GREGORY OF NYSSA:
HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS

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Gregory of Nyssa:
Homilies on the Song of Songs

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Brian E. Daley, S.J., and John T. Fitzgerald

GREGORY OF NYSSA:
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Translated with an Introduction and Notes

by

Richard A. Norris Jr.

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Foreword

Richard A. Norris (1930–2005) was one of the great patristic scholars of modern times. Readers who wish to know more about Norris as a person, scholar, and theologian can gain valuable insights into him by reading the special issue of *Anglican Theological Review* (90:3) that was published in honor of his numerous contributions (2008). He was especially interested in the history of biblical interpretation, and one of the texts to which he devoted particular attention was the Song of Songs. A highly influential patristic interpreter of this text was Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335–395 C.E.), whose fifteen homilies on the Song are translated by Norris in this volume.

Norris submitted the final portion of his manuscript approximately six weeks before his death. Preparing it for press has presented a significant number of daunting challenges, and these have resulted in a much more protracted process than we had initially envisioned. We deeply regret that Norris was not able to offer us his sagacious counsel on various matters, but we trust that he would be pleased with the final result. We are proud to have played a small part in making the fruits of his scholarship accessible to a wider reading audience.

The Greek text that Norris used for his translation is that of Hermann Langerbeck, which was published in 1960 as volume 6 of Werner Jaeger's edition of the works of Gregory of Nyssa (Gregorii Nysseni Opera). This text, minus the critical apparatus, accompanies Norris's translation. The numbers that appear to the right of the Greek text indicate the page number of Langerbeck's edition. When Norris in his footnotes refers to "Jaeger," he is referring to the GNO edition as a whole, though the specific reference is usually to Langerbeck's edition of Gregory's homilies on the Song of Songs. We wish to express our gratitude to Brill for permission to include the text in this Writings from the Greco-Roman World volume.

There are many people who have helped us prepare this volume for publication, but there are five individuals in particular to whom we wish to express our gratitude. They are Brent Nongbri and Justin Schedtler for checking the Greek text against that of Langerbeck; Margaret M. Mitchell for reading through the first proofs of this volume and supplying us with a list of errata

and helpful suggestions, especially in regard to the introduction, Gregory's preface to his homilies, and Homily 1; Hans Boersma, who called our attention to several cases of omitted words and misplaced accents; and Bob Buller, the Editorial Director of the Society of Biblical Literature, who copyedited the manuscript and alerted us to various potential problems. Although there are doubtless remaining errors that we did not detect, these five individuals helped us to reduce the number of such instances contained in this volume.

Brian E. Daley, S.J.
John T. Fitzgerald

Abbreviations

Abr.	Philo, *De Abrahamo* (*On the Life of Abraham*)
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
Apol. Hex.	Gregory of Nyssa, *Apologia in Hexaemeron* (*In Defense of the Hexaemeron*)
Barn.	*Barnabas*
Beat.	Gregory of Nyssa, *De beatitudinibus* (*On the Beatitudes*)
C. Ar.	Athanasius, *Orationes contra Arianos* (*Orations against the Arians*)
Cael.	Aristotle, *De caelo* (*Heavens*)
Cat. Cant.	Procopius, *Catena in Canticum canticorum* (*Catena on the Song of Songs*)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series latina
Cher.	Philo, *De cherubim* (*On the Cherubim*)
Comm. Cant.	Origen, *Commentarius in Canticum* (*Commentary on the Song of Songs*)
Comm. Jo.	Origen, *Commentarii in evangelium Joannis* (*Commentary on the Gospel of John*)
Conf.	Philo, *De confusione linguarum* (*On the Confusion of Tongues*)
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum
CWS	Classics of Western Spirituality
De an.	Gregory of Nyssa, *De anima et resurrectione* (*On the Soul and the Resurrection*)
Div.	Cicero, *De divinatione* (*On Divination*)
Ebr.	Philo, *De ebrietate* (*On Drunenness*)
Enn.	Plotinus, *Enneades*
Ep.	Basil, *Epistulae* (*Letters*)
Eth. nic.	Aristotle, *Ethica nichomachea* (*Nichomachean Ethics*)
Eun.	Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* (*Against Eunomius*)
Exc.	Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* (*Excerpts from Theodotus*)
Exp. Cant.	Gregory the Great, *Expositio in Canticum canticorum* (*Exposition of the Song of Songs*)

FC	Fathers of the Church
GCS	Die griechische christliche Schriftsteller der ersten [drei] Jahrhunderte
GNO	Gregorii Nysseni Opera. Edited by Werner Jaeger et al.
Her.	Philo, *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit* (*Who Is the Heir?*)
Hex.	Basil, *Homiliae in Hexaemeron* (*Homilies on the Hexaemeron = Homilies on the Six Days of Creation*)
Hist. an.	Aristotle, *Historia animalium* (*History of Animals*)
Hom. Exod.	Origen, *Homiliae in Exodum* (*Homilies on Exodus*)
Inscr. Pss.	Gregory of Nyssa, *In inscriptiones Psalmorum* (*On the Titles of the Psalms*)
Isaac	Ambrose of Milan, *De Isaac vel anima* (*Isaac, or The Soul*)
Jaeger	See GNO
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LXX	Septuagint
Metaph.	Aristotle, *Metaphysica* (*Metaphysics*)
Midr. Rab.	*Midrash Rabbah*
Mos.	Philo, *De vita Mosis* (*On the Life of Moses*)
Mut.	Philo, *De mutatione nominum* (*On the Change of Names*)
Nat.	Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia* (*Natural History*)
Nat. an.	Aelian, *De natura animalium* (*On the Nature of Animals*)
NPNF[2]	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2
Opif.	Philo, *De opificio mundi* (*On the Creation of the World*)
Opif. hom.	Gregory of Nyssa, *De opificio hominis* (*On the Creation of Humanity*)
Paed.	Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* (*Christ the Educator*)
PG	Patrologia graeca [= Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca]. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857–86.
Phaed.	Plato, *Phaedo*
Phaedr.	Plato, *Phaedrus*
Poet.	Aristotle, *Poetica* (*Poetics*)
Princ.	Origen, *De principiis* (*First Principles*)
Prot.	Plato, *Protagoras*
REAug	*Revue des Études Augustiniennes*
Reg. fus.	Basil of Caesarea, *Regulae fusius tractatae* (*Longer Rules*)
Res.	Methodius, *De resurrectione* (*On the Resurrection*)
Resp.	Plato, *Respublica* (*Republic*)
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBLWGRW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Greco-Roman World

SC	Sources chrétiennes. Paris: Cerf, 1943–.
StPatr	Studia patristica
SVF	*Stoicorum veterum fragmenta.* Hans Friedrich August von Arnim. 4 vols. Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–24.
Symp.	Methodius, *Symposium (Convivium decem virginum)*
Theaet.	Plato, *Theaetetus*
Tim.	Plato, *Timaeus*
TLZ	*Theologische Literaturzeitung*
TP	*Theologie und Philosophie*
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
VC	*Vigiliae christianae*
Virg.	Gregory of Nyssa, *De virginitate* (*On Virginity*)
Vit. Mos.	Gregory of Nyssa, *De vita Mosis* (*Life of Moses*)

INTRODUCTION: GREGORY OF NYSSA
AND HIS FIFTEEN *HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS*

1. Gregory of Nyssa: Background, Life, and Major Writings

Historical Context

Gregory of Nyssa was the youngest among the threesome commonly referred to as "the Cappadocian Fathers." The other two were his older brother Basil (called "the Great") and Basil's friend from their student days in Athens, Gregory of Nazianzus (called "the Theologian"). Taken together, these three men—temperamentally very different from each other, to say the least—are remembered as the principal theological architects of the victory of Nicene orthodoxy over the various forms and degrees of Arianism at the "ecumenical" Council of Constantinople (381). At the same time, they were in their different manners leaders of the ascetic or "monastic" movement in Asia Minor, organizing its communities, popularizing its ideals, and evolving the "theory" that guided its practice. To be sure, they did not stand alone in these enterprises. If one is to speak of "the Cappadocians," one must think not only of these three men but also, at the very least, of the larger familial circle to which they belonged: Basil and Gregory's sister Macrina the Younger, who presided over a "double" monastery on their ancestral estate; their younger brother Peter, bishop of Sebaste; and Gregory Nazianzen's cousin Amphilochius, the bishop of Iconium.

Basil, Gregory, and Peter were the children of another Basil ("the Elder") and his wife Emmelia. Basil the Elder (d. 341) had been a prominent rhetorician in the city of Neocaesarea. His mother, Macrina the Elder, had been martyred in the persecutions of the early fourth century and had been a disciple of Gregory Thaumaturgus (d. ca. 270), himself a pupil of Origen and a native (later the bishop) of Neocaesarea. Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa stemmed, then, from an established, landed, and aristocratic family with roots in the region of Pontus embraced by the course of the river Iris as it flowed into the Black Sea, a region that had Neocaesarea as its urban focus. Theirs was also a family marked by deep commitment to

Christian faith and by a tradition of attachment to the calling and skills of the rhetorician.

Gregory's older brother Basil (d. 379) was the one of the three Cappadocians who had the qualities of a natural "leader." For all his ascetic style of life, he was plainly impressive, and more than just impressive, as a figure in the public sphere. He had political skills of a high order together with a dutiful grasp of the uses of power—not to mention something of a genius for organization, as revealed in his work of disseminating and ordering the ascetic movement in his region. Beyond all that, Basil exhibited a remarkable social vision combined with genuine theological acumen. He had enjoyed the best of educations for his day. He had studied rhetoric at Caesarea in Cappadocia (present-day Kayseri), at Constantinople (under the great Libanius), and, finally, in 351, at Athens. There he met his best friend and temperamental opposite, Gregory of Nazianzus, perhaps the most brilliant rhetorician of his time, a self-scrutinizing, sometimes moody poet with a marked tendency, to say the least, to find ways out of public office and the responsibilities and ambiguities that attend it. From Athens, Basil moved back to Caesarea, and there he taught rhetoric from around 355 until 357, at which time he underwent what might best be called a conversion, was baptized, and undertook a tour of the principal sites where the ascetical movement had blossomed in Egypt and Palestine/Syria. Returning to Asia Minor, he sold his possessions and retired to practice the contemplative life on a site by the Iris River near Neocaesarea. There a small community was gradually formed as he was joined by others and, for a short time, by Gregory of Nazianzus. There too he and Gregory put together a now famous anthology of the works of Origen (the *Philokalia*), a book that nicely defines the intellectual tradition in which the Cappadocians consciously, but never uncritically, stood.

Permanent withdrawal from the public realm, however, was really not in Basil's nature. In 364, at the request of the bishop of Caesarea, one Eusebius, he emerged from his retreat, became a presbyter of that church, and, indeed, not without the help of his friend Nazianzen, succeeded Eusebius on the latter's death in 370. Thus he found himself in the position of a metropolitan bishop and was thrust into the midst of the Trinitarian controversy at a time when imperial policy had set itself firmly against the Nicene cause.

