship with God. Finally, queens represent those of a more perfect habit, who are joined together

with God's purity and are called "queens" because "they share in the divine kingship" (*GNO VI* 461:19–462:3).³⁵ Gregory explains that the Bride is one of the queens (*GNO VI* 463:16–17);³⁶ she represents those whose spiritual intimacy with Christ is most intense.

For Gregory, moral propaedeutics enables the soul to progress from immaturity to maturity. Only through ascetical training do we learn how to practice impassibility (*apatheia*) and become like God in purity (*katharotēs*, *GNO VI* 25:3–15).³⁷ Only then, Gregory insists, do we begin to understand the spiritual evocations of the Song of Songs. Sexual self-restraint has to come first. Otherwise, the Song of Songs is likely to be interpreted in a distortedly sexual sense (*GNO VI* 25:17–26:4):³⁸

So now, at this time when we are addressing ourselves to this task of interpretation, we ought, I think, to forget notions about marriage, in accordance with the injunction of Moses, who commanded candidates for initiation to be purified of marital relations [Exodus 19:15; *apo tōn gamōn*], and we ought, as I see it, to apply to ourselves the Lawgiver's instructions as we come to approach the spiritual mountain of the knowledge of God, where the female species of thoughts [*to thēly genos tōn logismōn*] is left behind in the lower existence, together with material equipment.

It is clear that Gregory is thinking specifically of the removal of the passion of erotic love (*to erōtikon pathos*), which he regards as "the most intense of pleasurable activities" (*GNO VI* 27:6–7).³⁹ Gregory is also deeply aware of the paradoxical nature of this summons to purity. On the one hand, one has to quell the fleshly evocations of sexual desire—but on the other hand, the Song of Songs uses those evocations of desire to describe the soul's erotic passion (*empathēs*) for God. This use of erotic language is intentional. Gregory hopes that the soul will love God "as much as the body has a bent for what is akin to it" (*GNO VI* 27:10–11).⁴⁰ Piling up one paradox on top of another, Gregory remarks (*GNO VI* 29:3–12):⁴¹

What could be more incredible than to make human nature itself the purifier of its own passions [*empathes*], teaching and legislating impassibility [*apatheia*] by words that are considered to be tintured with passion [*empathēs*]? For he [Solomon] does not say that one must be outside the motions of the flesh and put to death one's earthly members and have one's mouth cleansed of the language of passion [*empathēs*]. On the contrary, he has so disposed the soul that she directs her gaze toward purity by means of instruments that seem inconsistent with it and by means of impassioned utterances communicates a meaning that is undefiled.

It is here that we see a crucial difference between Origen and Gregory in their retrospective interpretations of the Song of Songs. Like Origen,⁴² Gregory presumes that ascetical propaedeutics engenders a correct spiritual interpretation of the text. But Origen says that people who are fleshly minded should not read the text, inspired as he was by rabbinic practice at the time, which set a minimum age

of maturity before one could read the text. By contrast, Gregory hopes that his commentary will provide direction to more fleshly folk (*sarkōdesteroi*, *GNO VI* 4:7).⁴³ It has already been argued that Gregory posits “an epistemological continuum between ordinary sensation and perception (which is subject to the effects of the Fall) and ‘spiritual sensation’ as it leads us into the transformed life of resurrection.”⁴⁴ Without rehearsing all the evidence in favor of this position, it suffices simply to note how this “epistemological continuum” elevates “more fleshly folk” (*sarkōdesteroi*)—through a lifelong course of ascetical learning—to a spiritual state of erotic intimacy with Christ. For Gregory, knowledge of the challenges of sexual desire can become an opportunity and incentive to transform worldly desire into spiritual passion for God. He hopes that the text’s compelling descriptions of erotic love for Christ will quell carnal desires and lead its readers to the discovery of an ascetically inflected vision of transformation. There is considerable parity, here, with what was said earlier in our discussion of Gregory’s middle-period writings—namely that youthful passions have to be worked through in order to make advancements in the practices of contemplation and virtue.

An issue of remaining ambiguity⁴⁵ is whether contemplation precedes or follows from the life of virtue. On the one hand, Gregory’s schematization of the Solomonic corpus, as shown above, suggests that moral purity is antecedent to contemplation. But other passages from Gregory’s later writings suggest the reverse—or so it has been argued. This apparent ambiguity in Gregory’s thought was already played out in the thought of Plato: the *Apologia* (29e–30b) privileges the way one lives one’s life above the pursuit of truth, whereas the *Phaedrus* (249d) and the *Symposium* (210a–211c) seem to say, on the contrary, that virtue is a means of attaining the vision of Beauty. Aristotle (*Ethica Nicomachea* 1177a–b) and Plotinus (*Enneads VI:9:11*) place the contemplative life after and above the life of virtue.

While admitting that Gregory is not himself “absolutely clear” on this issue, Anthony Meredith argues on the basis of the prologue of the *De vita Moysis* (prologue 5–7)⁴⁶ that contemplation precedes virtue. But Meredith, I believe, fails to note that the *De vita Moysis* is addressed to immature souls, those who “wander outside virtue” (*De vita Moysis* I:11),⁴⁷ for whom contemplation (*theōria*) of God is likely to be corrupted by fleshly lust.

Meredith is right to point out that in the *De vita Moysis*, the life of virtue is necessarily predicated on knowledge of the nature of God: “Moses learns *at first* [*en prōtois*] the things that must be known about God (namely that none of those things known by human comprehension is to be ascribed to him). Then [*houtō*] he is taught the other side of virtue, learning by what pursuits the virtuous life is perfected” (*De vita Moysis* II:166; emphasis mine).⁴⁸ However, the renunciation of idolatry is a minimal requirement addressed to immature souls (as is the *De vita Moysis* as a whole). What Gregory does not do is call for the sophisticated type of contemplation (*theōria*), which is only brought to the fore in the *In Cant*.

There are, I propose, three stages of progress in the spiritual life, which shed light on the relationship between the practices of contemplation and virtue. To avoid misunderstanding, these stages are not to be confused with the differentiations of ethics, physics, and epoptics, which I mentioned earlier. The first two stages belong to the lower rungs of spiritual ascent, whereas the third represents a more mature stage of development:

1. A proper understanding of the ineffability and limitlessness of God;
2. The life of virtue, including ascetical practices that prepare the soul for the Song of Songs;
3. The erotic contemplation of God, in which there is true synergy between prayer and virtue.

The first stage is adumbrated in Gregory's discussion of idolatry in the *De vita Moysis*, in which he underscores the importance of cultivating proper spiritual desires and practices as a prerequisite to the practice of virtue. Here, he is reconciling the doctrine of free will (*proairesis*) with the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in Exodus 9:12 (cf. Romans 9:17–18). He quotes Romans 1:28—"since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done"—and concludes that "a person's failure to acknowledge God becomes the reason [*aitios*] why he is being pulled down into the passionate and dishonorable life" (*De vita Moysis* II:75).⁴⁹ Even though the apparently extrinsic hardening of Pharaoh's heart suggests that God imposed his will on Pharaoh's, Gregory insists that it is Pharaoh himself who was responsible for evil by refusing to acknowledge God: "the Egyptian tyrant is hardened by God not because the divine will places the resistance in the soul of Pharaoh but because the free will through its inclination to evil does not receive the word, which softens resistance" (*De vita Moysis* II:76).⁵⁰ Drawing on Romans 1:28, Gregory remarks that transferring to a creature the worship owed to God is aetiologically linked to the outpouring of shameful affections (*De vita Moysis* II:76).⁵¹ Idolatry is thus opposed to what Gregory invariably calls "true religion" (*theosebeia*, *De vita Moysis* II:14–15)⁵² and must be rejected before embarking upon the life of virtue.

At this juncture, it is important to underscore the distinction that I earlier drew between the summons to the renunciation of idolatry (which is addressed to immature souls) and the erotic contemplation of God (which is the privilege of mature souls)—a distinction particularly present in the *In Cant*. A proper understanding of God that eschews idolatry is linked to virtuous practices, specifically the overcoming of disordered passions (*GNO* VI 376:8–13):⁵³

There are two things that bring humanity into close affinity with God. One of these is the truthfulness of one's idea of what authentically *is*, so that one is not carried off by erroneous notions into heretical and Gentile opinions about the Divine; and this is in truth the *yes*. The other is pure thinking that banishes every chronic disorder of the soul; and this is consistent with the *yes*.

Gregory argues that this is the yes that the Bride gives to the virgins. These virgins are the young maidens (*neanides*, *GNO VI* 373:4, 14; 375:11),⁵⁴ who, as I mentioned earlier, are spiritually immature and are the intended recipients of the injunction to reject idolatrous conceptions of God. It is only after possessing a true knowledge of God and cultivating virtuous dispositions within the soul that a person is able to see the pure Bridegroom with mature eyes (like the Bride) and to speak to him using the words of Song of Songs 5:8, “I am wounded with love” (*GNO VI* 376:17–20).⁵⁵

It is also interesting that in this passage the two injunctions are not as evidently sequential or aetiological as in the *De vita Moysis*. The fact that they are explicitly enumerated may imply a certain order of priority; so too may the identification of the first injunction with *dynamis*. This could be the *dynamis* that gives potency to the practice of virtue, although Gregory never spells out its significance explicitly. At any rate, what is clear from the *De vita Moysis*, if not here specifically, is that the renunciation of erroneous ideas about God is the basis for the practice of virtue. To the extent that Gregory is addressing immature Christians, therefore, I agree with Meredith that proper knowledge of God is prior to the practice of virtue. But Gregory, I argue, does not leave it there.

We have already highlighted the importance of asceticism as a preparative undertaking for the practice of contemplation; there is no need to offer further elucidation of this point. So we move now to discuss the third stage (enumerated above): the synergy between the life of virtue and the contemplative life at the heights of spiritual ascent.

In his discussion of the significance of saffron in Song of Songs 4:14, Gregory writes (*GNO VI* 285:14–17):⁵⁶

Let the judgment of the hearer choose from the two interpretations as it will, either one of them or both; for in a certain way, both are one—possession of perfect virtue and possession of the Godhead—since there is no virtue outside the Godhead.

Building on these themes, Gregory later regards contemplation and the practice of virtue as inseparable (*GNO VI* 394:2–6):⁵⁷

Contemplation [*theōria*] does not of itself bring the soul to perfection unless it makes room for works [*ta erga*] that further the practice of the moral [*ēthikos*] life, any more than practical wisdom [*praktikē philosophia*] is profitable in its own right unless, in the face of events, true and reverent belief [*alēthinē eusebeia*] guide what comes to pass.

No doubt at the root of the conjunction of contemplation and virtue is Gregory’s insistence on the simultaneity of faith and good works (*In Ecclesiasten*, *GNO V* 434:3–8).⁵⁸ It is also, for Gregory, warranted by 2 Corinthians 6:14—“Light has no fellowship with darkness”—a favorite passage of his, which he elsewhere quotes to

highlight the importance of appropriating all virtues and eschewing all vices (*De virginitate* XVI:2:2–18;⁵⁹ *De perfectione*, GNO VIII/1 180:7–20).⁶⁰ As he reflects on this verse, Gregory concludes that faith cannot be disarticulated from moral practice—or, as he puts it in the *De perfectione*, there can be no division between what the mind gives assent to in spiritual matters and what the body does in moral matters (GNO VIII/1 179:8–180:2).⁶¹

To summarize what I have been arguing so far in this section: Gregory resolves the dilemma of the relationship between contemplation and virtue by portraying the Christian life as a diachronic process of transformation. This train of development begins with a basic knowledge of God as ineffable and limitless, which rules out the practice of idolatry. From this flows the life of virtue and the ascetical disciplines required for contemplation. Then, at the heights of spiritual ascent, contemplation and virtue come together and form a reciprocal relationship. Indeed, as we have just read in the *De perfectione*, what the mind assents to and what the body does cannot, for Gregory, be separated from each other. But this raises an important question: What is the relationship between bodily and spiritual forms of maturation? It is to this question that we now turn.

Physical Maturation and Spiritual Maturation

For Gregory, there is an important analogy (*analogos*) between bodily development and spiritual development, an insight as popular in the late phase of Gregory's literary career as at any other period. A passage from the *In Cant* reveals its continued currency in Gregory's late thinking (GNO VI 17:12–18:7).⁶²

Where our life in the flesh [*kata sarka*] is concerned, not every age makes a place for all our natural activities, nor does our life move forward by like steps in the different ages; for the children do not attend to the business of grown-ups, nor is the grown-up taken into the embrace of a nurse, but there is something different that is profitable and appropriate for each period of growth. Correspondingly, one can see in the soul something analogous [*analogos*] to the ages of the body, stages by means of which there is discovered a particular order [*taxis*] and sequence [*akolouthia*] that brings the human person to the life of virtue.

The ideas discussed in this passage should no longer surprise us at this stage in our inquiry. Just as there is progression and development in bodily maturation, so too is there a certain diachronic development in spiritual maturation. However, Gregory mentions for the first time in his late writings a significant *differentia* between physical and spiritual development. In the *De instituto Christiano*, Gregory explains that physical growth is “not in our hands,” because “nature [*physis*] measures size not by man's judgment or pleasure but by its own impulses and by necessity.” Spiritual development is different: it relies on human responsibility. Put sim-

ply, it needs our judgment (*gnōmē*), so that, “as far as you extend your efforts in behalf of piety, so far will the greatness of your soul extend through effort and toils” (*GNO VIII/1 46:8–15*).⁶³

On various occasions, Gregory suggests that human initiative toward God comes first, and that Grace emerges later to consolidate and collaborate with this initial movement. But note that Gregory’s invocation of divine help or cooperation is a feature of his later thought, having developed (so we may speculate) as he confronted the Pneumatomachians (also known as the Macedonians), who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit in the middle period of his literary career. Perhaps it also has to do with the “greater spiritual experience of his old age.”⁶⁴ Gregory claims that “the Grace of the Holy Spirit” is bestowed upon “those who are worthy” (*De vita Moysis II:121*),⁶⁵ those who are already undertaking “the life of virtue” (*De vita Moysis II:44*;⁶⁶ cf. *De instituto Christiano*, *GNO VIII/1 46:25–47:4, 47:7–11*,⁶⁷ *57:13–15*).⁶⁸ It would be inaccurate and anachronistic to characterize Gregory as a proponent of Pelagianism, since his writings predate the Pelagian controversy in the West.⁶⁹ At any rate, Gregory does predicate ascetical transformation and spiritual growth upon the willing (and divinely aided) strivings of *proairesis*—a view termed “synergia”⁷⁰ by Jaeger, in which human and divine activity are seen to be cooperating toward a common goal. It would later be described as a form of semi-Pelagianism.⁷¹

Along with this important distinction between bodily maturation (which is outside the remit of human control) and spiritual maturation (for which one is duly responsible), Gregory also asserts that spiritual maturation never succumbs to the kind of decline experienced physically in old age. It is interesting that his concerns about physical weakness in old age are now explicitly linked in a negative sense to the cessation of sexual desire. The end of physical sexual desire, he says, differs essentially from the outpouring of erotic desire that occurs at the heights of spiritual maturation. Earlier, in the *De virginitate*, Gregory claimed that erotic desire for God is intensified as one grows in spiritual maturity, referring, as he did, to “the steadfastness and fire of the divine love [*erōs*] of wisdom, which increases from youth and persists to old age” (*De virginitate XXIII:6:17–20* [*recensio altera*]).⁷² The ascetic ideal, we also learned, was a commixture of youth and old age: the virility of young men is emulated spiritually by the old ascetic, and the young ascetic replaces sexual excess with the tranquility and self-restraint of the elderly (the presumption here being that sexual urges diminish in old age).

As Gregory himself ages, however, he becomes increasingly reluctant to incorporate the characteristics of physical aging into spiritual maturity. In the *De vita Moysis*, Gregory claims that as one matures in one’s faith, “the eye is not dimmed, nor does the person age” (*De vita Moysis II:318*).⁷³ What is more (and more important), since the elderly experience a diminution of physical sexual desire, they are not suitable for comparison with spiritually mature Christians (*In Cant*, *GNO VI 38:9–21*).⁷⁴

Just as erotic love of the material order [*ho hylikos erōs*] does not affect those who are still young (for childhood [*nēpiotēs*] has no place for this passion [*pathos*]) and one cannot see extremely old people afflicted in this way, so too in the case of the divine Beauty one still a child “tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine” [Ephesians 4:14] and the elderly person who has aged and is approaching dissolution are both unmoved by this desire [*epithymia*]. For such people are not touched by the invisible Beauty, but only a soul of the sort that has passed through the condition of childhood [*nēpiotēs*] and has arrived at the height of spiritual maturity [*pneumatikē hēlikia*] without receiving any “spot or wrinkle or any such thing” [Ephesians 5:27]—the soul that is neither imperceptible by reason of youth [*nēpiotēs*] nor weakened by old age [*palaiotēs*].

In this key passage, Gregory is pointing to the middle way—the mean (*meson*), we may say—between infancy and old age as the best bodily comparison to spiritual maturity. The height of one’s physical powers is thus the analogue for the best spiritual age, to which one must aspire whatever one’s time in life. Whereas Gregory earlier extols the tranquility of old age, he now avoids comparing spiritual maturity to old age. Rather, the prime of one’s physical life—in which sexual desires are operative but (presumably) not excessive, as in one’s youth—has become an analogue for the spiritual ideal.

All this begs the question: Why does Gregory change his focus from the mixture of old age and youth to adulthood? For one, at this time in his life, Gregory is himself aware of the effects of aging and the diminution of sexual desire—but he is also seeking to advance spiritually and deepen his intimacy with Christ. Another way of answering this question is to focus on Gregory’s immersion, at the end of his life and particularly in the *In Cant*, in the intensities of erotic desire for God. In the *In Cant*, we read: “The bride . . . with pure vision sees the ineffable beauty of her spouse. And thus she is wounded by a spiritual and fiery dart of desire [*erōs*]. For love that is strained to intensity [Philippians 3:13] is called ‘desire’ [*epitetamenē gar agapē ho erōs legetai*]” (*GNO VI* 383:6–9).⁷⁵ Here, spiritual *erōs* and *agapē* are aligned—but in contrast to Origen, they are not straightforwardly equivalent.⁷⁶ Rather, *erōs* is a particular aspect of *agapē*—the stretching forth of *agapē*. This definition of *erōs*, as Andrew Louth⁷⁷ has observed, following Daniélou,⁷⁸ seems to reflect the paradox of spiritual union, in which the soul is continually drawn onward, toward the unknowable God. As Louth puts it: “The longing that stretches the soul out towards God as He is in Himself, this *ecstatic* longing, is *eros*; and *eros* is the *ecstatic* aspect of *agape*.”⁷⁹ I shall return to the theme of erotic desire shortly. For now, it suffices simply to understand why the diminution of sexual desire in old age renders it incapable of representing spiritual maturity. The message is clear: as one’s physical sexual desires diminish in old age, one must not allow one’s spiritual erotic desires (that were so physically intense in one’s youth) to dissipate.⁸⁰

The analogy between bodily maturation and spiritual maturation is also enriched by certain Christological insights that deserve analysis here. It was in the middle phase of Gregory's literary career that he developed a more Christologically theorized account of moral maturation in response to Apollinarius. Earlier, I pointed to the possibility that the diachronic aspect of Christ's maturation might be applied to the life of an individual Christian. But this remained speculative. In the late period, however, the diachronic developments of Christ's life are explicitly interiorized as spiritual developments in the individual (*In Cant*, GNO VI 96:7–97:6):⁸¹

The child who was born for us—Jesus, who within those who receive Him grows in a variety of different ways in wisdom and stature and Grace [Luke 2:52]—is not the same in all but indwells in a way that accords with the capacity of the one into whom He comes. He is manifested in a character that fits the ability of the one who takes Him in, either as a babe or as making progress or as being perfected—and this accords with the nature of a grape cluster, which does not always have the same appearance on the vine but changes its character with time [*tōi chronōi*] as it blossoms, takes on color, matures, ripens, and becomes wine. By its own fruit, then—which is not ripe enough to make wine but awaits “the fullness of the times” [Galatians 4:4] and yet is not meant to be merely a useless luxury—the vine affords a promise. For in anticipating good things it delights smell rather than taste and gives pleasure to the soul's senses with the fragrances of hope; for to those who await it with eager patience there comes the trustworthy and unambiguous enjoyment of the Grace that is hoped for.

This is the first explicit attestation of the conjunction between Christ's maturation and the maturation of the soul. It indicates that Christ, who reflects the soul's maturity on arrival, catalyzes the process of spiritual development. Gregory's earlier confrontation with Apollinarianism, therefore, eventually led in his mature works to a spiritually interiorized rendition of the diachronic maturation of Christ's humanity, which becomes the norm for the life of virtue.

Now that I have outlined some of the salient features of Gregory's account of spiritual maturation, it falls to me to consider the applications and corollaries of this deeper understanding of maturation for (a) the conjugal life; (b) fraternal relations; and (c) sexual differentiation.

Maturation in Marriage

In what I believe is an overlooked passage in the *In Cant*, Gregory argues that a husband's level of spiritual maturity shapes the kind of love he expresses toward his wife. Gregory begins by distinguishing the contrasting demands of the summons to love in different relational contexts—love of God, neighbor, wife, and enemy (GNO VI 121:16–122:4).⁸² With an analysis of the order (*taxi*) of love squarely in mind, he identifies a distinction in maturity between the first half and

the second half of Ephesians 5:23–35. Someone who is truly pure in soul, Gregory says, will reflect Christ’s love for his Church in marriage (Ephesians 5:23–24; *GNO* VI 122:6–8).⁸³ However, if a man is more subject to passion (*ho . . . empathesteros*), he ought to love his wife as his own body, “for so Paul, the ordainer of such things, commands [Ephesians 5:25]” (*GNO* VI 122:8–9).⁸⁴ For Gregory, therefore, the ordering of love in marriage is inflected by the spiritual and moral maturity of the husband. A spiritually immature husband must regard the ethics of self-referentiality—treating one’s wife as one would one’s own body—as the basis of conjugal life. Though an inferior sort of love, it is not morally disordered. It differs essentially from the “love that is unbalanced and lacking direction,” such as the love of “things and honors and wives (if they have to be warmly disposed to them)” (*GNO* VI 122:11–15).⁸⁵ The immature expression of conjugal love keeps desire within the bounds of moderation. As discussed earlier, sexual intercourse in marriage must, for Gregory, be constrained to circumstances of absolute necessity: that is, to procreative activity. The *In Cant* reflects that ideal by noting that one should adopt a certain disdain (*aēdia*) for sexual intercourse (*mixis*) in imitation of the heron, mentioned in Psalm 103(104):16–17, who mates “by a kind of compulsion of nature [*physeōs anankē*]” (*GNO* VI 111:7–10).⁸⁶

By contrast, mature love for one’s wife recapitulates the love of Christ for the Church. Whether this also applies to the wife is unclear. Gregory speaks only of the husband. But the fact that he dedicates the *In Cant* to a widow, Olympias, a woman of high reputation in the period of Theodosius,⁸⁷ suggests that a woman’s maturity may also figure into the shaping of conjugal love. What kind of transformative effect it may have (whether, for instance, it would differ in some way from the maturation of the husband) is left open to speculation.

Fraternal Eroticism?

Most commentaries on Gregory, following the lead of Daniélou, have focused on the erotic desire of the soul (the Virgin Bride) for Christ (the Bridegroom) in the *In Cant*. However, this emphasis has sidelined the role of erotic fraternal love in Gregory’s thinking. The expression *diathesis erōtikē*⁸⁸ is, as Jean-Robert Pouchet says, “une expression typiquement”⁸⁹ of Gregory’s mature theology. It appears in Basil’s *Epistle CXXIV, ad Theodorum*, which has been falsely attributed to Basil;⁹⁰ it is Gregory’s thirty-sixth letter according to Anna Silvas’s categorization.⁹¹ Here, it is striking that *tis diathesis . . . erōtikē* describes Gregory’s affections for Theodore, not—as one would otherwise expect—for God.

Gregory begins this letter in typical fashion,⁹² with a vivid image (1:1–5): sometimes, we are seized with the passion of love (*to pathos tou erōtos*)—a reference to sexual desire—but sometimes the person whom one desires so ardently is separated from us. We attempt to assuage the strength of our passions by looking at an image of our beloved. For Gregory, this is not unlike the situation with which he is

confronted: he has been separated from Theodore and his brethren. It is here that Gregory mentions that he has “a disposition of—if I may so speak—passionate love” (*diathesis . . . erōtikē*) for Theodore. Gregory then adds: “And if, in their absence, I had fallen in with your Sincerity, I would have considered that I had also seen them in you, since the measure of love [*agapē*] in each of you, I say, is so great, that there appears in each an evenly balanced rivalry for still more” (1:13–17).⁹³ Fraternal love, expressed as “an evenly balanced rivalry for still more,” corresponds to the insatiability of love for God. The implication seems to be that the ascetical pursuit of spiritual *erōs* is inexorably linked to the outpouring of fraternal *erōs*. In both, sexual self-restraint enables erotic desire to reach its proper spiritual end.

It is important, therefore, to understand that for Gregory, both spiritual *erōs* and fraternal *erōs* are disarticulated from sexual desire.⁹⁴ Failing to grasp this point lands us with the kind of nonascetical construal of *erōs* that we find in the work of Virginia Burrus. She seems not to have noticed Gregory’s ascetical demands when she claims that “in divine love’s unendingly expansive relational economy, a man can have it all ways.”⁹⁵ The problem is that Burrus imposes post-Foucauldian presumptions on the epoptic stage of ascent—in which *erōs* and *agapē* are brought into close alignment—and in doing so, she neglects the preparative ethical dimensions to spiritual growth. On one occasion, she gets closer to the mark by saying: “perhaps because his confidence in theory’s sublimating power is so strong, Gregory does not attempt to cancel the impulse of desire itself but *only* to reorient it” (emphasis mine).⁹⁶ However, I believe that the language of “reorientation” does not give sufficient credit to the importance of ascetical propaedeutics. For Gregory, the disciplines of the ascetic life transfigure and chasten desire as well as reorient it.

So, to clarify: Gregory’s erotic fraternal love for Theodore is not sexual. Nor does it evidence a settled homosexual orientation. It denotes an ascetically transformed spiritual desire, which can be compared to the intensities of erotic desire for God at the heights of spiritual ascent. What is more, erotic desire of the sort that Gregory describes is not determined or even defined by the male or female identity of its object—that is, on this occasion, Theodore. This fact alone raises the question of how, and in what ways, erotic desire for God may be described, given that the categories male and female cannot be applied as ontological referents to the divine nature. I now turn in the final chapter to explore the development of Gregory’s thinking on this and other associated issues in his late writings.

Male and Female

Diachronic Exchanges

Even since Daniélou foregrounded the theme of desire in his seminal study on Gregory's *théologie mystique*, so called, there has been a flurry of interest in the associated themes of spiritual ascent, *erōs*, and *epektasis*. Following suit, particularly in more recent decades, Anglo-American scholarship has been almost mesmerized by Gregory's theorization of desire for its perceived contributions to modern-day discussions on gender and sexuality, as charted in a recent survey of the literature by Morwenna Ludlow.¹ However, I believe something in all this has been missed—namely a full appreciation of how the soul's shifting identifications with male and female characteristics are linked to key moments in spiritual maturation.

To anticipate the outcome of my analysis: the maturational trajectory that Gregory adumbrates starts out with morally questionable femininity, which is superseded by virtuous masculinity and then finally—and triumphantly—superseded by a supreme femininity. As noted in the early phase, Gregory regards the ascetic life as a remonstrance against the sexual excess of young men. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I want to focus on the commentary texts of the *De vita Moysis* and the *In Cant*—which have received greatest attention by far in discussions of gender—to offer a detailed account of the spiritual maturational process as described by Gregory. The *De vita Moysis* is addressed to the spiritually immature, who still “wander outside virtue” (*De vita Moysis* I:11),² whilst the *In Cant* is addressed to those of mature spiritual standing, who “with [Christ] have been transformed for impassibility and the life divine” and who read the Song of Songs with the aim of being “led as a bride toward an incorporeal and spiritual and undefiled marriage with God” (*In Cant* GNO VI 14:19–15:2, 15:13–15).³

The bulk of this chapter will be devoted to a renewed and detailed analysis of the shift in the intended audience between the *De vita Moysis* and the *In Cant*. But I include, by way of framing and comparison, appreciative and critical analyses of two commentators, differently motivated in their retrievals of Gregory's theology. One commentator, Verna Harrison, writing in the 1980s, reflected something of the quasi-Jungian complementarian view of masculinity and femininity that was popular at the time. The other, Sarah Coakley, writing in the 1990s, reflected prevailing notions of gender fluidity popularized by poststructuralist gender theorist Judith Butler.

There is much to be gleaned from their respective analyses of Gregory's mature thought. Harrison identified a crucial shift in the soul's identity from male to female at the very heights of ascent. Coakley underscored the "gender switches and reversals"⁴ that accompany the soul's advances in spiritual growth and emphasized, *contra* Judith Butler, the importance of lifelong asceticism in Gregory's theorization of desire as well as its eschatological focus. At the same time, however, both Coakley and Harrison imposed categories of interpretation onto the texts that, I shall argue here, distract us from what is truly at stake. It is the burden of this chapter to provide further illumination on the *De vita Moysis* and the *In Cant* by highlighting the relationship between spiritual maturation and the soul's shifting identifications with male and female characteristics.

So let us begin with the *De vita Moysis* to develop some insight into the immature soul's desires for God.

MALE AND FEMALE IN THE LATE PERIOD

De vita Moysis: Disavowing Womanish Passion

In the *De vita Moysis*,⁵ there is an apparent contradiction between the first and second halves of the treatise. In the first half of the treatise, Gregory invokes the physiological division in human nature (*hē anthrōpinē . . . physis*) between male (*arrēn*) and female (*thēlys*, *De vita Moysis* I:12),⁶ arguing that Abraham and Sarah (cf. 1 Peter 3:6) are male and female exemplars of virtue. Through them, men and women have a "corresponding example of virtue" (*De vita Moysis* I:12).⁷ In the second part of the treatise, however, Gregory claims that both men and women need to emulate manly virtue. He claims that free will (*proairesis*)⁸ is responsible for the person whom one chooses to become, "whether male or female" (*De vita Moysis* II:3).⁹ The manly¹⁰ birth (*ho andrōdēs tokos*), Gregory writes, represents "austerity and intensity of virtue, . . . which is hostile to the tyrant and suspected of insurrection against his rule." By contrast, the female form of life (*to thēly tēs zōēs*) denotes "the material and passionate disposition" (*De vita Moysis* II:2).¹¹ These comments reveal what is, for Gregory, the "real intention" (*De vita Moysis* II:2)¹² behind the narrative of Exodus 1, in which Pharaoh tries to curb the growth

of the Israelite population (Exodus 1:16) by ordering Israelite midwives to murder all newborn males, thus preventing “the effeminate¹³ [*malakōteros*] and weaker [*asthenesteros*] to grow in numbers” (*De vita Moysis* II:49). The fact that male offspring were singled out for destruction is hugely significant for Gregory. It suggests, at the level of allegory, that “the tyrant” (*De vita Moysis* II:2, 5, 49),¹⁴ the Devil, whom Pharaoh represents, wants to destroy the practice of virtue among human beings. The Devil, says Gregory, incessantly “bears hostility” (*De vita Moysis* II:49)¹⁵ against male offspring—that is, virtue—and must therefore be defeated through prayer and ascetical practice. For this reason, using the Exodus narrative as an opportunity to expound “moral teaching” (*De vita Moysis* II:49),¹⁶ Gregory summons his readers to pursue the manly life of virtue against the Devil.

So which is it? Do women emulate Sarah, the paradigm of virtue for women? Or do they emulate manly virtue? One solution to this apparent contradiction is offered by Verna Harrison. Keen to eschew “the monolithic character of . . . androcentrism,”¹⁷ Verna Harrison claims that Gregory is integrating masculine and feminine symbols in the *De vita Moysis* rather than privileging the former above the latter. This is of a piece with her remarks on pagan and Christian thought in the late antique period, in which female imagery, she says, is reclaimed at the heights of spiritual ascent alongside masculine qualities.¹⁸ However, while Gregory, as we shall shortly discover, does indeed allow the Bride of Christ to emerge triumphant at an advanced level of spiritual maturity, Harrison preempts the reclamation of what she calls “feminine qualities” at an immature stage of ascent where womanish passion is in fact renounced *tout court*.