It is against the background thus sketched of the life of Basil that one does best to introduce an account of the life and works of Gregory of Nyssa, for if anything is clear about Gregory, it is that he regarded Basil as his leader and teacher and that he devoted himself loyally throughout his career not merely to the defense of Basil's reputation but to the furtherance of his causes. The same, indeed, might be said of his relation to his older sister Macrina, whom he venerated; after her death he wrote a biography of her that qualifies as a

piece of highly sophisticated hagiography, and in a major work, his dialogue *De anima et resurrectione* (*On the Soul and the Resurrection*), he attributes to her many of what posterity has taken to be his own characteristic ideas. While, then, one may suspect that Gregory was being entirely too modest in his estimate of the influence of Basil and Macrina on his thought, one cannot doubt that he consciously saw himself in the role of a disciple—and creative interpreter—of his two elder siblings.

Career and Major Writings

No one is perfectly sure of the year of Gregory's birth, or, for that matter, of Basil's. If Basil was born in 329 or 330, as seems reasonably likely, then Gregory, whose reverence for his brother might plausibly be taken to indicate a significant difference in their ages, most probably came along between 335 and 340.[1] His education was undertaken at home, in local schools, unlike Basil's, and it was Basil who taught him rhetoric at Caesarea in the years 355–357. There was, of course, more to Gregory's education than this; no one can read his writings without recognizing not merely that that his mind was well stocked but also that he was endowed with a natively curious and questing intellect as well as the instincts and talents of a systematizer. His works exhibit an acquaintance with the biological, medical, and physical science of his day (which he uses for more than just illustration), with the Greek philosophical tradition (Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Neo-Pythagorean) as that had been pulled together in Middle and Neo-Platonism, and, needless to say, with the theory and practice of Greek rhetoric, a discipline whose practice he seems to have enjoyed, though without the *gravitas* of his brother's style or the brilliance of that of his namesake of Nazianzus.

Little is known of the events of Gregory's life before, say, 370. It is clear that, following in Basil's footsteps, he too took up the profession of a rhetor, perhaps around 364, when the emperor Julian's decree forbidding Christians to teach the classical subjects was repealed.[2] It is also clear that he married around this time. This is evident from his remarks, in the early treatise *De virginitate* (*On Virginity*), on the relative merits of the married and the celibate conditions; the full joys—and freedom—of the virgin state can never be his, he says, for he is separated from them by the "chasm" created by his participation in "the life of this world."[3] As Daniélou observed, however, this passage, while it leaves open the question whether Gregory kept his wife after

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1. See May 1971, 53.
2. Ibid.
3. *Virg.* 3 (in GNO 8.1:256).

his elevation to the episcopate, nevertheless suggests that he did not himself undertake the monastic life,[4] and Daniélou thought it more than likely, in the light of a letter that Gregory received from Gregory of Nazianzus on the death of one Theosebeia, that the latter was Nyssen's wife at the time of her death.[5] There are difficulties with this interpretation of the evidence,[6] but there is no doubt whatever that Gregory had refused an early invitation of Basil's to join him in the ascetical community that was taking shape in the north at Annesi and that it was in 372, when he was still following the career of a rhetor in Caesarea, that Basil summoned him to surrender that vocation and become the first bishop of the city of Nyssa, an insignificant town slightly north and west of Caesarea, which Basil created as a bishopric in order to reinforce his own authority and with it the strength of the Nicene cause. This was Basil's response to an imperial effort to diminish both by splitting the province of Cappadocia in two and assigning the southern sector of it to the metropolitical jurisdiction of the Arian bishop of Tyana. Gregory reluctantly allowed himself to be installed in this post just before Easter 372.[7]

Gregory was not a success as bishop of Nyssa, at least not from Basil's point of view. He, of course, came under theological attack at the hands of Eustathius, then the bishop of Sebaste, for his stand in favor of the deity of the Holy Spirit, classically defended by Basil in his treatise *De Spiritu Sancto* (*On the Holy Spirit*) of 375.[8] Gregory's real difficulties began, however, when, with the imperially sponsored Homœan party taking the initiative, he contrived to get himself accused in 375 both of mishandling church finances and of a violation of canon law in the process of his appointment as bishop of Nyssa. Taken ill (with a chill and a kidney complaint, as Basil insists in his *Ep.* 225), Gregory was unable to answer a summons to appear before the court of the imperial vicar of Pontus, one Demosthenes. Instead, he retired somewhere to recover and was exiled and then deposed from his see in 376.[9] It is not known where he spent his exile, but he was restored in 378—no doubt after the battle of Adrianople, which occurred in August of that year and in which Emperor Valens, the imperial supporter of the Arian cause, was killed. Basil himself died in the very next year, and Gregory was present at his brother's

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4. Daniélou 1956, 72. Daniélou described *De virginitate* as an "encomium on Basilian monachism written by a married layperson" (ibid.).

5. PG 37:321B.

6. See the judgments of May 1971, 53; Aubineau 1966, 65–77.

7. Basil also assigned his friend Gregory of Nazianzus to the new see of Sasima, but Gregory disliked the place intensely (not without justification) and for all practical purposes declined the honor.

8. See Basil, *Ep.* 237.

9. See ibid., 231 and 237.

end, reflecting, no doubt, on the misfortune that Basil should die just as the Nicene cause was being vindicated by the appointment of Theodosius I ("the Great") as emperor in the East.

For the period between Basil's elevation to the see of Caesarea and his death (370–379), little can be known with assurance of Gregory's literary production. It is generally agreed that the treatise *De virginitate* was produced during this period, though the precise date of 371, defended by Daniélou,[10] has been questioned, and some have located the treatise *De perfectione* (*On Perfection*) in this period. Daniélou further urged that a whole series of Gregory's works be assigned to this period,[11] which included his years of exile. The principal grounds given for this judgment have to do with the presence in the writings in question of theological themes that they share not only with each other (in some cases) but also with the treatise *De virginitate* and, further, with the presence in them of Origenist ideas against which Gregory seems to have reacted after 379. May has pointed out that these conclusions cannot claim any very high degree of certainty but concedes that they are, for some of the works in question, as likely as any alternative, and Heine has located the composition of *In inscriptiones Psalmorum* (*The Titles of the Psalms*) in the year or so just prior to Gregory's return to Nyssa.[12]

It is only for the period after the death of Basil, however, that Gregory's literary output, and at the same time his new-found prominence as a leader in the Nicene cause, can be reliably documented. In 379, after Basil's death, Gregory Nazianzen was summoned to Constantinople, whose bishop was an Arian (Homœan) named Demophilus, by supporters of the Nicene cause. There, based in a private chapel called the "Anastasia," he began the labors that culminated in the delivery of his five "theological orations," an eloquent—and effective—defense of the Nicene cause. This defense led Theodosius I, on his arrival in the East, to appoint Nazianzen bishop of Constantinople in place of Demophilus. During this period Gregory of Nyssa, for his part, undertook in 379 his treatises *De opificio hominis* (*On the Creation of Humanity*) and *Apologia in Hexaemeron* (*In Defense of the Hexaemeron*)—both of which were, though in different ways, defenses and friendly supplemental amendments of Basil's *Homiliae in Hexaem-*

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10. See Daniélou 1956, 78; 1966, 159–60.

11. Daniélou 1966, 160–62. The works in question were *De mortuis non esse dolendum* (*On the Dead*), *De beatitudinibus* (*On the Beatitudes*), *In inscriptiones Psalmorum* (*The Titles of the Psalms*), *De oratione dominica* (*The Lord's Prayer*), *In sextum psalmum* (*On Psalm 6*), and *Ad Eustathium de Sancta Trinitate* (*To Eustathius on the Trinity*).

12. See May 1971, 56–57, and Heine 1995, 8–11, where these arguments are usefully reviewed.

eron (*Homilies on the Hexaemeron*) and both of which are important for an understanding of Gregory's exegetical policies. Gregory was paying, in effect, a debt to his elder brother, while at the same time expanding the scope of Basil's commentary. In autumn of the same year he attended the council in Antioch summoned by its bishop Meletius (a former bishop of Sebaste), who now, in effect, was assuming the leadership of the Nicene cause in the East. On his return from the council, Gregory attended the deathbed of his sister Macrina and perhaps in the following year (380) or not long after composed his dialogue *De anima et resurrectione,* presented as an account of his last conversation with Macrina.

The year 380 was a busy one for Gregory. Much of it was spent in Sebaste, where he had been summoned to take charge of the election of a successor to Eustathius, the leader of the *Pneumatomachi* ("Spirit-fighters," who accepted the deity of the second person of the Trinity, the Son or Word, but rejected that of the Spirit). No doubt to his surprise, Gregory was himself elected to the post and indeed spent much of the year there in a vain attempt to reconcile Nicenes and *Pneumatomachi*. In the end, he resigned and returned to Nyssa. During this period or shortly after it, he produced his polemical treatise *Ad Eustathium de Sancta Trinitate* (*To Eustathius on the Holy Trinity*), whose content reflects the issues with which Gregory wrestled in the course of his time at Sebaste,[13] and *In Ecclesiasten homiliae* (*Homilies on Ecclesiastes*). (Some authorities assign *In inscriptiones Psalmorum* to the period between Basil's death and the opening of the Council of 381.)

It was, moreover, just after the death of Basil in 379 that Eunomius of Cyzicus, the leader of the Anomœan or Neo-Arian party, circulated a response to Basil, who in his *Adversus Eunomium* (*Against Eunomius*) had mounted an attack on Eunomius's *Apologia* (*Apology*). To this *Apologia apologiae* (*Apology for the Apology*), Gregory—ever his brother's defender—undertook to respond in his first two books *Contra Eunomium* (*Against Eunomius*). They were written in 380 and the early part of 381, respectively. In them, and in two later works with the same title,[14] Gregory further devel-

13. May 1971, 57–58.

14. The "work" to which this title has traditionally been applied in fact contains four distinct writings of Gregory's, the order of which has become thoroughly confused in the manuscript tradition and therefore in the standard English translation. Here, as indicated above, Gregory is taking up a task originally begun by Basil, whose treatise *Adversus Eunomium* answered the latter's *Apologia*. After Basil's death Eunomius circulated his *Apologia apologiae,* and Gregory replied to the first part of this in what is now book 1 of his own *Contra Eunomium*. Slightly later he replied to the second part of Eunomius's work by writing what has traditionally been called book 12b. But Eunomius then published a further attack on Basil, and to this Gregory also replied—after the Council of 381—in a work that was early divided

oped themes already sounded by Basil and by Gregory Nazianzen in his *Orationes theologicae* (*Theological Orations*), themes having to do with the indefinabilty and incomprehensibility of the divine nature, a cornerstone of the Nicene case against Neo-Arianism. To his own somewhat radicalized version of these ideas Gregory joined, in these writings against Eunomius, a correlative theory of theological predication, and these eventually played a significant role in his construction of the meaning of the Song of Songs for the human relationship to God.

From May to July of 381, Gregory was in attendance at the Council of Constantinople, a council called by Theodosius I to reunite the churches of the East around the faith of the Council of Nicaea (325). The principal theological issue by this time was that of the Holy Spirit, and the debate over it in fact continued after the close of the Council. Thus Gregory's treatise *Adversus Macedonianos de Spiritu Sancto* (*Against the Macedonians* [*Pneumatomachians*] *on the Holy Spirit*) appeared immediately after the conclusion of the Council, and it was on behalf of this Council and its decisions that Gregory undertook a journey to Arabia and Jerusalem.[15] The matter of the status of the Spirit was not closed, and at the Constantinopolitan Council of 383, Gregory delivered his work *De deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti* (*On the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit*)—and presumably heard Eunomius read out his *Expositio fidei* (*Confession of Faith*), which Gregory then proceeded to confute in the final piece of his extended response to that Neo-Arian divine. It is safe to say, then, that at the Council and throughout the time of Theodosius's residence in Constantinople, which came to an end in 387, Gregory was a principal apologist and theological resource for the imperial court in its effort to establish the "new Nicene" solution to the Arian controversy. This judgment is supported by the invitation issued him in 385, at yet another Council of Constantinople, to deliver the official eulogies of the Princess Pulcheria and the Empress Flacilla. It also tends to confirm the common opinion that Gregory's *Oratio catechetica magna* (*Great Catechesis*) belongs to the later part of the period between 381 and 387 and was roughly contemporary with his polemical work *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium* (*Against Apollinarius*).

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into ten (short) books: traditionally books 3–12a of *Contra Eunomium*. Finally, in 383, Eunomius presented an *Expositio fidei* (*Confession of Faith*) to Emperor Theodosius I, and Gregory wrote, as a rebuttal of it, what has traditionally been counted as book 2 of his *Contra Eunomium*. Thus the correct order of Gregory's several works in reply to Eunomius, an order now reproduced in the Jaeger (GNO) edition, is as follows: (a) book 1; (b) book 12b; (c) books 3–12a; (d) book 2.

15. May 1966, 118–20; note the contrary view of Daniélou 1966, 163–64.

The Homilies on the Song

Gregory's *In Canticum canticorum* (*Homilies on the Song of Songs;* hereafter *Homilies*), however, belongs to the very last years of his life, and the same is probably true, as Daniélou argued, of *De vita Mosis* (*Life of Moses*) and the treatise *De perfectione* (*On Perfection*), which share significant themes with the *Homilies*. The occasion for the composition of the latter is—uncharacteristically, one might add—indicated by Gregory himself in the dedicatory letter that he prefixed to it. The letter contains, at its end, a brief account of how the homilies took shape, prefaced by a much longer defense of the "allegorical" method he followed in his exegesis of the Song (he preferred on the whole to call it "anagogical"). Equally important from our point of view is his dedication of the work to the lady Olympias, who, as he there observes, solicited it "both in person and by [her] letters."

 Olympias, as it happens, was a person of high reputation. Thirty or more years younger than Gregory, she was of noble descent (her grandfather had been Constantine's praetorian prefect) and wealthy as befitted her rank.[16] Theodosius I, living then in Constantinople, brought about her marriage to a relative of his, Nebridius, praetor of the city, when Olympias was still in her teens. Nebridius, however, died some twenty months after the marriage, leaving her, in 386, a young widow of vast riches. Theodosius doubted whether such wealth could be administered to useful public ends by an inexperienced young woman devoted to asceticism and good works and accordingly ordered her to marry another of his relatives, Elpidius. She refused, wanting nothing to do with marriage, and the emperor reacted by impounding her possessions until she should reach the age of thirty and by forbidding her to keep the company of high-ranking ecclesiastics. He relented, however, in 391, on his return to Constantinople, well before she had achieved the required age. After that time Olympias was free to conduct her life in the service of the church, especially in care of the poor and the sick. The anonymous biography of Olympias[17] reports that she built a convent on property of her own in Constantinople (which, as it happens, adjoined the church of the Holy Wisdom), whose membership initially consisted of herself and her *familia* of maidservants.

 It was entirely consonant with the character of Olympias, who was much given to study of the Scriptures, that she should request of Gregory an

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16. For what follows, I am indebted to Kelly 1994, 112–13, and to Cahill 1981, although I have not followed either in all details.

17. See the edition of Malingrey 1968. Cahill (1981, 451 n. 1) doubts this evidence on the ground that Palladius does not mention the convent.

interpretation of the Song of Songs; the problem is to know when she might have done so. After 386, Olympias was, after all, forbidden the company of higher clergy, but it is possible that she had met, or become acquainted with the reputation of, Nyssen as early as 381, when he was attending the Council of Constantinople, for she was known to Gregory Nazianzen through her governess Theodosia, Gregory's cousin and the sister of Amphilochius of Iconium. This does not, however, seem to be a setting in which a young girl, for all practical purposes a child, might have "enjoined" (ἐπιτίθημι) upon a prominent, not to say elderly, bishop the composition of a commentary on the Song. Gregory and Olympias may have become acquainted before 386, but Olympias's request is best assigned to the year 391 or shortly thereafter, when, though still in her twenties, she had emerged as a person of significance in her own right. Daniélou believed that the homilies were delivered between 390 and 394, but 390 is too early, and for all we know the homilies might have been delivered even a bit later than 394 (the year of Gregory's last known attendance at a council in the imperial city).[18]

Daniélou took the view that Olympias's request to Gregory included an invitation to make her community of ascetic women the initial audience of his homilies, but Gregory's dedicatory letter makes it perfectly plain that this hypothesis is out of the question. The homilies, Gregory says, were initially delivered "in the presence of the assembly" (ἐπ' ἐκκλησίας) and "during the days of fasting" (κατὰ τὰς ἡμέρας τῶν νηστειῶν); what this means, plainly enough, is that they were originally addressed to the regular congregation at Nyssa in the season of Lent, presumably on weekdays. Daniélou thought this unlikely, partly because he judged that during this last period of his life Gregory was doing his thinking and writing before a mental audience of ascetics and partly because he reckoned it implausible and inappropriate for such "homilies of mystical inspiration"[19] to be given before a collection of ordinary types whose prepossessions they did not, and could not, address. The difficulty with this judgment is twofold. In the first place, it is doubtful whether Gregory saw his subject matter as "mysticism" in the modern sense of that word; in the second place, he openly says, at the beginning of the dedicatory letter, that the homilies did not have Olympias (and presumably, therefore, people like her) in mind but were intended to give direction "to more fleshly folk for the sake of the spiritual and immaterial welfare of their souls." From Gregory's point of view, the "way" that his homilies discern as the theme of

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18. Note the sensible proposal of Tillemont, quoted by Cahill 1981, 452–53.
19. Daniélou 1966, 168.

the Song of Songs is not a way reserved for the "advanced" but one that is meant to be trodden by all serious Christians.

Finally, it is clear that what has come down in the manuscript tradition is indeed a set of homilies, and in a form not too far removed from that in which they were delivered. Gregory explains[20] that certain of his "associates" had "taken down notes" (no doubt in shorthand) of "the greater part" (τὰ πολλά) of what he had said. He then, so the report says, did three things. He accepted what these associates had given him (surely rendered already into longhand) if it was in sequence; he added what he thought was lacking to make proper sense of the transcription; and he put everything into the form of homilies in which "the interpretation of the words followed the order of the text." The last of these undertakings seems to imply that as originally delivered the homilies contained some passages in which the preacher treated certain lines or verses not in the order in which they appear but perhaps in connection with other, thematically related lines or verses—and that Gregory wanted the homilies to have the form of a proper verse-by-verse commentary (like Origen's). Dünzl is quite right to point out that there is no reason to suppose that Gregory's revisions or additions were either extensive or thorough.[21] Gregory himself suggests that he had little time to work on revisions "during the days of fasting" (which, I am inclined to suspect, means that his original delivery of the sermons and his revisions were undertaken during the same—busy—Lenten season). He also comments that his commentary had only got halfway through the text of the Song, a vague, perhaps even careless, remark that nevertheless inspired Dörries to suggest that, since homilies 13–15 go beyond the (precisely calculated) first half of the Song of Songs, they must have been added to the set after Gregory's work of oral delivery was done.[22] Quite apart from the fact that this hypothesis, as Dünzl has observed, does little to clarify the way in which the homilies assumed their present form,[23] it also seems to imply, on the best interpretation of the chronology, that the manuscript Gregory originally sent to Olympias was shorter by three homilies than the one we presently possess and that Gregory did not so much hope, as positively intend, to expand it. His language however—"If the God who provides life provides us with both a long enough life and a time of quiet, we shall perhaps work our way through what remains"—does not seem to rise even to the level of hope.

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20. Homily preface, p. 13 (Jaeger). All references to Gregory's *Homilies on the Song of Songs* are to the page numbers of the edition by Hermann Langerbeck in vol. 6 of the GNO, for which Jaeger served as the general editor.

21. Dünzl 1994b, 1:32–35.

22. Dörries 1963, 572–73.

23. Dünzl 1994b, 1:36–37.

Gregory sounds tired, and his language is not that of a person who foresees a much longer life. Indeed, he did not enjoy a much longer life. His death occurred at some time around, though probably shortly after, 395.

2. The Themes, Method, and Sources of Gregory's Interpretation of the Song

The Problem of "Allegory"

Anyone with a properly modern outlook and a properly modern taste in literary—and especially biblical—interpretation is likely, on reading Gregory's *Homilies* for the first time, to undergo something of a shock. If, moreover, such a person is asked what occasions this reaction—of dismay, incredulity, and rejection—the answer that comes is likely to specify (1) Gregory's systematic treatment of the text as allegory, and, in the particular case of the Song, (2) his use of allegory to cleanse away or purge or trivialize its marked, and cheerful, sexual eroticism. Gregory himself acknowledges that there are, in his own day, exegetes who could be said to have shared something of this aversion to allegory, teachers who "do not agree that Scripture says anything for our profit by way of enigmas and below-the-surface meanings"[24] (a phraseology that represents Gregory's carefully neutral way of saying what "allegory" means as he understands it). Nor is there much doubt that the people he has in mind here are representatives of the so-called Antiochene School, teachers such as Diodore of Tarsus or Theodore of Mopsuestia. The first of these, moreover (Diodore) he could well have met, and probably did meet, at the Council of Antioch (379) or the Council of Constantinople (381) or both.[25] In any case, Gregory's dedicatory letter to Olympias undertakes what he doubtless regarded as an obligation, namely, the defense of his exegetical policy—a policy he had already followed in his *De vita Mosis* and *In inscriptiones Psalmorum*—against just such critics. And he does so in terms that indicate his debt to Origen but, at the same time, as we shall see, depart significantly in some ways from Origen's theory and practice.