One of the problems with Harrison’s interpretation is its reliance on Jungian presumptions. It is worth recalling that for Jung, there are two anthropomorphic archetypes of the unconscious mind. The *anima* in men denotes a contrasexual archetype of the collective unconscious—its counterpart is the *animus* in women (although Jung wrote relatively little on this)—which needs to be integrated into the conscious mind in order to give rise to wholeness and individuation.¹⁹ These Jungian sensibilities seem to have been imported into Harrison’s reading of the *De vita Moysis*. Referring to the imagery that we have just described, Harrison argues that the “virtuous human person” is “at once the mother giving birth and the male child being born” and “the qualities represented by these masculine and feminine symbols are together affirmed as positive.” The “mature human person,” she remarks, “must possess both.”²⁰

It is also revealing that in an article entitled “The Feminine Man in Late Antique Ascetic Piety,” which does not mention Gregory’s *De vita Moysis* as such, Harrison characterizes late antique theology and philosophy as “a serious ascetic quest for human wholeness” that seeks the integration of “both masculine and feminine qualities.”²¹ Note that Harrison invites us to compare this late antique ascetic quest with the thought of Carl Jung, a suggestion she makes *en passant* in a footnote.²²

This gives further credence to the view that her reading of Gregory and her presumptions about gender are underlyingly, if not at times explicitly, Jungian.

However, Harrison's portrayal of Gregory as a proto-Jungian results in a set of related misinterpretations, which I shall now outline in brief. In the first instance, Harrison presupposes that "masculine and feminine qualities" (as she herself puts it) are concretized characteristics. In fact, for Gregory, they are labile. They signify different characteristics depending on the maturity of the soul—an insight that will become apparent in our discussion of the *In Cant*. In the second instance, she posits a relationship of complementarity between masculinity and femininity—a view that contradicts the *In Cant*, in which, as we shall shortly see, the Virgin Bride of Christ displaces and supersedes the "manly birth" of the *De vita Moysis*. Gregory's description of spiritual ascent does not, therefore, attempt to integrate two complementary parts of the soul but rather schematizes the soul's transition in identity from male to female within a framework of diachronic spiritual growth.

To these observations, we may add three supporting exegetical remarks from the *De vita Moysis* itself:

- First, Gregory does not specifically and only relate the birthing of offspring (whether virtue or vice) to motherhood. In fact, he speaks of "parents"—literally "fathers" (*pateres*, *De vita Moysis* II:3, 4, 7)—as in the *In Ecclesiasten* (*GNO* V 380:3),²³ not "mother."²⁴
- Second, the capacity to give birth to oneself through free will (*proairesis*) is not the principal focus of the *De vita Moysis* II:2–7. At stake, rather, is the proper or improper use of *proairesis*. It is, in other words, a question of giving birth to the right kind of offspring, which allows *proairesis* to assist the "return to the Good" (*De mortuis*, *GNO* IX/1 56:9–10). As such, Gregory does not deliver the unqualified affirmation of motherhood that Harrison would have us believe, because the capacity to give birth is only good if it is put to good use. While *proairesis* is elsewhere ascribed to the creative hand of God (it is constitutive of the "tunics of skin"²⁵ and is regarded, in at least one place, as divine),²⁶ its capacity to give birth can nonetheless result in the proliferation of evil-doing—since passions originate from *proairesis* (*De mortuis*, *GNO* IX/1 58:2–8, 59:19–22)—as well as virtue.
- Third, the hegemony of manly virtue is a theme of supreme importance in the *De vita Moysis*. Gregory condemns womanish (*gynaikeios*) behavior on numerous occasions, linking it in one instance to jealousy (*zēlotypia*, *De vita Moysis* I:62)²⁷ and in another to pleasure (*hēdonē*, *De vita Moysis* II:298),²⁸ not unlike the Stoics, to whom I previously alluded in this study.

If not in the way Harrison suggests, how will it be possible to reconcile the first and second halves of the *De vita Moysis*? To answer this question, it is important to

point out that Gregory does not think that women are inexorably or exclusively implicated in the female form of life. It is clear, for instance, that both Miriam and Aaron were “wounded by the passion of [envy’s] influence” (*De vita Moysis* II:260),²⁹ even though envy is described as most femalelike (*gynaikōdestera*, *De vita Moysis* I:62).³⁰ What is more, Gregory claims that envy is a “congenital malady in the nature of man” (*De vita Moysis* I:61).³¹ “Man,” here, is generic—*anthrōpoi* rather than *andres*—which means that men and women are both equally entangled in the vice of envy.

It follows, therefore, that when Gregory summons women to emulate Sarah in the first half of the treatise (*De vita Moysis* I:12),³² he is rehearsing what has been described as one of his many reversals of stereotypical expectations about gender.³³ Or—to put it more precisely—Abraham’s wife exemplifies the kind of manly birth that Gregory later advocates in the second half of the treatise. This is how the two halves of the *De vita Moysis* form a coherent unity, despite their apparent contradiction. Although the first half presents Abraham and Sarah as separate exemplars for men and women to emulate, respectively, it is evident by the second half that the virtuous life amounts to the same thing for both men and women—it is a manly endeavor, and Sarah’s virtue is as manly as Abraham’s.

My proposal here would be undermined if Burrus’s claim that Moses is presented in the *De vita Moysis* as the virginal, spiritual childbearer of the Word were correct.³⁴ However, Burrus errs in thinking that Gregory compares Moses to the mother of Christ in II:216.³⁵ In fact, Moses is said to be a type (*typos*) of the true Lawgiver (*ho alēthinōs nomothētēs*)—an allusion to Jesus Christ, not the Virgin Mary. Moses, who destroys the tables of the Ten Commandments, is compared to the Lawgiver, Jesus Christ (whose “God-receiving flesh” is the produce of the Holy Spirit), who restores our broken human nature. It is also significant that the expression “God-receiving [*theodochon*] body” in the *In Cant* refers not to the Virgin Mary but to the flesh of Christ (*GNO* VI 388:22; cf. 391:2).³⁶ This is also its meaning in the *Oratio catechetica* (XXXII:27; XXXVII:30, 111).³⁷

Thus far, I have argued that Gregory consistently associates female characteristics with vice in the *De vita Moysis*. It is worth recalling at this juncture that the *De vita Moysis* does not represent the terminus of spiritual maturation. On the contrary, “the female form of life,” with its evocations of passion and jealousy, must be situated upon a diachronic continuum along which the soul moves from the manly birth to the Virgin Bride of Christ in the Song of Songs. It is to the latter part of that continuum that our attention now turns.

In Cant: Transforming Female Vice into Passionate Desire for Christ

As I already established at the start of this chapter, the *In Cant* is addressed to spiritually advanced Christians. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the adjectives *gynaikēios* and *malakos*³⁸ never make an appearance in these homilies. This fact

alone would seem to suggest that at a higher stage of ascent, the female form of life—that is, the life of moral disorder castigated in the *De vita Moysis*—is no longer in view. Indeed, if I am right to think that these two works form a progressive continuum in what Martin Laird calls the “education of desire,”³⁹ then womanish recalcitrance has already—from the perspective of the *In Cant*—been repudiated. The soul is now ready to identify with the Virgin Bride in the Song of Songs.

This is a point of supreme importance, yet Coakley and Harrison overlook one of its deepest implications—namely that Gregory is operating with not a unitary definition of “feminine qualities” (to borrow Harrison’s term), but two related, though distinct, sets of characteristics. On the one hand, female characteristics encompass forms of worldly vice—disordered passion in particular—whereas, on the other hand, they refer to the spiritual passions of the mature soul, newly identified with the Bride, for her incorruptible Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, progress from manly birth—the life of virtue—to the Bride of Christ gives the lie to the idea that Gregory is espousing an aimlessly fluid construal of (what we would now call) gender. With all this in mind, let us now see how female characteristics play out in the course of spiritual ascent according to Gregory’s most mature work, the *In Cant*.

Gregory describes the immature soul as a man courting female Wisdom (*sophia*)—that is, Jesus Christ—whose praises are extolled in Proverbs, “the praises of that ‘virtuous wife’ [or manly woman]” (*ta tēs andreias gynaikos ekeinēs enkōmia, In Cant, GNO VI 22:6–7*).⁴⁰ However, Gregory avers that at a mature stage of spiritual development—the level at which the Song of Songs operates—the soul must relinquish its desire to possess *sophia*, so that it may be transformed into the Bride of Christ (*GNO VI 23:1–4*).⁴¹ Male courtship of *sophia* is therefore ultimately provisional, since it gives way to a further change in identity as the soul matures.

There is a particularly vivid description of the supersession of manly virtue by the Virgin Bride in the sixth homily of the *In Cant*. Here Gregory offers an exegesis of Song of Songs 3:7, which refers to Solomon’s marriage surrounded by sixty armed soldiers. Initially, these soldiers are described by Gregory as “intermediaries with the pure Bride,” who “point out to her the beauty of the royal bed, so as to induce the Bride to desire a divine and unspotted cohabitation with Bridegroom” (*GNO VI 189:16–190:3*).⁴² Later, however, they are identified with the soul and the Church, both of whom are incorporated into the identity of the Bride (*GNO VI 197:13–198:2*):⁴³

All who have put on the divine armor surround the royal bed. They have become, as a whole group, the one Israel; and since, because there are twelve tribes that constitute this body of the brave in its fivefold form, the full total of the brave is completely summed up in the number sixty; they make up one formation, and one army, and one bed—that is, all shall become one Church, one people, and one bride, fitted together into the communion of one body by one Commander, one Head of the Church, one Bridegroom.

While the male soldiers have an important role in guarding against temptation and eliciting the Bride's desire (*epithymia*) for the Bridegroom, they are—in the final analysis—subsumed into the role of the Bride. In this regard, Harrison makes a very pertinent remark (as long as we leave her Jungian importations aside): “notice that ultimately the masculine activity of the soldier has an instrumental purpose. It defines the periphery, but the feminine activity is at the centre.”⁴⁴ This comment may seem surprising given Harrison's interpretation of the *De vita Moysis*. For despite her awareness of the centrality of feminine activity in this quotation from *In Cant*, she does not feel compelled to reevaluate her Jungian predilections. After all, the Jungian integration of masculine and feminine qualities is considerably at odds with the displacement of masculine activity with feminine activity that Gregory presents in the quotation from the *In Cant* above.

From all that has been said thus far, it seems that Gregory leads his readers from passionate excess of a worldly sort (the female form of life) to virtue (the manly birth). Then, he escorts the soul as the Virgin Bride to the incorruptible Bridegroom; in doing so, fleshly passion is ascetically transformed and redirected toward its true goal in Jesus Christ.

We now turn our attentions to how Gregory maps the transition of the soul from male to female onto the spiritual schematization of the Solomonic corpus. He describes this progression in the following way: “the one who is called ‘son’ in Proverbs is here called ‘bride,’ and Wisdom, correspondingly, is transferred into the role of the bridegroom. This is to assure that the human person, once separated from the bridegroom, may be betrothed to God as a holy virgin” (*GNO VI 23:1–4*).⁴⁵ Note, here, that the soul initially identifies with the Son named in Proverbs 5:1, who courts Christ as Wisdom (*sophia*). It seems that the Son is equivalent to the virtuous manly birth described in the *De vita Moysis*. Gregory's message is clear: it is only after sufficient spiritual maturity has been attained that the male soul is able to accede to the status of the Virgin Bride of Christ.

It has been a recurring theme in Gregory's theory of desire that ascetical practice not only transforms desire and reorients it toward Christ but also intensifies it. The shift from the female form of life to the Virgin Bride of Christ is concomitant with the shift from fleshly desire to (further intensified) spiritual desire for the Bridegroom. Reading the *In Cant* in this way sheds fresh insight upon the transformation of the female form of life in spiritual ascent. Gregory, it seems, is harnessing the worldly characterization of female vice, specifically its associations with disordered passion, in order to contour the ascetical ardors of the Virgin Bride. As such, the redeemed female figure that emerges triumphant at the heights of spiritual ascent is no less passionate than her fleshly minded counterpart who pursues vice in the female form of life. If anything, the Bride is more passionate, because her desires for the Bridegroom are endlessly intensified in spiritual ascent.⁴⁶ The characteristics of the female form of life do, therefore, in a certain

sense, remain intact,⁴⁷ insofar as they still encompass a passionate disposition, albeit of a laudable spiritual sort, at the heights of spiritual ascent.

Crucially—and finally—it is important to underscore how novel these insights are when we place them within the overarching trajectory of Gregory's thought. The suggestion that different stages of spiritual ascent are diachronically associated with the various male and female characteristics with which the soul identifies emerges only in Gregory's late thought. As we already saw in the *De virginitate*, the dual identification of the soul as male and female appears *in simul*. It is only in his late writings that Gregory diachronically schematizes these nuptial transfers.

Concluding Reflections on Male and Female

In the course of these reflections on the diachronic exchanges of the soul's male and female identifications, I have sought to demonstrate that female characteristics change from fleshly passion to spiritual desire for Christ as advances are made in the practices of virtue and contemplation. My chief aim has been to call into question some of the presumptions that have animated two of the most influential interpretations of Gregory's so-called gender theory. I have done so by drawing attention to his diachronically theorized account of spiritual growth and detailing the effects of spiritual maturity on the shifting nuptial metaphors that are used to describe the soul's relationship of erotic, mystical intimacy with Christ.

In the first instance, I have argued that the Butlerian term "fluidity" does not do sufficient justice to the directional, diachronic nature of spiritual ascent. The "gender switches and reversals" of spiritual growth are not, in other words, amorously fluid. The term "fluidity" does not, it seems, naturally lend itself to the themes of directionality and diachronicity; attempting to interpret Gregory's schema as the completion of "Butler's remorselessly sophisticated and tortured manoeuvres"⁴⁸ means that Gregory's vision of spiritual growth is anachronistically framed by the postmodern concern to subvert "gender binaries."⁴⁹ On the contrary, as we have seen, the soul journeys through a very specific set of nuptial metaphors: the (immature) man courting Wisdom gives way to the (mature) Virgin Bride of Christ.

In the second instance, I have demonstrated that Gregory does not espouse unitary definitions of "masculinity" and "femininity," terms that we have shown to be inherently problematic because they denote two concretized sets of characteristics. On the contrary, female characteristics change from fleshly passion to spiritual passion depending on the maturity of the soul. Nor, indeed, is it possible to claim that Gregory's mystical vision strives toward the integration between masculine and feminine qualities, as Harrison suggests that it does. It is by now clear that spiritual ascent culminates, for Gregory, in the triumph of female passion in the Virgin Bride of Christ, not the delicate balancing act between two complementary halves or parts of the soul.

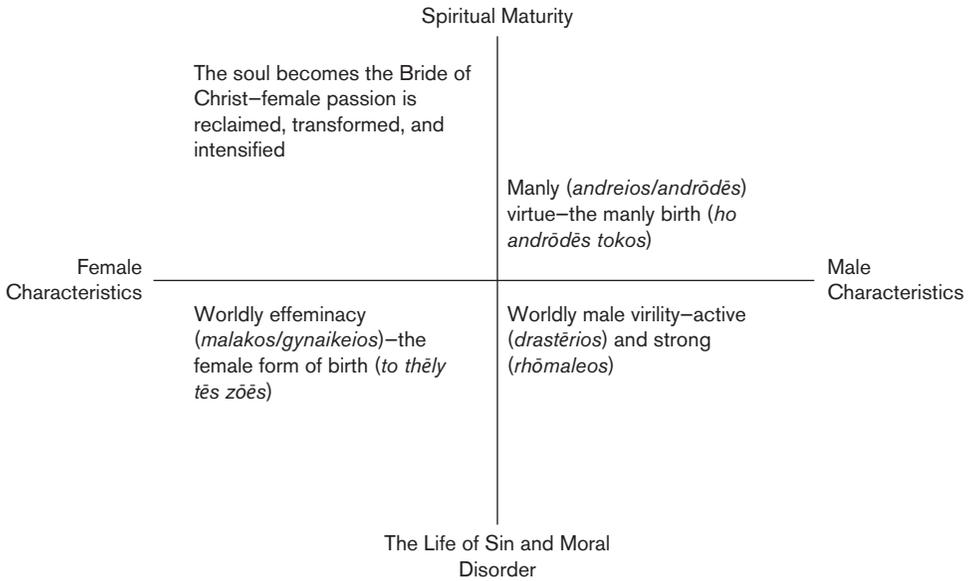


FIGURE 1. A summary of the soul's shifting identifications with male and female characteristics.

What this chapter has sought to show, above all else, is the importance of interpreting the male and female characteristics with which the soul variously identifies from the perspective of his diachronically theorized account of spiritual ascent. In order to sum up Gregory's theorization of male and female in spiritual ascent, I have sought to represent his views in the diagram shown in figure 1, in which the horizontal axis represents a sliding scale from female to male characteristics whereas the vertical axis charts the soul's progress in spiritual maturity.

The bottom-left quadrant represents female moral disorder, and the bottom-right quadrant designates the worldly forms of male virility, typically associated for Gregory with youthfulness—its attributes are “active” (*drastērios*) and “strong” (*rhōmaleos*). Both sets of worldly characteristics are disavowed as advances are made in the practices of contemplation and virtue. Above the horizontal axis, the Virgin Bride of Christ in the top-left quadrant is placed above the (manly) practice of virtue in the top-right quadrant. This is to highlight the Virgin Bride's supersession of the virtuous son's courtship of Wisdom.

There is a remaining uncertainty as to whether these reversals and purgations of male and female characteristics apply separately or identically to women and men. What is clear, at any rate, is that men are not the only readers whom Gregory has in mind; the homilies of the *In Cant* are in fact dedicated to Olympias, and they were

read out to “the regular congregation at Nyssa in the season of Lent.”⁵⁰ At the same time, however, as discussed in Part Two, it is not clear whether Macrina had to overcome male virility (as men do) in order to advance spiritually. Men certainly succumb to womanish passion—but do women succumb to manly vice? It seems that we have to join the dots for Gregory here. It seems likely that both sets of worldly characteristics—male and female—need to be renounced by all Christians, whether male or female, even though this is never spelled out by Gregory himself.

In order to deepen our understanding of the diachronic exchanges of male and female characteristics in spiritual ascent, it is important now to explore Gregory’s descriptions of erotic intimacy between the Bride and the Bridegroom. It is here that one begins to understand how these diachronic exchanges are rendered possible through the soul’s mingling with Christ.

INTIMACY WITH CHRIST

This section addresses a curious paradox: How is Gregory able to insist that there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus on the basis of Galatians 3:28 while also using male and female imagery to describe the soul’s relationship with Christ? This is a paradox on which I already reflected when discussing Gregory’s works from the middle period. But I now want to approach the question from a different perspective, by looking at how the ever-increasing intimacy between the Bride and the Bridegroom gives rise to the spiritual undoing of male and female.

Gregory uses a variety of expressions to describe the soul’s erotic intimacy with Christ: “participation” (*metousia*), “mingling” (*mixis*, *krasis*, and cognate terms), “conjunction” (*synapheia*), and “union” (*henōsis*). Martin Laird⁵¹ argues that the doctrine of deification is present in Gregory’s thought, even though the verbs “to deify” (*theopoiein*) and “to deify together” (*synapothēōthēnai*) do not appear. Whether or not deification is elevated in Gregory’s thought to the status of a doctrine is a moot point. Since he does not employ the relevant technical vocabulary for deification, the (more capacious) language of intimacy with Christ has been used in this study to encompass Gregory’s wide-ranging descriptions of the erotic relationship between the soul and Christ.

Laird provides many examples in the *In Cant* where it seems that the Bride is “divinized.”⁵² I shall not reproduce them all here—but in one noteworthy passage, the soul’s intimacy with Christ has significant implications for our present discussions on the role of male and female characteristics in spiritual ascent. Commenting on Song of Songs 2:5—“I am wounded by love”—Gregory remarks that the “archer who discharges the arrow is love [*agapē*]” and that he “discharges his own chosen arrow—the Only-Begotten God—at those who are being saved over the triple point of the barb with the Spirit of life” (*GNO VI 127:10–14*).⁵³ Noticing that

the imagery of Song of Songs 2:5–6a shifts from archery to “the joy of marriage” (GNO VI 128:6–7), Gregory comments that the soul who was “the arrow’s target” now sees herself “in the arrow’s place, in the hands of the archer” (GNO VI 128:12–14).⁵⁴ He continues: “one and the same is both our Bridegroom and our Archer, who handles the purified soul both as bride and as arrow. In that the soul is ‘arrow,’ he guides her toward the good target. In that the soul is ‘bride,’ he receives her into participation [*metousia*] of his incorruptible eternity” (GNO VI 129:3–7).⁵⁵ In the interests of clarity, it is worth disentangling this complex conglomeration of both parental and conjugal imagery. At one point, the arrow is Christ, and the Bride is his target. However, as the image of nuptial embrace is brought to the fore, the Virgin Bride becomes the arrow that is held by the Archer (Father), who participates in the Son’s eternal incorruptibility. What is significant is that the (female) Bride is brought into close alignment with the (male) Bridegroom so that she can participate (*metousia*) in the (male) Son’s incorruptibility.

A parallel example to this one can be found in the *De instituto Christiano*, in which the Bride and the Bridegroom are likened to each other. On this occasion, intimacy with Christ is described not as *metousia* but *mimēsis*: “It is necessary for anyone desiring to be closely united with another to take on the ways of that person through imitation [*tēi mimēsei*]. Therefore, it is necessary for the one longing to be the bride of Christ to be like [*homoiōthēnai*] Christ in beauty through virtue as far as possible” (GNO VIII/1 50:1–4).⁵⁶ The Bride is summoned to emulate the Bridegroom (Christ) through the pursuit of virtue. The same paradoxical theme is rehearsed, both here and in the *In Cant*—in order to become the (female) Bride of Christ, one must grow in likeness to the (male) Bridegroom. Gregory’s interest in the eschatological restoration of the *imago Dei* in humanity is at play in these two passages. By describing spiritual and moral maturation in terms of growing into the image (*eikōn*) of God (GNO VI 458:6–7; cf. 447:15–448:2), Gregory is placing the iconic *telos* of spiritual ascent onto the conjugal imagery of the Song of Songs, so that the bride at “the highest and most perfect of goods” develops a similarity (*homoiōsis*) to God (GNO VI 458:3–12).⁵⁷

Let us now turn to the theme of mingling (*mixis*, *krasis*, and related cognate terms) in order to understand how its evocations of physical sexual intercourse is transposed (and transformed) by Gregory into the realm of spiritual conjugal intimacy between the Bride and the Bridegroom. At issue here, too, is the *homoiōsis* between the Bride and the Bridegroom.

Sarah Coakley⁵⁸ has highlighted the threefold use of “mingling” in the fourth homily of the *In Cant*: the Christological mingling of the human and the divine in Christ; the mingling of Christ with the individual soul in nuptial love; and the physical, sexual mingling of husband and wife in sexual intercourse. The following excerpt reveals the full extent of that mingling, bringing all three types into counterpoint with one another (GNO VI 108:7–109:3).⁵⁹

How could a mortal and perishable nature be adapted to live together with the imperishable and inaccessible nature, unless the shadow of the body had mediated between the Light and us who live in darkness? In a figurative turn of speech the Bride uses the word “bed” to mean the mingling [*anakrasis*] of the human race with the Divine, just as the great apostle has the virgin—us—“betrothed” [*harmozein*] to Christ [2 Corinthians 11:2] and leads the soul in a bridal procession, and declares that the joining [*proskollēsis*] of the two in communion [*koinōnia*] of one body is the great mystery of the union [*henōsis*] of Christ with the Church. For when he said, “The two shall become one flesh,” he added, “This is a great mystery, but I apply it to Christ and the Church” [Ephesians 5:31–22]. Because of this mystery, the virgin soul names the union with [*koinōnia*] God a “bed.” So it is in view of this mystery that the virgin soul gives the name “bed” to communion with the Divine.

In this excerpt, the (female) Bride is not obliterated or absorbed into the (male) Bridegroom, even though her characteristics are transformed by the Bridegroom’s characteristics. If, at the level of Christology, mingling of the divine and human natures does not for Gregory entail the “obliteration of the human” but rather its “unique transformation” (emphasis is Coakley’s),⁶⁰ may this equally apply to the “mingling” of the soul *qua* Virgin Bride with Christ *qua* Bridegroom? It certainly seems so. It is instructive to compare this excerpt with a passage in the *Oratio catechetica* (a work from the middle period) that describes the transformative effects of the Eucharist. Here, Gregory writes that “He [Christ] disseminates Himself in every believer through that flesh, whose substance comes from bread and wine, blending [*katakirnamenos*] Himself with the bodies of believers, to secure that, by this union [*henōsis*] with the immortal, man, too, may be a sharer in incorruption” (*Oratio catechetica* XXXVII:115–18).⁶¹ The blending of Christ’s body with the body of believers does not obliterate difference but constitutes a transformative intermingling.

The language of “mingling” is interesting for two reasons. First, given its associations with sexual intercourse, the ontological distinction between Christ and the soul—which is conveyed metaphorically in terms of sexual differentiation—is preserved. Just as a man and a woman mingle in sexual intercourse without loss of their separate sexual morphologies, so too Christ and the soul mingle in spiritual ascent without resulting in confusion in the creature–Creator distinction. Second, the Bride participates in and imitates the Bridegroom—so much so that she develops a likeness to him. Since spiritual ascent is endless, the Bride is never at complete unity with the Bridegroom. The Bride is stretched out *ad infinitum*, drawing ever closer to the Bridegroom, without ever identifying ontologically with him. This has an important moral corollary. The soul can never accrue all the goodness that inheres in God. Its moral growth is perpetually open-ended and ever-expanding (*In Cant*, *GNO* VI 158:12–19):⁶²

As, therefore, it draws human nature to participation [*metousia*] in itself, it always surpasses what participates in it to the same degree, in conformity with its

superabundant goodness. For the soul is always becoming better than itself on account of its participation [*metousia*] in the transcendent. It does not stop growing, but the Good that is participated remains in unaltered degree as it is, since the being that ever more and more participates in it discovered that it is always surpassed to the same extent.

So we find in Gregory's writings a twofold assertion of both the difference and the similarity between Christ and the soul. This, I believe, gives rise to the paradox with which we have been dealing throughout this study: the gendering of what is ultimately ungendered. Gregory speaks in a different context of the combination of sleep and wakefulness in spiritual ascent and describes this as a "novel and surprising mixture [*mixis*] and coalescence [*synodos*] of these opposites" (*In Cant*, GNO VI 311:16–17).⁶³ His use of (what we would now call) gendered language to describe the spiritual intimacy between Christ and the soul is also a paradoxical mixture of opposites—one among the many that appear in the *De vita Moysis* and the *In Cant*.⁶⁴ This paradox is inexorably related to the quality of ineffability that characterizes divine as well as human nature. There is a particularly illuminating passage in the *In Cant* that demands analysis here because it brings the ineffability of God to bear on Gregory's discussion on the human transcendence of sexual differentiation.

Here Gregory insists that the current division of humanity into male and female is not a permanent state of affairs (*In Cant*, GNO VI 213:3–4).⁶⁵ Commenting on Song of Songs 3:11—"see King Solomon in his crown with which his mother crowned him"—Gregory identifies the "mother" as God, justifying his interpretation on the basis of Galatians 3:28 (GNO VI 212:14–213:9):⁶⁶

Now, no one who has given thought to the way we talk about God is going to be over-precise about the sense of the name—that "mother" is mentioned instead of "father," for he will gather the same meaning from either term. For the Divine is neither male nor female [Galatians 3:28]. (How, after all, could any such thing be conceived in the case of Deity, when this condition is not permanent even for us human beings, but when we all become one in Christ, we put off the signs of this difference along with the whole of old humanity?) For this reason, every name we turn up is of the same adequacy for purposes of pointing to the unutterable [*aphrastos*] Nature, since neither "male" nor "female" defiles the meaning of the inviolable Nature.

Two points need to be gleaned from this rich passage. First, only a mature understanding of God can stave off the introduction of male and female categories into the Godhead—a point that has been overlooked in the most recent scholarship on Gregory and gender. In order to flesh out the importance of maturity in this context, we need to compare these remarks with those of the *Contra Eunomium*. In the *Contra Eunomium*, Gregory had in mind an immature stage of ascent, inhabited by the childish and the untrained, those who are of the more carnally minded

(*tōn sarkōdesterōn*), for whom it is best not to think of “father” at all. So the Fourth Evangelist refers to the Word, not Son, in the opening of his Gospel in order to prevent untrained minds from importing the fleshly associations of “Father” and “Son” into the Godhead. Otherwise, it would have led such untrained minds to imagine, by consequence, a “mother” also (*Contra Eunomium* III:2:19:1–6).⁶⁷ Gregory, however, now applies the term “mother” to the Father in the *In Cant* but qualifies this by saying that one has to be mature enough to appreciate its metaphorical import.

Another important observation is in order here: the overcoming of male and female, as Gregory argues in the passage from the *In Cant* that I quoted at length above, is dependent on being one with Christ. It is only “when [*hotan*] we are one in Christ” that “we are divested of the signs of this difference along with the old man.” Intimacy with Christ—in which the Bride becomes increasingly like the Bridegroom—is therefore the basis for such transcendence.

What is to be made of Gregory’s appeal to the concept of unutterability or the ineffable (*aphrastos*) in this passage? Gregory first developed an understanding of the ineffability of divine nature in his disputes with Eunomius, whose epistemological confidence led him to think that the divine nature is knowable and even namable. By contrast, for Gregory, theological language is illuminating to the extent that it gropes for concepts and a language for God, who ultimately transcends human thought and speech (*Contra Eunomium* II:576–77).⁶⁸ Humans have a share in divine ineffability by virtue of being created in the *imago Dei* (*De hominis opificio* XI:3, *PG* 44 156:7–25),⁶⁹ which explains why they live in ignorance about themselves, especially the nature of their souls (*Contra Eunomium* II:106–14)⁷⁰ but also their bodies (*Contra Eunomium* II:115–16).⁷¹ If we grant that human nature eludes human intellectual and discursive grasp, then it cannot—as Gregory says—be tied to the fleshly categories of male and female. This is a core novelty of the *In Cant* (which is developed nowhere else in Gregory’s *œuvre*): the transcendence of male and female is, in other words, now firmly situated within the realm of human (and thus, by theological necessity, divine) ineffability.

Despite all that has been said about the remarkable lability of the soul in its identifications with male and female characteristics in spiritual ascent, it cannot be overlooked that Christ’s identification with the Bridegroom and the soul’s mature identification with the Bride rest on the presumption of male headship. Gregory endorses the male-female hierarchy in marriage, as we saw in chapter 4. This is further evidenced in the *Epistula canonica ad Letoium*, which belongs to the late phase of his literary career. Gregory appeals to 1 Corinthians 11:3 and describes the man as the head (*kephalē*) of the woman (*PG* 45 228:25–26).⁷² This sexual hierarchy is transposed onto the erotic relationship between Christ and the soul, so that Christ reigns supreme above his Bride. One may try to exonerate Gregory by appealing to the gender switches and reversals that take place earlier in spiritual

ascent—but such an approach overlooks the superior spiritual status accorded to the Virgin Bride, whose creaturely subordination to the Bridegroom entrenches male headship, albeit metaphorically, in spiritual ascent. In any case, these switches and reversals, as I have already shown, do not occur indefinitely. Although the soul's desires continue to develop and intensify over time, they do so whilst being stabilized and fixed at the mature identity of the Virgin Bride of Christ.

CONCLUSION

In this final section, I have sought to gain a better understanding of the transcendence of the worldly evocations of male and female characteristics in Gregory's account of spiritual ascent. For Gregory, the soul's erotic encounter with Christ is the means by which the fixity of these characteristics is overcome. Gregory's late writings therefore have a different flavor as opposed to his earlier writings. Galatians 3:28 was previously understood in terms of the eschatological erasure of sexual differentiation (as in the *De hominis opificio*) or the ascetic's appropriation of male and female virtues (as demonstrated in the lives of Macrina and Naucratius). I have now shown that in Gregory's late writings, the transcendence of male and female is preeminently accomplished through an intense erotic participation in God, in whom there is no male and female.

Looking back on the late phase of Gregory's literary career, I have come to appreciate how pervasive the theme of maturation is for the ascetical themes of this inquiry. It is rather astonishing to discover that most commentaries on Gregory neglect the ascetical implications of his diachronically theorized account of spiritual maturation. In Part Three, we have seen that love in marriage is inflected by the spiritual maturity of the husband and that married Christians are able to become the Virgin Bride through the measured exercise of sexual activity. The wisdom of the monastery is thus incorporated into the conjugal life. Both the *De vita Moysis* and the *In Cant* are, after all, reflections on the form of monasticism developed by Basil in eastern Anatolia and codified in his *Asketikon*.⁷³ Gregory, it seems, generalizes what Silvas describes as "the inner quality of the monks and virgins,"⁷⁴ so that all Christians, celibate or not, strive toward the same goal—intimacy with Christ. We have also discussed Gregory's diachronically theorized account of the male and female characteristics with which the soul identifies at different stages of ascent. Here, too, the theme of maturation is crucial, and sadly lacking any analogue in contemporary theories of gender which, as we have seen, cannot provide complete illumination to the richness of Gregory's vision of moral transformation.