It is a temptation, then, when confronted with Gregory's exegetical policies in the *Homilies,* to turn straightway to this dedicatory letter and to set out the terms of his defense of allegory, that is, to attend deliberately and narrowly to the question of his *method* of eliciting what he takes to be the teaching of the Song. To adopt this procedure, however, would be to ignore the presupposi-

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24. Homily preface, p. 4 (Jaeger). On the meaning of "enigma," see ibid., n. 1
25. For an excellent discussion of this issue, see Cahill 1981, 453ff.

tions of his use of allegory, that is, the extent to which his understanding of it is correlative with (1) a picture of the structures of reality, (2) a conception of the subject matter (the σκοπός, i.e., the "aim" or "purpose") of the Song, and (3) a picture of the workings of human language that goes along with these. These presuppositions are not, to be sure, original with Gregory. His phrasing and deployment of them are in every case developments of an inherited tradition that he adopts and sometimes reworks. They embody or imply both an idea of how a biblical text "works" and an understanding of the human relationship to God, and allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures as Gregory sees it plays a central role in the maturation of this relationship; in other words, it has, in practice, as Gregory sees the matter, a transformative function.

STRUCTURES OF REALITY

More than once in the course of the *Homilies* Gregory argues that the Song intimates a certain manner of envisaging the way in which reality is structured. One of the clearest of these is found in the opening section of homily 6, where Gregory is addressing Song 3:1–4.[26] In that passage the Bride of the Song,[27] alone on her bed at night, goes out in search of her Beloved: she cries out for him and, receiving no answer, steps out into *the markets and … the streets* of the city to find him. She even asks the *watchmen* of the city as they go their rounds whether they have seen him; when their response disappoints her, she leaves them behind—then and only then to find the one she seeks. What this passage conveys, Gregory says, is a kind of philosophy whose aim it is to explain how "lovers of the transcendent Beauty are to relate themselves to the Divine."[28]

The basis of this "philosophy"—which, as we shall see further on, does indeed have practical implications—is initially a division of reality into two realms or orders. The division in question appears as early as Gregory's *Apologia in Hexaemeron,* where he teaches that the creation "of heaven and earth" related by Moses in the first chapter of Genesis is, by intent, limited to an account of the coming-to-be of the *perceptible* order, the world of "things that appear," but also insists that the "third heaven" to which Paul was exalted (2 Cor 12:2), while a part—the highest, not to say noblest, part—of the

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26. See homily 6, pp. 172–74 (Jaeger); cf. homily 5, pp. 157ff. (Jaeger).

27. Gregory follows the established tradition that the female figure of the Song, when the text is read in its literal sense, is a bride of King Solomon, commonly thought to be the daughter of Pharaoh (cf. 1 Kgs 3:1; 11:1). In the Song, she is neither bride nor soul nor church but simply a woman.

28. Homily 6, p. 173 (Jaeger).

perceptible order, is in fact the borderline beyond which there lies the "inner-most shrine of wisdom," that "paradise" (2 Cor 12:3) which is the *intelligible* cosmos. The latter, he thinks, is the realm experienced by Paul, the very realm that the apostle describes elsewhere as "unseen" and "eternal" (2 Cor 4:18) and with regard to which he says that its contents are inexpressible in human words.[29] The very same division of reality appears at various points in the *Homilies* and at first glance seems simply to reiterate the momentous distinction originally made by Plato at the opening of his *Timaeus* (27D–28A). For example, Gregory writes in one place:

> The nature of things that exist is divided, at the highest level of general-ity, into two kinds. On the one hand, there is that which is perceptible and material; on the other, that which is intelligible and nonmaterial. Hence we reckon something to fall into the category of the perceptible to the extent that it is grasped by sense perception, but we reckon as intelligible that which falls beyond the observation of the senses.[30]

Yet there is a subtle divergence here between Plato and Gregory. Plato's distinction puts its primary emphasis on the difference between that-which-unchangeably-is and that-which-comes-to-be and then secondarily on the description of these two realms as intelligible and perceptible, respectively. Gregory, however, in the passage just quoted, ignores the former of these two differences—for the good enough reason that in his mind the distinc-tion between intelligible and perceptible does not coincide with that between Being and Becoming as Plato understood it. His point emerges when he goes on to explain that, in addition to this most fundamental distinction, there is a second to be made, this time within the category of the intelli-gible itself, which, Gregory asserts, "is also divided into two kinds." This, to put it bluntly, is the distinction between God the Creator ("the uncre-ated") and that segment or division of the intelligible realm that comes to be, that is created. The Divine alone is eternal in the proper sense and eter-nally self-identical; it is God alone who possesses the characteristics that Plato ascribed to the realm of Forms or Ideas—although God, as will soon become plain, is well beyond Form or Idea. The remainder of the intelli-gible realm thus consists of created beings. Indeed, Gregory insists, they "are always being created."[31] Their life is, as it were, always in process, which means that they have to be described, intelligible though they be, as always

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29. 2 Cor 12:4; see Gregory's discussion of all this in *Apol. Hex.* (PG 44:120D–121C).
30. Homily 6, p. 173 (Jaeger).
31. Ibid., p. 174.

coming to be, and this, needless to say, would from Plato's point of view have constituted a perfect oxymoron.

Gregory's Platonism, then, is a strictly Christian Platonism in the sense that the difference between perceptible reality and intelligible reality is in practice subordinated to the further, biblical distinction between Creator and creature, and within the terms of that distinction the intelligible and perceptible realms as Plato knew them fall together into the category of the creaturely: of that-which-comes-to-be. There is, moreover, a further divergence here between Gregory and Plato that should not go unremarked, even though it does not represent a characteristically Christian development. For later Platonism, through whose eyes Gregory understood the master, the intelligible realm is also the realm of intellect; that is, what it contains is not simply Ideas or Forms but Ideas or Forms *as known,* as entertained by mind or by minds that are themselves immaterial, nonperceptible, realities. The "intelligible" realm, then, is that dimension of reality in which knower and known, intellect and intelligible, subject and object, approximate unity. It is the realm in which what-one-is and what-one-knows move toward coincidence. Naturally enough, then, for Gregory this realm is the home of the angelic host—and, at least intermittently and eschatologically, of human beings in their capacity as rational, intellectual subjects.

Hence, to return to the passage in homily 6 with which we started, the Bride, when at night she sallies forth to find her Beloved, follows a route that is determined by just this map of reality. The *night* in which she starts her search is the "darkness" that is God's "hiding-place" (Ps 17:2; cf. Exod 20:21) and that is "entered" when God is sought as an identifiable phenomenon of the *perceptible* order; for then the One she seeks is experienced simply as the invisible. But then, we are told, she goes out into the city, its streets and markets; this, Gregory tells us, represents "the intelligible and supracosmic order," the angelic realm. But even the *watchmen* who represent this incorporeal cosmos testify by their silence that the Beloved is no acquaintance of theirs. The Bride, therefore, must pass them by, must pierce beyond the intelligible order, and there she meets the One whose "existence is known only in incomprehension of what it is."

God, then, stands beyond intelligibility. Gregory—in what may be one of his most frequent and characteristic ways of referring to God—asserts dogmatically in his *Homilies* that "the blessed and eternal Nature … transcends every intellect."[32] The same point is made in slightly different language in the course of Gregory's comments on Song 1:11. God is "that Reality … which

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32. Homily 5, p. 157 (Jaeger).

transcends the entire structure and order of Being, [and] is unapproachable, impalpable, and incomprehensible."[33] Gregory may seem to conceive of God in the first instance as a "sector" of the realm of the intelligible, but in the end he acknowledges that God, who contains or encompasses all things but cannot be contained,[34] is no part, aspect, or dimension of the cosmic order. In his Song commentary, this teaching—extensively developed in the writings *Contra Eunomium* as a response to Neo-Arianism—is in full bloom and is characteristically developed in the form of a doctrine of divine infinity[35] that is at least partially rooted in Gregory's belief that the divine goodness is unlimited, whether externally or internally.[36]

Into this frame of a twofold, perceptible and intelligible, created order posited and sustained by a Goodness so deep and so intense as to reach beyond the grasp of any human word or concept, Gregory inserts the human creature. And clearly, there is a certain sense in which he finds humanity baffling. On the one hand, this Adam/Eve is said to be created "after the image and likeness of God," and to Gregory this signifies that the human being participates in the divine way of being, thus imitating that way of being at the level of the creature. To be "after the image … of God" means, then, to be possessed of self-determination (and the capacity for choice that that presupposes). It means to enjoy an immortality that is a participation in the eternity of God. It means to be characterized by love—love of the good, for God, after all, *is* the Good and is called "Love." In brief, it means to possess on a human scale the excellences—the "virtues"—that are proper to God, not excluding impassibility.[37] On the other hand, in Gregory's eyes "the piteous and wretched state of the human race" as one now sees it is not consistent with its description as "image of God."[38] The passions that are proper to the "nature" of humanity's animal dimension—that is, to the lower reaches of its life principle, soul in its nutritive and perceptive phases—can as it were "infect" the

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33. Homily 3, p. 90 (Jaeger).

34. Homily 5, p. 157 (Jaeger); cf., e.g., homilies 11, p. 338; 13, p. 386; and 15, p. 438. This language goes back to Philo of Alexandria and was much favored by Irenaeus in his controversy with Christian Gnostics.

35. On this idea, see the essential study of Mühlenberg 1966.

36. This is an idea that Gregory intimates fairly clearly as early as his treatise *Opif. hom.* 21 (PG 44:201B). Cf. *Vit. Mos.* preface 7 (trans. Malherbe and Ferguson 1978, 33): "The Divine One is himself the Good…, whose very nature is Goodness.… and since the Divine does not admit of an opposite, we hold the divine nature to be unlimited and infinite." Above all, see *Eun.* 1.360–369 (GNO 1:133ff.).

37. For Gregory's full account of what is involved in the concept "image of God," see *Opif. hom.* 4–5 (PG 44:136B–137C).

38. See *Opif. hom.* 16 (PG 44:180B–C).

intellect in which the divine image is rooted. That happens when the intellect turns away from God and seeks its good not in God but in the realm of things perceptible. In doing so, it assumes a new identity to the extent that in turning to perceptible "goods" it takes on the likeness of what it attends to; this, for Gregory, is the meaning of "Adam's" fall. "Nature"—which here means the "logic" (λόγος), the indwelling cunning and dynamic instilled by the Creator in plant and animal forms of life—takes control of the human self and makes the human self over in its own image instead of itself being brought to participate in the divine image implanted in the intelligible self, the intellect.[39] The human project, then, is restoration of the divine image, the return of humanity, intelligible and perceptible, to its original identity.

Such imaging comes about, however, within a relationship of "mirroring," for "the intellect," says Gregory, "is decked out with the likeness of the prototypical beauty, rather like a mirror marked with the form of what is reflected in it."[40] This metaphor of the mirror is frequent, needless to say, in the *Homilies,* and when examined closely it conveys one or two essential elements in Gregory's understanding of the image idea. For one thing, of course, it indicates that the image, while a reproduction of its original, does not normally count as another instance of its original.[41] An image reproduces its original *in another medium,* such as in the form of a reflection on the surface of glass or in that of a portrait painted on wood or canvas. In the case of the ἄνθρωπος that God summoned into existence (Gen 1:26–27), the image takes form in a *created* and *mutable* nature and not that of uncreated Deity. Further, and just as important, the human mirror conveys an image of its original only as and when it is "looking to" its original. The "life-endued and choice-endowed mirror"—that is, the soul that is the Bride—asserts that she focuses "upon the face of [her] Kinsman with [her] entire being," and the result of this attentiveness to the incarnate divine Word is that "the entire beauty of his form is seen in me."[42] And in general, "Those who look upon the true Godhead take to themselves the characteristics of the divine Nature."[43] There is a close relation, therefore, between knowing God (or "seeing" God) and being like God. In

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39. See *Opif. hom.* 17 (*PG* 44:189C–D and 192Dff.). Cf. homily 15, pp. 457–59 (Jaeger).

40. *Opif. hom.* 12 (PG 44:161C; cf. 164A).

41. The exception that proves this rule is, of course, the relations of the persons of the Trinity: the Word or Son is indeed a "reproduction" of the Father, but (so the Nicene argument ran) a reproduction that counts as "spitting image," i.e., the very same thing all over again.

42. Homily 15, p. 440 (Jaeger).

43. Homily 5, p. 147 (Jaeger). One wonders whether Gregory—or those Christians before him who shared this understanding of the relation between likeness and knowledge/vision—had noted 1 John 3:2 ("we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is"). Certainly Gregory had taken account of 2 Cor 3:18.

Gregory, indeed (and surely not in Gregory only), the two seem to be correlative. He can talk the language of Matt 5:8, according to which virtue (purity of heart) is a condition of seeing God (and therefore of actualizing the divine image): "knowledge," he says, "of the Good that transcends every intellect comes to us through the virtues."[44] He can also, however, as we have just seen, talk the language of 1 John 3:2, according to which the vision of God is a condition of bearing the likeness, for people become like what they look at.[45] The good that human nature seeks can thus be defined in two ways[46] that come to the same thing: virtue makes the vision of God possible, and the vision of God makes virtue possible. Progress in respect of either virtue or knowledge thus entails progress in the other.

THE QUESTION OF ΣΚΟΠΟΣ

Against the background of this account of the structure of reality, and of the human situation within it, one can turn to the question of Gregory's exegetical procedures, which in one way or another are informed by his world picture. In this connection, the first thing to be noted is simply that Gregory had enjoyed a standard rhetorical education in the Greek tradition and that he was familiar with the questions customarily posed by grammar-teacher and rhetor alike to a classical text and with the techniques they employed to answer their questions. In the *Homilies* as elsewhere, then, he can be observed raising issues about the syntax of a sentence or word,[47] explaining the sense of a word by reference to other occurrences of it in the Scriptures,[48] or complaining of the difficulty of turning Hebrew into idiomatic Greek.[49] Among these normal preoccupations of the exegete, however, there looms one that is of more central and critical importance, since it determines what shall be taken to be the business—the aim or purpose—of the work to be interpreted; this is the question of its σκοπός.

That question, as has often been noted, grew out of concern for the organic unity of a literary composition. Such an interest goes back at least as far as Plato himself, who in the *Phaedrus* argues that "any speech ought

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44. Homily 3, p. 91 (Jaeger).

45. Homily 4, p. 105 (Jaeger); cf. homily 5, pp. 147, 150.

46. For another way of putting this idea, see homily 13, p. 376 (Jaeger).

47. See, e.g., his discussion of Song 4:9c and the phrase "in one" (homily 8, pp. 258–59 [Jaeger]).

48. Thus his discussion of the sense of "sweet-smelling" in homily 9, p. 266 (Jaeger), which enables him to construe "spice" as a reference to sacrifice.

49. See homily 2, pp. 53–54 (Jaeger), where Gregory is worried at the suggestion that it was "the sons of my mother" who assigned the Bride to "guard" the vineyard.

to hang together like a living organism" (ζῷον). Plato goes on to insist that someone may well be competent to create examples of the sorts of compositions proper to a tragedy without being thereby constituted the equal of a Sophocles or Euripides. The genius of the latter depends on their sense of the unity-in-difference of the concrete whole, and they understand, in practice, that "a tragedy is nothing other than a combination of … components that harmonizes them with one another and with the whole" (*Phaedr.* 264B, 268D). Similarly Aristotle—with dramas primarily in mind—insists that,

> just as, in the other forms of mimesis,[50] a single work of mimesis has a single action as its focus, so it is also in the case of the mythos [story? plot?]: since it is mimesis of an action, it must concern a single action, and that action as a whole,[51] and the deeds or events that make it up must hang together in such a way that if any of them is relocated or removed the whole is disrupted and disturbed; for any element whose presence or absence makes no difference is no part of the whole. (*Poet.* 8 [1451a29–35])

This concern for the organic unity of a literary composition was not necessarily or universally shared by the posterity of Plato and Aristotle. Indeed, it is by now a commonplace that self-conscious interest in the σκοπός of a text as a hermeneutical key to its unity was first given articulate and systematic shape in Neoplatonist circles by Iamblichus (d. ca. 325). This pupil of Porphyry (and beneficiary of Plotinus) wrote commentaries on works of Plato and Aristotle and appears to have adopted Plato's analogy of the organism for a literary creation.[52] Iamblichus insisted that the interpreter give an account of the subject matter of an individual work, an account that, for all practical purposes, is at the same time a specification of the author's intent or purpose in producing the work: "for with the Neoplatonists it is above all the conscious intention of the artist, what they call the σκοπός, which imparts to the various elements of his work the quality of being necessary or belonging."[53] Excellence in a literary work, then, would on this hypothesis require, among other things, that its every part contribute to the sense of the whole and, at the same time, that the sense of the whole control the articulation of each of its parts. The critic

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50. He has just praised Homer for the way in which both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* portray a single "action": the "wrath of Achilles" with its effects, on the one hand, and the return of Odysseus, on the other.

51. Aristotle has already explained that "whole" means having "a beginning, middle, and end" (*Poet.* 7 [1450b25–26])

52. For Iamblichus and the Neoplatonist interest in σκοπός, see Coulter 1976; Dalsgaard Larsen 1972; and the discussions in Rondeau 1974; Heine 1995; and Young 1997.

53. Coulter 1976, 77.

or exegete is thus bound, in approaching a text, to begin by indicating what he takes its "business" to be, for this consideration defines the course that its interpretation must take.

At any rate, in Christian circles there was an interest in these matters even before Iamblichus wrote his commentaries. Thus one finds Origen explaining that the primary "aim" (σκοπός) embodied in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures is that of familiarizing human beings with "the ineffable mysteries that concern human affairs," which turn out to be in the first instance the mysteries of God the Trinity and of the incarnation, the work of Christ, and all matters concerning the creation and fall of the rational spirits.[54] To be sure, the Spirit also had a secondary aim (δεύτερος … σκοπός), which was

> to conceal the λόγος relating to the subjects just mentioned in expressions that convey a narrative containing a recital concerned with the acts by which the perceptible order was constructed, the creation of humanity, and successive offspring of the original human beings down to the point where they become many. (*Princ.* 4.2.8)

Needless to say, this definition of the Scripture's twofold "aim" is simply a more explicit way of stating Origen's earlier description of the scriptural texts as the "forms … of certain mysteries and images of divine things" (*Princ.* 1 preface 8). The picture in Origen's mind seems to be that of the scriptural text as the perceptible clothing or embodiment of a "meaning" that belongs to the intelligible or spiritual order. It is the Spirit's first σκοπός, then, that defines the real—and single—burden of the Scriptures, even though there is a partial and elementary truth conveyed by the perceptible, corporeal "letter" itself.

Ronald Heine further cites two places where Origen appears to discuss the "aim," not of the Scriptures as a whole, but of an individual work or type of work within the Scriptures.[55] One of these is the Song itself, for in the lengthy preface to his commentary on the Song of Songs Origen asserts that "love [ἔρως] … is the principal theme of this writing."[56] The other example is a brief passage in book 10 of Origen's commentary on John, where he speaks of the "mystical σκοπός" of the Gospels and explains that the Gospel writers sometimes alter their narrative (ἱστορία) in order to accommodate this aim, which is thus "higher" both in the sense that it governs the detail of the

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54. Origen, *Princ.* 4.2.7. These, of course, constitute the core subject matter of Origen's treatise "on first principles."

55. Heine 1995, 38–39.

56. Heine 1995, 38. I insert the Greek word ἔρως here because I assume that Rufinus's *amor,* here and elsewhere in his Latin version of the commentary, is a translation of that term.

text and in the sense that it has to do with matters spiritual rather than with goings-on in the perceptible realm (*Comm. Jo.* 10.19).

To this evidence from Origen it is worth adding testimony from a later source. About a quarter of a century after the death of Iamblichus (and a good century after that of Origen), Athanasius, writing against his Arian opponents, accused them of misunderstanding the Gospels. The cure for this condition, he suggests, would consist in their "grasping the σκοπός of our Christian belief" and "using it as a norm" while they pay attention "to the reading of the God-inspired Scriptures" (1 Tim 4:13; cf. 2 Tim 3:16). What the "belief" (πίστις)—that is, the baptismal creed—thus intends to convey is the same as the purport of the Scriptures themselves, Athanasius thinks, for, as he goes on to say, the aim and distinguishing characteristic of Scripture is that it everywhere proclaims Christ and Christ as at once divine and human.[57] Athanasius may or may not have been acquainted with Iamblichus's views and hermeneutical policies; if not, then his language, like Origen's, attests an independent concern, in some Christian circles at least, for the unity of the Scriptures taken as a whole and also of individual writings among their number, understood in terms of σκοπός.

By Gregory of Nyssa's time, however, the influence of Neoplatonist ideas in Christian circles is clear. It may be most clear in the case of Antiochene exegetes. Anyone who consults, say, Theodore of Mopsuestia's commentary on the Psalms,[58] with its careful expositions of the "hypothesis" (*argumentum*) of each psalm and its insistence that a psalm's meaning be limited to its explicit aim, is bound to be impressed with the systematic way in which Theodore employs the inferred setting of a psalm to determine its aim.[59]

Gregory of Nyssa is perhaps not so "systematic" as Theodore in his use of the concept of *skopos:* he is a debtor to Origen before he is to Iamblichus.[60]

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57. Athanasius, *C. Ar.* 3.28–29 (ed. Bright 1873, 183–84).

58. See Hill 2006.

59. Thus, to take the first example that comes to hand, Theodore rejects the view of those who say that the "subject" of Ps 1 is King Jehoash on the ground that the latter, given his acquiescence to popular frequentation of "high places" (4 Kgdms 12:3), could not have embodied the virtues of the sort of person whose "delight is in the law of the Lord." The psalm is in fact, then, a piece of paraenesis dealing with "desire for the virtues and abstinence from errors," neither of which was characteristic of Jehoash, and Theodore proceeds to develop its inherent "aim," which is the same as its *hypothesis:* to teach that correct faith and good morals are alike essential to beatitude.