Despite the remarkable destabilization of male and female that takes place as the soul participates in the incorruptibility of Christ, we are nonetheless faced with male headship at every turn. No attempt has been made to exonerate Gregory's

thinking from its entanglement in notions of sexual hierarchy. I have sought simply to represent his views as they appear. But in the conclusion, a new task befalls me: to reflect on the generative possibilities of Gregory's ascetical thinking for contemporary ethical discourse. As such, I shall return to the significance of these notions of sexual hierarchy for Gregory and consider their implications for what I have called "the second phase of ascetical theorizing." It is to these suggestive areas of inquiry that I now turn in the concluding section of this study.

Conclusion

In this study, I have sought to provide a detailed examination of the maturation of Gregory's thought on the disciplines and challenges of the ascetic life. My overarching interest in erotic transformation has brought a myriad of interconnected themes into view: marriage, virginity, bodily and spiritual fecundity, the vice of gluttony, passionless fecundity within the Godhead, and the moral evocations of male and female characteristics. My contribution to a growing body of literature on asceticism has been to show how bodily maturation (with particular focus on the crucial transitions of adolescence and old age) and spiritual maturation have profound implications for the ascetic life.

It is appropriate to close with a brief overview of the findings of this inquiry. I shall provide only a recapitulation of the salient concepts of Gregory's ascetical theology to highlight what I regard as its richest and most striking aspects. Then I shall end with some brief suggestions on how these insights challenge the underlying presumptions of contemporary ethical discourse.

OVERVIEW

One of the most fascinating discoveries of this study has been Gregory's growing awareness that married Christians can emulate the spiritual outcomes of virginity. It is the *De virginitate* that first makes this suggestion, albeit implicitly, by presenting David and Isaac as models of virtue whom virgins can emulate. Though married, they had become virginally pure in their love of God and neighbor. Later, Gregory begins explicitly to identify the virtuous married individual with the Virgin Bride of Christ. I now want to suggest that the adoption of certain ascetical

disciplines in the conjugal life may be related to a twofold movement of crucial importance for Gregory: the movement of *withdrawal* from the world in monasticism that leads inexorably to the movement of *reengagement* with the world and with those who are married. In other words, once one has been trained in the disciplines of the monastic life, it is important to instruct and guide the multitudes, as Moses had done, after “a long and exacting training” (*De vita Moysis* II:54).¹ Although he never became a monk, Gregory appropriates the moral insights of the monastic life through his ascetic siblings and seeks to disseminate its wisdom to those, like him, who could not claim physical virginity. Married Christians are invited to learn from those who have devoted their lives to the craft of asceticism. Asceticism is thus placed on a continuum that assumes a shared logic of spiritual formation for married Christians and monastics alike.

Second, it may seem surprising to the modern reader that Gregory’s ascetical vision is an intensely passionate one. The ascetic life does not entail the denial or (to use a Freudian term) repression of desire. On the contrary, it unleashes and intensifies the deepest erotic desires of the soul. And therein lies the rub. The unleashing of erotic desire toward Christ, as Gregory is at pains to demonstrate, is often confused with and complicated by its fallen associations with sexual activity. This is why contemplation is prone to the insidious intrusions of the flesh. This is also why Gregory highlights the importance of ordering and transforming one’s erotic desires before embarking upon the task of contemplation. To do otherwise is morally and spiritually perilous. Rather than repress the memory of fleshly desire, Gregory summons his readers, as we discovered in chapter 6, to be cognizant of—but not to give in to—adolescent passions, to pass through them in order to understand that all desire has its true goal in Jesus Christ. If Gregory’s argument here is to be at all cogent, then the celibate, who has acquired the virtue of sexual temperance along with the other virtues, ought to be the most erotically charged individual, the one most passionately in love with Christ and not at all “unsocial and brutish” (*De virginitate* XXIII:3:25–28).² It is, by contrast, the person who lives in the flesh (sexually or not)—and the celibate who abstains sexually, and only sexually, is included here—who has missed out on the profoundest transformative possibilities of erotic desire.

A third insight that deserves to be underscored in this conclusion is the neglected theme of the maturation of love in the conjugal life. The ethics of self-referentiality—a sign of immature love, in which the husband treats his wife as he would his own body—is eventually displaced by a mature love patterned on the love of Christ for the Church. This transformed conjugal desire may prevent worldly preoccupations from corrupting marriage, as described in the *De virginitate*. For those who are married, then, the effeminate softening of one’s moral life is not inevitable, so long as one prioritizes the disciplines of prayer and ascetical practice.

The fact remains, however, that for Gregory only physical virginity can extricate itself from the worldly differentiations of activity and passivity, associated with male and female roles, respectively, in sexual intercourse. As such, whoever commit themselves to the life of celibacy transcend the characteristics of male and female, not only by practicing all the virtues but also by refusing to participate in the sexual dynamics of activity and passivity. The ascetical disentanglement from sexual activity and passivity, I believe, further prevents Gregory from regarding virtuous marriage and virtuous celibacy as equal in spiritual terms.

Now I turn to my fourth and final observation: the transformation of male and female characteristics in spiritual ascent does not require the disavowal of what we would now call gendered language. If anything, Gregory's use of gendered language is intensified through the manifold reversals and exchanges of nuptial imagery at the heights of ascent to describe the soul's deepening love of Christ. As I have argued throughout this study, the capacity of the soul to assume male and female characteristics at different stages of spiritual ascent evidences its transcendence of male and female. It would be a mistake to think that Gregory's protological and eschatological views propose insipid androgyny as an ascetic goal. Rather, he opens the ascetic life up to a spectrum of moral and spiritual potentialities, in which the best of what is stereotypically associated with male and female is incorporated into the soul—but only at certain key moments in spiritual ascent. It is this diachronic aspect of spiritual ascent that poses the greatest challenge to some recent readings of Gregory's theology. The reversals and exchanges of male and female characteristics cannot be hurried in the process of transformation. One has to surrender oneself in love to a whole set of purgations that have to happen in the right order.

It is, I trust, by now clear how important it is to read Gregory's theorization of the body and desire from the perspective of his theory of maturation—conceived both as bodily growth and as spiritual ascent. It is the challenge laid down by this study to consider the potential contributions of these insights to contemporary thinking. It is to some closing suggestions on this point that I now turn.

THE CHALLENGES POSED TO CONTEMPORARY ETHICAL DISCOURSE

This study is written at a time when many ecclesial communities are rent by moral controversies related to the issues of gender and sexuality. Broadly speaking, there are three main sources of consternation. First, there is considerable debate about the ministerial or sacerdotal role of women in the churches and disagreement as to what counts as liberation from restrictive gender roles. Second, discussions of homosexuality, so called, and the legitimacy and status of gay marriage in Western countries seem to have reached a fractious impasse. Third, the sexual-abuse

scandal that has afflicted the Roman Catholic Church has raised fresh doubts about celibacy in the priesthood as a mandatory requirement. An insidious view has crept in as a response to these abuses:³ namely that celibacy is primarily (if not solely) to blame for the proliferation of sexual disorder, a view that risks pathologizing celibacy or ignoring its spiritual and moral worth.

As one reflects on this constellation of issues, it seems that a crisis in what may be described as the “economy of desire” looms large.⁴ It is against this fraught backdrop that this study seeks to mark a new moment in the theorization of desire, one that holds open the door to a richer theological engagement with the dilemmas that assail the churches and contemporary society at large. Although my purpose has not been to offer solutions to these contemporary dilemmas, it is nonetheless an underlying aim of this study to articulate a new theoretical framework that may assist in reengaging with these contentious issues. In closing, therefore, let me adumbrate the striking, vital relevance of Gregory’s ascetical theology for contemporary ethical discourse.

The recovery of a diachronically theorized account of spiritual maturation, in a secular context replete with ever-new and ever-subversive gender theories, makes us rethink and reprioritize the importance of individual moral formation. The novelty of Gregory’s ascetical theology has been its underlying presumption—to put it in modern terms—that there can be no gender theory or theory of sexuality without an accompanying theory of maturation. Many challenges to contemporary ethical discourse arise from this core insight.

First, the tendency in contemporary culture (as well as many, if not most, ecclesial communities) to assign fixed categories, such as homosexual and heterosexual, to specific constellations of sexual desire is shown to be impoverished and reductive. Not only are such typological accounts of sexuality absent from Gregory’s theology (as most now concede since Foucault). They also, I believe, prevent us from seeing the full spiritual potentials of erotic desire. If erotic desire is understood primarily as the propulsive force in spiritual ascent whose true goal is Christ Jesus (in whom there is no longer male and female), then we are obliged to come to terms with a very different nexus of moral and spiritual associations. For one, the malleability of erotic desire is not, for Gregory, a license to proliferate or diversify sexual practice for its own sake, as the latest post-Foucauldian gender theory is wont to say. Nor, second, is its primary goal the subversion of cultural norms. To acknowledge the malleability of desire is, rather, to be aware of its profound role in moral development as well as its tendency to degenerate into sexual excess. This calls for vigilance in ascetical practice and prayer. It also summons individuals to spiritual openness, a willingness to accept the erotic invitations of the incorruptible Bridegroom and to welcome the interchange of both male and female imagery in spiritual ascent. Most ecclesial communities, doubtless motivated by concerns

around homoeroticism, so called, and its biblical associations with excess, say little about the transformation of male and female characteristics in spiritual ascent. Doing so threatens to destabilize the fixed cultural meanings assigned to sexual morphology. But, at the same time, the sexual ethic heard from the pulpit—from both liberal and conservative quarters—seems so engrossed in adjudicating the morality of genital acts that it has lost sight of the need to release erotic desire, in prayer, from its fleshly entanglements.

Another insight that emerges from Gregory's core conviction in the malleability of erotic desire has to do with the nature of liberation from restrictive gender roles. It has been my intention throughout to eschew the language of "masculine" and "feminine," partly to underscore the deeply theological focus of Gregory's theorization of desire. What I have sought to highlight instead is the distinction between the fallen or worldly associations of male and female characteristics and their transformed spiritual counterparts. One of the outcomes of ascetical practice for Gregory is to replace the former with the latter.

From a modern perspective, Gregory's theorization of ascetical practice may appear unhelpful, even enlightened, when we consider social, political, and legal advancements in the area of gender equality. Gregory does not explicitly call for the abandonment of male headship in marriage and society at large. He also insists that there is only one legitimate conjugal union: that is, between a man and a woman. He seems slavishly to obey the canons of the Synod of Gangra, which sought to preserve social order, not to challenge it. Furthermore, Gregory's remarks on the male-female hierarchy in marriage will doubtless elicit paroxysms of discomfort—and rightly so. It has never been my intention at any point in this study to oblige the reader to accept all that Gregory says without critique.

Whatever our misgivings about Gregory's theology, it is perhaps too easy to forget the context in which Gregory develops his theory of the ascetic life and instead launch into his writings with contemporary expectations in hand. Gregory's theological utterances on almsgiving, virginity, marriage, and gluttony emerge in the context of the conciliation of imperial power and the Church in the wake of Constantine's conversion. Ascetical bodily practice, as Gregory understood it, is intended to be a vehicle of moral transformation and a means of deepening one's erotic intimacy with Christ. One cannot pretend that his primary intentions are otherwise. But it is worth considering how ascetic discipline also functions as a kind of bodily remonstrance against worldly power in the social (imperial) body. While Gregory's views on sexual hierarchy may sound unenlightened to modern ears, it is his broader conviction that an individual's bodily practices can transform the social body that should inspire faith and hope in the worth and efficacy of ascetical practice, whatever the moral challenges of our cultural milieu.

A further challenge that Gregory's ascetical theology poses to contemporary ethical discourse is its espousal of the ethics of integration in the life of virtue. This means that sexual self-mastery is necessarily linked to the appropriation of all the virtues. An ethical discourse that discusses genital acts more than it discusses desire and ascetical practice (broadly conceived) is overlooking the profound reciprocity of the virtues and therefore does a disservice to the rich potentialities of moral growth. To insist on celibacy in the priesthood, say, without simultaneously encouraging celibates to moderate their desire for food may seem innocuous. But it introduces, in an insidious way, a pernicious form of disintegration in the moral life that makes preserving one's celibacy all the more difficult. If this seems surprising at first, it is perhaps because Western moral discourse has compartmentalized ethical practice in a way that would have seemed utterly alien to Gregory.

What I hope has emerged with greatest clarity in this study is the necessary entanglement of moral practices. In order to care for the poor, to love one's spouse, and to master one's passions (to name but a few moral obligations), it is important to ensure that one's erotic desires are reoriented toward God; this, too, cannot be divorced from a serious commitment to practice all the virtues. Herein lies what I regard to be the greatest challenge posed by Gregory's ascetical theology to modern secular sensibilities. The challenge is this: to regard the lifelong quest for ascetical self-mastery—in which one's erotic desires are channeled toward Jesus Christ and one's bodily practices are ordered toward the service of virtue—as the precondition for transforming the social body. Only when we release ourselves from our slavery to the passions (including sexual passion) can we begin to discern and desire the face of Christ in the poor. The ascetic life is thus inescapably linked to ministering to those most in need: "serve your brother or serve your satiety" (*De beneficentia*, GNO IX/1 97:9–13), as Gregory so arrestingly puts it. This ascetic quest, moreover, cannot be undertaken in isolation. It is always situated in the community of the Church, in which the saints, both alive and dead, engender the hope that ascetical transformation is achievable through God's Grace. Guides in the ascetic life, as Gregory argues, must also be sought before embarking upon the arduous task ahead.

A detailed elucidation of the modern-day relevance of asceticism can be properly addressed only through a second phase of theorization on the body and desire, which is outside the remit of this study. My suggestions for reframing contemporary debates on gender and sexuality have instead sought to highlight the intersection of contemplation, ascetical practice, care for the poor, and imitation of the saints. This, in turn, has led us to cast aside the disjunctions of modernity between the public and the private, as well as the spiritual and the political. It is the invitation of this study to reconsider the threats to moral development posed by the vulgarizations and diminishment of erotic desire in contemporary society and the churches, and to look again at the rich transformative possibilities of bodily

and spiritual discipline. Let me suggest, in closing, that what is required above all else is a more theologically refined theorization of desire that is attuned to the vital relevance of asceticism for the modern day. It is hoped that this study has brought us some way to that renewed perspective, by drawing attention to Gregory's significance and creativity as a thinker on asceticism, and by underscoring the spiritual and moral entanglements of the body and desire for contemporary ethical discourse.

Appendix

The Chronology of Gregory's Œuvre

Gregory's works are arranged below in roughly chronological order and grouped together according to the three phases of his literary career. The date in the left-hand column represents in my view the most likely date of composition for each of his works, although other possibilities are duly noted for the sake of comprehensiveness. The exact chronology of Gregory's writings cannot be settled with incontrovertibility, as he does not always refer to external datable events. In this study, however, it is the chronological phase to which each work belongs that is ultimately more important than its specific date of composition.

THE EARLY PHASE, 371–SEPTEMBER 378

TABLE 1 Gregory of Nyssa's works in the early phase of his literary career, 371–September 378

Work	Most likely proposed date of composition	Alternative proposal	Alternative proposal	Alternative proposal
<i>Epistle XXI ad Ablabium episcopum</i>	Before 371 ¹			
<i>De virginitate</i>	371 ²	370–78 ³	375–78 ⁴	
<i>Epistle XXV ad Amphiloichium Iconiensem</i>	373–75 ⁵	381 ⁶		

¹Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 188.

²Aubineau, *Grégoire de Nysse, Traité de la virginité*, 31; Daniélou, "La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse," 160.

³Gribomont, "Le panégyrique de la virginité, œuvre de jeunesse de Grégoire de Nysse," 250.

⁴Staats, "Basilius als lebende Mönchsregel in Gregors von Nyssa 'De Virginitate.'"

⁵Restle, *Studien zur frühbyzantinischen Architektur Kappadokiens*, 80.

⁶Maraval, *Grégoire de Nysse: Lettres*, 289 n. 1; cf. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 198.

(continued)

TABLE 1 *Continued*

Work	Most likely proposed date of composition	Alternative proposal	Alternative proposal	Alternative proposal
<i>Adversus Arium et Sabellium de patre et filio</i>	374–75 ⁷	After 381 ⁸		
<i>In inscriptiones Psalmorum and In sextum Psalmum</i>	376–78 ⁹	Early or middle 380s ¹⁰	No later than 381 ¹¹	
<i>Epistle VI ad Ablabium episcopum</i>	378 ¹²			
<i>De beatitudinibus</i>	Before 379, probably 378 ¹³	376–78 ¹⁴		
<i>De mortuis non esse dolendum</i>	Before 379 ¹⁵	Slightly after 379 ¹⁶	380 ¹⁷	
<i>De beneficentia (vulgo De pauperibus amandis I)</i>	The years before the death of Valens (378) ¹⁸	Between 371/2 and the early 380s ¹⁹	382 ²⁰	
<i>In illud: Quatenus uni ex his fecistis mihi fecistis (vulgo De pauperibus amandis II)</i>	Roughly the same time as the <i>De beneficentia</i> —between 371/2 and the early 380s ²¹	384 ²²		
<i>De oratione dominica</i>	376–78 ²³	374–76 ²⁴	385 ²⁵	381 or shortly afterwards ²⁶

⁷Daniélou, “La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse,” 163.

⁸May, “Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregory von Nyssa,” 59.

⁹Canévet, *Grégoire de Nysse et l’herméneutique biblique*, 9–10; Daniélou, “La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse,” 160–62; Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa’s Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, 8–11; May, “Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregory von Nyssa,” 56.

¹⁰Reynard, *Grégoire de Nysse: Sur les titres des psaumes*, 14–15.

¹¹Maraval, “Chronology of Works,” 157.

¹²Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 140.

¹³Daniélou, “La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse,” 160–62.

¹⁴May, “Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregory von Nyssa,” 56.

¹⁵Daniélou, “La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse,” 160.

¹⁶Alexandre, “Le *De mortuis* de Grégoire de Nysse.”

¹⁷Lozza, *Gregorio di Nissa, Discorso sui defunti*, 7.

¹⁸Cavalcanti, “I due discorsi De pauperibus amandis di Gregorio di Nissa.”

¹⁹Holman, “Healing the Social Leper in Gregory of Nyssa’s and Gregory of Nazianzus’s ‘*Peri philoptochias*,’” 300–301.

²⁰Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 360–61.

²¹Holman, “Healing the Social Leper in Gregory of Nyssa’s and Gregory of Nazianzus’s ‘*Peri philoptochias*,’” 300–301.

²²Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 364.

²³May, “Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregory von Nyssa,” 56.

²⁴Daniélou, “La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse,” 160–62.

²⁵Caldarelli, *Gregorio di Nissa: La preghiera del Signore, Omelia sul Padre nostro*, 17.

²⁶Rordorf, “Le ‘pain quotidien’ (Matth. 6, 11) dans l’exégèse de Grégoire de Nysse.”

THE MIDDLE PHASE, SEPTEMBER 378–387

TABLE 2 Gregory of Nyssa's works in the middle phase of his literary career, September 378–87

Work	Most likely proposed date of composition	Alternative proposal	Alternative proposal	Alternative proposal
<i>De hominis opificio</i>	September 378–April 379 ¹			
<i>Ad Petrum fratrem de differentia essentiae et hypostaseos</i> (Basil's <i>Epistle XXXVIII</i>)	378–80 ²	379 ³		
<i>Epistle IX ad Stagirium sophistam</i>	378 or 380 ⁴			
<i>Apologia in Hexaemeron</i>	Early months of 379 ⁵	Summer of 379 ⁶	378–81 ⁷	
<i>In XL Martyres II</i>	379 ⁸			
<i>Contra usurarios</i>	379 ⁹			
<i>Epistle XX ad Adelphium scholasticum</i>	379 ¹⁰			
<i>In sanctum Pascha (vulgo In Christi resurrectionem oratio III)</i>	21 April 379 ¹¹	After 379 ¹²		
<i>Epistle XVIII ad Otreium episcopum</i>	379–80 ¹³			
<i>In Ecclesiasten</i>	379–80 ¹⁴	Before 381 ¹⁵	378–79 ¹⁶	
<i>Contra fatum</i>	379–84 ¹⁷	378 ¹⁸	386 ¹⁹	386–87 ²⁰

¹Daniélou, "La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse," 162; May, "Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregory von Nyssa," 57.

²Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 248.

³May, "Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregory von Nyssa," 57.

⁴Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 145.

⁵Maraval, "Chronology of Works," 157; Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 40.

⁶Daniélou, "La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse," 162–63.

⁷Risch, *Über das Sechstageswerk*, 15.

⁸Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères cappadociens*, 303; Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse," 347–49.

⁹Bernardi, *prédication des Pères cappadociens*, 265; Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse," 347–49.

¹⁰Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 182.

¹¹Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères cappadociens*, 285; Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse," 350–51.

¹²Cassin, "Liturgical Celebration and Theological Exegesis: The Easter Homilies of Gregory of Nyssa," 151.

¹³Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 169.

¹⁴Maraval, "Chronology of Works," 158.

¹⁵Jaeger, GNO V 382:15 (and notes); May, "Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregory von Nyssa," 56–57.

¹⁶Vinel, *Homélie sur l'Ecclésiaste*, 17–18.

¹⁷Bandini, *Gregorio di Nissa, Contro il fato*, 32–34.

¹⁸Voss, *Der Dialog in der frühchristlichen Literatur*, 183.

¹⁹Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 52.

²⁰Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse," 365–66.

(continued)

TABLE 2 *Continued*

Work	Most likely proposed date of composition	Alternative proposal	Alternative proposal	Alternative proposal
<i>Epistle XIX ad Joannem</i>	Early to mid-380 ²¹			
<i>De vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi</i>	380 ²²	379 ²³		
<i>Epistle V ad Sebastenos</i>	380 ²⁴			
<i>Epistle X ad Otreium episcopum</i>	380 ²⁵			
<i>Epistle XII ad Eupatrium scholasticum</i>	380 ²⁶			
<i>Epistle XXII ad episcopos</i>	380 ²⁷			
<i>Adversus Macedonianos de spiritu sancto</i>	380 ²⁸	381 ²⁹		
<i>Contra Eunomium libri I et II</i>	380 ³⁰	380–81 ³¹ (<i>Contra Eunomium I</i>) 382 ³² (<i>Contra Eunomium II</i>)		
<i>Epistle XVI ad Strategium presbyterum</i>	380s ³³			
<i>Epistle XXXII ad Philippum monachum</i>	380s ³⁴			
<i>Epistle XXIX ad Petrum Sebastenum</i>	380–81 ³⁵			
<i>De pythonissa ad Theodosium episcopum</i>	After 380 ³⁶			
<i>Ad Graecos ex communibus notionibus</i>	Before 381 ³⁷	After 381, probably 382 ³⁸		
<i>In Basilium fratrem</i>	1 January 381 ³⁹			

²¹Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 154.

²²Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères cappadociens*, 308.

²³Mitchell, "The Life and 'Lives' of Gregory Thaumaturgus," 115.

²⁴Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 136.

²⁵Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 147.

²⁶Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 151.

²⁷Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 189.

²⁸Daniélou, "La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse," 163.

²⁹May, "Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregory von Nyssa," 59.

³⁰Maraval, "Chronology of Works," 153.

³¹Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 44.

³²Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 49.

³³Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 160.

³⁴Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 228.

³⁵Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 206.

³⁶Simonetti, *La Maga di Endor*, 35 n. 45.

³⁷Hübner, "Gregor von Nyssa als Verfasser der sog. Ep. 38 des Basiliius," 490; May, "Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregory von Nyssa," 59.

³⁸Vogt, "Die Schrift 'Ex communibus notionibus' des Gregor von Nyssa," 216.

³⁹Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères cappadociens*, 313; Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse," 352–53.

De iis qui baptismum different	7 January 381 ⁴⁰	6 (or 10) January 381 ⁴¹
De sancto Theodoro	7 February 381 ⁴²	
Epistle XIV ad Libanium sophistam	January 381 ⁴³	
Contra fornicarios	Lent 381 ⁴⁴	September 379 ⁴⁵
Ad Simplicium de fide	The months before the Council of Constantinople in May 381 ⁴⁶	
Ad Ablabium quod non sint tres dei	The months before the Council of Constantinople in May 381 ⁴⁷	386–94 ⁴⁸
De deitate adversus Evagrium (vulgo In suam ordinationem)	May 381 ⁴⁹	394 ⁵⁰
Oratio funebris in Meletium episcopum	May–June 381 ⁵¹	
Epistle II De iis qui adeunt Hierosolyma	After July 381 ⁵²	
Epistle III ad Eustathiam et Ambrosiam	After July 381 ⁵³	
Epistle XXVIII sine titulo	After July 381 ⁵⁴	
Vita Sanctae Macrinae	After 381; latest possible dates: 382–83 ⁵⁵	381–82 ⁵⁶
Ad Eustathium de sancta trinitate (Basil's Epistle CLXXXIX)	After 381 ⁵⁷	

⁴⁰Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse," 353–55.

⁴¹Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères cappadociens*, 290.

⁴²Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse," 355–56.

⁴³Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 156.

⁴⁴Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères cappadociens*, 269; Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse," 356–67.

⁴⁵Daniélou, "Grégoire de Nysse à travers les *Lettres* de saint Basile et de saint Grégoire de Nazianze," 38.

⁴⁶May, "Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregory von Nyssa," 59.

⁴⁷May, "Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregory von Nyssa," 59.

⁴⁸Maspero, *Trinity and Man*, 41.

⁴⁹Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse," 357–58; May, "Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregory von Nyssa," 59.

⁵⁰Staats, "Die Datierung von 'In suam ordinationem' des Gregor von Nyssa," 58–59.

⁵¹Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse," 358–59; Gantz, *Gregor von Nyssa: Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam*, 20–21.

⁵²Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 48, 115; Maraval, *Grégoire de Nysse: Lettres*, 35–38.

⁵³Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 48, 123; Maraval, *Grégoire de Nysse: Lettres*, 35–38.

⁵⁴Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 204–5.

⁵⁵Maraval, "Chronology of Works," 160.

⁵⁶Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 102.

⁵⁷Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 235.

TABLE 2 *Continued*

Work	Most likely proposed date of composition	Alternative proposal	Alternative proposal	Alternative proposal
<i>Epistle I ad Flavianum episcopum</i>	381–94 ⁵⁸	383 ⁵⁹		
<i>Contra Eunomium liber III</i>	381–83 ⁶⁰	383 ⁶¹		
<i>De tridui inter mortem et resurrectionem domini nostri Jesu Christi spatio (vulgo In Christi resurrectionem oratio I)</i>	17 April 382 ⁶²	386–94 ⁶³		
<i>Epistle XXVII ad Stagirium sophistam</i>	382 or after ⁶⁴			
<i>Adversus eos qui castigationes aegre ferunt</i>	2 January 382 ⁶⁵			
<i>Epistle XV ad Joannem et Maximianum</i>	382 or 383 ⁶⁶			
<i>Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium</i>	382–83 ⁶⁷	387 ⁶⁸		
<i>Epistle XXIV ad Heraclianum haereticum</i>	383 ⁶⁹			
<i>In diem luminum (vulgo In baptismum Christi oratio)</i>	6 January 383 ⁷⁰	375 ⁷¹		
<i>In XL Martyres Ia and Ib</i>	9–10 March 383 ⁷²	375 ⁷³		
<i>De deitate filii et spiritus sancti</i>	June 383 ⁷⁴			

⁵⁸Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 106.

⁵⁹Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères cappadociens*, 303; Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 362–63.

⁶⁰Maraval, “Chronology of Works,” 153.

⁶¹Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 50.

⁶²Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères cappadociens*, 285; Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 361–62.

⁶³Drobner, *Gregor von Nyssa: Die drei Tage zwischen Tod und Auferstehung unseres Herrn Jesus Christus*, 171.

⁶⁴Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 202.

⁶⁵Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères cappadociens*, 270–71; Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 359–60.

⁶⁶Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 158.

⁶⁷Daniélou, “La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse,” 163. Zachhuber supports Daniélou’s dating and critiques Lietzmann’s argument: Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*, 205–6.

⁶⁸May, “Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregory von Nyssa,” 61. May draws on the insights of Lietzmann, *Apollinaris von Laodicea und seine Schule*, 83–84, as well as Mühlenberg, *Apollinaris von Laodicea*, 90–91.

⁶⁹Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 191.

⁷⁰Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères cappadociens*, 290; Daniélou, “La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse,” 164; Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 362.

⁷¹Leemans, “On the Date of Gregory of Nyssa’s First Homilies on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (Mart. Ia and Ib).”

⁷²Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères cappadociens*, 303–4; Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 362–63.

⁷³Leemans, “On the Date of Gregory of Nyssa’s First Homilies on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (Mart. Ia and Ib).”

⁷⁴Le Nain de Tillemont, *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire ecclésiastique des six premiers siècles—Tome neuvième*, 587.

Refutatio confessionis Eunomii	383 ⁷⁵			
De anima et resurrectione	Winter of 383/4 or 384/5 ⁷⁶	380 ⁷⁷	Between 381 and 383 ⁷⁸	381 ⁷⁹
Oratio funebris in Flacillam imperatricem	14 October 385 ⁸⁰			
Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam	25 August 385 ⁸¹	Insufficient evidence ⁸²		
Ad Theophilum adversus Apollinaristas	Slightly after 385 ⁸³			
In illud: Tunc et ipse filius	After 385 ⁸⁴			
Epistle VIII ad Antiochianum	Mid-380s onwards ⁸⁵			
Epistle XI ad Eupatrium scholasticum	Mid-380s onwards ⁸⁶			
Oratio in diem natalem Christi	25 December 386 ⁸⁷	25 December 382 ⁸⁸		
In sanctum Stephanum protomartyrem I	26 December 386 ⁸⁹	383 ⁹⁰		
In sanctum Stephanum protomartyrem II	27 December 386 ⁹¹			
De infantibus praemature abreptis	After 386 ⁹²			
Oratio catechetica magna	386–87 ⁹³	After 381 ⁹⁴	Before 381 ⁹⁵	After 383 ⁹⁶

⁷⁵Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*, 83–84; Maraval, “Chronology of Works,” 153.

⁷⁶Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 155.

⁷⁷Daniélou, “La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse,” 163.

⁷⁸Terrieux, *Grégoire de Nysse: Sur l'âme et la resurrection*, 12.

⁷⁹Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 356.

⁸⁰Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères cappadociens*, 319.

⁸¹Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères cappadociens*, 319; Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 364.

⁸²Gantz, *Gregor von Nyssa: Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam*, 19, 58.

⁸³Maraval, “Chronology of Works,” 155.

⁸⁴Daniélou, “La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse,” 167.

⁸⁵Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 144.

⁸⁶Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 148.

⁸⁷Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 365.

⁸⁸Daniélou, “La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse,” 164.

⁸⁹Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères cappadociens*, 290; Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 365–67.

⁹⁰Daniélou, “La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse,” 164.

⁹¹Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères cappadociens*, 290; Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 365–67.

⁹²Daniélou, “La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse,” 167.

⁹³Barbel, *Gregor von Nyssa, Die große katechetische Rede*, 14; Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 365–66.

⁹⁴May, “Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregory von Nyssa,” 60–61.

⁹⁵Winling, *Grégoire de Nysse: Discours catéchétique*, 126–30.

⁹⁶Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*, 206–7.

THE LATE PHASE, 387–394

TABLE 3 Gregory of Nyssa's works in the late phase of his literary career, 387–394

Work	Most likely proposed date of composition	Alternative proposal	Alternative proposal
<i>Epistle IV ad Eusebium</i>	387 ¹		
<i>Epistle XIII ad Libanium sophistam</i>	Late 380s onwards ²		
<i>Epistle XVII ad presbyteros in Nicomedia</i>	Late 380s–94 ³		
<i>In sanctum et salutare Pascha (vulgo In Christi resurrectionem oratio iv)</i>	9 April 388 ⁴	386–94 ⁵	
<i>In ascensionem Christi</i>	18 May 388 ⁶	Just before the redaction of the <i>In Cant</i> –391 ⁷	At the same time as the <i>In inscriptiones Psalmorum</i> (so 379) ⁸
<i>In sanctam Pentecosten</i>	23 May 388 ⁹		
<i>Epistle XXXI (Epistula canonica ad Letoium)</i>	Ca. 390 ¹⁰		
<i>De instituto Christiano</i>	After 390 ¹¹		
<i>Epistle XXXVI (Epistula ad Theodorum [Basil's Ep. CXXIV])</i>	Early 390s ¹²		
<i>De perfectione Christiana ad Olympium monachum</i>	390s ¹³	370–78 ¹⁴	
<i>De professione Christiana ad Harmonium</i>	Final years–390s ¹⁵		
<i>De vita Moysis</i>	392 ¹⁶	390 ¹⁷	Mid-380s ¹⁸
<i>In Canticum canticorum</i>	391–94 ¹⁹	After 390 ²⁰	After 391, perhaps even after 394 ²¹

¹Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse," 366.

²Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 132.

³Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 162.

⁴Bernardi, *La prédication des Pères cappadociens*, 285; Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse," 369–70.

⁵Drobner, *Gregor von Nyssa: Die drei Tage zwischen Tod und Auferstehung unseres Herrn Jesus Christus*, 168–70.

⁶Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse," 370–71.

⁷Daniélou, "Grégoire de Nysse et l'origine de la fête de l'ascension," 666.

⁸McCambley, *A Homily on the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ*, 1. <http://www.lectio-divina.org/index.php/reflections/reflections-on-the-writings-of-gregory-of-nyssa>, accessed 5 August 2018.

⁹Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse," 371–72.

¹⁰Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 213.

¹¹Daniélou, "La chronologie des oeuvres de Grégoire de Nysse," 168; Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*, 115–42.

¹²Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 261.

¹³Daniélou, "La chronologie des oeuvres de Grégoire de Nysse," 168.

¹⁴May, "Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregor von Nyssa," 56.

¹⁵Daniélou, "La chronologie des oeuvres de Grégoire de Nysse," 168.

¹⁶Daniélou, *Grégoire de Nysse: La vie de Moïse*, 15.

¹⁷Simonetti, *Gregorio di Nissa, La vita di Mosè*, xix–xx.

¹⁸Heine, *Perfection in the Virtuous Life*, 15.

¹⁹Cahill, "The Date and Setting of Gregory of Nyssa's 'Commentary on the Song of Songs,'" 29.

²⁰Daniélou, "La chronologie des oeuvres de Grégoire de Nysse," 168.

²¹Dünzl, *Braut und Bräutigam: Die Auslegung des Canticum durch Gregor von Nyssa*, 32.

Listed below are works that cannot be dated because of insufficient information:

Epistle VII ad Hierium praefectum

Epistle XXIII sine titulo

*Epistle XXXIV.*¹

DISCUSSION OF DATING

This section lays out the case for dating Gregory's works. Whilst all his writings were examined in the process of research, I shall restrict myself to a discussion of the texts used in the main body of this study. The works with uncontested dates (where a scholarly consensus has been reached) are noted alongside the commentator (or commentators) who have argued in favor of the proposed date.

THE EARLY PHASE, 371–SEPTEMBER 378

370–72, possibly 371. *De virginitate*. This treatise, written on Basil's request, is situated after Basil's episcopal consecration and before Gregory's, which dates it to the period 370 to 372. The style of the treatise also fits the context of Gregory's first career as a practicing rhetorician.²

376–78. *In inscriptiones Psalmorum* and *In sextum Psalmum*. These works were probably written during Gregory's exile, between 376 and 378. The *In inscriptiones Psalmorum* does not discuss a number of key themes characteristic of Gregory's mature works, such as divine darkness; nor does it defend the divinity of the Holy Spirit against the Pneumatomachians. This period also marks the early part of Gregory's episcopal career, which was dogged by accusations of financial mismanagement from his adversaries. If Gregory was lying low in response to these accusations,³ this would have given him opportunities to immerse himself prayerfully in the Scriptures.

Late 370s. *De beatitudinibus*. The *De beatitudinibus*, the *De oratione dominica*, and the *In inscriptiones Psalmorum* share common themes in the early development of Gregory's theorization of desire, placing the *De beatitudinibus* in the late 370s. There is no mention of an occasion for the delivery of these sermons, and so no further specificity can be reached.

Before 378. *De mortuis non esse dolendum*. The argument for dating the *De mortuis* to the early period of Gregory's literary career is based on differences between this work and the *De hominis officio* (and other works in the middle period) on the theme of the resurrection, although a sharp division between the two works is probably ill advised.⁴ An early date of composition is also supported by the text's thematic convergences with the *De virginitate* and other works from the early period. Furthermore, a watershed moment in Gregory's life is the deaths of Basil and Macrina in quick succession. The absence of any references to his siblings in a work that has death as its focus supports a date before September 378, although this has all the limitations of an *argumentum ex silentio*.

Before 378. *De beneficentia* (vulgo *De pauperibus amandis I*) and *In illud: Quatenus uni ex his fecistis mihi fecistis* (vulgo *De pauperibus amandis II*). Daniélou dates the *De beneficentia* in close proximity to the *Contra fornicarios*,⁵ assigning the former to Lent 382. However, Cavalcanti believes that the economic and political backcloth of the homily is that of the final years of the emperor Valens, who died in 378.⁶ Gregory's reflections on the plight of the poor are also, I believe, linked to the construction of the *Basileias* set up by his brother Basil in response to the famine of 369. This led Gregory to appreciate the relationship between ascetical self-mastery (such as fasting) and Christian service to the poor. So this sermon and the *In illud: Quatenus uni ex his fecistis mihi fecistis* were probably written at roughly the same time, in close proximity to the active ministry of the *Basileias*. The years preceding Valens's death are plausible.

Before 378. *De oratione dominica*. I am inclined to date the *De oratione dominica* prior to 378 because of thematic convergences with other texts assigned to the early period. It was probably written near the latter part of the early period, because Gregory's expostulations against the Pneumatomachians reflect the theological climate approaching the First Council of Constantinople (381).

THE MIDDLE PHASE, SEPTEMBER 378–387

379. *De hominis opificio*. It is widely agreed that the *De hominis opificio* was written between Basil's death (September 378) and Peter's accession to the see of Sebaste in ca. 380. The early months of 379, therefore, seem probable.

379. *Apologia in Hexaemeron*. The *Apologia in Hexaemeron*, written shortly after the *De hominis opificio*, was dedicated to Peter, Gregory's brother, apparently before his consecration as bishop of Sebaste (ca. 380). I agree with Silvas⁷ and Maraval⁸ that it was probably composed during the early months of 379, before Gregory's trip to Antioch in the summer of that year.

9 March 379. *In XL Martyres II*. Although this is categorized as Gregory's second sermon on the Forty Martyrs, it is in fact chronologically prior to *In XL Martyres Ia* and *Ib*. I see no reason to oppose the scholarly consensus, first proposed by Daniélou, that it was preached on 9 March 379.⁹ In the sermon, Gregory models himself on Basil, who had proclaimed the martyrs' miracles. As such, the *In XL Martyres II* fits the context shortly after Basil's death, when Gregory took on his brother's mantle.

Lent 379. *Contra usurarios*. Daniélou and Bernardi.

Easter 379 or posterior. *In sanctum Pascha* (vulgo *In Christi Resurrectionem oratio III*). Daniélou dates this Easter homily to 379¹⁰ because of its thematic convergences with the *De hominis opificio*. Cassin argues that there is insufficient evidence to settle the issue of dating and opts for a date posterior to the composition of the *De hominis opificio* (379). His argument appears to be partly based on the homily's affinities with the *De anima*—but no reason is given for rejecting Easter 379.¹¹ The middle period is a time of intense reflection for Gregory on the

resurrection (and attendant themes); anytime from and including Easter 379 is a reasonable estimation of the homily's date of delivery.

379–80. *In Ecclesiasten*. I support dating these homilies to the period 379 to 380.

This is because Gregory refers to the impiety of the Arians as an ongoing concern, which places the work shortly before the Council of Constantinople in 381. Whilst there are several thematic affinities with the *De oratione dominica*,¹² the *In Ecclesiasten* develops several ideas that are characteristic of the middle period, as outlined in the main body of this study.

Unclear but possibly 379–87. *Contra fatum*. The date of this work is uncertain, which is reflected in the considerable divergence of proposed dates ranging from 378 to 387. However, its position within the middle period of Gregory's literary career is not in dispute.

Early to mid-380. *Epistle XIX ad Joannem*. *Epistle XIX* represents the beginning of a stream of theorization and meditation on core theological concepts, prompted by Macrina's death, relating to grief and the general resurrection. It was probably written less than a year after Macrina's death, so early to mid-380 is likely. Key themes from this letter are then developed in the *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*. When *Epistle XIX*, the *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*, and the *De anima* are placed beside one another, it becomes apparent that Gregory is elaborating ideas that he discusses more briefly in the previous work (i.e., *Ep. XIX breuius* vs. *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*; *De anima* likewise vs. *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*). This gives us a sense of chronological development in his thinking.

17 November 380. *De vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi*. Along with many other commentators, I remain unconvinced by Mitchell's suggestion that Gregory delivered the panegyric in Neocaesarea on 17 November 379.¹³ After all, *Epistle XIX*, which offers an overview of the events in 379, makes no mention of any travels to Neocaesarea. It is, nonetheless, possible to maintain 379 if the panegyric was delivered in nearby Ibora, since *Epistle XIX* mentions a mission to Ibora in the winter of 379/80. Either way, the work is situated in the middle period.

380. *Contra Eunomium libri I et II*. The *Contra Eunomium* I was written sometime in the year 380 in response to the first book of Eunomius's *Apologia Apologiae* ("Apology for the Apology," dated to 378)—a text that was itself a response to Basil's *Contra Eunomium*. The rationale for this dating of the *Contra Eunomium* I (and for most commentators the *Contra Eunomium* II)¹⁴ is based on Gregory's self-reports in *Epistle XXIX*:1–2. Here he notes that he wrote a response to the first book of the *Apologia Apologiae* on his return from Armenia (that is, Sebaste, where he was taken into some sort of custody) and completed it in seventeen days. The dating of the *Contra Eunomium* II seems to depend on one's interpretation of Jerome's *De viris illustribus* 128, which notes that Gregory read from his "books" against Eunomius at the Council of Constantinople in 381. If these "books" refer to the *Contra Eunomium* I and II,¹⁵ then both would have been composed in 380, before the council. If Jerome is referring instead to two sections of what we now know as the *Contra Eunomium* I,¹⁶ then the *Contra*

- Eunomium* II would have been written later, perhaps in 382.¹⁷ Either way, these two works are firmly situated in the middle phase.
- 1 January 381. *In Basilium fratrem*. The majority scholarly view is that Gregory's eulogy on behalf of his brother Basil was delivered on 1 January 381. However, whilst 1 January is certain (Basil's memorial day), the specific date is less so.
381. *Epistle XIV ad Libanium sophistam*. In this letter, Gregory notes that he received Libanius's second letter on 1 January 381, when he was in Caesarea, possibly the same day time he delivered his sermon *In Basilium fratrem*. *Epistle XIV* may have been written shortly afterward, possibly January 381 itself.
- Lent 381. *Contra fornicarios*. In 1955, Daniélou dated the *Contra fornicarios* to the Lenten period in 381, seeing allusions in the text to the upcoming Council of Constantinople (381).¹⁸ By 1965, Daniélou changed his mind, suggesting September 379: that is, before Gregory headed off to the Council of Antioch. I am persuaded that Lent 381 is more plausible, as that penitential season would have been a fitting context to deliver the sermon. At any rate, its positioning within the middle period is not in dispute.
- May 381. *De Deitate adversus Evagrium* (vulgo *In suam ordinationem*). Although a date of 394 has been suggested, I agree with Daniélou¹⁹ and May²⁰ that this discourse was delivered at the opening address of the Council of Constantinople in May 381. This is because Gregory refers to unsuccessful discussions with the Pneumatomachians and the arrival of the Egyptians.
- May–June 381. *Oratio funebris in Meletium episcopum*. Daniélou and Gantz.
- After July 381. *Epistle II, De iis qui adeunt Hierosolyma*, and *Epistle III, ad Eustathiam et Ambrosiam*. It is likely that *Epistles II and III*, which mention Gregory's visits to the churches in Arabia and Jerusalem, were written after the Council of Constantinople (381). I am in agreement with Tillemont and Maraval that there was probably no time for Gregory to undertake significant missions to Arabia and Jerusalem in 379, given everything that was going on in that year. Furthermore, *Epistle III's* discussion of Mary may be read against the backdrop of Antidicomarianism that denied her perpetual virginity and had reached its apex roughly at this time.
- 381–83. *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*. In the opening of the *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*, Gregory refers to a discussion he had in Antioch on his return from Jerusalem (381) that prompted him to write this hagiographical work on his sister Macrina. This gives us the *terminus post quem*. It is likely Gregory responded promptly to the question asked of him in Antioch, which gives us the period between 381 and 383.
- 381–83. *Contra Eunomium liber III*. If we assume that Jerome heard Gregory reading from the *Contra Eunomium I and II* at Council of Constantinople in 381 (*De viris illustribus* 128), then this gives us the *terminus post quem* for the *Contra Eunomium III*. Given Gregory's strength of feeling about the Eunomian controversy, it

is unlikely he would have delayed in extending his anti-Eunomian polemic after the council. An approximate date of composition between 381 and 383 seems plausible.

Easter 382. *De tridui inter mortem et Resurrectionem domini nostri Jesu Christi spatio* (vulgo *In Christi Resurrectionem oratio I*). Drobner lays out the case for dating the *De tridui spatio* to the period between 386 and 394.²¹ But I am inclined to disagree with Drobner in favor of Daniélou's dating of Easter 382,²² as the *De tridui spatio* takes up the arguments in the *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium* and *Epistle III* (dated shortly after the Council of Constantinople, in 381), and reflects Gregory's Christological focus in 382. Cassin dismisses the possibility of using the *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium* as a point of reference,²³ and Maraval regards Daniélou's dating of this work as erroneous,²⁴ but there is a convincing case for dating the *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium* to 382–83, as discussed below.

382–83. *Epistle XV, ad Joannem et Maximianum*. This appears to be a covering letter sent with the *Contra Eunomium I* to John and Maximian (students of Libanius), and so it must be dated after the *Contra Eunomium*. Although there is insufficient evidence to propose a specific date, sometime around 382 to 383 seems likely.

382–83. *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium*. The date of this work has not been definitively settled. Daniélou suggests 382 to 383,²⁵ whilst Lietzmann assigns it to the latter half of the 380s.²⁶ Lietzmann argues that the *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium* was written after Gregory's anti-Apollinarian letter *ad Theophilum adversus Apollinaristas*, which (at least by Lietzmann's account) demonstrates only a rudimentary understanding of Apollinarianism—the letter was addressed to Theophilus when he was bishop of Alexandria, which puts the *terminus post quem* at 385. I agree with Zachhuber that Lietzmann's argument does not stand because the two works have different purposes. *Ad Theophilum adversus Apollinaristas* is intended to highlight the dangers of the schismatic Apollinarians—there is no reason for Gregory to show an in-depth knowledge of Apollinarianism to Theophilus. By contrast, the *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium* says nothing about the Apollinarians. Daniélou's dating of 382/3 seems likely, especially given developments in Gregory's thinking about Christ's state after death.²⁷

6 January 383. *In diem luminum* (vulgo *In baptismum Christi oratio*). Daniélou.

383. *In XL Martyres Ia* and *Ib*. The widely accepted view is that this first homily on the Forty Martyrs (subdivided into *Ia* and *Ib*) was written in 383. An earlier date of composition is proposed by Leemans,²⁸ which would require us to reallocate the work to the early period—but this seems unlikely, given that the start of the first homily refers to Peter, Gregory's brother, as "shepherd." This indicates that Peter was already the bishop of Sebaste at this time. His elevation to the See of Sebaste took place in around 380, which gives us the *terminus post quem* for the *In XL Martyres Ia* and *Ib*.

383. *De Deitate filii et spiritus sancti*. This dogmatic oration was delivered at the Council of Constantinople of 383. The theological pronouncements of the oration, which affirm the divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit, naturally fit with the context and aims of the council. Furthermore, Gregory's reference to four emperors seems to be an allusion to the appointment of Arcadius (who then became Augustus), the eldest son of Theodosius I, by his father on 16 January 383. The other two "royal luminaries" would have been Valentinian II and Gratianus.
383. *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii*. The *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii* is Gregory's response to Eunomius's *Expositio fidei*, which was delivered to the Council of Constantinople in 383. Gregory, eager to refute the Eunomian heresy, would probably have completed the text in the latter part of 383.
- 383 or shortly thereafter. *De anima et resurrectione*. The *De anima* expands and elaborates on a number of themes from the *Vita Sanctae Macrinae* using the format of a philosophical dialogue. It can therefore be dated after the *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*, probably from around 383 onward.
- 385/6. *Oratio funebris in Flacillam imperatricem*. This funeral oration for Empress Aelia Flacilla, wife of Theodosius, can be dated to her death in 385 or 386.
- 25 August 385. *Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam*. Daniélou.
- Mid-380s onward. *Epistle VIII, ad Antiochianum*, and *Epistle XI, ad Eupatrium scholasticum*. *Epistles VIII and XI* are allocated to the latter part of the middle period because Gregory refers to his gray hair and old age. They were probably written from the mid-380s onward. These form an example of work that could be assigned to either the middle or the late phase of Gregory's literary career.
- After 386. *De infantibus praemature abreptis*. At the start of the work, Gregory speaks of his advanced age and portrays himself as "an aged horse" who, though outside the race course, is nonetheless roused into excitement and "lifts his head with eager looks" and "shows his spirit in his breathings, and prances, and paws the ground frequently, though this eagerness is all that is left to him, and time has sapped his powers of going" (*GNO III/2 67:10–17*). For this reason, I have assigned it, with Daniélou,²⁹ to the latter part of the middle period, sometime after 386.
- 386/7. *Oratio catechetica magna*. No scholarly consensus has been established on the dating of this work, although the various dates that have been proposed are all situated in the middle period. Nonetheless, Daniélou's argument for 386/7 seems persuasive.³⁰ In chapter XXXVIII, Gregory's mention of his earlier treatises (one of which is likely to be the *Contra Eunomium*) supports this dating. The suggestion that the final chapters were added later by Gregory, though not impossible, is conjecture. Daniélou's dating would also fit the context of returning home in 385 from his stay in Constantinople, where he would have met pagan philosophers and other intellectuals,³¹ prompting him to offer a detailed examination of the faith.

THE LATE PHASE, 387–394

Late 380s–early 390s. *Epistle XVII, ad presbyteros in Nicomedia*. In this letter, Gregory exhorts the presbyterate of Nicomedia to select a bishop worthy of office to succeed Patricius. Gregory refers at one point to the Euphrasius who as bishop of Nicomedia attended the Council of Constantinople in 381 and subscribed to its teachings. On this basis, *Epistle XVII* was written sometime after 381. Note, also, that Gregory refers to his advancing age, so a date of composition in the late 380s, if not early 390s, is possible.

Possibly 388. *In sanctum et salutare Pascha* (vulgo *In Christi Resurrectionem oratio IV*). The *In sanctum et salutare Pascha* may be the last of the triptych of Easter sermons; if so, it could have been delivered on 9 April 388. Alternatively, given its brevity, it may in fact be the epilogue of the *De tridui spatio*,³² which according to the dating provided above would place it in the middle period. I do not believe there is sufficient evidence to settle the issue of dating—it could be assigned to the middle phase or late phase of Gregory’s literary career.

Late 380s–early 390s. *In Ascensionem Christi*. Gregory’s brief sermon *In Ascensionem Christi* provides the earliest evidence of the liturgical celebration of the Ascension as a feast in its own right (distinct from Pentecost). McCambley believes that the sermon, which provides focused discussion on Psalms 22(23) and 23(24), belongs to the same period as the *In inscriptiones Psalmorum* (which he assigns to 379).³³ However, Gregory’s use of paradoxical phrases, such as “sober inebriation” (*In Ascensionem Christi*, GNO IX/1 324:18; cf. *In Cant*, GNO VI 156:18, 310:4, 362:12), is characteristic of his mature works. Furthermore, I see no reason why Gregory’s appeal to the Psalms restricts him to a particular period in his literary career. The brevity of the sermon—combined with its lack of reference to external events—prevents us from assigning it a specific date.

Late 380s–early 390s. *Epistle XXXI (Epistula canonica ad Letoium)*. *Epistle XXXI* is addressed to Letoios, the successor of Otreius as bishop of Melitene. The dating of the accession of Letoios to the episcopate has not been established, but Gregory’s reference to his advanced age and his use of the language of *diathesis erōtikē* (as in *Epistle XXXVI*) suggest a late date of composition, either late 380s or 390s.

After 390. *De instituto Christiano*. Jaeger and Daniélou.

Early 390s. *Epistle XXXVI (Epistula ad Theodorum [Basil’s Epistle CXXIV])*. The letter uses the expression *diathesis erōtikē*, which is consistent with Gregory’s theorization of desire in his commentary on the Song of Songs. He also refers to his advanced age at 1:5.

390s. *De perfectione Christiana ad Olympium monachum*. Whilst May dates the *De perfectione* to the period 370 to 379,³⁴ I am inclined to side with Daniélou, who assigns the work to Gregory’s final years.³⁵ The *De perfectione* develops the theme of perpetual progress, which is characteristic of Gregory’s mature thought.

390s. *De vita Moysis*. The *De vita Moysis* has been dated to his later years (Daniélou)³⁶ and conversely to the period between 380 and 384 (Heine).³⁷ Heine argues that Gregory's mention of gray hair does not necessarily indicate a late date of composition. He also believes that the treatise is best seen against the backdrop of the Eunomian crisis, still assailing the churches in Cappadocia and preoccupying Gregory's theological concerns. I agree with Conway-Jones³⁸ that the underlying point of disagreement between Daniélou and Heine is not that of dating but the nature of the treatise—that is, whether it is primarily concerned with mysticism, so called, or polemics. After all, there is nothing precluding the possibility that Gregory may have written the treatise in his last remaining years whilst also having an eye to theological controversy. Overall, I side with Daniélou's dating, because the *De vita Moysis*, set alongside the *In Canticum canticorum*, forms a progressive continuum in the education of desire, as argued in the main body of this study.

390s. *In Canticum canticorum*. The *In Canticum canticorum* is the very last of Gregory's works, representing the summit of his theorizations on spiritual ascent. It was probably written after the composition of the *De vita Moysis*, because the latter contains no references to the Song of Songs, whereas the *In Cant* is replete with references to Moses's life.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following acronyms are to be found in the notes and bibliographical materials.

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
CUP	Cambridge University Press
<i>De anima</i>	<i>De anima et resurrectione</i>
<i>De mortuis</i>	<i>De mortuis non esse dolendum</i>
<i>De perfectione</i>	<i>De perfectione Christiana ad Olympium monachum</i>
<i>De professione</i>	<i>De professione Christiana ad Harmonium</i>
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
GCS	Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
GNO	<i>Gregorii Nysseni Opera</i> , ed. Werner Jaeger et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1952–)
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUP	Harvard University Press
<i>In Cant</i>	<i>In Canticum canticorum</i>
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JFSR	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
NPNF	A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church
<i>Oratio catechetica</i>	<i>Oratio catechetica magna</i>
OUP	Oxford University Press
PG	Jacques-Paul Migne, ed., <i>Patrologia cursus completa</i> , . . . <i>Series Graeca</i> , 166 vols. (Paris: Petit-Montrouge, 1857–83)
PUP	Princeton University Press

RAM	<i>Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique</i>
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
SP	Studia Patristica
SUNY	State University of New York
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. For a thorough discussion of the reception history of Gregory's theology, see Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa: Ancient and (Post)modern*.
2. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique: Essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de Saint Grégoire de Nysse*.
3. Peter Brown, "Bodies and Minds: Sexuality and Renunciation in Early Christianity," in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, ed. Halperin, Winkler, and Zeitlin, 479–93; Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80–101; Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, 1971–1997," *J ECS* 6 (1998): 353–76.
4. Clark, "Foucault, the Fathers and Sex," *JAAR* 56.4 (1988): 619–41; Clark, "Holy Women, Holy Words: Early Christian Women, Social History and the 'Linguistic Turn,'" *J ECS* 6.3 (1988): 413–30; Clark, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn,'" *Church History* 67 (1998): 1–31; Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity*.
5. Behr, "The Rational Animal: A Rereading of Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio*," *J ECS* 7.2 (1999): 219–47; Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*; Smith, "A Just and Reasonable Grief: The Death and Function of a Holy Woman in Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Macrina*," *J ECS* 12.1 (2004): 57–84; Smith, "The Body of Paradise and the Body of the Resurrection: Gender and the Angelic Life in Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio*," *HTR* 92.2 (2006): 207–28; Smith, *Passion and Paradise: Human and Divine Emotion in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa*.
6. All dating is given according to the New Style (n.s.) or Gregorian calendar.
7. Daniélou argues that this is the major original contribution of Gregory's works, to which he assigned the term *epektasis* (Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 291–307;

Daniélou, ed., and Musurillo, ed. and trans., *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings*, 46–71). While the term *epektasis* enjoys unchallenged popularity in contemporary scholarship in the aftermath of Daniélou's work, it is not a word Gregory himself uses with any precision or consistency. The term derives from Philippians 3:13, where Paul speaks of "straining ahead [*epekteinomenos*] to what lies ahead." Gregory quotes and alludes to this passage on several occasions, but not with the doctrinal precision or systematicity that Daniélou suggests.

8. The winter of 387/8 marked a watershed in Gregory's life. It consisted of the relative quietening of theological controversy in the Eastern empire and the successive deaths of many of Gregory's family, friends, and acquaintances (Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 54–55).

9. The exact date of Gregory's death cannot be established incontrovertibly. The last appearance of his name is on a list of attendees at a synod in Constantinople in 394; thereafter, he fades from history. He may have died later that same year or shortly afterward.

10. The date of Basil's death has been the subject of considerable debate over the last few decades. Maraval queried the view then prevailing that Basil died in 379 (Maraval, "La date de la mort de Basile de Césarée," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 34 [1988]: 25–38). He suggested August 377 and assigned Macrina's death to 19 July 378. Pouchet also questioned whether 379 could be the date of Basil's death, advancing late September 378 as a viable alternative (Pouchet, "La date de l'élection épiscopale de Saint Basile et celle de sa mort," *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 87 [1992]: 5–33). On his account, Macrina died on 19 July 379. For a defense of the traditionally recognized date of 1 January 379, see T. D. Barnes, "The Collapse of the Homoeans in the East," *SP* 29 (1997): 3–16. Maraval later repented of his original dating, persuaded by Pouchet's chronology (Maraval, "Retour sur quelques dates concernant Basile de Césarée et Grégoire de Nysse," *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 99 [2004]: 153–57). For a detailed overview of these arguments, see Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 32–39. On balance, the arguments favor September 378.

11. Fraade, "Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism," in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages*, ed. Green, 253. It is also worth noting that the term "asceticism" first appears in the English language in 1646 in Sir Thomas Browne's *Pseudegraphia Epigrapha*, pejoratively describing those "doomed to a life of celibacy by the asceticism which had corrupted the simplicity of Christianity."

12. *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium*, GNO III/1 175:17; 192:26, 27, 29; *In XL Martyres II*, PG 46 773:17. In this count, I have omitted the title of the *De instituto Christiano* (GNO VIII/1 40:t1–t3). The most significant of these references is that of the *In XL Martyres II*, in which *askēsis* refers to the military operations of Roman soldiers proudly displayed during monthly commemorations (PG 46 773:17). Gregory compares the zeal of these Roman soldiers to the zeal of Christian martyrs who are regarded as the soldiers of Christ.

13. *Adversus eos qui castigationes aegre ferunt*, PG 46 309:22, 50; 313:23, 24; *De iis qui baptismum differunt*, PG 46 421:21; *In diem luminum*, GNO IX/1 238:17.

14. *De beneficentia*, GNO IX/1 94:4.

15. *De virginitate*, p:c:41; XX:n:1 [repetition]; 23:1:3; *Ep. XXIX* 5:4.

16. *De virginitate* XX:4:18.

17. *De professione*, GNO VIII/1 132:1.

18. *Vita Sanctae Macrinae* 4:3.

19. *Contra usurarios*, GNO IX/1 195:21.
20. *De hominis opificio*, PG 44 220:10.
21. *De deitate filii et spiritus sancti*, PG 46 556:30.
22. *De iis qui baptismum differunt*, PG 46 425:47.
23. As in the *Adversus eos qui castigationes aegre ferunt*, PG 46 309:22.
24. Spira and Klock, eds., *The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa: Translation and Commentary*, 44–45.
25. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius*, 20–24.
26. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 146. On Gregory’s description of monastics as “philosophers,” see Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*, 82.
27. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 34.
28. Hall, ed., *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, 32.
29. Malherbe and Ferguson translate this phrase as “the ascetic way of life” (Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 102). The translation is misleading because the adjective “ascetic” does not appear in the Greek.
30. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 125.
31. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 127.
32. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*, 31.
33. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*, 31 n. 1.
34. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*, 31.
35. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*, 35.
36. On this point, I am indebted to Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 15–16.
37. Garrett, “Sociology of Early Christianity,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. Freedman, 91.
38. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*, 2nd ed. Part I of the first edition was published in 1954 by the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Glendale, California.
39. Jaeger thinks that three exegetical treatises—the *De vita Moysis*, the *In inscriptiones Psalmorum* and the *In Cant*—should be included among Gregory’s ascetical writings (Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*, 32). However, in his printed edition of Gregory’s works, they do not appear in the *Opera Ascetica*.
40. Migne’s edition of Gregory’s *œuvre* is divided as follows: PG 44 (*exegetica*), PG 45 (*dogmatica*), PG 46 (*dogmatica* [continued], *ascetica*, *orationes*, *dubia*). Under *Ascetica et miscellanea* (PG 60 237–432), Migne places the *De perfectione* (PG 46 252–85), the *De professione* (PG 46 237–49), the *De instituto Christiano* (PG 46 288–306), and the *De virginitate* (PG 46 317–416)—but leaves the *Vita Sanctae Macrinae* out of his collection of Gregory’s ascetical writings (PG 46 960–1000), as Jaeger himself acknowledges (Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*, 18). Jaeger transfers the *De iis qui baptismum differunt* (PG 46 416–23) to GNO X/2.
41. The blurring of the (misguided) disjunction between “dogmatic” and “ascetic” works is evinced by Callahan’s incorporation of the *De anima* in her translation of Gregory’s “ascetical works” (Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, xix).
42. Keenan, “*De professione* and *De perfectione*: A Study of the Ascetical Doctrine of St. Gregory of Nyssa,” *DOP* 5 (1950): 174.

43. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation according to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross*, trans. Doyle, 23–43.

44. McGinn, “Asceticism and Mysticism in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages,” in *Asceticism*, ed. Wimbush and Valantasis, 58.

45. On the unity of the spiritual life in both its “ascetical” and “mystical” dimensions, see Stolz, *The Doctrine of Spiritual Perfection*, trans. Williams, 203–8.

46. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Parshley; Stoller, *Presentations of Gender*. The validity of this distinction has since been contested by Judith Butler and many other postmodern gender theorists. See Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

47. The adjective *malthakos* appears once in Gregory’s corpus to denote the “weak [or soft] seams” of the sophisms of Eunomius (*Contra Eunomium* II:622:5; NPNF II/5, 313).

48. It may also refer to the faculty of the soul from which desires and affections arise.

49. Very often, *euphrosynē* describes gladness or joy of a spiritual sort.

50. For the history of the development of the distinction between “patristics” and “early Christian studies,” see Clark, “From Patristics to Early Christian Studies,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Harvey and Hunter, 7–41.

51. Meredith, “Influence of Gregory of Nyssa,” in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Mateo-Seco and Maspero, rev. and expanded English ed., trans. Cherney, 427.

52. Srawley, “St. Gregory of Nyssa on the Sinlessness of Christ,” *JTS* 7.27 (1906), 440.

53. Bethune-Baker, *An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine to the Time of the Council of Chalcedon*, 251.

54. John Norman Davidson Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th ed., 267. However, Gregory’s doctrinal treatises became key texts for those, such as Zizoulas, who adulated his “social Trinitarianism.”

55. Tixeront, *Histoire des dogmes dans l’antiquité chrétienne*, vol. 2, 128–30; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. Bowden; Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. Wilkins and Priebe.

56. Von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, Band 2, *Die Entwicklung des kirchlichen Dogmas I*.

57. Loofs, *Leitfaden zum Studium der Dogmengeschichte*, 4th ed.

58. Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 2, *Die Dogmenbildung in der alten Kirch*.

59. Holl, *Amphilochius von Ikonium in seinem Verhältnis zu den grossen Kappadoziern*.

60. Otis, “Cappadocian Thought as a Coherent System,” *DOP* 12 (1958): 98 n. 3.

61. It was Holl (*Amphilochius von Ikonium*, 1904) who first began to recognize that Gregory was a unique thinker in his own right and needed to be distinguished from the other two “Cappadocian” Fathers.