60. See Heine 1995, 40: "[Gregory] has retained and expanded Origen's use of the concept of the *skopos* of Scripture and its individual books by applying to it various principles derived from Iamblichus." This is a just estimate of Gregory's method in *In inscriptiones Psalmorum,* but it might—oddly—be less plausible, I think, if taken of the *Homilies* or the *De vita Mosis.*

Nevertheless, he seems to address the question systematically in his early exegetical works. It raises its head, indeed, in one of his earliest "commentaries," of the year 379: the *Apologia in Hexaemeron*. This is, as indicated above, a work designed both to defend and to complement his brother Basil's nine sermons on the narrative of creation in Gen 1. The slightly earlier treatise, *De opificio hominis,* in fact adds to Basil's work, for Basil's explication of Gen 1 had not reached as far as the account of the creation of the ἄνθρωπος on the sixth day, but the *Apologia in Hexaemeron* is an effort to come to terms with Basil's way of reading Gen 1, regarding which Gregory asserts that it has for him an authority second only to that of Scripture itself.[61] It is clear, nevertheless, that Basil's account disappointed him in two respects—not by its content but by what it had omitted, or at any rate partially omitted. The first of these disappointments (the second we will take up in the next section) had, of course, to do with Basil's addressing the text as it stood, taking it in its "literal" sense. In this regard, Basil had departed from Origen's conviction that the narrative of "the acts by which the perceptible order was constructed" was intended by the Spirit to "conceal" teaching about the mysteries of the faith (Origen, *Princ.* 4.2.8), and this meant, of course, that the language of the narrative required an allegorical interpretation to bring out its full meaning. Gregory, however, true to his fraternal loyalty to Basil, agrees that the literal sense must in this case stand, for, he argues, it was the σκοπός of Basil's work to present the teaching of Moses' narrative in a manner adapted to the average understanding of his audience. Moreover, Basil's aim corresponded exactly to that of Moses himself:

> For … the prophet composed the book of Genesis as an introduction to the knowledge of God, and Moses' σκοπός is to take those who are enslaved to sense perception and to guide them, by way of things that appear, toward that which transcends the grasp of sense perception. Hence when he says heaven and earth, he is specifying the knowledge that comes to us by way of the eyes.[62]

To be sure, as we have seen,[63] Gregory is sure that Moses' mention of "waters that are above the firmament" is a reference to what lies beyond Paul's "third heaven," that is, the realm of intelligible reality; however, he agrees that that is not the business (σκοπός) of the narrative of the six days. Gregory, then, assigns a carefully defined σκοπός not only to Moses' treatment of the

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61. PG 44:68B–C.
62. PG 44:69D; cf. Basil, *Hex.* 1.6 (PG 29:16C).
63. See p. xxiv above, with the reference there.

creation narrative but to Basil's explication of it—and indeed suggests how the former is related to the intent of the book of Genesis as a whole.

Similarly, in the (probably slightly earlier) treatise *In inscriptiones Psalmorum,* Gregory begins by considering the character of the Psalter as a whole; the first task that this entails, he says, is that of identifying the σκοπός of the book of Psalms. The decisive clue here is the first word of Ps 1: "blessed" (μακάριος). The "aim" or "business" of the entire Psalter is the human blessedness (i.e., likeness to God) attained through the practice of virtue.[64] Gregory then proceeds to assign to each of the five successive "books" of the Psalter a stage along the way of virtue as its subtopic. In this way he follows Iamblichus's program and interprets each of the parts of the work in and through its relation to the business of the whole.

The same, I think, cannot be said of *De vita Mosis,* the work that in its outlook most closely approximates the teaching of the *Homilies.* In the case of *De vita Mosis,* it is crucially important to distinguish between Gregory's σκοπός[65] in writing and the subject matter (ὑπόθεσις), as he saw it, of the text he was studying, which he had brought out, he says, by elaborating a bit on the (literal) text in his summary of it.[66] Gregory's personal aim was to address a particular question: the question of "the perfect life."[67] This was an issue with regard to which he entertained idiosyncratic ideas. As he saw the matter, since God is the Good, and since there is no limit to God's goodness, and since one's desire (ἐπιθυμία) for the Good will therefore stretch out beyond all possible limits, there can be no static condition of perfection. "The perfection of human nature is a disposition ever to want to possess more in the way of goodness."[68] He supported this view by reference to what was, for him, a seminal text, Phil 3:13–14, where the participle ἐπεκτεινόμενος ("stretching out") embodies his whole "picture" of the way of perfection as an unending ascent from lower to higher things. He also believed, however, that the narrative of Moses' life was relevant to the topic of spiritual perfection, both in the sense that it presents itself as an example to be imitated[69] and in the sense that it is an account of an ascent in which Moses is initiated into progressively greater

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64. *Inscr. Pss.* 1.8 (GNO 5:23,8–10).

65. This surely is the proper way to take τὸν προκείμενον … σκοπόν at 1.70. Cf. the version of Malherbe and Ferguson 1978, 51.

66. *Vit. Mos.* 1.77 (GNO 7.1:33,5).

67. Ibid., 1.2–3 (GNO 7.1:2).

68. Ibid., 1.7 (GNO 7.1:4,14–15); see above, n. 35.

69. Cf. ibid., 1.13 (GNO 17.1:6,5–8).

mysteries[70]—although, Gregory insists, Moses' nature was unchangeable in preserving the beauty of goodness.

In the case of the *Homilies,* the situation is much the same. Gregory is quite clear about what he himself is up to. He announces it in his dedicatory letter, where he explains to Olympias that his homilies are not intended to be "of assistance to [her] in the conduct of [her] life" but are on the contrary to give "some direction to more fleshly folk for the sake of the spiritual and immaterial welfare of their souls."[71] To be sure, he addresses his audience in homily 1 as people "who have 'taken off' the old humanity with its deeds and lusts like a filthy garment and have clothed [themselves] … in the lightsome raiment of the Lord." He says, indeed, that they have " 'put on' our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and with him have been transfigured for impassibility and the life divine."[72] Such language is bound to impress the modern reader as describing persons who are advanced in the spiritual life, and the more so since shortly thereafter Gregory suggests that Jesus addresses his disciples as folk who have "surpassed the human condition," on the ground that at Caesarea Philippi Jesus had contrasted his followers with (mere) "human beings."[73] In saying this sort of thing, however, Gregory may have been in the business—all but statutory for a rhetorician—of flattering his audience; this seems especially likely when it is noted that the language he employs belongs to the sphere of customary accounts of the meaning of baptism and therefore conveys no more (or less) than that his hearers were indeed "in Christ," if only as beginners in the exercise of this identity. Thus he speaks of the baptized as "children" who are no longer "earth-treaders" but participants in the "procession" that leads upward toward things divine.[74] His references to putting off "the old humanity" and "putting on" Christ are allusions to Col 3:9–10 and Gal 3:27, which is to say that they are not talking about spiritual attainments, or any degrees of "perfection," as such. If Jesus' disciples have "surpassed the human condition," it is because they have been given entrance into the realm of God's "new creation" in Christ, a new status that makes surpassing the human condition a possibility and a calling upon which they have now truly and properly entered. Hence Gregory in homily 1 portrays a line of progress from the elementary moral teachings of Proverbs, through the enlightenment and purification worked by Ecclesiastes, to the higher "philosophy" of the Song; while there is no doubt that he thinks his hearers have

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70. Cf. homily 12, pp. 354–55 (Jaeger).
71. Homily, preface, p. 4 (Jaeger).
72. Homily 1, p. 14 (Jaeger).
73. Ibid., p. 29 *ad fin.* Cf. Mark 8:27 (οἱ ἄνθρωποι) and 29 (ὑμεῖς).
74. Homily 2, pp. 52–53 (Jaeger).

their feet on that path, his words imply nothing about how far along it any one of them has traveled.[75] They imply only that this way is indeed theirs and that as people who have "put on" Christ they are drawn to him. Their like are to be seen in the "maidens" of the Song, the companions of the Bride, who have the Bride as their schoolmistress, while the Bride herself represents the most "advanced" among believers, people such as "the bride Moses"[76] or Paul himself,[77] who had mounted in spirit to the third heaven.

None of this means, however, that Gregory regards the Song itself as somehow elementary in its function—far from it. He does not speak explicitly of the σκοπός of the Song, but it is clear enough that he remains firmly in the tradition of Origen in this regard. For one thing, he adopts Origen's view that the Song has love (ἔρως) as its fundamental subject matter. God, he thinks, "who wills all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth" (1 Tim 2:4), reveals "in this work the blessed and most perfect way of salvation … that which comes through love."[78] For in the Song, "the soul is led as a bride toward an incorporeal and spiritual and undefiled marriage with God."

It is perhaps typical of Gregory that he explicitly conceives this "way" on the model of a progressive transformation. As we have seen, it starts with the instruction of Proverbs, in which the true, the divine, Solomon appears in the persona of Wisdom to draw beginners in the way toward love and a desire for virtue. It passes through Ecclesiastes and culminates in the Song, where the same Solomon now appears in the persona of the Bridegroom, the Word of God, who, as Gregory saw the matter, brings the Bride step by step to ever greater and higher attainments. Indeed, Gregory saw the Song's successive praises and characterizations of the believing soul (i.e., the Bride) as marking a series of steps or "ascents" (ἀναβάσεις); there is nothing more characteristic of these homilies than the many passages in which the Bride's progress is

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75. See homily 15, pp. 460–61 (Jaeger), as well as Gregory's interpretation of Song 5:3 ("I have removed my tunic, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I soil them?), which he takes to refer to the Bride's baptism (homily 11, pp. 328–30).

76. For this phrase, see homily 1, p. 31 (Jaeger); for Gregory's portrayal of the "maidens," see homily 1, pp. 39 *ad fin.* 46–47. Homily 1, p. 39, draws a contrast between "the more perfect soul" and "those who do not yet possess the fulness of virtue," even though the latter are souls that follow the way of love, as distinct from those who obey out of fear or out of desire for an external reward (homily 1, pp. 15–16). Gregory's compliment to his audience, then, comes to this, that in the language of the Song they are drawn in love to the sweet scent of the Bridegroom's perfumes.

77. See, e.g., homily 1, pp. 46–47 (Jaeger), where the Bride follows the example of "the great Paul."

78. Ibid., p. 15; cf. homily 4, p. 119.

rehearsed in detail,[79] invariably to make a single basic point. Commenting on Song 3:1–4, Gregory makes the point in question by observing first that, in the light of her previous ascents, the Bride ought to have attained "the hope of the very highest good." He then goes on to say that, even though she has "received the object of her desire within [herself]," she is still "perplexed and dissatisfied," and he finally explains why:

> we are taught plainly that the greatness of the divine Nature knows no limit, and that no measure of knowledge sets bounds to a seeker's looking—bounds beyond which one who is reaching to the heights must cease to move ahead. On the contrary, the intelligence that makes its course upward by searching into what lies beyond it is so constituted that every fulfillment of knowledge that human nature can attain becomes the starting point of desire for things yet more exalted.[80]

It turns out, then, that the "ascents" that lead the soul toward marriage with God and toward that "likeness to God" that is "the limit that the virtuous life approaches"[81] are successive approximations. In the *Homilies*—as earlier in the *De vita Mosis* and the *In inscriptiones Psalmorum*—Gregory is opposed to the very notion of a final, static perfection. Perfection consists in unending transformations that lead to a goal that is reached in never being fully attained. To his insistence upon the infinity of the Good (i.e., of God) Gregory thus weds his equally firm belief that it is precisely in its mutability, its capacity for infinite change for the better, that the human soul images and thus participates in the divine way of being.