62. Von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, Band 2, *Die Entwicklung des kirchlichen Dogmas I*, *passim*. Von Harnack, *Grundriss der Dogmengeschichte*, *passim*. For a discussion of von Harnack’s views on the Hellenization of Christianity, see Meijering, *Die Hellenisierung des Christentums im Urteil Adolf von Harnacks*, especially 68–72.

63. Leys, *L’image de Dieu chez Saint Grégoire de Nyse: Esquisse d’une doctrine*; Merki, ‘Ομοίωσις Θεῷ: *Von der platonischen Angleichung an Gott zur Gottähnlichkeit bei Gregor von Nyssa*, *Paradosis* 7; Weiswurm, *The Nature of Human Knowledge according to Saint*

Gregory of Nyssa; Gaïth, *La conception de la liberté chez Grégoire de Nysse*; Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*; Völker, *Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker*.

64. It is worth remembering that the import, application, and legitimacy of these terms have been contested. Some have thought it appropriate to speak of Christian and non-Christian varieties of “Platonism” or “Neo-Platonism” (Hankey, “Denys and Aquinas: Anti-modern Cold and Postmodern Hot,” in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, ed. Ayres and Jones, 139–84). Ayres, by contrast, uses these terms when referring to non-Christian traditions that were adapted by patristic authors (Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*).

65. Von Ivánka, “Vom Platonismus zur Theorie der Mystik (Zur Erkenntnislehre Gregors von Nyssa),” *Scholastik* 11 (1936): 163–95; Hugo Rahner, “Die Gottesgeburt: Die Lehre der Kirchenväter von der Geburt Christi im Herzen des Gläubigen,” *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 59 (1935): 333–418. For later treatments of this view, see Meredith, “Gregory of Nyssa and Plotinus,” *SP* 17 (1982): 1120–26; Rist, “Plotinus and Christian Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Gerson, 386–413.

66. The view that Gregory acquiesced to (Neo-)Platonic philosophy was questioned by Diekamp, *Die Gotteslehre des heiligen Gregor von Nyssa: Ein Beitrag zur Dogmengeschichte der patristischen Zeit*; Bayer, *Gregors von Nyssa Gottesbegriff: Dissertation zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde bei der philosophischen Fakultät der Hessischen Ludwigs-Universität Gießen*; González, *La fórmula “mia ousia treis hypostaseis” en San Gregorio de Nisa*.

67. Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa*, 62; cf. Meyer, *Die Gotteslehre des Gregor von Nyssa: Eine philosophische Studie aus der Zeit der Patristik*.

68. For a comparison between Cherniss and Daniélou, see Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*, 71–72 n. 1. But it was von Ivánka who, before the renaissance of scholarship I am interested in here, claimed that Gregory was not an uncritical follower of Plato (von Ivánka, “Vom Platonismus zur Theorie der Mystik,” 163–95).

69. For a survey and review of Daniélou’s reception, see Pottier, “Le Grégoire de Nysse de Jean Daniélou,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 128 (2006): 258–73.

70. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 310.

71. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, *passim*.

72. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 222–52.

73. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 291–307.

74. Karl Rahner, “Le début d’une doctrine des cinq sens spirituels chez Origène,” *RAM* 13 (1932): 113–45.

75. Mühlenberg, *Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa: Gregors Kritik am Gottesbegriff der klassischen Metaphysik*.

76. Heine, *Perfection in the Virtuous Life: A Study in the Relationship between Edification and Polemical Theology in Gregory of Nyssa’s De Vita Moysis*.

77. Mühlenberg, *Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa*, 22–25 and 147–51.

78. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 20, 21, 31, 35, 180–82, 244, 246.

79. Coakley, “Gregory of Nyssa,” in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Gavrilyuk and Coakley, 40.

80. A critical discussion of Cappadocian Christology can be found in Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, 367–77.

81. Stead, “Ontology and Terminology in Gregory of Nyssa,” in *Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie: Zweites Internationales Kolloquium über Gregory von Nyssa*, ed. Dörrie,

Altenburger, and Schramm, 107–19; Stead, “The Concept of the Mind and the Concept of God in the Christian Fathers,” in *The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology*, ed. Hebblethwaite and Sunderland, 39–54.

82. The term *nouvelle théologie* was originally a pejorative term used by the opponents of the movement, most notably by Garrigou-Lagrange, “La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?” *Angelicum* 23 (1946): 126–45. For an overview of the history of the term, see Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery*, 8–9. In using the term *nouvelle théologie* in this study, I am adapting to the widespread use of the term in secondary literature.

83. On the background and underlying motivations of the *ressourcement* movement, see Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*; Duffy, *The Graced Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought*; Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie—New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II*.

84. de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, trans. Arnandez.

85. Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition after Vatican II*, 94.

86. de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Études historiques*; cf. de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Sheed.

87. Coakley, “Gregory of Nyssa,” 39.

88. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 251.

89. Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*; Louth, *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*.

90. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 2–115.

91. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 199–208.

92. Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, 259–73.

93. For a critical discussion on these two strains of influence, see Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement*, 5–15. Rebecca Krawiec provides an excellent overview of contemporary scholarly interests in asceticism and discusses their underlying influences (Krawiec, “Asceticism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Harvey and Hunter, 764–85).

94. Hadot, “Reflections on the Idea of the ‘Cultivation of the Self,’” in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Davidson, trans. Chase, 206–13.

95. For an assessment of these Freudian theorizations of desire, see Coakley, “Pleasure Principles: Toward a Contemporary Theology of Desire,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 33.2 (2005): 20–33; Coakley, *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God*, 39–45.

96. Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” and “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, 1971–1997.”

97. Having become more cognizant of the similarities between the “holy man” and the average believer, Peter Brown later repented of his earlier preoccupation with extreme forms of asceticism (“The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, 1971–1997,” 373–74).

98. Elm, “*Virgins of God*”: *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, 350.

99. Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*; Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*.

100. Martin and Miller, eds., *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography*.

101. In this study, “feminism” refers to what is sometimes called “second-wave feminism,” which emerged in the West during the 1960s and 1970s, and fought for the

equality of the sexes in law. “Gender theory,” here, refers broadly to the movement known as “third-wave feminism,” which arose in the 1990s in the West. Despite their diverse commitments, gender theorists tend to agree that “woman” cannot be regarded as an essentialist category.

102. Børresen, “God’s Image, Man’s Image? Patristic Interpretation of Gen. 1:27 and 1 Cor. 11:7,” in *Image of God and Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, 188–207, especially 198–99. On the patriarchy of the Church Fathers, see Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 43, 47. See also Daly’s condemnation of “asceticism” in *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*, 45, 48, 58, 100.

103. Ruether, “Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church,” in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Tradition*, 150–83.

104. Daniélou and Musurillo, *From Glory to Glory*.

105. Burrus, *Begotten, Not Made: Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity*, 83.

106. Burrus, *Begotten, Not Made*, 84.

107. Burrus, *Begotten, Not Made*, 97.

108. Burrus, *Begotten, Not Made*, 135.

PRELUDE

1. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 111; see also Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 3.

2. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 130.

3. On the blurring of the boundaries between the secular and the spiritual, see Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*; and Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity*.

4. For an in-depth study on how marriage and celibacy were viewed in the late antique period, see Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*.

5. Rousseau, *The Early Christian Centuries*, 204.

6. Gaddis, “The Political Church: Religion and the State,” in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. Rousseau and Raithel, 513.

7. Council of Nicaea, canons 4, 6, 9, 15, 16 (NPNF II/14: 11, 15, 23, 32, 35); Council of Antioch, canons 13, 21, 22 (NPNF II/14, 115, 118, 119); Council of Sardica, canons 1, 2 (NPNF II/14, 415, 415–16.); Council of Chalcedon, canons 2, 5, 6, 10, 20 (NPNF II/14, 268, 271, 271, 275, 282); Gaddis, “The Political Church,” 514.

8. Lim, “Christianisation, Secularisation and the Transformation of Public Life,” in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. Rousseau and Raithel, 501.

9. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 165.

10. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 127. On the wealth of bishops, presbyters, and deacons, see Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint*, 107–8.

11. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 125.

12. Drake, “Church and Empire,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Harvey and Hunter, 450.

13. Barnes, “The Constantinian Reformation,” in *The Crake Lectures, 1984*, ed. Fancy, 39–57; Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 86.

14. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, 38.
15. O'Donnell, "Paganus: Evolution and Use," *Classical Folia* 31 (1977): 163–69.
16. Drake, "Church and Empire," 451–52.
17. Drake, "Church and Empire," 454.
18. In February 380, Gratian and Theodosius produced an edit that stated that all Christian subjects were to profess the faith of the bishops of Rome and Alexandria.
19. Rousseau, *The Early Christian Centuries*, 218–19.
20. Ferguson, "Creeds, Councils and Canons," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Harvey and Hunter, 437.
21. Ludlow, *The Early Church*, 119.
22. For a discussion of the authority of the Nicene Council and its Creed, consult Graumann, "The Conduct of Theology and the 'Fathers' of the Church," in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. Rousseau and Raithel, 545–46.
23. Elm, "Virgins of God": *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, 1–18, 385; O'Neill, "The Origins of Monasticism," in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, ed. Williams, 270–87; Rubenson, "Christian Asceticism and the Emergence of the Monastic Tradition," in *Asceticism*, ed. Wimbush and Valantasis, 49.
24. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius*, 16.
25. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius*, 16.
26. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 59.
27. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 67.
28. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 106.
29. Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity*, 3.
30. Hatlie, *The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople, ca. 350–850*, 32. While it is the dominant view that early monastics were made up predominantly of unlettered peasants, this conclusion is now very much up for grabs. Rubenson has argued, on the basis of the *Apophthegmata* and the *Epistulae Antonii*, that early monks were literate and educated (Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, 38–42, 91, 96–98). As evidenced from the *Epistulae Antonii* (and *contra the Vita Antonii*), philosophy was not lost on Anthony (Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, 59–88); he was "a man of letters" (Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, 185; emphasis is his).
31. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 80.
32. For a discussion of Egyptian and Palestinian monasticism in the fourth century, and its founders, see Chitty, *The Desert a City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire*, 1–45.
33. Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian*, 34.
34. Basil answers some of these pertinent questions from ascetics in *Ep. XXII* (NPNF II/8, 127–29).
35. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, 180–286, 294–95.
36. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, 180. LR, *Longer Rules*; ST, *Shorter Rules*; RBas., *Regula Basilii*.
37. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, 25–26.

38. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, 220–23.
39. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, 320.
40. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, 198–99.
41. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 7.
42. Goehring, “The Encroaching Desert: Literary Production and Ascetic Space in Early Christian Egypt,” *J ECS* 1.3 (1993): 281–96. David Brakke observes that although male ascetics lived at every point on the “continuum” from the city to the desert, the “general trend” in early monasticism was “toward the desert” (Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 10).
43. For scholarship on this shift to urban monasticism, see Dagron, “Les moines et le ville: Le monachisme à Constantinople jusqu’au Concile de Chalcédoine (451),” *Travaux et Mémoires* 4 (1970): 253–54; Garrigues, “Les caractéristiques du monachisme basilical (Ve–VIIIe siècle),” in *Moines dans l’assemblée des fidèles à l’époque des Pères (IVe–VIIIe siècle)*, ed. Garrigues and Legrez, 162–64; Ueding, “Die Kanones von Chalkedon in ihrer Bedeutung für Mönchtum und Klerus,” in *Das Konzil von Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Band II, *Entscheidung um Chalkedon*, ed. Grillmeier and Bacht, 571–72.
44. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, 289.
45. *Ep.* CXLIII:1:8, 15; CL:3; CLXXVI:1:20.
46. For details of the location, see Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 43:63.
47. Holman, *The Hungry Are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia*, 74–76; Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance, 4e–7e siècles*, 321–22; Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 139–43, 170–71.
48. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, 157–211.
49. Bacht, “Die Rolle des orientalischen Mönchtums in den kirchenpolitischen Auseinandersetzungen um Chalkedon (431–519),” in *Das Konzil von Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart II*, ed. Grillmeier and Bacht, 292–96; Charanis, “The Monk as an Element of Byzantine Society,” *DOP* 25 (1971): 63–64; Savramis, *Zur Soziologie des byzantinischen Mönchtums*, 53–55.
50. Hatlie, *The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople, ca. 350–850*, 34.
51. Most bishops of the fourth century came from Decurion social ranks or higher; see Gilliard, “Senatorial Bishops in the Fourth Century,” *HTR* 77 (1984): 153–75; Gilliard, “The Social Origins of Bishops in the Fourth Century,” Ph.D. dissertation, The University of California, Berkeley, 1966.
52. Fedwick, *The Church and the Charisma of Leadership in Basil of Caesarea*, 38 n. 4; Kopecek, “The Cappadocian Fathers and Civic Patriotism,” *Church History* 43 (1974): 293–303; Kopecek, “The Social Class of the Cappadocian Fathers,” *Church History* 42 (1973): 453–66.
53. Bacht, “Die Rolle des orientalischen Mönchtums in den kirchenpolitischen Auseinandersetzungen um Chalkedon (431–519),” 292–313; Holl, *Enthusiasmus und Bussgewalt beim griechischen Mönchtum: Eine Studie zu Symeon dem Neuen Theologen*, 138–70, 225–31; Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian*, 56–62.
54. This is by Brown’s own admission in Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, 1971–1997,” 364–65.
55. Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity.”

56. Delehayé, “Byzantine Monasticism,” in *Byzantium: An Introduction to East Roman Civilization*, ed. Baynes and Moss, 158–63; Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: The Church, 450–680 AD*, 81–92.

57. Rousseau draws attention to the fact that this was not always the case; in Palestine, monks and clergy enjoyed a close relationship (Rousseau, “Monasticism,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, volume XIV, *Empire and Successors, A.D. 425–600*, 3rd ed., ed. Cameron, Ward-Perkins, and Whitby, 752–54).

58. Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian*, 62–64.

59. There has been considerable debate about this issue among scholars. See Bacht, “Die Rolle des orientalischen Mönchtums in den kirchenpolitischen Auseinandersetzungen um Chalkedon (431–519),” 300–304; Sterk, *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church: The Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity*; Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*, 137–52; Ueding, “Die Kanones von Chalkedon in ihrer Bedeutung für Mönchtum und Klerus,” 591–92.

60. Hatlie, *The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople, ca. 350–850*, 38–41.

61. Greer, *Broken Lights and Mended Lives: Theology and Common Life in the Early Church*, 163.

62. Clarke, *St. Basil the Great: A Study in Monasticism*, 177 n. 2.

63. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, 203.

64. NPNF II/8, 237.

65. NPNF II/8, 256–57.

66. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 14.

67. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 140.

68. Daniélou and Musurillo, *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa’s Mystical Writings*, 3.

69. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 44–45. Silvas opposes the “traditional view” that Basil was the “founder” of monastic life in Pontus or at Annisa.

70. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 22–28.

71. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, 486 n. 1; Silvas, “The Date of Gangra and a Point of Comparison between Basil’s Small and Great Asketikon,” *SP* 41 (2003): 409–13.

72. Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4:24; NPNF II/2, 320.

73. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 38–43.

74. Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 24–25, 74–76.

75. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 154–55.

76. Holman, *The Hungry Are Dying*, 156, 158–59; Wessel, “The Reception of Greek Science in Gregory of Nyssa’s *De hominis opificio*,” *VC* 63 (2009), 24–46.

77. Janini Cuesta, *La Antropología y la Medicina Pastoral de San Gregorio de Nisa*.

78. Maraval, “Biography of Gregory of Nyssa,” in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Mateo-Seco and Maspero, rev. and expanded English ed., trans. Cherney, 104–5.

79. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 57.

80. Maraval, “Biography of Gregory of Nyssa,” 105; Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 8.

81. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 121.

82. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 146.

83. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 118–19.
84. By this time, the family home had been moved by Emmelia to Annisa on the river Iris after the death of Basil Senior, Gregory's father.
85. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 117–18.
86. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 2–9.
87. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Ep. XI*; Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 90–92.
88. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 12.
89. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 12–13.
90. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 12.
91. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 12.
92. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 12.
93. NPNF II/5, 343. There is an inconcinnity in Callahan's translation (*Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 7) between the English adjective "unmarried" and the Greek noun *agamia*.
94. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 73 (modified). However, there is a danger here of according too much significance to Gregory's use of *moi*. If he is employing what Smyth §1486 calls the "ethical dative," it may mean no more than "Why, pray tell, are you so curious. . .?"
95. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 35.
96. Daniélou, "Le mariage de Grégoire de Nysse et la chronologie de sa vie," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 2 (1956), 71–78.
97. Persuasive arguments for this can be found in Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 98–99; cf. Devos, "Grégoire de Nazianze, témoin du mariage de Grégoire de Nysse," in *II. Symposium Nazianzenum, Louvain-la-Neuve, 25–28 août 1981: Actes du Colloque International organisé avec le soutien du Fonds National Belge de la Recherche Scientifique et de la Görres-Gesellschaft zur Pflege der Wissenschaft*, ed. Mossay, 269–81.
98. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 154.
99. Maraval, "Biography of Gregory of Nyssa," 106.
100. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 145.
101. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 25.
102. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 15–25.
103. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 28.
104. Aubineau, *Grégoire de Nysse, Traité de la virginité: Introduction, texte critique, traduction, commentaire et index*, SC 119, 96.
105. Aubineau, *Grégoire de Nysse. Traité de la virginité*, 83–96.
106. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 20 n. 36.
107. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 17.
108. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, 79–80.
109. NPNF II/7, 241.

CHAPTER 1. MARRIAGE, CELIBACY, AND PEDERASTY

1. Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa: Ancient and (Post)modern*, 182–201.
2. Hart, "Reconciliation of Body and Soul: Gregory of Nyssa's Deeper Theology of Marriage," *JTS* 51 (1990): 458.

3. Hart, "Reconciliation of Body and Soul: Gregory of Nyssa's Deeper Theology of Marriage," 471–72.
4. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 55.
5. Hart, "Reconciliation of Body and Soul: Gregory of Nyssa's Deeper Theology of Marriage," 458.
6. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 56.
7. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 59.
8. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, 297–98.
9. Soskice, "Love and Attention," in *Philosophy, Religion and the Spiritual Life*, ed. McGhee, 63.
10. Broudehoux, *Mariage et famille chez Clément d'Alexandrie*, 174.
11. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 13.
12. Lutz, "Musonius Rufus: 'The Roman Socrates,'" *Yale Classical Studies* 10 (1947): 89; Musonius Rufus, *Reliquiae*, ed. Hense, 67–68.
13. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 18.
14. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 17–18.
15. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 14–15.
16. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 15–16.
17. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 18.
18. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 26.
19. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 39.
20. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 27.
21. Michel R. Barnes, "'The Burden of Marriage' and Other Notes on Gregory of Nyssa's *On Virginity*," *SP* 37 (2001): 13.
22. Michel R. Barnes, "'The Burden of Marriage' and Other Notes on Gregory of Nyssa's *On Virginity*," 17.
23. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 14.
24. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 6.
25. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 36.
26. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 35–36.
27. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 63.
28. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 21–22.
29. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 22.
30. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 22.
31. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 105.
32. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 48.
33. Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, 136.
34. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 33.
35. 1 Samuel 18:17–21, 25:43, 27:3, 30:18; 2 Samuel 2:2, 3:2–5, 5:13–15.
36. 2 Samuel 5:13, 1 Chronicles 3:9.
37. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 37.
38. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 137.
39. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 33.
40. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 48.
41. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 33–34 (modified).

42. Augustine argues that “fellowship in children” in marriage is “the one alone worthy fruit, not of the union of male and female, but of the sexual intercourse” (*De bono coniugali* 1; NPNF I/3, 399).

43. Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement*, 2; Coleman, *Christian Attitudes to Marriage: From Ancient Times to the Third Millennium*, 131, 134–35; Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World*, 105.

44. Noonan, *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists*, 46–49, 76–81.

45. *Paedagogus* II:10:91:2; GCS 12:212. See Noonan, *Contraception*, 93.

46. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 23.

47. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 24.

48. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 24.

49. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 36.

50. Aubineau, *Grégoire de Nyssse, Traité de la virginité*, 295.

51. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 13.

52. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 31.

53. Callahan has “living with someone” (*Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 13).

54. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 33.

55. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 41.

56. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 31.

57. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 51.

58. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 70–71.

59. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 71.

60. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 71.

61. Aubineau convincingly makes the case that the intended readership of the treatise is primarily though not exclusively male (Aubineau, *Grégoire de Nyssse, Traité de la virginité*, 145–46).

62. Karras, “A Re-evaluation of Marriage, Celibacy, and Irony in Gregory of Nyssa’s *On Virginité*,” *J ECS* 13.1 (2005): 120.

63. All citations are taken from Karras, “A Re-evaluation of Marriage, Celibacy, and Irony in Gregory of Nyssa’s *On Virginité*,” 116–17.

64. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 34.

65. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 34.

66. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 35.

67. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 52.

68. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 68.

69. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 70.

70. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 33.

71. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 35.

72. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 34.

73. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 34.

74. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 34.

75. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 35.

76. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, 307–8.

77. Burrus, *Begotten, Not Made*, 83.

78. “Androgyny” was espoused by second-wave feminism in its early stages of development but later critiqued, at least from the 1970s. In 1987, Luce Irigaray discouraged her readers from embracing a world that purports to be neuter but is, in fact, man’s alone (Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill).

79. Burrus, *Begotten, Not Made*, 97.

80. Burrus, *Begotten, Not Made*, 210, n. 21.

81. Burrus, *Begotten, Not Made*, 93.

82. It must not be presumed, therefore, that only Jewish and Christian authors regarded male sexual passivity with contempt. For this reason, Meredith is not quite right to claim that one of the differences between Gregory (Meredith appeals not to the *De virginitate* specifically but to the *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*) and the *Symposium* is that (for the former) “the object of search becomes a lover himself . . . and not merely the pursued” (“A Comparison between the *Vita Sanctae Macrinae* of Gregory of Nyssa, the *Vita Plotini* of Porphyry and the *De vita Pythagorica* of Iamblichus,” in *The Biographical Works of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Spira, 190). The tendency to underestimate the degree of reciprocity in Plato’s account of philosophic pederasty must be avoided.

83. Halperin, “Plato and Erotic Reciprocity.”

84. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 16, 52, 103.

85. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 105.

86. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 103–9, 145–48.

87. Morrison, “Four Notes on Plato’s Symposium”; Pender, “Spiritual Pregnancy in Plato’s Symposium.”

88. There is a fleeting mention of “female” pregnancy in 206c—“All [human beings] are pregnant, Socrates, both in body and in soul: on reaching a certain age our nature yearns to beget”—but this is repressed in the ensuing dialogue. For a discussion of this passage, see Pender, “Spiritual Pregnancy in Plato’s Symposium,” 73–74. See also Luce Irigaray, who argues that earlier passages in Diotima’s speech give a positive evaluation to the generative powers of motherhood; this theme, however, “miscarries” later in the speech (“Sorcerer Love: A Rereading of Plato, *Symposium*, ‘Diotima’s Speech,’” in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Burke and Gill, 27).

89. Morrison, “Four Notes on Plato’s Symposium,” 52–55.

90. Pender, “Spiritual Pregnancy in Plato’s Symposium,” 74.

91. Pender, “Spiritual Pregnancy in Plato’s Symposium,” 79.

92. Pender, “Spiritual Pregnancy in Plato’s Symposium,” 82.

93. Stokes, *Plato’s Socratic Conversations: Drama and Dialectic in Three Dialogues*, 178, 471 n. 98.

94. See also *Theaetetus* 150b and 186a on having intercourse with reality.

95. Pender argues that the Form of Beauty must perform the mother’s role in nurturing and bringing to birth the male seed. But references to this “female” type of pregnancy are deliberately suppressed at 209c. See Pender, “Spiritual Pregnancy in Plato’s Symposium,” 84.

96. Pender, “Spiritual Pregnancy in Plato’s Symposium,” 84.

97. Council of Elibira (ca. 309; canon 71). For the condemnation of “homosexual” acts, see *Theodosian Code* 9:vii:3 (ca. 342). For various interpretations of the *Theodosian Code*, see Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality*, 228–30.

98. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 219.

99. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 219.
100. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 219.
101. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 219.
102. What Paul is specifically referring to here is still a matter of debate.
103. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 218–19.
104. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 29.
105. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 31.
106. Literally, “estranging,” “banishing from.”
107. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 69.
108. “Nature” as used in this context probably refers to the brutish impulses of the soul, which are overcome by the disciplines of the ascetic life. In the *De hominis opificio*, the term *physis* has two possible meanings depending on context, referring either to the *imago Dei* or (as here) to brutish impulses (XVI:8–9, PG 44 181:16–47; NPNF II/5, 405).
109. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 36.
110. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 37.
111. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 39.
112. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 40.
113. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, 226.
114. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 49.
115. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 49.
116. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 38–39.
117. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 70–73.
118. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 72.
119. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 64.
120. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 64.
121. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 64. Gregory modifies 1 Corinthians 9:22 so that “Christ,” not Paul, is the subject.
122. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 48.
123. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 62.
124. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 11.
125. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 50.
126. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 48.
127. Origen sets the precedent for thinking that Christians are capable of being mothers of Christ; see Aubineau, *Grégoire de Nyse, Traité de la virginité*, 131.
128. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 61.
129. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 10.

CHAPTER 2. THE INTEGRATION OF THE VIRTUES

1. Brown, *The Body and Society*, 298; Hart, “Reconciliation of Body and Soul: Gregory of Nyssa’s Deeper Theology of Marriage,” 455; Soskice, “Love and Attention,” 62.
2. Holman, *The Hungry are Dying*, 138.

3. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 17. Callahan has “desires” instead of “longings”.
4. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 39.
5. Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine’s Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity*, 194.
6. NPNF I/2, 275.
7. Miles, “From Rape to Resurrection,” in *Augustine’s City of God: A Critical Guide*, ed. Wetzel, 83.
8. NPNF I/1, 120.
9. NPNF I/2, 276.
10. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, 212–20.
11. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, 207.
12. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 90–93.
13. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 90–96, 157, 184–85; Brakke, “The Problem of Nocturnal Emissions in Early Christian Syria, Egypt, and Gaul.”
14. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 90–91.
15. *De bono coniugali* 23; NPNF I/3, 409.
16. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 93–95.
17. John M. Cooper, *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory*, 76–117.
18. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 52.
19. Radde-Gallwitz, “Gregory of Nyssa on the Reciprocity of the Virtues,” *JTS* 58.2 (2007): 538.
20. Irwin, *Plato’s Ethics*, 41–44, 80–81, 84–85; Penner, “The Unity of Virtue,” in *Plato 2: Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul*, ed. Fine, 560–86.
21. John M. Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*, 76–117.
22. Radde-Gallwitz, “Gregory of Nyssa on the Reciprocity of the Virtues,” 540–43.
23. Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa*, 55.
24. Radde-Gallwitz, “Gregory of Nyssa on the Reciprocity of the Virtues,” 542.
25. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 52.
26. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 52.
27. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 45.
28. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 71.
29. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 51.
30. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 51.
31. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 51.
32. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 53.
33. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 53.
34. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 138.
35. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 52.
36. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 65.
37. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 54.
38. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 7.
39. Louth believes that “envy” (*phthonos*) is the “chief sin” in Gregory’s thought (Louth, “Envy as the Chief Sin in Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa”). Envy is certainly called “the passion which causes evil, the father of death, the first entrance of sin . . . the basis of diso-

bedience, the beginning of shame” (*De vita Moysis* II:256; Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 120). But “pride” (*hyperēphania*) seems at other times to be a strong contender for the chief sin (*De virginitate* IV:2:11–15; Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 21–22). For our present purposes, it is enough simply to note the prominence of gluttony in Gregory’s moral discourse, even if he is at times inconsistent in ordering the vices according to severity.

40. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 78.

41. While “the pleasure of taste” is the “mother” of all sin, “the sense of touch,” as Gregory reveals in the *De oratione dominica*, is “the last of the senses by which sin can be committed” because “all things that pleasure-lovers practise on the body are diseases of the perception of touch” (305:24–30; Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 79).

42. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 78.

43. Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa’s Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, 93.

44. Based on Gregory’s use of *pleonexia*, Hart argues that Gregory “connects all vices, even vainglory,” to “taking pleasure through the body” (Hart, “Reconciliation of Body and Soul: Gregory of Nyssa’s Deeper Theology of Marriage,” 460–61), so that “as long as the good is in reference to oneself, localized as it were by the body, it is locked into competition with others” (Hart, “Reconciliation of Body and Soul: Gregory of Nyssa’s Deeper Theology of Marriage,” 461). Hart fails to mention that gluttony is Gregory’s preferred exemplar of the kind of sin that “takes pleasure through the body.”

45. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 65.

46. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 78.

47. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 78.

48. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 47.

49. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 35.

50. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 25.

51. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 25.

52. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 123.

53. Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa’s Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, 93.

54. The adjective, *andrapodōdēs*, means “slavish,” “abject,” “servile.”

55. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 39.

56. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 65.

57. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 65. Callahan translates *pathēmata* as “sins” instead of “passions.”

58. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 24.

59. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, 62–63.

60. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, 77.

61. Basil of Ancyra claims that gluttony leads aetiologically to sexual arousal. What is more, he lists specific foods that undermine the endeavors of the ascetic life, such as seeds, legumes, and certain vegetables. For more in-depth discussion on Basil of Ancyra’s views on gluttony and sexual excess, see Shaw, “Creation, Virginité and Diet in Fourth-Century Christianity: Basil of Ancyra’s On the True Purity of Virginité.”

62. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 65.

63. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 65.

64. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 65.

65. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 77–78.
66. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 118.
67. Mira, "Philo of Alexandria."
68. For more discussion on this, see Baer, *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female, Arbeit zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums III*, 37–38.
69. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 65.
70. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 66.
71. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 66.
72. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 66–67.
73. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 65–66.
74. Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, 202–3.
75. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, 220.
76. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, 74.
77. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 34.
78. Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, 93.
79. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 24.
80. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 68–69.
81. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 70.
82. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 70.
83. Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nyse," *Revue de Sciences Religieuses* 29 (1955): 354.
84. The link between ascetic practice and ministering to the poor may seem odd to modern sensibilities. Although Boersma does not provide an analysis of fasting and the perils of gluttony, he rightly notes the disjunction between "the foundations that usually undergird social justice within modernity" and Gregory's "anagogical aim of deepening one's participation in the life of God" (Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*, 248). However, I would add a further disjunction—Gregory's espousal of the reciprocity of the virtues (seen through the lens of spiritual fidelity to Christ) means that philanthropy without dietary self-restraint creates an inner contradiction in the ascetic life. This contrasts with the compartmentalization of contemporary ethical discourse, wherein social ethics seems to have little relationship to personal ethics.
85. NPNF II/14, 92.

CHAPTER 3. GREGORY'S EMERGING THEORY OF DESIRE

1. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 64.
2. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 28.
3. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 39.
4. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 42–43.
5. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 65.
6. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 121.
7. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 49.
8. Plato, *Republica* 558d–559d; cf. 554a, 571b, *Phaedo* 64d–e; *Philebus* 62e; Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea* 1147b29; Cicero, *De Finibus* I:13:45, *Tusculanae Quaestiones* V:33:93; Porphyry, *De abstinentia* I:49.

9. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, 207, 214, 220–23.
10. Gregory's language is never as technical or systematized as we would perhaps like it to be; here, in the *De mortuis*, it appears that *orexis* and *epithymia* are basically synonymous. Wilken claims that Gregory "remains somewhat uneasy with the term [*epithymia*]" and for this reason proposes "a distinction between desire and love" ("Maximus the Confessor on the Affections in Historical Perspective," in *Asceticism*, ed. Wimbush and Valantasis, 415). However, our discussions so far appear to challenge this argument. After all, Gregory speaks regularly of the desire (*epithymia*) for "heavenly things" (*De virginitate* II:3:6–7), for "divine things" (*De virginitate* VII:3:4–5; cf. VIII:1:4), for "the incorporeal goods" (*De virginitate* VIII:1:33–34), for "beauty" (*De virginitate* XI:3:12–13), for "the higher gifts" (*De oratione dominica* 224:9–10), and for "what is holy" (*In inscriptiones* I:11). He also speaks of "good desire" (*agathē epithymia*) for virtue (*De virginitate* IV:1:36; cf. IV:1:25–27) and that "great and lofty desire" (*megalē te kai hypsēlē epithymia*) for God (*De virginitate* XXIII:2:42–43).
11. Ludlow claims that "free choice . . . is given more prominence [in the *De anima*] as the rational faculty which determines whether the inclinations are used rightly or wrongly" (Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner*, 59). However, it seems that, on the contrary, the role played by *proairesis* in the moral life is already discussed and given prominence in the early period, as shown here.
12. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 45.
13. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 103.
14. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 45.
15. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 30–31.
16. It would appear that *dianoia* and *nous* are used interchangeably here.
17. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 42.
18. Aubineau, *Grégoire de Nysse, Traité de la virginité*, 168.
19. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 57.
20. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 152.
21. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 61.
22. Aubineau, *Grégoire de Nysse, Traité de la virginité*, 104.
23. But the fact is that Gregory does summon us to *apatheia* (*De virginitate* XVII:2:21; Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 55). This may be a reflection of Gregory's terminological inconsistency, for he does not, at this stage in his thinking, explicitly distinguish between morally neutral "impulses" (which can never be extirpated) and morally disordered "passions."
24. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 102–3.
25. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism*, 173–75; Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*, 398–401; Rist, *Stoic Philosophy*, 25–26, 31–35.
26. Aubineau, *Grégoire de Nysse, Traité de la virginité*, 573–74.
27. *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 67. Callahan has "maintenance".
28. *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 67. Callahan has "equality".
29. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 66.
30. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 68.
31. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 33, 33–34.
32. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 64.

33. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 126.
34. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 25.
35. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 29.
36. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 127.
37. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 127.
38. There is also a spiritual sort of *hēdonē* that is “divine” and “blessed” (*De virginitate* V:1:16–17), “the most beautiful” and “the purest” (*De virginitate* IX:2:22–23) of all pleasure; it is superior to what are “commonly called pleasures” (*De virginitate* V:1:18–19). Gregory is distancing himself from authors such as Philo, for whom pleasure is intractably evil. (See particularly *Legum Allegoriae* III:68, 107, 182.) Note that for Socrates, the good life consists of pleasure, but only true and unalloyed pleasure is counted as meritorious (*Philebus* 60, 63b–64a).
39. Gregory speaks only once of “the pleasures of the flesh” (*De virginitate* V:1:7) but more frequently of bodily pleasures (*sōmatikai hēdonai*: *De virginitate* XXI:n:2, XXIII:6:16) and the pleasures of the body (*ta hēdea tou sōmatos*: *De virginitate* IV:5:2; cf. *De beatitudinibus* PG 44, 1244:30–31; *In inscriptions* I:14, II:190).
40. Consult Harl, “Recherches sur l'origénisme d'Origène: La ‘satiété’ (*kóros*) de la contemplation comme motif de la chute des âmes,” *SP* 8 (1966): 404–5 n. 9.
41. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 118.
42. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 128.
43. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 127.
44. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 127.
45. Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, 93–94.
46. For more on the unreality of the lower pleasures, see *Phaedo* 66c–67b; *Philebus* 36a–44d.
47. Cf. 51b, 66c, 31b–32b, 62e.
48. Rather inexplicably, McCambley does not include “order and power” in his translation, as I have here.
49. Our observations also counter the view that “The *De mortuis* argues for the abandonment of the earthly form; the *De anima*, and, of course, the *De hominis* also, support its restoration” (Dennis, “Gregory on the Resurrection of the Body,” in *The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa: Translation and Commentary*, ed. Spira and Klock, 71). Whilst Gregory's views are refined and modulated in the middle period, as I shall soon show, they do not undergo the kind of radical shift that Dennis seems to imagine. See also Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*, 134 n. 95. Boersma points out that it is not corporeality in itself that is problematic in the *De mortuis* but its “heavy” constitution *qua* the “tunics of hide.”
50. Ludlow, “Gregory of Nyssa and the Body: Do Recent Readings Ignore a Development in His Thought?”
51. On Gregory's views on mutability as a means of redemption, see Holman, *The Hungry Are Dying*, 164–66. Boersma has written in depth on Gregory's construal of *diastēma* (“extension”) as—in Boersma's view—an essential feature of creaturely existence before the *eschaton*, which does not characterize human destiny in the life hereafter. See Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*, 19–23, 25–27, 30–34, 37–38, 40–42, 44–49, 51–54. However, the continuation of *diastēma* (as transformed *diastēma*) at the *eschaton* has been proposed by other commentators (Harmon, “Motion [κίνησις] and Anthropology in the Writings of Gregory of Nyssa,” Ph.D. dissertation, The Catholic University of America,

2016; Plass, “Transcendent Time and Eternity in Gregory of Nyssa”). Boersma believes that there has been an exaggerated focus on Gregory’s “positive appreciation of embodiment” that loses sight of “the profoundly otherworldly cast of his overall theology” (9). Whilst he acknowledges that the “diastemic nature of this-worldly existence is . . . able to contribute to human growth in virtue” (22), he says very little about the significance, for Gregory, of different moments of transition in bodily maturation (such as adolescence and old age), which present significant opportunities (and challenges) for transformation in the life of virtue. Boersma’s account of spiritual sensation (93–100) also omits any reference to Sarah Coakley’s work on spiritual sensation, which has persuasively highlighted a shift between Gregory’s early work and the *De anima*. In the case of the latter, Gregory adumbrates an “epistemological continuum” between “ordinary sensation and perception” and “spiritual sensation” (Coakley, “Gregory of Nyssa,” 45).

52. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 103.
53. For a discussion of male and female characteristics in the work of Philo, see Baer, *Philo’s Use of the Categories Male and Female*.
54. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 86.
55. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 39.
56. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 32.
57. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 125 Graef translates *andrea* as “fortitude.”
58. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 57.
59. Lutz, “Musonius Rufus: ‘The Roman Socrates,’” 40, 42–49.
60. For further discussion on Plutarch’s “manly women,” see Jeremy McInerney, “Plutarch’s Manly Women,”
61. Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*, 126 n. 41, 260 n. 132.
62. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 34.
63. Hart, “Reconciliation of Body and Soul: Gregory of Nyssa’s Deeper Theology of Marriage,” 474.
64. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 29–30.
65. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 49.
66. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 34.

CHAPTER 4. A WORLDLY LIFE OF DESIRE: MARRIAGE, CHILDREN, MONEY, AND SEX

1. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 14–15.
2. NPNF II/5, 488.
3. Hall, “On the Three-day Period of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ,” in *The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa: Translation and Commentary*, ed. Spira and Klock, 32.
4. NPNF II/5, 488.
5. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 411.
6. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 49.
7. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 116.
8. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 14

9. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 28.
10. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 172.
11. Hall and Moriarty, "Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes," in *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, ed. Hall, 110.
12. Hall and Moriarty, "Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes," 108–9.
13. I have modified McCambley's translation to reflect the literal sense of *kata sarka*.
14. Hall and Moriarty, "Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes," 38–39.
15. NPNF II/5, 379.
16. NPNF II/5, 379.
17. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 63.
18. Leemans, "First Homily on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (Ia and Ib)," in *Let Us Die That They May Live: Greek Homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria (c. AD 350–AD 450)*, ed. Leemans et al., 105.
19. Leemans, "First Homily on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (Ia and Ib)," 106.
20. Leemans, "First Homily on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (Ia and Ib)," 106.
21. NPNF II/5, 380.
22. Hall, "Discourse on the Holy Pascha," in *The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa: Translation and Commentary*, ed. Spira and Klock, 15.
23. For an in-depth discussion of Aristotle's reproductive hylomorphism, see Henry, "Understanding Aristotle's Reproductive Hylomorphism."
24. For Galen's criticism of Aristotle's conception theory, see Preus, "Galen's Criticism of Aristotle's Conception Theory."
25. NPNF II/5, 497.
26. NPNF II/14, 36.
27. Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse," 347.
28. Way, "Homily Twelve: 'A Psalm of David against Usurers,'" *The Fathers of the Church* 46, 187.
29. Hall and Moriarty, "Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes," 79.
30. Hall and Moriarty, "Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes," 79–80.
31. Sinclair, *Aristotle: The Politics*, 46.
32. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 57.
33. Hall and Moriarty, "Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes," 104.
34. NPNF II/5, 292. References to the *Contra Eunomium* are by book, section, and line number. This is not to be confused with the page numbers and lines in *GNO* to which some scholars refer.
35. NPNF II/5, 502.
36. Hall, "The Holy and Saving Pascha," in *The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa: Translation and Commentary*, ed. Spira and Klock, 52.
37. Hall, "On the Three-day Period of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ," 34.
38. Hall and Moriarty, "Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes," 68.
39. Ramelli, "Methodius."
40. Musurillo, *St. Methodius, The Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity*, 86.
41. Musurillo, *St. Methodius, The Symposium*, 86.
42. Hall and Moriarty, "Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes," 67–68. Hall and Moriarty translate *hēdonōn chorēgia* as "the means of self-indulgence."

43. The comparative *asthenesteros* is used.
44. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 119.
45. Interestingly, the word “frailty” or “weakness” (*astheneia*) is also applied to human nature in a generic sense (*De vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi*, PG 46 945:45–46).
46. Hall and Moriarty, “Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes,” 57.
47. Hall and Moriarty, “Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes,” 137.
48. NPNF II/5, 48.
49. The verb *thryptein* can be translated as “to enfeeble” or “to weaken,” especially by luxury and debauchery.
50. I have altered McCambley’s translation, which has “fragile female nature.”
51. NPNF II/5, 207.
52. The noun *andrapodon* conveys the meaning of “captive” or “slave.”
53. The adjective *antirrhopos* is used.
54. NPNF II/14, 99.
55. NPNF II/14, 97.
56. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 81.
57. Hall and Moriarty, “Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes,” 75.
58. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 94–95.
59. Hall and Moriarty, “Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes,” 73–74.
60. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 17.
61. Hall and Moriarty, “Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes,” 81. Hall and Moriarty do not capture *dia tou kosmou* in their translation; for this reason, I have modified their translation to ensure literal fidelity to the text.
62. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 118.
63. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 71.
64. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 146.
65. Hall, “On the Three-day Period of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ,” 37–38.
66. NPNF II/5, 268.

CHAPTER 5. THE DEATH OF SIBLINGS

1. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 39.
2. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 154–55.
3. NPNF II/5, 387.
4. Daniélou, “La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse,” *SP* 7 (1966): 162; cf. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 40.
5. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 177.
6. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 177.
7. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 27.
8. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 27.
9. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 110.
10. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 176.
11. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 122.
12. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 27.
13. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 176.

14. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 178.
15. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 177.
16. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 133.
17. Burrus, *Begotten, Not Made*, 116–22; Clark, “Holy Women, Holy Words”; Clark, “The Lady Vanishes,” 25–30.
18. Halperin, “Why Is Diotima a Woman?” in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love*.
19. Virginia Burrus, “Is Macrina a Woman?” *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 258.
20. Burrus, “Is Macrina a Woman?” 261.
21. Boersma is therefore correct in highlighting Gregory’s reflection on “anagogical entry into an angelic (and thus genderless) or virginal life” and noting that Burrus and Clark’s concerns are “horizontal and this-worldly whereas Gregory’s are vertical and other-worldly” (Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*, 111). However, to use the word “genderless” is, I think, potentially distorting, because Gregory never does away with the language of what we would now call “gender.” Indeed, it is the eschatological and ascetical transcendence of worldly constraints (associated with the fallen characteristics of male and female) that allows him, especially in the *In Cant*, to use nuptial imagery in various configurations to describe the soul’s erotic relationship with Christ.
22. Georgia Frank, “Macrina’s Scar: Homeric Allusion and Heroic Identity in Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of Macrina*,” *J ECS* 8.4 (2000): 522–23.
23. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 115–16.
24. For a discussion of Christian attitudes of contempt for digamy, see Percival, “Excursus on Second Marriages, Called Digamy.”
25. Momigliano, *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, 111.
26. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 133.
27. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 72.
28. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 113.
29. It is worth noting Socrates’ critique of passionate excess in the Homeric myths of traditional pedagogy (*Respublica* 377d, 377e, 378b, 379d–e, 386b–387b).
30. Cobb, *Dying to be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts*, 62–63. For Stoic reactions to the weeping of Odysseus, see Georgia Frank, “Macrina’s Scar,” 527–28.
31. Dillon, “*Metriopatheia* and *Apatheia*: Some Reflections on a Controversy in Later Greek Ethics.”
32. Krueger, “Writing and the Liturgy of Memory in Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of Macrina*,” *J ECS* 8.4 (2000): 488–89.
33. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 137.
34. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 144.
35. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 57.
36. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 108.
37. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 110.
38. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 114.
39. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 114.

40. NPNF II/5, 518.
41. NPNF II/5, 513.
42. NPNF II/5, 514.
43. NPNF II/5, 514.
44. Translation is mine. See also NPNF II/5, 516.
45. Hall, “The Holy and Saving Pascha,” 52.
46. NPNF II/5, 516.
47. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 128.
48. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 172.
49. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 173.
50. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 119–20.
51. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 137.
52. Most scholarship in recent years has tended to focus on Macrina, almost completely ignoring the ascetic maturity of Naucratius and the impression he left on Gregory (Burrus, *Begotten, Not Made*, 116–22; Burrus, “Is Macrina a Woman?”; Burrus, “Macrina’s Tatoo”; Clark, “Holy Women, Holy Words”; Frank, “Macrina’s Scar”; Rousseau, “The Pious Household and the Virgin Chorus: Reflections on Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of Macrina*”; Smith, “A Just and Reasonable Grief”; Wilson-Kastner, “Macrina: Virgin and Teacher”).
53. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 119.
54. It also means “active,” “efficacious”; “activity,” “energy.”
55. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 72.
56. Hall and Moriarty, “Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes,” 102.
57. Hall and Moriarty, “Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes,” 137.
58. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 72.
59. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 73.
60. Hall and Moriarty, “Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes,” 131.
61. Hall and Moriarty, “Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes,” 131.
62. The word *hypallagē* can also be translated as “interchange” or “exchange.”
63. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 72.
64. Note, again, that *andres* (“manhood”/“men”) is linked to youthfulness.
65. Daniélou and Musurillo, *From Glory to Glory*, 14; cf. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 51–53, 167–68.
66. Ruether, “Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church,” in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Tradition*, 153–54.
67. Ruether, “Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church,” 154.
68. Børresen, “God’s Image, Man’s Image?” 198.
69. Børresen, “God’s Image, Man’s Image?” 199.
70. Behr, “The Rational Animal.”
71. Hart, “Gregory of Nyssa’s Ironic Praise of the Celibate Life”; Hart, “Reconciliation of Body and Soul: Gregory of Nyssa’s Deeper Theology of Marriage.”
72. NPNF II/5, 405.
73. NPNF II/5, 405; cf. Behr, “The Rational Animal,” 224.
74. Behr, “The Rational Animal,” 224.
75. Smith, “The Body of Paradise and the Body of the Resurrection,” 226.

76. Smith, "The Body of Paradise and the Body of the Resurrection," 227.
77. Karras, "Sex/Gender in Gregory of Nyssa's Eschatology: Irrelevant or Non-existent?" *SP* 41 (2006): 368; cf. Coakley, "The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation and God"; Harrison, "Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology."
78. Karras, "Sex/Gender in Gregory of Nyssa's Eschatology," 364.
79. Behr, "The Rational Animal," 222–23.
80. The doctrine of double creation is borrowed from Philo (*De opificio mundi* 134; *Legum Allegoriae* I:31) and Origen (*In Genesim homilia* I, PG 12:155c–157d). The only difference is that both Philo and Origen derive the doctrine from Genesis 1:27 and 2:7, whereas Gregory derives it from Gen 1:27a–b alone.
81. NPNF II/5, 404.
82. NPNF II/5, 404.
83. Corsini, "Plérôme humaine et plérôme cosmique chez Grégoire de Nysse," in *Écriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nysse: Actes du Colloque de Chèvotogne* (22–26 sept. 1969), ed. Harl, 123.
84. Mateo-Seco, "Creation," in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Mateo-Seco and Maspero, rev. and expanded English ed., trans. Cherney, 188.
85. NPNF II/5, 406.
86. It is important to note that this is both quantitative and qualitative; see Zachhuber, "Physis," in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Mateo-Seco and Maspero, rev. and expanded English ed., trans. Cherney, 628.
87. Hübner, *Die Einheit des Leibes Christi bei Gregor von Nyssa: Untersuchungen zum Ursprung der "physischen" Erlösungslehre*, *Philosophia Patrum: Interpretations of Patristic Texts* 2, 83; Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa*, 33.
88. NPNF II/5, 406.
89. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 44.
90. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 26.
91. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 113.
92. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 26; Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 45–46.
93. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 42–43.
94. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 43.
95. NPNF II/5, 411.
96. NPNF II/5, 406.
97. NPNF II/5, 406.
98. NPNF II/5, 411–12.
99. NPNF II/5, 407.
100. NPNF II/5, 405.
101. NPNF II/5, 406.
102. NPNF II/5, 407.
103. Karras, "Sex/Gender in Gregory of Nyssa's Eschatology," 365.
104. NPNF II/5, 405.
105. Origen, *De principiis* I:6:2; cf. Alexandre, "Protologie et eschatologie chez Gregoire de Nysse," in *Arché e Telos: L'antropologia di Origene e di Gregorio di Nissa: Analisi storico-religiosa*, *Studia Patristica Mediolanensia* 12, ed. Bianchi and Cruzel, 126–28.

106. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 240.
107. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 45–46.
108. Floeri, “Le sens de la ‘division des sexes’ chez Grégoire de Nysse,” *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 27 (1953): 108.
109. Critical texts include the *De Genesi ad litteram* (especially 3:22; Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 28:1:88–90) and the *De Trinitate* (especially 12:7:10–13; Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 50:364–67).
110. It is worth noting that in the *In XL Martyres Ib*, when Gregory contrasts “our first contestants, Adam and Eve” (who brought sin into the world) with Christian martyrs (who render death ineffective), no mention is made of the *imago Dei* (PG 46 764:47–765:1; cf. 765:11–13).
111. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes*, 66.
112. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 120.
113. Hall, “On the Three-day Period of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ,” 38.
114. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 239.
115. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 239.
116. These contradictions and tensions in the middle period are arguably implicit in the early period. A critical passage from the *De mortuis* (GNO XI/1 63:9–20) seems to suggest that the resurrection body will no longer be differentiated into male and female, which raises the question whether humans were also protologically devoid of sexual differentiation in the Garden of Eden. However, Gregory does not develop this line of inquiry and always assumes that humans were divided into male and female in Paradise. Boersma puts the problem well when he writes: “even the mere fact that gender has a place in Paradise is difficult to square with Gregory’s overall theology. [He] never quite explains how a brutish, gendered body was able to reside in Paradise. . . . Nor does he explain how his gendered paradisaic life fits with his insistence elsewhere that the truly virtuous life is an angelic overcoming of gender” (Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*, 109). My only concern is Boersma’s anachronistic use of the word “gender,” which sometimes seems to refer, as in this passage, to sexual differentiation.
117. However, we should recall from our discussion of the early period that Gregory believes that sexual intercourse exists solely for the purpose of procreation.
118. Boersma’s discussion of the relationship between protology and eschatology also inveighs against Behr’s move of treating the *De hominis opificio* in isolation. But Boersma’s presumptions about the homogeneity of Gregory’s thought prevent him from seeing two anthropological theories at play (Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*, 101). One of the underlying assumptions in this study is that Gregory’s views of the body and desire should be seen in the tradition of Origen: they are hypotheses developed within the parameters set by the rule of faith.
119. It is important to note that this view differs essentially from that of the late Augustine, who in the *De civitate Dei* writes: “Nuptias ergo Dominus futuras esse negavit in resurrectione, non feminas” (22:17, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 48:835–36). On Augustine’s evolving understanding of the resurrection, consult Miles, *Augustine on the Body*, American Academy of Religion, Dissertation Series 31, 99–125, especially 124–25.
120. Karras, “Sex/Gender in Gregory of Nyssa’s Eschatology,” 365.
121. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 238.
122. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 238.

123. On Gregory's familiarity with Stoic philosophy, see Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance*, Supplements to VC 46, 9–10.

124. Seneca in *Ep.* CXXI:11 invokes as examples of instinctual impulses the tortoise, who attempts to right itself having fallen on its back, and the child, who, trying to stand, keeps falling down and getting up again in order to achieve what nature demands.

125. Seneca claims that "passion" (in Latin, *adfectus*) emerges when one surrenders to one's impulses; see Seneca, *De Ira* II:3:4.

126. PG 46 61:28–33, Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 195; PG 46 68:3–6, Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 197. The transformability of these animal impulses is also at play in an earlier period of Gregory's thinking. Describing how the body is purified through death in the *De mortuis*, Gregory claims that "our innate impulses direct us to seek what is desirable; it is not quenched but transformed in order to participate in spiritual benefits" (GNO IX/1 61:16–18).

127. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 194. Indeed, Christopher Stead claims that Gregory follows the Middle Platonists, for whom a conceptual distinction existed between the *hor-mai* and the *pathē*, but terminologically it was "constantly overlooked" (Stead, "The Concept of the Mind and the Concept of God in the Christian Fathers," 44–45).

128. Macrina defines "desire" as "a seeking for what one lacks, or a yearning for the enjoyment of some pleasure, or a grief when something on which we have set our heart is not in our power, or a habituation toward some pleasure that it is not possible to enjoy" (PG 46 56:9–12; Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 192).

129. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 192.

130. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 192.

131. Stewart, "Evagrius Ponticus and the Eastern Monastic Tradition on the Intellect and the Passions," *Modern Theology* 27.2 (2011): 268.

132. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 197.

133. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 125.

134. NPNF II/5, 391.

135. NPNF II/5, 391.

136. NPNF II/5, 498.

137. Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 333.

138. NPNF II/5, 391.

139. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 233. Note, also, that Gregory says that *diakrisis* ("thorough judgment") adjudicates between the beautiful and the not beautiful (*De virginitate* XI:2:8; Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 39).

140. This is basically equivalent to the term *dianoia* that Gregory uses in the *De hominis opificio*.

141. The term *epoptikē* also denotes the soul's contemplative union with God, but it appears to fall out of use in the *De anima*.

142. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 193.

143. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, 216.

144. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 366.

145. *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* III:394: "It is a belief itself that contains the disorderly kinetic element."

146. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 367.
 147. Ludlow, *Universal Salvation*, 56–60.

CHAPTER 6. DOCTRINAL CONTROVERSIES:
 CHRISTOLOGICAL AND TRINITARIAN

1. For an overview of scholarship on Gregory's Christology, see Mateo-Seco, "Christology." On Gregory's Trinitarian theology, see Maspero, "Trinity."
2. An exception is the work of Sarah Coakley: "'Mingling' in Gregory of Nyssa's Christology: A Reconsideration," in *Who Is Jesus Christ for Us Today: Pathways to Contemporary Christology; Festschrift for Michael Welker*, ed. Schuele and Thomas, 73; Coakley, ed., *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa*. Even in the case of Coakley, however, the full ascetical implications of Gregory's doctrinal reflections as discussed in this chapter are never fully developed.
3. NPNF II/5, 190.
4. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 128.
5. NPNF II/5, 485.
6. NPNF II/5, 488.
7. NPNF II/5, 488.
8. NPNF II/5, 488. The plural, "movements," is used in the translation.
9. On the dissimilarities between Cyril and Gregory, see Coakley, "Does Kenosis Rest on a Mistake? Three Kenotic Models in Patristic Exegesis."
10. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 240.
11. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 144.
12. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 150.
13. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 163.
14. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 149–50.
15. NPNF II/5, 372.
16. NPNF II/5, 372.
17. NPNF II/5, 372.
18. NPNF II/5, 372.
19. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 159 n. 221.
20. Or "prime."
21. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 150.
22. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 204.
23. Hall, "Discourse on the Holy Pascha," 8.
24. NPNF II/5, 374.
25. NPNF II/5, 377.
26. Hall and Moriarty, "Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes," 58.
27. Hall and Moriarty, "Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes," 58.
28. Hall and Moriarty, "Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes," 56.
29. Hall and Moriarty, "Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes," 56.
30. Hall and Moriarty, "Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes," 54.
31. NPNF II/5, 67.

32. NPNF II/5, 78.
33. NPNF II/5, 55.
34. NPNF II/5, 109–10.
35. NPNF II/5, 152.
36. NPNF II/5, 114.
37. NPNF II/5, 144.
38. NPNF II/5, 171.
39. NPNF II/5, 292.
40. NPNF II/5, 155.
41. NPNF II/5, 153.
42. NPNF II/5, 152 (modified).
43. NPNF II/5, 154.
44. NPNF II/5, 159.
45. NPNF II/5, 159 (modified).
46. NPNF II/5, 165.
47. NPNF II/5, 160.
48. NPNF II/5, 159–60.
49. NPNF II/5, 160.
50. NPNF II/5, 288.
51. NPNF II/5, 288.

PART THREE. THE LATE PHASE (387–394)

1. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 487.
2. Daniélou and Musurillo, *From Glory to Glory*, 9.
3. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*, 139–40.
4. Coakley, *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa*, 6–7.
5. One manuscript designates the recipient as a monk. Heine proposes that the *De vita Moysis* was written to a priest or a man preparing for the priesthood (Heine, *Perfection in the Virtuous Life*, 22).
6. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 29.
7. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 30.
8. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 30–31.
9. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 113–14.
10. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 30–31.
11. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 95.
12. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 122.

CHAPTER 7. SPIRITUAL MATURATION: VIRGINITY
AND THE NARRATIVE OF PROGRESS

1. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 110.
2. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 111.
3. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 133.

4. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 134.
5. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 218–19.
6. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, xxi.
7. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 135.
8. Daniélou, “La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nyse,” 168.
9. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 279.
10. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique, passim* and—on the theme of perpetual progress—291–307; Laird, “Under Solomon’s Tutelage: The Education of Desire in the *Homilies on the Song of Songs*”; Louth, *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition*.
11. Laird, “The Fountain of His Lips: Desire and Divine Union in Gregory of Nyssa’s Homilies on the Song of Songs,” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 7.1 (2007): 50–52.
12. Origen also refers to bodily growth from childhood to adulthood and the types of food suited to each stage of growth (Hebrews 5:12; cf. 1 Peter 2:2) to underscore the theme of progress in the spiritual life (*Prologus* 1:4; SC 376:82; Lawson, *Origen: The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, ACW 26, 22).
13. NPNF II/5, 377.
14. For Origen, in the *Prologus* 3:1, 3–7 (SC 375:128, 130–32; Lawson, *Origen: The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, 39, 40–41) of his *Commentarium in Canticum canticorum*, the first stage of the Christian life is the moral life, whose virtues are inculcated by the Book of Proverbs. Second, by learning from the Book of Ecclesiastes, one reflects intellectually on the created order and soon realizes that all is “vanity.” Finally, through the Song of Songs, God instills into the soul the love of things divine and heavenly, this being the highest stage of spiritual ascent. Lawson refers to “enoptics” based on an older GCS edition of the text that has *enopticen* instead of *epopticen*. For a discussion of the correction of Baehrens’s text, see Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Clement of Alexandria and Other Early Christian Witnesses*, 19 n. 68; SC 376:755 n. 4; Kirchmeyer, “Origène, Commentaire sur le Cantique, prol. (GCS Origenes 8, Baehrens, p. 75, ligne 8).”
15. Origen notes: “among the Jews care is taken that no one who has not attained full maturity be allowed so much as to hold this book in his hands” (*Prologus* 1:7; Lawson, *Origen: The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, 23; SC 375:84).
16. For the origins and development of this tripartite division in Xenocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Ammonius, Aetius, and Diogenes Laertius, among others, see Fürst, “Origen: Exegesis and Philosophy in Early Christian Alexandria,” in *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity: The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad*, ed. Lössl and Watt, 26–28; cf. Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology*, 18–19.
17. In the *In inscriptiones Psalmorum*, Gregory envisages five stages of spiritual ascent, and in the *De Beatitudinibus*, there are eight. See Ludlow, “Theology and Allegory: Origen and Gregory of Nyssa on the Unity and Diversity of Scripture”; Rondeau, “Exégèse du psautier et anabase spirituelle chez Grégoire de Nyse,” in *Epektasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou*, ed. Fontaine and Kannengiesser (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), 518–19.
18. Louth, *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition*, 82.
19. Bouyer, *Histoire de la spiritualité chrétienne I, La spiritualité du Nouveau Testament et des Pères*, 428.
20. Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, 2nd ed., rev. and enlarged.
21. O’Meara, *Platonopolis*, 50–68.

22. Hall and Moriarty, “Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes,” 32–33.
23. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 19.
24. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 19.
25. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 25.
26. Verna E. F. Harrison, “A Gender Reversal in Gregory of Nyssa’s First Homily on the Song of Songs,” *SP* 27 (1993): 36.
27. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 23.
28. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 23.
29. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 29.
30. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 489.
31. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 489.
32. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 489.
33. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 489.
34. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 491.
35. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 491.
36. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 493.
37. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 27.
38. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 28–29.
39. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 29.
40. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 29.
41. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 31.
42. Because ascetical practice so profoundly shapes one’s interpretation of the Song of Songs, Origen refuses to give the text to those who are mired in “the vexations of flesh and blood” and have “not ceased to feel the passion of his bodily nature.” “Love’s language,” he says, must be received “in purity and with chaste ears.” People who interpret the Song of Songs carnally will exacerbate their lusts. They will be “turned away from the spirit to the flesh and will foster carnal desire in himself,” thinking that the Song itself is “egging” them to “fleshly lust” (*Prologus* I:6; Lawson, *Origen: The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, 22–23; SC 375:84).
43. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 3.
44. Coakley, “Gregory of Nyssa,” 45.
45. Anthony Meredith, “Homily I,” in *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes; An English Version with Supporting Studies*, ed. Hall, 146–47.
46. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 30–31.
47. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 32.
48. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 96.
49. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 71.
50. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 71–72.
51. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 71.
52. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 58.
53. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 397.
54. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 393, 395.
55. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 399.
56. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 301.
57. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 415.

58. Hall and Moriarty, “Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes,” 139.
59. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 53.
60. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 100.
61. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 99.
62. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 19.
63. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 131.
64. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*, 138–39.
65. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 82.
66. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 64.
67. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 131–32.
68. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 139.
69. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*, 88–92.
70. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*, 92–96.
71. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*, 97.
72. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 72.
73. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 136.
74. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 41. In connection with the idea that there is no place for passion in childhood as expressed parenthetically in this passage, it is important to note that Gregory shares Origen’s view that those in their childhood are not affected by sexual desire: “just as in childhood we are not affected by the passion of love, so also to those who are at the stage of infancy and childhood in their interior life . . . it is not given to grasp the meaning of these sayings” (*Prologus* 1:4; SC 376:83; Lawson, *Origen: The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, 22).
75. For this translation, I have used Daniélou and Musurillo, *From Glory to Glory*, 44. Neither Norris nor McCambley picks up the significance of the verb *epiteinein*, which means literally “to stretch over or upon,” hence “to increase in intensity” (McCambley, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 234; Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 403).
76. *Prologus* 2:16; SC 375:102; Lawson, *Origen: The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, 29; cf. Louth, *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition*, 67.
77. Louth, *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition*, 96.
78. Daniélou and Musurillo, *From Glory to Glory*, 45–46.
79. Louth, *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition*, 96.
80. It is noteworthy that in his mature works, Gregory now believes that there is a continuing role for desire (*epithymia*) at the *eschaton*, whereas the *De anima* prefers to use the language of *apolausis* (“enjoyment”) and eschews the ongoing relevance of *epithymia* in humanity’s restored state (Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 197–216). Even so, as noted in the early phase of Gregory’s literary career, Gregory often regards (ascetically transformed) *epithymia* as an integral part of the life of virtue, and so it cannot be said that there is a complete turnabout in Gregory’s thinking on *epithymia*.
81. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 107.
82. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 135.
83. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 135.
84. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 135.
85. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 135.

86. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 123.
87. For biographical details about Olympias, see Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, xx–xxiii.
88. This expression also appears in Plato's *Symposium* (207b–c). Here, it appears twice, once as *erōtikōs diatithemena* and once as *erōtikōs diatithesthai*. See Pouchet, "Une lettre spirituelle de Grégoire de Nysse identifiée: l'Epistula 124 du Corpus Basilien," *VC* 42 (1988): 33.
89. Pouchet, "Une lettre spirituelle de Grégoire de Nysse identifiée," 32.
90. Pouchet, "Une lettre spirituelle de Grégoire de Nysse identifiée."
91. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 260–62.
92. Silvas notes that Gregory's letters often conform to the same pattern: "introductory vivid image, transitional sentence (usually a question) on the meaning of the opening image, subsequent explanation and application to what Gregory really wishes to say to his correspondent" (Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 261).
93. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 263.
94. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 262.
95. Burrus, *Begotten, Not Made*, 132.
96. Burrus, *Begotten, Not Made*, 128.