It is true enough, then, to say that Gregory in the *Homilies* follows Origen in the latter's estimate of the Song's σκοπός. The aim of the Song is indeed to present the way of love—desire—as that which draws people to chase after the Word towards a "marriage" with the Divine, but Gregory introduces a distinctive qualification into this tradition. He does not share the Platonist distaste for that which is unlimited and therefore indefinable. As Plato himself at least hinted, Gregory sees the ultimate Good as that which is "beyond being" and therefore as infinite, beyond intelligibility. Hence he does not perceive mutability or finitude simply as the source of evil. He clearly sees—or wants to see—human perfection to consist in this unending change in the

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79. For the longest of these, see homily 6, pp. 175–80 (Jaeger). See also, e.g., homilies 6, pp. 186–87; 9, pp. 279–81; and 11, pp. 319–20, 323–24.

80. Homily 6, pp. 179–180 (Jaeger); cf. homily 11, p. 320.

81. Homily 9, p. 271 (Jaeger).

direction of a Good that has no limit,[82] and this idea is one of the themes that is built into his version of the σκοπός of the Song.

The Question of Ἀκολουθία

To grasp the importance of this understanding of the σκοπός, or central theme, of the Song of Songs, as well as the way in which Gregory conceives its relation to the text of that work, it is necessary to make a short detour and take account of his exegetical use of the idea of ἀκολουθία.[83] An abstract noun formed on the stem of a verb meaning to follow, or to come or go after, the term most often means a sequence or series or succession, but with the additional implication that what follows is connected with and even consequent upon what precedes it. Thus in Stoic logic ἀκολουθία could refer to a form of logical entailment[84] and in Stoic physics to "the order and series of causes"[85] that constitute Fate. It is from Zeno himself that we learn that

> The primary Fire is like a kind of seed that contains the *logoi* and the causes of all things that have come-to-be, that are coming-to-be, and that will come-to-be; and the knitting together and ἀκολουθία of the latter are the fate and knowledge and truth and law of all things, something inevitable and inescapable.[86]

One might say, then, that ἀκολουθία connotes, in its broadest sense, a series or succession in which the members of the series do not constitute a jumble of items but are closely and intelligibly connected, like the links of a "chain": what "follows" is entailed or is caused or is at any rate consistent with what precedes.

Daniélou was no doubt correct in arguing that Gregory of Nyssa met this idea initially not in any writings of the Stoics but in those of Philo of Alexandria, in particular in the latter's exegesis of the story of creation in Gen 1. There Philo had explained:

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82. For an excellent illustration of this, see homily 5, pp. 158–59 (Jaeger).

83. For the classical treatment of this subject, on which I have liberally drawn, see Daniélou 1970, 18–50; see also the thoughtful treatment of Gregory's exegesis in *De opificio hominis* and in *Apologia in Hexaemeron* by Alexandre 1971.

84. Of the form "If A, then B," see *SVF* 2:71,10; 2:72,7.

85. Cicero, *Div.* 1.55, where in the phrase "ordinem seriemque causarum," the terms *ordo* and *series* seem to render the Greek τάξις and ἀκολουθία, respectively.

86. *SVF* 1:27.

> [Moses] says that the cosmos was formed in six days, but not because the Maker needed a length of time to do the job, for God surely accomplished all the things he did at once, not only the giving of commands but also the conception behind them. Rather was it because order was necessary for the things that came-to-be.[87]

What this means is that "even if the Maker made everything all at once, the things that came-to-be in beauty possessed an order" (Philo, *Opif.* 7.28). "Order" Philo then defines as "a sequence [ἀκολουθία] and a chain [εἱρμός] of things that precede and that follow, considered not in their finished products, but in the mental scheme [ἐπίνοιαι] of those who originated the plan." In the case of the world's creation, of course, the Originator is God, and the "plan" is the "content" of the same divine Word (λόγος) who is the agent of its actualization (*Opif.* 6.24). What is created, then, is a finite totality that is internally ordered to follow an intelligible sequence that brings things along to their intended fulfillment. It is this idea, with its fairly plain Stoic roots, that Gregory seems to have picked up on in his two amplifications of Basil's *Homiliae in Hexaemeron.*

Like Philo, then, Gregory insists that "God posited the occasions and the causes and the powers of all things taken together as a whole in a timeless moment."[88] This idea recurs in another connection, and in a slightly different form, in *De opificio hominis,* where Gregory raises with himself the difficult question why the text of Genesis says that God first created humanity (the ἄνθρωπος) after his image and likeness and only after that adds the distinction between male and female, the latter being a characteristic pertaining not to the intellectual soul that is created after the divine image but to the corporeal realm. His answer was inspired by a text he would also quote in his *Apologia in Hexaemeron,*[89] namely, Sus 42,[90] where "the Eternal God" is described as the One "who knows all things before they come-to-be." Gregory's suggestion is that, "in virtue of the divine foreknowledge and power, the whole of humanity was comprehended in the first creation.… the entire fullness of humanity was embraced as it were in a single body by the universal God through his power of foreknowledge." Understood in this way, "human

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87. Philo, *Opif.* 3.13. It should be noted that Basil—and therefore Gregory, to be sure—followed Philo in asserting that God created everything in a single instant (see Basil, *Hex.* 1.6 [PG 29:16C–17A]; Gregory, *Apol. Hex.* [PG 44:69A–71B]).

88. Gregory, *Apol. Hex.* (PG 44:72B). He had earlier (69D) appealed to Aquila's translation of "In the beginning" as ἐν κεφαλαίῳ ("in summation," "all at once").

89. Ibid.

90. Or, alternatively, Dan 12:42.

nature as a whole,[91] extending as it does from the things that came first to the last things of all, constitutes a single image of Being." In other words, the act of creation embraces humanity's end as well as its beginning.

The reason for this unusual line of thought is Gregory's belief that as a result of Adam's sin, humanity's end—its perfection—and its beginning ceased to coincide: humanity's τέλος is real in God's foresight but not in its own present condition. Between beginning and end there comes an "interval" (διάστημα), within which there occur the steps through which this creature moves from the one to the other, and this sequence or succession of stages—which is what entails a linear, corporeal, and sexual mode of reproduction[92]—is precisely "the … path and … sequence [ἀκολουθία]" that "the Word follows" as he adapts "human nature to God."[93] In Gregory's view, then, God's creation of "everything" simultaneously means something slightly different in the cases of humanity and of the other creatures. For all creatures, including the ἄνθρωπος, actualization and perfection originally coincide (which is why the narrative form of Moses' account of creation must be taken with a grain of salt), but because Adam, created perfect, turned away from God and thus from his own perfection, a process of re-creation became necessary, and this does not, says Gregory, occur "in the same sequence and order" as did the original act of creation.[94] It is this picture of things—this picture of an ongoing ἀκολουθία that leads to human redemption—that no doubt influences his insistence, cited earlier, that even the members of the intelligible order are "always being created."[95]

This conception also helps to explain the second disappointment that Gregory experienced in reading Basil's exegetical treatment of the creation narrative. The first disappointment, dutifully suppressed, was, as we have seen, Basil's decision to follow and embroider the literal text—a departure from Origen's conviction that the creation narrative is anagogical throughout. This policy Gregory could explain reasonably on the double ground that Basil's aim was not to address the questions of educated persons but to adapt his exegesis to the simplicity of an audience of ordinary folk[96] and that in any case Moses' narrative concerned only the visible cosmos, the cosmos as

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91. What Gregory means by this use of "nature" is essentially "species," humanity taken collectively.

92. For all this, see *Opif. hom.* 16 (PG 44:185B–D). Gregory thought that union with a bodily constitution made it impossible for humans to reproduce in the angelic—i.e., presumably nonsexual—fashion normal for members of the intelligible realm.

93. Homily 5, p. 144 *ad fin.* (Jaeger).

94. Homily 15, pp. 457–58 (Jaeger).

95. Homily 6, p. 174 (Jaeger).

96. *Apol. Hex.* (PG 44:65B).

perceived by the senses. Gregory's second disappointment, however, was precisely that, in pursuing this policy, Basil also ignored the sorts of questions that in Gregory's eyes were rightly being raised by "those who seek the coherent sequence [τὸ ἀκόλουθον] within the scriptural ideas." One such person was, clearly enough, Basil's—and Gregory's—younger brother Peter, who thought that the text of Gen 1 as it stood written was not self-consistent and had therefore charged Gregory with the duty of reconciling Moses' statements by bringing them together into a "chain" by way of a "coherently sequential" (ἀκόλουθον) interpretation.[97]

Gregory for his part was willing to follow Basil in holding to the ordinary sense of the scriptural words, but he was also willing to go Basil one better by reconciling investigation into the workings of nature (φυσικὴν θεωρίαν) with the scriptural letter,[98] or, as he puts it elsewhere, by following out "the chain of nature through a close look [θεωρίαν] into the [scriptural] terminology, while the text continues in its plain sense."[99]

Here there are two points to be noted. In the first place, the ἀκολουθία in question here is that which is presupposed by a narrative whose explicit σκοπός is portrayal of the coming-to-be of the perceptible—and therefore not the intelligible—cosmos. What is at stake, therefore, is Gregory's version of the cosmological ἀκολουθία of the Stoics, and such matters as the marriage of the soul to God can scarcely be in question. In the second place, it follows that Gregory is employing the term "nature" to denote what might now be called "the natural order," meaning by that, of course, what Moses meant by "heaven and earth," that is, that which is the object of sense knowledge.[100] What this "nature" amounts to is a "necessary chaining" that "is followed out in accordance with a certain order."[101] It is, in a word, the way things work as a result of God's first, summary act of creation, in and with which were posited, as we have seen, "the occasions and the causes and the powers of all things."[102]

In other words, Gregory took the divine commands—into whose sequence the Genesis narrative dissolves the divine act of creation—as λόγοι. By use of this term he no doubt intends to say that these were in some sense words, for what they conveyed was comprehensible, but what they communicated was each creature's intelligible principle, that is, the divine

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97. Ibid. (PG 44:61A).
98. Ibid. (PG 44:124B); cf. 89C.
99. Ibid. (PG 44:121D).
100. Cf. ibid. (PG 44:68D).
101. Ibid. (PG 44:72C).
102. See above, n. 85.