CHAPTER 8. MALE AND FEMALE: DIACHRONIC EXCHANGES

1. Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa: Ancient and (Post)modern*.
2. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 32.
3. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 15.
4. Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*, 165.
5. My reflections here are reproduced in a condensed form in a chapter entitled "Spiritual Maturation and Gender in Gregory of Nyssa's 'Mystical Theology.'"
 6. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 32.
 7. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 32.
 8. "Free will" is an approximate translation. The word *proairesis*, used frequently by Gregory, can be defined as "the liberty that permits the human being to be master of himself and decide by himself." For further discussion on this term, see Dal Toso, "Proairesis," in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Mateo-Seco and Maspero, rev. and expanded English ed., trans. Cherney, 647–49.
 9. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 56.
 10. Malherbe and Ferguson have "male" instead of "manly." For purposes of clarification, I have chosen the latter, because I want to distinguish between *arrēn* (which refers to a physical differentiation, "male") and *andrōdēs* (which conveys specific moral and spiritual evocations).
 11. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 55.
 12. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 55.
 13. Malherbe and Ferguson have "feminine," but I wish to distinguish between *gynaikeios* (Gregory's more usual term for "womanish" moral disorder) and *malakos* (the comparative of which appears here).
 14. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 32, 55, 56, 65.
 15. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 65.

16. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 65.
17. Verna E. F. Harrison, "A Gender Reversal in Gregory of Nyssa's First Homily on the Song of Songs," 38.
18. Verna E. F. Harrison, "The Feminine Man in Late Antique Ascetic Piety," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 48 (1994), 49–71, particularly 53.
19. Jung, *Alchemical Studies*, trans. Hull; Jung, *Man and his Symbols*, ed. Jung and, after his death, von Franz; Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. Hull; Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious: A Study of the Transformations and Symbolisms of the Libido; A Contribution to the History of the Evolution of Thought*, trans. Hinkle.
20. Verna E. F. Harrison, "Gender, Generation and Virginity in Cappadocian Theology," *JTS* 47.1 (1996): 64.
21. Verna E. F. Harrison, "The Feminine Man in Late Antique Ascetic Piety," 49.
22. Verna E. F. Harrison, "The Feminine Man in Late Antique Ascetic Piety," 69 n. 2.
23. Hall and Moriarty, "Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes," 104.
24. Dal Toso translates it as "father of himself" (Dal Toso, "Proairesis," 648).
25. *De mortuis*, GNO IX/1 55:15–56:7.
26. *De mortuis*, GNO IX/1 54:1–15.
27. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 47. Miriam, Moses's sister, is said to have been "driven by a most femalelike [*gynaikōdestera*] jealousy against the honour given to Moses by God."
28. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 131. Gregory here is referring to the Israelite men of Numbers 25:1–6, who indulged in sexual immorality with the daughters of Moab and worshipped Baal: "For those who prevailed over the enemy's arms . . . were themselves wounded by feminine [*gynaikeios*] darts of pleasure. . . . They forgot their manly strength [*andreaia*] and dissipated their vigor in pleasure."
29. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 121.
30. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 47.
31. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 47.
32. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 32.
33. Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*, 164.
34. Burrus, *Begotten, Not Made*, 126–27.
35. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 110–11.
36. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 411.
37. NPNF II/5, 499, 505, 506.
38. The adjective "soft" (*malakos*) does admittedly appear on one occasion, but without any moral connotation. It is used in connection to Elijah's "soft garment of goat's skin" (*In Cant*, GNO VI 222:17; emphasis mine; Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 235).
39. Laird, "Under Solomon's Tutelage."
40. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 23.
41. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 25.
42. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 203.
43. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 209.
44. Verna E. F. Harrison, "Gender, Generation and Virginity in Cappadocian Theology," 65–66.

45. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 25.
46. Among other places, see *In Cant*, GNO VI 32:2–8.
47. Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*, 164.
48. Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*, 166.
49. Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*, 164.
50. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, xxi.
51. Laird, “Gregory of Nyssa and Deification: A Reconsideration.”
52. Laird, “Gregory of Nyssa and Deification”; Laird, “The Fountain of His Lips,” 138–40, 174, 188–95.
53. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 141.
54. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 141.
55. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 141.
56. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 133.
57. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 487.
58. Coakley, “‘Mingling’ in Gregory of Nyssa’s Christology.”
59. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 119–21.
60. Coakley, “‘Mingling’ in Gregory of Nyssa’s Christology,” 77. This is, admittedly, a big “if.” The language of “mingling,” as discussed in the introduction, was later condemned for its associations with the very Apollinarianism that Gregory sought to refute (73–75). Coakley argues that Gregory’s theory of “mingling” does not fit exactly into Aristotle’s “mingling of predominance,” in which the weaker element is changed into the stronger. According to Coakley’s reading, Gregory also summons Stoic types of “mixture,” as discussed by Stoebaeus, in which there is no loss of existence or identity by the lesser element (77).
61. NPNF II/5, 506.
62. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 171.
63. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 327.
64. Gregory enjoys using paradox and oxymoron, particularly in his late writings: “sober inebriation” (*In ascensionem Christi*, GNO IX/1 324:18; *In Cant*, GNO VI 156:18, 310:4, 362:12); “stationary movement” (*De vita Moysis* II:243); “living death” (*De vita Moysis* II:314). See Daniélou and Musurillo, *From Glory to Glory*, 34–46; Koch, “Das mystische Schauen beim heiligen Gregor von Nyssa,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 80 (1898): 405–6, 415–16; Lewy, *Sobria Ebrietas: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der antiken Mystik*, 31 n. 1, 41 n. 3; Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 177–78 n. 198.
65. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 225.
66. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 225.
67. NPNF II/5, 154.
68. NPNF II/5, 308.
69. NPNF II/5, 396.
70. NPNF II/5, 261.
71. NPNF II/5, 261–62.
72. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 219.
73. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*, 23, 133–42, 138; Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 3.
74. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 56.

CONCLUSION

1. Malherbe and Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, 67.
2. Callahan, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, 71.
3. Coakley, “Pleasure Principles: Toward a Contemporary Theology of Desire.”
4. I have borrowed this term from Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, 132.

APPENDIX

1. See Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 142–44, 189–90, 245–47.
2. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*, 132–33.
3. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 32.
4. Alexandre, “Le De mortuis de Grégoire de Nysse,” 35–43; cf. Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*, 134 n. 95.
5. Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 360–61.
6. Cavalcanti, “I due discorsi De pauperibus amandis di Gregorio di Nissa,” 170–80.
7. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 40.
8. Maraval, “Chronology of Works,” 157.
9. Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 347–49.
10. Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 350–51.
11. Cassin, “Liturgical Celebration and Theological Exegesis,” 151.
12. Mosshammer, “The Created and the Uncreated in Gregory of Nyssa *Contra Eunomium* I:105–113,” in *El “Contra Eunomium I” en la producción literaria de Gregorio de Nisa*, 362–65.
13. Mitchell, “The *Life* and ‘*Lives*’ of Gregory Thaumaturgus,” 115.
14. Maraval, “Chronology of Works,” 153.
15. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*, 81–82; Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*, 205.
16. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 44 n. 98. However, Silvas later notes in her discussion of *Ep.* XXIX (which she dates to 380/81) that the *Contra Eunomium* I and II deal with the first book of Eunomius’s *Apologia Apologiae* and that shortly after the composition of *Ep.* XXIX, “Gregory wrote his *Contra Eunomium* III dealing with the second part of Eunomius’s book”: Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 207 n. 440. These remarks produce an inconsistency in her argument. If books I and II of the *Contra Eunomium* are a response to the first book of the *Apologia Apologiae*, then he would have completed them before *Ep.* XXIX, since Gregory in that letter acknowledges the completion of his response to Eunomius’s first book and notes that he has not yet had a chance to address the second part of Eunomius’s book. But this contradicts Silvas’s dating of the *Contra Eunomium* II to 382.
17. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 49.
18. Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 356–67.
19. Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 357–58.
20. May, “Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregory von Nyssa,” 59.
21. Drobner, *Gregor von Nyssa: Die drei Tage zwischen Tod und Auferstehung unseres Herrn Jesus Christus*.
22. Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 361–62.

23. Cassin, “Liturgical Celebration and Theological Exegesis,” 151.
24. Maraval, “Chronology of Works,” 162.
25. Daniélou, “La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse,” 163.
26. Lietzmann, *Apollinaris von Laodicea und seine Schule*.
27. Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*, 206.
28. Leemans, “On the Date of Gregory of Nyssa’s First Homilies on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (Mart Ia and Ib).”
29. Daniélou, “La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse,” 167.
30. Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse,” 365–66.
31. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 52–53.
32. Drobner, *Gregor von Nyssa: Die drei Tage zwischen Tod und Auferstehung unseres Herrn Jesus Christus*, 168–70.
33. McCambley, *A Homily on the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 1.
34. May, “Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregory von Nyssa,” 56.
35. Daniélou, “La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse,” 168.
36. Daniélou, *Grégoire de Nysse: La vie de Moïse*, 15.
37. Heine, *Perfection in the Virtuous Life*, 15.
38. Conway-Jones, *Gregory of Nyssa’s Tabernacle Imagery in Its Jewish and Christian Contexts*, 26.

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PG 32 col. 684–96

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Vol. III/1, 19–33, ed. Fridericus Mueller*
PG 45 col. 176–85

Ad Petrum fratrem de differentia essentiae et hypostaseos (Basil's Ep. XXXVIII)
PG 32 col. 325–40*

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INDEX

- Aaron, brother of Moses, 142
 Abraham, 78, 85, 110, 142
 absence of passion/impassibility (*apatheia*), 15, 52, 64–65, 106, 128, 199n23
 abstinence: from meat, 7, 25, 60–61; from sexual activity, 8, 28, 41; from wine, 7, 60
 activity/passivity, 5, 107, 114–15, 125, 157, 194n82
 Adam, 59, 64, 79, 85, 96, 97, 98–100, 101, 102, 207n110
Ad Theophilum adversus Apollinaristas (Gregory of Nyssa), 126, 175
 adultery (*moicheia*), 24, 49, 56, 124
Aeterni Patris (papal encyclical), 15
 affection/passion (*pathēma*), 12, 57, 58, 63
 against nature (*para physin*), 46, 49, 81, 84
agapē (love), 12, 15, 134, 137, 147
 Agathon, 43
 Ahab, 85
akolasia (licentiousness), 57, 84
akolouthia (sequence), 57, 132
 Alcibiades, 47
Alcibiades (Plato), 126
 Alcmaeon of Crotona, 65
 Alexander (friend of Gregory), 27
 Ammianus Marcellinus, 28
 Ammoun, 23
anachōrēsis (withdrawal), 24
anankē chreia (necessary need), 63
 Anatolia, 25, 26, 152
 anchoritism (eremiticism), 22–23
andreia (fortitude), 68–69, 143, 201n57, 215n28
andreios (manly), 10, 46, 146
andrikōs (manly), 43, 68, 69
andrōdēs (manly), 10, 84, 85, 94, 139, 146, 214n10
 androgyny, 17, 45, 96, 157, 194n78
 anger (*orgē*), 63, 64
 Anglo-American scholarship, 1, 14–15, 16–17, 138
 Anthony of Egypt, 22–23, 188n30
 anthropological perspectives, 96–98
 Antidicomarianism, 74, 174
 Antioch, Council of, 174, 187n7
apatheia (absence of passion/impassibility), 15, 52, 64–65, 106, 128, 199n23
aphormai (drives), 104
aphrastos (ineffable), 150, 151
apokatastasis (restoration), 13, 68, 101
apolausis (enjoyment), 12, 57, 59, 67, 213n80
 Apollinarianism, 13, 74, 107, 108, 109, 135, 175, 216n60
Apologia (Plato), 129
Apologia Apologiae (Eunomius), 173, 217n16
Apologia in Hexaemeron (Gregory of Nyssa), 88, 99, 165, 172
 appetite (*orexis*), 12, 62, 63, 66, 84, 106, 199n10
 Arianism, 13, 19, 21, 173
 Aristophanes, 47
 Aristotle, 8, 25, 26, 63, 67, 80, 81, 115, 129, 202n23, 211n16, 216n60

- Arrow imagery, 147–48
- ascetical theology: overview, 1–3, 155; contemporary ethical discourse and, 155, 157–61; observations on, 155–57; term clarifications, 7–9
- ascetical transformation: erotic transformation and, 6; stages of maturation, 2
- asceticism: appropriation of all the virtues, 34, 44, 55–56; *coniunctio oppositorum*, 76, 96; extreme, 65, 186n97; Freudian/Foucauldian interpretations of, 1, 11, 15, 16, 137, 156; of Gregory's family, 25–28; late antique asceticism, 15; older ascetics, 50–51, 93–94; self-mastery and, 2, 9, 77, 94, 160, 172; Song of Songs and, 128–29, 212n42; suffering and, 40, 77; term clarifications, 7, 182n11, 183nn29,41
- ascetics: *adelphotēs*, 25; ascetic person (*askētēs*), 7; *Asketikon* (Basil of Caesarea) and, 23; intra-Trinitarian relationships and, 112–15; pedagogic relationships of, 50–51; in Pontus, 23, 26, 86–87, 90, 190n69; Syrian ascetics, 16
- asexuality, 96
- Asia Minor, 22
- askēsis* (exercise/training), 7; term clarifications, 182n11
- Asketikon* (Basil of Caesarea), 23, 25, 54, 63, 152
- Athanasius, 24, 54, 196n39
- Athenian society, 45–48
- Aubineau, Michel, 27–28, 35, 39, 64, 65, 193n61
- Augustine of Hippo, 16, 54, 80, 96, 102, 193n42, 207n119
- auxēsis* (growth): of ascetical theory, 3; of Christ, 3, 108, 112; diachronic maturation and, 74, 108, 109–12, 132–35, 135–36, 141, 145, 148; of moral life, 61, 67, 109–12, 120–21, 125–26, 132–35, 135–36, 137, 139, 141, 145, 149–50, 157, 160, 201n51; physical growth, 109–12, 132–35, 139–40, 157, 201n51, 211n12
- Balthasar, Hans Urs von, 13, 14
- baptism, 82
- Barnes, Michel René, 35–36, 37
- Basileiados/Basileias* (poorhouse), 23, 172
- Basil of Ancyra, 58, 197n61
- Basil of Caesarea (Gregory of Nyssa's brother), 1, 3, 4, 13, 23, 24, 25, 26, 54, 60, 63, 73, 78, 81, 87, 88, 105, 136, 152, 171, 172, 173, 174, 182n10, 190n69
- Basil Senior (Gregory of Nyssa's father), 90, 191n84
- Begotten, Not Made* (Burrus), 16–17
- Behr, John, 96–97, 98, 101, 103, 207n118
- bestiality (*zōophthoria*), 49
- biblical authority, 5, 26, 51, 75
- The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Brown), 16
- Boersma, Hans, 198n84, 200nn49,51, 204n21, 207nn116,118
- Børresen, Kari Elisabeth, 96
- Brakke, David, 189n42
- Bridegroom imagery, 6, 35, 51, 53, 55, 56, 62, 75, 90–91, 116, 121, 125, 127, 131, 136, 143–44, 147–49, 149, 151–52, 158
- Brown, Peter, 1, 16, 23, 24, 34, 43, 59, 186n97
- Burrus, Virginia, 16–17, 45, 51, 90, 137, 142
- Butler, Judith, 10, 139, 145, 184n46
- Callahan, Virginia Woods, 191n93, 197n57
- Cappadocian Fathers, 1, 12, 13, 21, 184n61. *See also* Basil of Caesarea (Gregory of Nyssa's brother); Gregory of Nyssa
- Cassian, John, 54
- celibacy (*agamia*): overview, 4, 44–45; after marriage, 27–28; assessing the comparative worth of virginity and marriage, 41–43; breaking of vows of, 24; good/bad celibacy, 41; marriage and, 33–44; monastics and, 8; moral dangers of, 40–41; as against nature, 49; overcoming vice and, 76; pederasty and, 44–52; Plato, pederasty, and Athenian society, 45–48; postlapsarian state and, 77; reciprocity of the virtues and, 56; as replacement of pederasty, 48–52; sexual-abuse scandal and, 157–58; train of discussion in the *De virginitate*, 39–41
- celibacy and marriage: assessing the comparative worth of virginity and marriage, 41–43; compatibility of marriage and contemplation, 37–39; conclusions on, 43–44, 52; moral challenges of marriage, 34–37; problems of marriage, 33–34; train of discussion in the *De virginitate*, 39–41
- celibacy and pederasty: overview, 44–45; in Athenian society, 45–48; Christian celibacy, 48–52; conclusions on, 52
- Cephalus, 43
- Chalcedon, Council of, 13, 22, 24, 187n7
- charioteer analogy, 63
- chastity, 39, 77
- Cherniss, Harold, 13–14, 55
- childbirth, 47, 76, 79, 140–41
- childrearing, 75, 77–82, 193n42
- chreia* (need), 38, 60, 62–63, 65, 66, 106
- Christianity: after Constantine's conversion, 19–21, 159; Hellenization (*Hellenisierung*) of, 13. *See also* Church

- Christological theology: overview, 107; dia-
chronic transformation of Christ's humanity,
107–9; spiritual/bodily maturation and, 135;
spiritual maturation and physical aging,
109–12
- chronology, 2–3
- Chrysippus, 105–6
- Church: as Bride of Christ, 143–44; enforcement
of doctrine of, 21; imperialization of, 20–21;
as mother, 82; persecution of, 19; relation-
ships within, 79; Roman Empire and, 19–21;
women in, 85. *See also* Christianity; heresies
- Church Fathers, 12, 17
- Cicero, 63
- circularity of desire, 58
- Clark, Elizabeth, 1, 204n21
- Clement of Alexandria, 34, 39, 69
- Coakley, Sarah, 16, 87, 139, 143, 148, 201n51,
216n60
- coenobitism, 22–23
- coitus interruptus*, 39
- companionship (*syμβiōsis*), 34–35, 40
- concupiscentia* (desire), 54
- concupiscentia carne* (sexual lust), 54
- Constantine, 19, 21, 159
- Constantinople (381), Council of, 21, 172, 173, 174,
175, 177
- Constantinople (383), Council of, 176
- Constantius II, 20
- contemplation (*εποπτικῆ/θεωρητικῆ/theōria*), 22,
50, 105, 129, 131, 208n141
- contemporary ethical discourse, 153, 155, 157–61,
198n84
- contenance (*σῶφροσυνῆ*), 8, 39, 66, 77, 83, 84, 95
- contraceptive practices, 39
- Contra Eunomium* (Gregory of Nyssa), 8,
82, 85, 87, 107–9, 110–15, 150–51, 173–74,
217n16
- Contra fatum* (Gregory of Nyssa), 85, 173
- Contra fornicarios* (Gregory of Nyssa), 77, 83, 95,
172, 174
- Contra usurarios* (Gregory of Nyssa), 81, 82, 172
- Council of Antioch, 174
- Council of Chalcedon, 13, 22, 24
- Council of Constantinople (381), 21, 172, 173, 174,
175, 177
- Council of Constantinople (383), 176
- Council of Nicaea, 21, 80
- courage (*θάρσος*), 69, 79
- Creation doctrine, 88
- Criterion of need, 62–64
- cross-dressing condemned, 86
- Cynegius, 27
- Cyril of Alexandria, 108
- Daniel, 60
- Daniélou, Jean, 1, 13–14, 15, 16, 81, 120, 124, 134,
136, 138, 172, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 181n7
- David, King of Israel, 37, 155
- De anima et resurrectione* (Gregory of Nyssa), 2,
45, 88, 90, 92, 99, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 109,
172, 173, 176, 199n11, 200n49, 208n141
- death: body purified through, 208n126; fear of,
75; of infants, 110; pederasty and, 50; procre-
ation and, 36–37; virginity and, 50, 76
- death of siblings: overview, 4, 54, 73, 88–106;
impact on Gregory's theory of desire, 104–6;
sexual morphology: anthropological and
eschatological perspectives, 96–104
- De beatitudinibus* (Gregory of Nyssa), 36, 55, 57,
58, 63, 64, 65, 66, 68, 69, 76, 77, 86, 91, 99,
171, 211n17
- De beneficentia* (Gregory of Nyssa), 57–58, 60,
126, 172
- De civitate Dei* (Augustine of Hippo), 54, 207n119
- De constantia sapientis* (Seneca), 68
- De Deitate filii et spiritu sancti et in Abraham*
(Gregory of Nyssa), 78, 81–82, 85, 108, 110,
176
- deficiency (*elleipsis*), 68
- deficiency (*endeia*), 65
- De generatione animalium* (Aristotle), 80, 115
- De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (Augustine of
Hippo), 54
- De hominis opificio* (Gregory of Nyssa), 2, 88,
97, 98, 99–100, 101, 103, 105, 151, 152, 171, 172,
195n108, 200n49, 207n118
- De infantibus praemature abreptis* (Gregory of
Nyssa), 78, 80, 109, 110, 126, 176
- De instituto Christiano* (Gregory of Nyssa), 8, 9,
56, 123–24, 132, 133, 148, 177
- Democritus, 80
- De mortuis non esse dolendum* (Gregory of
Nyssa), 35, 37, 62, 63, 64, 67, 68, 91, 101, 105,
110, 141, 171, 200n49, 207n116, 208n126
- De musica* (Augustine of Hippo), 54
- Dennis, T. J., 200n49
- De oratione dominica* (Gregory of Nyssa), 39, 57,
58, 59, 63, 66, 68, 69, 86, 99, 102, 171, 172, 173
- De perfectione Christiana ad Olympium mona-
chum* (Gregory of Nyssa), 9, 120–21, 123, 132,
177
- De professione Christiana ad Harmonium*
(Gregory of Nyssa), 9

- De Pythonissa* (Gregory of Nyssa), 126
- Desert Fathers, 59. *See also* Anthony of Egypt
- desire (*epheſis*), 12, 66
- desire (*epithymia*), 5, 11–12, 35, 38, 43, 50, 58, 63, 64, 65, 76, 78, 105, 111, 134, 144, 199n10, 213n80
- desire, theory of: overview, 31, 70, 106; criterion of need and, 62–64; erotic desire, 62; moderation and, 65–66; moral evocations of male and female characteristics, 68–69; passions and, 64–65; refinements in, 104–6; role of desire at the *eschaton*, 213n80; satiety versus fulfillment, 66–68
- De tridui spatio* (Gregory of Nyssa), 7, 76, 82, 87, 102, 175, 177
- De uera religione* (Augustine of Hippo), 54
- Devil, 59, 60, 140
- De uirginitate*: overview, 3, 4, 31, 52, 61, 155; on ascetics, 93–94; *Asketikon* (Basil of Caesarea) and, 23; on beauty, 50–51; *chreia* (need) in, 65; commentators on, 39; comparisons to, 75, 89, 91; construal of virginity in, 124–25; on 1 Corinthians 7, 35–36; dating and style of, 2, 171; developmental train of discussion in, 39–41; evangelism in, 51–52, 82; on Fall, 102; Gregory's personal history and, 27–28; Hart on, 33; on *imitatio Dei* doctrine, 112; Jaeger on, 9; male/female roles in, 51, 90; marriage and celibacy, 33–44; marriage regrets in, 26–27; on older ascetics, 133; pederasty and celibacy, 44–52; physical fecundity in, 36–37, 77; proliferation of vice and example of gluttony, 57–61; reciprocity of the virtues, 55–56; on sexual immorality (*porneia*), 55–56, 124; sexual lust in, 53–54, 56; on sexual moderation in marriage, 38–39; stream analogy, 64; use of the word *anthrōpos* in, 99
- De uita Gregorii Thaumaturgi* (Gregory of Nyssa), 78, 84, 95, 111, 173
- De uita Moysis* (Gregory of Nyssa), 7, 8, 16, 20, 22, 26, 82, 102, 120–21, 129–30, 131, 133, 138, 139–42, 143, 144, 150, 152, 156, 178
- diachronic maturation: overview, 119, 125–26; of Christ's humanity, 107–9; fraternal eroticism, 136–37; Gregory's construal of spiritual maturation, 126–32; maturation in marriage, 135–36; passion and, 6, 138, 146, 156; physical maturation and spiritual maturation, 132–35
- diakritikē* (discrimination), 105
- diathesis erotikē*, 136–37, 177
- digamy, 90
- dikaiosynē* (justice), 7, 55
- Diocletian, 21
- Diotima, 47, 50, 90, 194n88
- Direttorio ascetico* (Scaramelli), 9
- Direttorio mistico* (Scaramelli), 9
- discrimination (*diakritikē*), 105
- distractions, 35–36, 53, 93
- divine generation, 5, 107, 114–15
- divine immutability, 107–9
- divine nature, 102, 107–8, 112–14, 127, 137, 151. *See also* Holy Spirit; Jesus Christ; Trinity
- doctrinal controversies. *See* heresies
- double creation doctrine, 98–99, 100–101, 206n80
- Douglas, Mary, 16
- Drake, Harold A., 21
- drinking, immoderate, 58, 83–84
- drives (*aphormai*), 104
- early Christian studies, 12
- Eastern Christian theology, 54
- Edict of Milan, 21
- effeminacy (*malakia*), 63, 68, 69, 84, 85, 91, 140, 146
- effeminization: overview, 4; defined, 11; of moral life, 156; as vice, 10
- Egypt, 22, 77, 95, 130, 139–40
- Elijah, 60, 69, 85, 215n38
- elleipsis* (deficiency), 68
- Emmelia (Gregory of Nyssa's mother), 89, 90, 93, 106, 191n83
- endeia* (deficiency), 65
- enjoyment (*apolausis*), 12, 57, 59, 67, 213n80
- enkrateia* (self-control), 7–8, 64, 77, 85
- envy (*phthonos*), 36, 196n39
- epektasis* doctrine, 14, 181n7
- ephebophile, 44
- epheſis* (desire), 12, 66
- Epictetus, 35, 36
- Epicureanism, 92
- Epigram* 154 (Gregory of Nazianzus), 27
- Epigram* 161 (Gregory of Nazianzus), 27
- Epigram* 164 (Gregory of Nazianzus), 27
- Epistle* CCXVII (Basil of Caesarea), 24
- Epistle* CXCIX (Basil of Caesarea), 24
- Epistle* II (Gregory of Nyssa), 84, 86, 174
- Epistle* III (Gregory of Nyssa), 108, 174, 175
- Epistle* VIII (Gregory of Nyssa), 109, 176
- Epistle* XI (Gregory of Nyssa), 109, 110, 176
- Epistle* XV (Gregory of Nyssa), 110, 175
- Epistle* XVII (Gregory of Nyssa), 20, 109, 177
- Epistle* XIX (Gregory of Nyssa), 88, 89, 90, 173

- Epistle XXVII* (Gregory of Nyssa), 110
- Epistle XXIX* (Gregory of Nyssa), 173, 182n15, 217n16
- Epistle XXXI* (*Epistula canonica ad Letoium*) (Gregory of Nyssa), 49, 105, 124, 151, 177
- Epistle XXXVI* (Gregory of Nyssa), 136–37, 177
- epithymia* (desire), 5, 11–12, 35, 38, 43, 50, 58, 63, 64, 65, 76, 78, 105, 111, 134, 144, 199n10, 213n80
- epoptikē* (contemplation), 105, 208n141
- equilibrium (*isokrateia*), 65
- erastēs* (older lover), 11, 45–48, 50, 51, 52, 70
- erastēs-erōmenos* erotic relationship, 51, 52, 70
- eremiticism (anchoritism), 22–23
- erōmenos* (young beloved), 44–47, 50, 51, 52, 70
- erōs*, 15, 43, 53; as aspect of *agape*, 134; in Platonic dialogues, 11; spiritual and fraternal aspects, 137; wisdom and, 51, 62, 90, 94, 133
- erotic desire, 90, 94; overview, 62, 70; ascetical transformation and, 6; criterion of need and, 62–64; Freudian theorizations of, 16; malleability of, 158, 159; moderation and, 65–66; nuptial imagery, 204n21; passion(s), 64–65; rechanneling of, 6; redirection of, 4, 11, 62, 70, 144; satiety versus fulfillment, 66–68; term clarifications, 6–7
- eschatology: hope, 59–60; protology and, 207n118; restoration of genitalia, 5, 10, 73, 88, 97, 103–4; resurrection body, 73, 88, 96, 207n116
- ethics: contemporary ethical discourse, 153, 155, 157–61; fasting and, 60; of integration, 54, 56, 70, 83, 160; sexual ethics, 159
- ethos of the desert, 20
- etic/emic distinction, 9
- Eucharist, 54, 149
- Eunomianism, 5, 13, 74, 85, 107, 112–13, 114, 115, 151, 173, 174–75, 176, 178
- Eunomius, 112–13, 114, 115, 184n47, 217n16
- Eupatrius the Scholastic, 110
- euphrosynē* (joy), 12, 66, 184n49
- Eusebius of Caesarea, 26
- Eusebius of Nicomedia, 25
- Eustathians, 23, 60, 65, 85–86, 96
- Eustathius of Sebaste, 23, 25, 60, 65
- Evagrius, 58, 59, 105
- evangelism, 51–52, 82
- Eve, 59, 76, 79, 85, 96, 97, 102, 207n110
- evil: evil of pain, 76; evil practices, 7; reciprocity of vices, 83; sequence (*akolouthia*) of evils, 57–58
- example (*hypodeigma*) of Christ, 123
- excess (*pleonasmos*), 68
- excess (*plēsmonē ametros*), 65
- Fall/fallen nature, 4, 5, 10, 57, 76, 92, 93, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 115, 116, 125, 129, 156, 159
- familial relationships, 79
- fasting, 6, 60, 85, 172, 198n84
- fear (*phobos*), 65, 85
- fecundity: physical, 77–82; spiritual, 82–83
- “The Feminine Man in Late Antique Ascetic Piety” (Harrison), 140–41
- feminist theology: Augustine of Hippo and, 16; Gregory of Nyssa and, 16; reclamation of female imagery, 87; on sexual morphology, 96
- Ferguson, Everett Ferguson, 183n29, 214nn10,13
- Form of Beauty, 4, 11, 44, 48, 49–52, 62, 129, 194n95
- fornication (*porneia*), 49, 55–56, 63
- fortitude (*andreia*), 68–69, 143, 201n57, 215n28
- Foucauldian theories, 137, 158
- Foucault, Michel, 1, 11, 15, 158
- fraternal eroticism, 136–37
- free will (*proairesis*), 63, 82, 105, 130, 133, 139, 141, 199n11, 214n8
- Freudian theories, 1, 16, 156, 186n95
- friendship (*philia*), 46
- From Glory to Glory* (Daniélou and Musurillo), 16
- fulfillment versus satiety, 4, 66–68
- Galen, 25, 80, 202n24
- gamos* (marriage), 11
- Gangra, Synod of, 23, 25, 60, 73, 75, 85–86, 159
- Garden of Eden, 58–59, 97, 102, 103, 207n116
- Garrigou-Lagrange, Réginald, 186n82
- gender and sexuality: effeminacy (*malakia*) and, 69; gendered connotations, 69; overview, 3; postmodern discourse on, 1, 2, 145, 157; term clarifications, 9–12
- gender fluidity, 2, 16–17, 139, 145
- gender theory, 16, 158, 187n101
- generation (*genesis*): baptism and, 82; biological presumptions of, 80, 194n88; divine generation, 112–14; genealogy and lineage, 78; human generation, 112–14; resurrection and, 37; term clarifications, 11
- genesis* (generation). *See* generation (*genesis*)
- genitalia, eschatological restoration of, 5, 10, 73, 88, 103–4
- Glaucon, 65
- gluttony, 54, 57–61, 67, 197nn39,41,44,61, 198n84

- God: compared to mother, 82, 150–51; creative presence of, 82; desire for vision of, 15; distractions from, 35–36; Form of Beauty as divine beauty, 49–50; Gregory's doctrine of, 5, 112–15; image (*eikōn*) of, 148; male and female concepts and, 74, 82; prayer as intimacy with, 39; Trinitarian doctrine, 5, 13, 52, 112–15; virginity and, 52. *See also* divine nature; Holy Spirit; Jesus Christ; Trinity
- Goths, 60
- grace, 15
- Gratian, 21, 188n18
- greed (*pleonexia*), 57, 68, 197n44
- Greek philosophy: Hellenization (*Hellenisierung*) of Christianity, 13; influence of on Gregory, 25–26, 55; *paideia* (training) of philosophers, 7. *See also* Aristotle; Plato
- Gregory of Nazianzus, 1, 13, 24, 26, 27, 28, 184n61
- Gregory of Nyssa: ancestors of, 19; biblical authority and, 5, 26, 51, 75; Christology of, 12–13; at Council of Constantinople, 21; death of, 182n9; as dogmatician, 13, 14; education of, 25–26; feminist theology and, 16, 45, 96; Greek philosophy and, 13, 25–26; on imperialization, 20; marriage of, 26–28; mysticism of, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 124; personal history of, 26–28; on tragic aspect of marriage, 34–35; Trinitarian analogy of, 13; wife of, 27–28
- Gregory Thaumaturgus (the Wonderworker), 84, 95
- grief (*lypē*): desire for God and, 73; moderation of, 91; moral transformation and, 92; reason and, 63; transformative aspect of, 91; womanish passion and, 91
- Gynaecia* (Soranus), 38–39
- Hadot, Pierre, 16, 126
- Halperin, David, 90
- Harnack, Adolf von, 13
- Harrison, Verna, 16, 87, 139, 140, 141, 143, 144, 145
- Hart, Mark, 4, 33–34, 41, 57, 96, 197n44
- health (*hygieia*) of the body, 65
- hebeophile, 44
- hēdonē* (pleasure), 12, 43, 50, 57, 58, 59, 63, 66, 76, 84, 105, 141, 200nn38–39
- Heine, Ronald, 14, 178, 210n5
- Hellenisches und christliches im frühbyzantinischen Geistesleben* (Ivánka), 13
- Hellenization (*Hellenisierung*) of Christianity, 13
- heresies, 4, 13, 24, 25, 74, 107–16. *See also* Antidicomarianism; Apollinarianism; Arianism; Eunomianism; Macedonianism; Nestorianism; Pneumatomachianism; Sabellianism
- heterodoxy, 12–13
- Hierius, 109
- Hippocrates, 25, 80
- Histoire de la sexualité* (Foucault), 15–16
- historical context (political/ecclesial situation): overview, 19, 28; asceticism of Gregory's family, 25–28; Christianity after Constantine's conversion, 19–21; monasticism, 22–25
- Holl, Karl, 13, 184n61
- Holy Spirit, 52, 83, 133, 142, 171, 176
- Homer, 25, 90, 204n29
- homilia* (sexual intercourse), 11, 39
- homilia* (spiritual intimacy), 39
- Homilia in Psalmum 14* (Basil of Caesarea), 81
- homosexuality: effeminacy (*malakia*) and, 69; as modern construct, 11, 52, 157, 158
- hormē* (impulse), 12; *pathē* (passions) and, 104–5, 208n127
- hospice (*xenodocheion*), 23
- humanity, *kata genos* (male/female division of humanity), 10, 87
- human nature: diachronic transformation of Christ's, 107–9; elemental impulses, 64; grief and pleasure, 76; *pathē* (passions) as alien to, 64; twofold nature of, 101; women as weaker part of, 85
- humility, 20, 40, 77
- hyperēphania* (pride), 36, 63, 77, 78, 197n39
- hypodeigma* (example) of Christ, 123
- hypolēpsis* (supposition), 105
- Iamblichus, 126
- idolatry, 129, 130, 131, 132, 215n28
- imago Dei*: Adam and, 98–100; Adam and Eve, 102, 207n110; divine ineffability and, 151; self-governance and, 86, 105; Song of Songs and, 6
- imbalance (*ametria*), 65
- imitatio Dei*, 5, 52, 112, 114–15
- immoderation, 58, 63, 65, 83, 84
- immortality, philosophic fecundity and, 50
- impassibility/absence of passion (*apatheia*), 15, 52, 64–65, 106, 128, 199n23
- imperialization, 20–21
- impulse (*hormē*), 12, 64, 68, 104–5
- impulse (*rhōpē*), 12, 64, 208nn124,127
- In Basilium fratrem* (Gregory of Nyssa), 35, 60, 78, 81–82, 85, 174
- In Canticum canticorum* (Gregory of Nyssa), 2, 16–17, 76, 82, 91, 119, 124, 127, 129, 130, 132, 133,

- 134, 135, 136, 138, 139, 141, 142, 142–45, 146,
147–48, 149–50, 151, 152, 177, 178
- incest, 83, 84
- In Ecclesiasten* (Gregory of Nyssa), 8, 77, 78, 81,
82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 94, 95, 105, 111–12, 127, 131,
141, 173
- ineffable (*aphrastos*), 150, 151
- In illud: Quatenus uni ex his fecistis mihi fecistis*
(Gregory of Nyssa), 95, 172
- In illud: Tunc et ipse filius* (Gregory of Nyssa), 8
- In inscriptiones Psalmorum* (Gregory of Nyssa),
37, 57, 59, 67, 171, 177, 183n39, 211n17
- In sanctum et salutare Pascha* (Gregory of
Nyssa), 82, 92, 177
- In sanctum Pascha* (Gregory of Nyssa), 80, 110,
172, 177
- In suam ordinationem* (Gregory of Nyssa), 109,
110, 174
- intra-Trinitarian relations: overview, 107, 112;
ascetics and imitation of, 114–16; divine
generation and, 112–14; human generation
and, 112–14; purity and, 52
- In XL Martyres Ia* (Gregory of Nyssa), 79, 172,
175
- In XL Martyres Ib* (Gregory of Nyssa), 79, 95, 175,
207n10
- In XL Martyres II* (Gregory of Nyssa), 60, 95,
172, 182n12
- irascibility (*thymos*), 105
- Irigaray, Luce, 45, 90, 194nn78,88
- Isaac, 37, 42, 78, 85, 155
- Ivánka, Endre von, 13, 185n68
- Jacob, 92
- Jaeger, Werner, 8, 9, 133, 183nn39–40
- Jesus Christ: *apatheia* (absence of passion/im-
passibility) and, 65; as the Arrow, 148; bodily
weakness and, 66, 68; diachronic trans-
formation of humanity of, 107–9; example
(*hypodeigma*) of, 123; familial relationships
and, 79; as goal of divine love, 62; Incarna-
tion of, 80; intimacy with as goal, 147–52,
152, 156, 158; maturation of, 135; as neither
male nor female, 147; overcoming vice in, 76;
perpetual progress and, 3, 177; prohibition
against wrath (*orgē*), 64; relationship with,
70; sinlessness of, 108–9; spiritual birth of, 51;
spiritual infidelity against, 55–56; as true goal
of desire, 6; as true Lawgiver, 142; virginity
of, 123; as the Word, 151. *See also* Bridegroom
imagery
- Jezebel, 85
- John Chrysostom, 24, 43
- John the Baptist, 69, 85
- John the Evangelist, 114, 151
- Joseph (son of Jacob), 77, 95
- joy (*euphrosynē*), 12, 66
- Judas, 60
- judgment (*krisis*), 105, 208n139
- Julian the Apostate, 28
- Jung, Carl G., 139, 140–41, 144
- justice (*dikaiosynē*), 7, 55
- Karras, Valerie, 41–42, 97, 101, 103
- kata genos* (male/female division of humanity),
term clarifications, 10
- katagōgion* (rest house), 23
- katharotēs* (purity), 55, 66, 83, 128
- kinēsis* (movement) of the soul, 12, 104
- koros* (satiety), 57, 63, 66, 67
- krasis/mixis* (mingling), 11, 13, 35, 76, 88, 95–96,
121, 147, 148, 149, 216n60
- krisis* (judgment), 105, 208n139
- Krueger, Derek, 91
- ktēsis* (possession), 66, 67
- Laird, Martin, 143, 147
- language: of activity/passivity, 5; of asceticism,
7–8, 182n11; of *diathesis erōtikē*, 135, 177; of ef-
feminizing, 4; erotic language, 128; etic/emic
distinction, 9; of gender, 10, 150, 157, 159; of
generation (*gennēsis*), 112–13; of homo/het-
erosexuality, 52; of intimacy with Christ, 147;
of marriage, 11; of mingling (*krasis/mixis*),
13, 95–96, 149; of old age, 121; of *orexis* and
epithymia, 199n10; of reorientations, 137; of
sexuality, 10–11; theological language, 151; of
youth, 93, 110, 121
- lapses of time (*diastēmatikē paratasis*), 119
- Lawson, Richard T., 211n14
- Leges* (Plato), 46, 49, 58, 59
- Leo XIII, Pope, 15
- licitiousness (*akolasia*), 57, 84
- logistike* (rational faculty of the soul), 63
- logos* (reason), 105
- loneliness, 5, 77
- Loofs, Friedrich, 13
- Lord's Prayer, 59
- Lot, 83
- Louth, Andrew, 134, 196n39
- love (*agapē*), 12, 15, 134, 137, 147
- love of glory (*philodoxia*), 63

- Lubac, Henri de, 15
 Ludlow, Morwenna, 138, 199n11
 Lutz, Cora, 69
- Macarius the Egyptian, 23
 Macedonianism, 13, 133, 171, 172, 174
 Macrina the Elder, 19
 Macrina the Younger (Gregory of Nyssa's sister), 4, 24, 25, 26, 73, 171; death of, 87, 88, 93, 173, 182n10; on eschatological restoration (*apokatastasis*), 102, 103–4; female roles of, 89–91; Gregory's discussions with, 88; grief (*lypē*) of, 105, 208n128; males roles of, 89–91, 147; as mother, 89–90; pedagogy of, 92–93; scholarship on, 205n52; Vetiana and, 37, 116
malakia (effeminacy), 63, 68, 69, 84, 85, 91, 140, 146
 male and female characteristics: overview, 73; female (*thēlys*), 10, 81, 139; late antique presumptions, 68, 69; male (*arrēn*), 10, 81, 139, 214n10; manly (*andreios/andrikōs/andrōdēs*) virtues, 4, 6, 10, 43, 46, 68, 69, 84, 94, 139–40, 142, 146, 215n28; moral evocations of, 68–69, 84–87; overcoming male virility, 5, 93–96; transformative aspect of, 158–59; transforming female vice, 142–45; womanish passion, 139–42. *See also* effeminization
 Malherbe, Abraham J., 183n29, 214nn10,13
 Maraval, Pierre, 172, 174, 175, 182n10
 marital love (*philandria*), 11
 marriage: overview, 31; as attachment to material pleasures, 33–34; celibacy after, 27–28; celibacy and, 33–44; comparative worth of, 33, 41–43; compatibility of marriage and contemplation, 37–39; conclusions on, 43–44; good/bad marriage, 41; maturation in marriage, 135–36; moral challenges of marriage, 34–37, 77; physical fecundity, 36–37, 75, 77–82, 193n42; problems of, 4, 36–37, 75–77; sexual hierarchy in, 5, 73, 85–86, 115–16, 125, 151, 153, 159; subordination in, 85, 88, 89; train of discussion in the *De virginitate*, 39–41; virginity and, 5, 123, 124
 martyrdom, 79, 95, 182n12, 207n110
 Mary, Blessed Virgin, 50, 51, 76, 77, 142, 174
 maternal attachments, 79
 Maximin Daia, Emperor of Roman Empire, 19
 McCambley, Casimir, 200n48, 202n13, 213n75
 medieval texts, 15
 Meletius, bishop of Antioch, 92
 Meredith, Anthony, 129, 131, 194n82
 Methodius of Olympus, 83–84
 mingling (*krasis/mixis*), 11, 13, 35, 76, 88, 95–96, 121, 147, 148, 149, 216n60
 Miriam, sister of Moses, 142, 215n27
mixis/krasis (mingling). *See* mingling (*krasis/mixis*).
 moderation: overview, 4, 6; drinking, immoderate, 58, 83–84; in erotic desire, 65–66; Gregory on, 27; of grief (*lypē*), 91; in marriage, 8, 38–39, 70, 136; pedagogic relationships among ascetics and, 50–51; in self-control (*enkrateia*), 7
moicheia (adultery), 24, 49, 56, 124
 Momigliano, Arnaldo, 90
 monasticism: authority of, 22, 24; codification of monastic practice, 63; from eremitic to coenobitic life, 22–23; geographical shift of, 22, 23–24, 189n42; incorporation into Church, 22, 24, 190n57; influence of, 22, 156; monastics as philosophers, 7; monastic vows, 24; philosophic life and, 7; in Pontus, 23, 26, 86–89, 90, 190n69; social demographics of, 22, 24, 188n30
 moral life: aging and, 110; diachronic transformation, 119; equilibrium (*isokrateia*) in, 65; impulses (*hormai*) and, 105; manly strength, 84; moderation and, 6, 65–66; moral challenges of marriage, 34–37; moral evocations of male and female characteristics, 68–69, 84–87; moral inadequacy, 120–21; moral maturation, 119; moral philosophy, 63; moral weakness, 42, 84; overcoming male virility, 5, 93–96; passions (*pathē*) and, 64–65; perpetual progress and, 125–37, 149–50; philanthropy and, 60
 Moses, 22, 128, 129, 142, 156, 178, 215n27
 motherhood, 81–82, 141, 194n88, 195n127
 movement (*kinēsis*) of the soul, 12, 104
 Mühlberg, Ekkehard, 14
Mulierum virtutes (Plutarch), 69
 Musonius Rufus, 34, 35, 36, 69
 Musurillo, Herbert, 16
 mutability, 3, 35, 48, 67–68, 107–8, 120–21, 200n51
 mysticism, 9, 13–14, 15, 16, 17, 124, 138, 178
- Naucratus (Gregory of Nyssa's brother), 5, 26, 73, 89, 93, 93–96, 152, 205n52
 necessary need (*anankē chreia*), 4, 63
 need (*chreia*), 38, 60, 62–63, 65, 66, 106
 Neo-Platonism, 13, 126, 185nn64,66
 neo-Thomism, 15

- Nestorianism, 13
 Nicaea, Council of, 21, 80
 Nicomedia, 20, 177
 nocturnal emissions, 54
 nonattachment, 33–34
 Norris, Richard, 124, 213n75
Nouvelle Théologie movement, 14–15, 186n82
- older lover (*erastēs*), 11, 45–48, 50, 51, 52, 70
 Olympias, 136, 146
 onanism, 39
Opera ascetica, 9, 183n39
Oratio catechetica magna (Gregory of Nyssa), 8, 76, 80, 82, 105, 108, 142, 149, 176
Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam (Gregory of Nyssa), 75, 85, 92
Oratio funebris in Flacillam imperatricem (Gregory of Nyssa), 79, 87, 176
Oratio funebris in Meletium episcopum (Gregory of Nyssa), 92, 174
 order (*taxis*) of evil, 87
 order (*taxis*) of good, 87
 order (*taxis*) of love, 5, 135–36
orexis (appetite), 12, 62, 63, 66, 84, 106, 199n10
 Origen, 14, 101, 126, 128–29, 134, 195n127, 206n80, 207n118, 211nn12,14,15, 212n42, 213n74
 Ossius of Cordoba, 20
- Pachomius, 22–23, 24
 paganism. *See* traditional religions
paideia (training), 7, 26
paiderastia, 49
paidopoiia (procreation), 11, 37
 Palestine, 22, 190n57
 Paradise, 98, 99, 101, 102, 103
para physin (against nature), 46, 49, 81, 84
parthenia (virginity), 5, 8, 49
 passionate attachment (*prospatheia*), 11, 12
 passions (*pathē/pathēmata*), 12, 63, 64–65, 197n57; overview, 4; disavowing womanish passion, 5, 73, 139–42; gluttony and, 57–58; *hormai* (impulses) and, 104–5, 208n127
 passivity/activity, 5, 107, 114–15, 125, 157, 194n82
pathē (passions). *See* passions (*pathē/pathēmata*).
 patriarchy, 96
 Patricius, bishop, 20, 177
 patristic scholarship, 1, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 108, 185n64
 patronage system, 16, 20
- Paul the Apostle, 35–36, 38, 42, 43, 49, 55–56, 77, 85, 86, 92, 99, 102, 123–24, 126, 136, 182n7, 195nn102,121
 Pausanias, 45
 pedagogy, 7, 91, 93, 105–6, 204n29
 pederasty: *erastēs-erōmenos* erotic relationship, 51, 52, 70; overview, 31, 44–45, 52; in Athenian society, 45–48; celibacy and, differences between, 48, 50–52; celibacy and, similarities between, 48–50, 70; Christianity as replacement for, 48–52; conclusions on, 52; death and, 50; as against nature (*para physin*), 49; Platonic ideal of, 4, 45–48, 51, 194n82; spiritual outcomes of, 4
 Pelagianism, 15, 133
 Pender, Elizabeth E., 194n95
 perfection: contemplation and, 131; as unattainable (*anepihktos*), 120–21; virtue and, 120, 131
 perpetual progress, 3, 120–21, 149–50, 177
 Peter (Gregory of Nyssa's brother), 26, 89, 172, 175
 Peter the Apostle, 20
Phaedrus (Plato), 11, 46, 47, 50, 63, 129
philandria (marital love), 11
 philanthropy, 60, 198n84
Philebus (Plato), 67, 76, 200n38
philodoxia (love of glory), 63
 Philo of Alexandria, 58–59, 68, 200n38, 206n80
 philosophic fecundity, 47, 48, 50
phthonos (envy), 36, 196n39
 physical fecundity, 36–37, 75, 77–82, 193n42
 physical maturation, 109–12, 132–35
 piety (*eusebeia*), 7, 77, 131
 Pike, Kenneth L., 9
 Plato, 25, 26; overview, 4, 31; *Apologia*, 129; charioteer analogy, 63; dialogues of, 55; on Form of Beauty, 52; *Leges*, 46, 49, 58, 59; on mixed pleasures, 4, 76; on pederasty, 45–48, 194n82; *Phaedrus*, 11, 46, 47, 50, 63, 129; *Philebus*, 67, 76, 200n38; *Republica*, 43, 46, 47, 48, 51, 58, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 76, 87, 204n29; on sexual inevitability, 87; *Symposium*, 11, 43, 45–48, 50, 90, 129, 194n82, 214n88
 Platonism, 13, 38, 44, 65, 68, 126, 185nn64,66,68, 208n127
Platonisme et théologie mystique (Daniélou), 13–14, 15, 16
 pleasure (*hēdonē*), 12, 43, 50, 57, 58, 59, 63, 66, 76, 84, 105, 141, 200nn38–39
pleonasmos (excess), 68
plēsmonē (satiety), 65, 66

- Plotinus, 25, 126, 129
ploutoi (riches), 63
 Plutarch, 69
 Pneumatomachianism, 74, 133, 171, 172, 174
pontifex maximus, 21
 poorhouse (*ptōchotropheion*), 23
porneia (fornication), 49, 63, 124
porneia (sexual immorality), 5, 55–56, 83–84, 124
 Porphyry, 63, 126
 Posidonius, 25
 possession (*ktēsis*), 66, 67
 postlapsarian state, 54, 76, 77, 83, 92, 101, 109
 postmodern discourse, 1, 2, 12, 145, 184n46
 Pouchet, Jean-Robert, 136, 182n10
 poverty, 26, 85, 93
 prayer, 5, 37, 39, 58, 59, 82, 91, 93, 130, 140, 156, 158, 159
Présence et pensée (von Balthasar), 13
 Price, A. W., 45
 pride (*hyperēphania*), 36, 63, 77, 78, 197n39
 primordial sin, 59, 76, 87, 207n110
proairesis (free will), 63, 82, 105, 130, 133, 139, 141, 199n11, 214n8
 Proclus, 126
 procreation (*paidopoia*): cessation of, 50; death and, 36–37; as gift from God, 78; as purpose of marriage, 34; resurrection and, 80; sexual intercourse as solely for, 38–39, 207n117; term clarifications, 11, 12; usury and, 80–81
prospatheia (passionate attachment), term clarifications, 12
 protology, 2, 76, 100, 101, 103, 104, 207n118
 Pseudo-Plutarch, 80
pura natura, 15
 purity (*katharotēs*): body as temple and, 83; courage (*tharsos*) and, 69; Douglas on, 16; grief (*lypē*) and, 91; of heart, 76; of Holy Spirit, 52; joy (*euphrosynē*) and, 66; pedagogic relationships and, 50; purification of the soul, 11; Song of Songs and, 128; virginity and, 55, 123
- Radde-Gallwitz, Andrew, 55
 Rahner, Karl, 14
 reason (*logistikē/logos*): desire (*epithymētikē*) and, 63; passion defeated with, 68; rational soul and, 105, 106; woman's reasoning, 79
 reciprocity of the virtues: overview, 4; defined, 55–56; philanthropy and, 198n84; sequence (*akolouthia*) of evils and, 57–58; spiritual fidelity and, 4
 redemption, 51, 87, 200n51
Regulae brevius tractatae (Basil of Caesarea), 24
Regulae fusius tractatae (Basil of Caesarea), 24
 research methodology: diachronic method of, 2–3; previous scholarship review, 1–2; scholarship overview, 12–17; semantic and terminological clarifications, 6–12; study structure, 3–6
Respublica (Plato), 43, 46, 47, 51, 58, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 76, 87, 204n29
ressourcement movement, 14–15, 186n82
 rest house (*katagōgion*), 23
 restoration (*apokatastasis*), 13, 68, 101
 resurrection: as goal (*skopos*), 68; procreation (*paidopoia*) and, 80; restoration of genitalia and, 5, 10, 73, 88, 89, 103–4
 Reuther, Rosemary Radford, 96
rhopē (impulse), 12, 64, 208n124, 127
 riches (*ploutoi*), 63
 Roman Catholic Church, 9, 15, 158
 Roman Empire, 16, 19–21
 Rousseau, Henri, 190n57
 Rubenson, Samuel, 188n30
- Sabellianism, 13
 same-sex activity, 49
 Sarah, 85, 110, 140, 142
 satiety: excess (*plēsmonē ametros*), 65; fulfillment and, 4, 66–68; gluttony as sin of, 54, 58, 59; necessity and, 63; wealth and, 78
 satiety (*koros/plēsmonē*), *koros* and *plēsmonē* distinction, 66
 Scaramelli, Giovanni Battista, 9
 scholarship, 1–2, 12–17
 scriptural references: Genesis, 5, 64, 76, 77, 79, 81, 95, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102–3, 103, 105, 110, 206n80; Exodus, 79, 128, 130, 139–40; Numbers, 215n28; Deuteronomy, 83, 86; Judith, 68; 2 Maccabees, 79; Psalms, 59, 81, 136, 177; Proverbs, 8, 40, 51, 59, 94, 104, 126–27, 144, 211n14; Ecclesiastes, 78, 85, 111, 126–27, 211n14; Song of Songs, 126–28, 131, 138, 142, 143, 147, 148, 150, 211n14, 212n42; Wisdom, 56; Isaiah, 51, 60, 65, 68, 82; Jeremiah, 92; Matthew, 7, 20, 33, 36, 59, 64, 89, 92, 97, 110, 120; Mark, 36, 97, 124; Luke, 33, 36, 77, 97, 108, 135; John, 82, 114, 127; Romans, 36, 49, 130; 1 Corinthians, 35–36, 38, 43, 51, 55, 56, 83, 85, 86, 99, 102, 123–24, 126, 151; 2 Corinthians, 42, 56, 66, 91, 131–32, 149; Galatians, 51, 82, 88, 98, 99, 101, 115, 135, 147, 150; Ephesians, 79, 86, 134, 136,

- 149; Philippians, 67, 134, 182n7; 1 Thessalonians, 92; 1 Timothy, 43, 77, 79; 2 Timothy, 43, 51–52, 77; Hebrews, 126, 211n12; 1 Peter, 84, 139, 211n12
- Second Sophistic writers, 25
- second-wave feminism, 9, 10, 96, 186n101, 194n78
- Seeberg, Reinhold, 13
- self-control (*enkrateia*): desire and, 64; gluttony and, 54; as manly, 85; in marriage, 69; sorrow and, 77; term clarifications, 7–8; virtues and, 160
- self-governance, 86, 105
- self-indulgence (*tryphē*), 8, 20, 65
- semantic and terminological clarifications, 6–12
- Seneca, 68, 104, 208nn124–125
- sequence (*akolouthia*) of evils, 57, 132
- serpent, 59, 87, 102
- sexual continence/temperance (*sōphrosynē*), 8, 39, 66, 77, 83, 84, 95
- sexual desire: overview, 31; childhood and, 133–34, 213n74; moderation of, 6; as primordial sin, 59; for reproduction, 10; sexual lust in the *De virginitate*, 53–54; theorization of, 4
- sexual differentiation: of Adam and Eve, 102–3, 207n116; double creation doctrine, 98–99; eschatological finality of, 5, 88, 96
- sexual hierarchy, in marriage, 5, 73, 85–86, 86, 115–16, 125, 151, 153, 159
- sexual immorality (*porneia*), 49, 55–56; in *Contra fornicarios* (Gregory of Nyssa), 83; corrupting effects of, 83; particular challenges of, 83–84; Paul on, 124
- sexual intercourse: Augustine of Hippo on, 193n42; as duty of marriage, 38–39; as solely for procreation, 38–39, 207n117; term clarifications, 11
- sexuality and gender: overview, 3; postmodern discourse on, 1, 2; term clarifications, 9–12
- sexual lust, in *De virginitate*, 53–54, 70
- sexual morphology: overview, 10, 87; anthropological and eschatological perspectives, 96–104; eschatological finality of, 88
- sexual morphology: anthropological and eschatological perspectives: overview, 96–98; Adam and the *imago Dei*, 98–100; double creation doctrine, 100–101; explanatory scope of the “Tunic of Skins,” 101–4
- sexual orientation, 11, 137
- sexual passivity, 45, 46, 194n82
- sexual vice, particular challenges of, 83–84
- Silvas, Anna, 26, 27, 28, 136, 152, 172, 190n69, 214n92, 217n16
- sin: chief sin, 196n39; primordial sin, 59, 76, 87, 207n110; reciprocity of vices, 83; sins of omission, 7; sorrow of repentance as remedy for, 91–92; as spiritual adultery against Christ, 124; suffering and, 76–77; weakness (*pathos*) and, 108
- slavery, 20, 86
- Socrates, 46, 47, 50, 55, 58, 65, 66, 67, 90, 200n38, 204n29
- Sodom, 83–84
- solitude, 5, 23, 26, 77
- Solomon, King of Israel, 127, 128, 143, 150
- Song of Songs, 6, 124, 125, 126–27, 130, 131, 138, 142, 143, 147, 148, 150, 177, 178, 211n14, 212n42
- sōphrosynē* (sexual continence/temperance), 8, 39, 66, 77, 83, 84, 95
- Soranus, 38–39
- soul: and contemplative union with God, 208n141; male and female characteristics and, 139; moral growth and, 149–50; self-governance of, 86, 105
- spilling of seed, 39
- spiritual adultery, 124
- spiritual ascent (*anabasis*): in *Contra Eunomium* (Gregory of Nyssa, 150–51; diachronic nature of, 3, 145–46, 157; female imagery and, 87; Gregory’s theorization of, 2, 3, 10, 14–17, 87, 119, 125, 211n17; male and female imagery in, 2, 10, 16, 17, 87, 121, 138, 140, 141, 143–45, 146, 147, 151–52, 157, 158–59; nuptial imagery and, 121; as perpetual progress, 3, 121, 125–26, 127, 130–32, 137, 149
- spiritual fecundity, 37, 45, 51, 52, 82–83, 112, 114
- spiritual fidelity, 4, 55, 198n84
- spiritual hunger, 58
- spiritual intimacy (*homilia*), 39
- spiritual life: bodily life as distinct from, 82; Christological reflections, 107–12; familial relationships and, 79; as a race, 77; three stages of, 126, 130–32, 211nn12,14; transformative aspect of, 78, 80
- spiritual maturation: overview, 5, 6, 119; diachronic train of progress, 125–26; fraternal eroticism, 136–37; Gregory’s construal of, 126–32; in marriage, 5, 135–36; physical aging and, 109–12; physical maturation and, 111, 132–35; virginity as moral purity, 123–25

- spiritual motherhood, 81–82
 spiritual sorrow, 91–92
 Stagirus, 110
 Stead, Christopher, 208n127
 Stobaeus, 216n60
 Stoicism, 25, 34, 35, 39, 55, 65, 68, 91, 104, 105, 141, 216n60. *See also* Musonius Rufus
 stream analogy, 64
 study structure, 3–6
 subordination, of women to men, 5, 73, 75, 85–86, 88, 89, 115–16, 125, 151, 153, 159
 suffering: celibacy and marriage, 5; extreme asceticism and, 65; pain, definitions of, 77; postlapsarian state and, 77; women's fear of, 85; worldly pleasure and, 4, 76–77
symbiōsis (companionship), as principal purpose of marriage, 34–35
Symposium (Methodius of Olympus), 83–84
Symposium (Plato), 11, 43, 45–48, 50, 90, 129, 194n82, 214n88
 Synod of Gangra, 23, 25, 60, 73, 75, 85–86, 159
 Syrian ascetics, 16, 22
- temperance (*sōphrosynē*), 66
tharsos (courage), 69, 79
 Theodosius I, 21, 136, 176, 188n18
 Theophilus, 175
theōretikē (contemplation), 105
theōria (contemplation), 22, 50, 129, 131
 Theosebeia, 27
 Thomas Aquinas, 15
 Thrace, 60
thymos (irascibility), 105
tokos (parturition/usury), 80–81, 139, 146
 traditional religions, Christian intolerance of, 21
 Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, 76
 Trinitarian doctrine: overview, 107; Council of Nicaea and, 21; intra-Trinitarian relationships, 112–16
 Trinity, 112, 114–15; *imitatio Dei*, 5, 52; inner life of, 52; intra-Trinitarian relationships and the ascetic life, 112–16
 trust, women as untrustworthy (*anaxiopistos*), 85
 tunic of skins, 98, 101–4, 141, 200n49
- usury, procreation (*paidopoiia*) and, 80–81, 82
- Valens, Eastern Roman Emperor, 60, 172
 Vetiana, 37–38, 116
- vice: effeminization as, 10; female vice, 5; gluttony, 57–61; proliferation of, 57–61; sexual lust, 53–54, 70
 vices: overview, 31; gluttony, 54; pride (*hyperēphania*), 36, 63, 77, 78; reciprocity of, 57, 83; reciprocity of virtues and, 55, 55–56, 57–61; sexual immorality (*porneia*), 83–84; sexual lust, 53–54
 Virgin Bride of Christ, 6, 51, 90, 90–91, 124, 125, 126–27, 127, 140, 141, 142, 143–46, 148, 149, 152, 155
 virginity: overview, 4, 31, 70; breaking vows of, 24; comparative worth of, 33, 41–43; death and, 50; in *De instituto Christiano* (Gregory of Nyssa), 123–24; Gregory's construal of, 124–25; monastics and, 8; as moral purity, 121; as against nature, 49; prayer and, 39; purity of heart, 5, 124; pursuit of, 89; recasting of, 123–25; reciprocity of virtues and, 55–61; spiritual fecundity of, 37, 51–52; spiritual suffering and, 77; true virginity defined, 8
 virility, 5, 93–96. *See also* effeminization
 virtue(s) (*aretē*): overview, 31; accrual of, 82; anger (*orgē*) and, 64; ascetical discipline and, 6; Christ's growth in, 108; contemplation and, 129; desire for, 66; exemplars of, 37; justice (*dikaiosynē*), 55; manly strength as, 10; motherhood of, 81–82; passions and, 64; perfection and, 131; reciprocity of, 55–56; term clarifications, 7; vice and, 5, 55–56, 57–61
vita contemplativa (contemplative life) tradition, monastics and, 7
Vita Sanctae Macrinae (Gregory of Nyssa), 2, 7, 9, 19, 26, 37, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 105, 173, 174, 176, 194n82
 Völker, Walther, 14
- Warren Smith, J., 97
 weakness: sin and, 108; of women, 84
 wealth: intergenerational transmission of, 78, 80; male prerogative in inheritance, 87; renunciation of, 6
 “Why is Diotima a Woman?” (Halperin), 90
 widowhood, 35, 37, 43, 75, 116, 136
 Wilken, Robert L., 199n10
 wisdom, 38, 48, 51, 56, 62, 65, 90, 94, 104, 108, 111, 131, 133, 135, 143, 144, 145, 146
 withdrawal (*anachōrēsis*), 24
 woman (*gynē*): disavowing of womanish passion, 139–42; Eustathians, 85–86; physical weak-

- ness of, 84; role of, 157; surpassing of female nature, 89; term clarifications, 10; transforming female vice, 142–45
- womanish passion: overview, 6; disavowing of, 139–42; grief (*lypē*) and, 91; moral life and, 5; of Sarah, 85; Stoic origins of, 68; transforming female vice, 142–45. *See also* effeminization
- xenodocheion* (hospice), 23
- Xenophon, 46
- yearning (*epithymia*), term clarifications, 11, 208n128
- young beloved (*erōmenos*), 44–47, 50, 51, 52, 70
- youth: as ascetics, 133–34; in *De vita Moysis*, 120–21; experiences of, 111–12; Gregory Thaumaturgus (the Wonderworker), 95; Joseph (son of Jacob), 95; sexual passion and, 94–95
- Zizoulas, Jean D., 184n54
- zōophthoria* (bestiality), 49