power-and-wisdom in the particular form in which these indwell each of the things God creates.[103] Further, however, these λόγοι were "spoken" all together in the "summary act" of creation. In this way, there is established a "necessary order of nature" that "seeks the order of succession [τὸ ἀκόλουθον] within the things that have come to be," and it is this that Gregory wants to get at, by unpacking the content of the scriptural "names." The ἀκολουθία in question, then, is the rationale, as one might say, that is presupposed in, and makes sense of, the Mosaic narrative of creation. Moreover, the ἀκολουθία of the perceptible realm, the cosmic ἀκολουθία, embraces any number of particular serial, and therefore temporal, processes. Gregory can speak of the (human) "seed" in which the mature form of the human person exists potentially, and this he regards as the λόγος that determines the causal ἀκολουθία by which human nature unfolds or develops.[104]

There was, however, in Gregory's mind, a difficulty to be noted in this undertaking. The story told by Moses' narrative refers directly only to things that might in principle be seen, heard, and touched—to phenomena of the perceptible realm. To inquire after the ἀκολουθία of this narrative, its underlying "rationale" or "logic," however, is to look beyond the perceptible realm to seek the intelligible "sense" of it, that which lends the phenomena their coherence. Yet "the poverty of our nature perceives that which comes-to-be but is unable to see or to praise the λόγος in accordance with which it comes-to-be,"[105] and Gregory tells his brother Peter that if he seeks to understand "the necessity of the order of the creation," he must follow Moses "into the darkness of investigation (θεωρίας) of the inexpressible."[106] What this presumably means is that Moses in his narrative must "explain," for example, the segregation of light from darkness by attributing it to a further, discrete act of God, when in fact it comes about ἀκολούθως—that is, consequentially, on the basis of the nature assigned to the creatures in God's primordial, single, all-embracing originative act (ἀρχή).[107] The σκοπός of Gen 1, it seems, requires employment of the narrative form in order to convey the "order" of God's original creative act in terms of a series of "perceptible" events, but that narrative form obscures what is really going on: the temporal spelling-out (ἀκολουθία) of the innate, intelligible "codes" (λόγοι) that underlie and determine what goes on. Moses' purpose or aim in telling the story of creation

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103. *Apol. Hex.* (PG 44:113B–C; cf. 73B).
104. *Opif. hom.* 29.3 (PG 44:236B–C).
105. *Apol. Hex.* (PG 44:76B).
106. Ibid. (PG 44:65C).
107. Ibid. (PG 44:76B).

dictates one sort of discourse, but the desire for rational explanation dictates another, parallel sort of discourse.

Here, though, we have what might at first glance seem to be an illustration of allegory as Gregory understands it. "Allegory" notoriously meant saying one thing and conveying another at the same time; in the words of Trypho's *De tropis* (*On Tropes*), "*Allēgoria* is speech which makes precisely clear some one thing but which presents the conception of another by way of likeness."[108] What Trypho does not say, and Gregory would have to add to make his practice clear, is that the latter perceives the secondary reference not merely as having to do with something "other" but as having to do with something *of a different order*. The movement from one type of reference to another is, in fact, as we have seen, a movement from perceptible to intelligible reality, and the difficulty this creates is that ideas and language adapted to the description of perceptible phenomena are not well adapted to expressing truth at the level of the intelligible. Hence Gregory insists that the undertaking his brother Peter has imposed upon him can only be carried through if it is understood as, on the one hand, an academic exercise, and as, on the other, involving guesswork—all of which means that one cannot make dogmas of the conclusions one reaches but must be content with corrigible approximations.[109] What Gregory does in his "rationalization" of the Genesis creation narrative is in some ways, then, not unlike Neoplatonist exegesis of Timaeus's "likely story" in Plato's dialogue on the structures of the world order.[110]

To the extent that this comparison is reasonable, however, it becomes apparent that what is going on in Gregory's *Apologia in Hexaemeron* is not "allegorical interpretation"—as he himself insists when he says that he is respecting the plain or literal sense of Moses' language. His exegesis does indeed employ the "phenomenal" narrative description that Genesis provides (and Basil had followed) to get at something "other," namely, the natural "chain" of cause and consequence that makes sense of Moses' διήγησις. But that ἀκολουθία, however difficult to discern with certainty, is nevertheless, when articulated, an account in another form of the same phenomena that Genesis relates in the form of a narrative of perceptible events. The Genesis narrative, then, is not a "figure" of another, higher-level process, "by way of likeness." No doubt that explains why Gregory says that his exegesis proceeds by attending to the meanings of the words that Moses employs; thus he explains the various statements about "light" by reference to the relation of fire with the other elements as that was portrayed in the natural philosophy

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108. Spengel 1853–56, 3:193.
109. *Apol. Hex.* (PG 44:68C).
110. See Plato, *Tim.* 29C–D.

of his day, and in *De opificio hominis* he develops the meaning of "image" at length and expands on the relation of intelligence and bodily "nature" in the human person by appealing to the biology of his time. He is showing, or trying to show, that the creation narrative and the ἀκολουθία of the natural order fit together.

The Allegory of the Song of Songs

But if, in *De opificio hominis* and *Apologia in Hexaemeron*, Gregory denies that his personal program (σκοπός)—that of interpreting Gen 1 by a defensive enhancement of Basil's commentary on it—calls for the use of allegory, the same is not true of *De vita Mosis, In inscriptiones Psalmorum,* or his *Homilies,* for there, as we have seen, he feels obliged not only to employ allegorical interpretation but also, in the dedicatory letter that is his preamble to the *Homilies,* to provide an apology for this practice. It is interesting, moreover, that these three works share, no doubt in slightly differing manners and with different foci, a single concern: that of characterizing the Christian "way," the way that leads to human fulfillment in likeness to, and knowledge of, God by the pursuit of ἀρετή, "excellence."

It is this interest that undergirds Gregory's conception at once of the nature of allegory, its function, and its relation to the intent of the Scriptures. Where the last of these matters is concerned, it seems fairly clear that Gregory follows in the footsteps of Origen, whose essay on the interpretation of the Bible (book 4 of the treatise *De principiis*) was the opening item in the set of excerpts from Origen's writings assembled by Basil and Gregory Nazianzen in their *Philokalia*. There, as we have seen, Origen had asserted that the "intent [σκοπός] of the Spirit who in the providence of God illumined those ministers of Truth, the prophets and apostles, was primarily to provide instruction regarding the ineffable mysteries that have to do with human affairs, so that anyone who is capable of receiving this instruction … might become a participant in all the teachings of his counsel."[111] The "mysteries" in question, Origen goes on to say, are things like the Trinity, the incarnation, and the truths about the human condition intimated in the story of the creation and fall. This definition of the Spirit's "intent" is, of course, then, a hermeneutical principle: it specifies what there is to look for in the Scriptures, or at any rate what the church seeks in them.

As might be expected, moreover, Gregory takes essentially the same view in his *Homilies*. He does not employ the word σκοπός in his prefatory letter

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111. *Princ.* 4.2.7 (15).

to Olympias. He does, however, emphasize, as what amounts to an unquestioned assumption, that the Scriptures say what they say "for our profit" and that what the exegete seeks in the Scriptures is "that which is profitable."[112] He further explains what he means by "profitable": it is "teaching that guides those who pay careful heed to it toward knowledge of the mysteries and toward a pure life,"[113] a characterization that dwells, as one might expect, on the correlative themes of knowledge and virtue and at the same time evokes the idea of growth, of a progressive transformation. There can be no question, then, that this is the same Gregory as the one who speaks in *In inscriptiones Psalmorum* and in *De vita Mosis.* It is important to observe, however, that it is also the Gregory who had spoken in the *Apologia in Hexaemeron,* for even there he insists that, although Moses in Gen 1 is speaking of the perceptible cosmos, the aim of his literal and corporeal discourse is "to take those who are enslaved to sense perception and to guide them, by way of things that appear, toward that which transcends the grasp of sense perception."[114] Thus Moses' intent feeds, as it were, into the overall σκοπός of the Scriptures, which is defined in a fashion that Origen could have acknowledged as equivalent to his own and in Gregory's basic formulation is verbally reminiscent of it.

Gregory further offers, as we have seen, a characterization of the aim and central theme of the Song of Songs itself. Homily 1, which in effect contains his introduction to the Song, asserts that "by what is written [in the Song], the soul is in a certain manner led as a bride toward an incorporeal and spiritual and undefiled marriage with God."[115] In more general terms, what it is up to is the "adapting of human nature to God."[116] This account of the business of the Song is, to be sure, a bit odd from the point of view of a modern exegete: it says not only that the Song in some fashion *narrates* an exemplary soul's progress in knowledge and love of God but also that readers of the Song may themselves, through their comprehension of it, be brought along as actual participants in the same progress. The text of the Song has a kind of symbolic or sacramental character, then, in that to understand it fully is to be involved with the reality it speaks of.

Here, however, there is implied a significant difference as between the text of the Song and, say, the text of the creation story in Genesis. The account of the man and woman who figure as lovers in the Song is assuredly an account of corporeal—phenomenal—realities. It is therefore, as Gregory and the

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112. Εἰς ὠφέλειαν ἡμῶν … τὸ ὠφέλιμον (homily preface, p. 4 [Jaeger]).
113. Homily preface, p. 5 (Jaeger).
114. *Apol. Hex.* (PG 44:69D).
115. Homily 1, p. 15 (Jaeger).
116. Homily 5, pp. 144–45 (Jaeger).

whole tradition in which he stands insist, an account of an ordinary courtship and wedding, and there is no question in anyone's mind that that is its literal sense—just as there is no doubt that Gen 1 is talking about a literal heaven and earth. In the case of the Song, however, the "logic" that informs and governs its literal sense—the truth that it conveys—is not an intelligible truth about "nature" but an intelligible truth that concerns intelligible realities, that is, the life of the soul—no doubt the embodied soul but the soul nonetheless—in relation to God. And this implies (1) that the ἀκολουθία in which the interpreter of the Song is interested is not that which governs the "nature" of the perceptible cosmos but that through which the "new creation"—humanity's "re-adaptation" to God—is accomplished and (2) that to get at that truth, that redemptive ἀκολουθία, allegory—or better, perhaps, anagogy—is in order.

Gregory of course insists that he has no investment in the labels one puts on his procedures. The apostle Paul, he observes, speaks of "allegory," of "type," and even of "enigma" (see 1 Cor 13:12) or of a change in "manner of speech."[117] He also allows of "tropology" and "below-the-surface meanings" (ὑπόνοιαι).[118] As far as Gregory is concerned, however, these terms all mean roughly the same thing: "the movement from corporeal to intelligible realities" or "intellectual discernment" or "a shift to an understanding that concerns the immaterial and intelligible."[119] Language of this sort is repeated throughout the *Homilies*. Thus Gregory writes, thinking of the Song as a whole: "What is described … is the business of a wedding, but what is intellectually discerned is the human soul's mingling with the Divine,"[120] and this means that in the Song "the language of passion" is employed "to render thought that is undefiled."[121] Again, what anagogy or allegory does is to "transpose the outward meaning of the words into the key of what is pure and undefiled,"[122] or—using the Pauline distinction between "spirit" and "letter"—"transpose what is said to the level of spiritual comprehension, after distancing the mind from the literal sense."[123]

The equivalence here of the spiritual, the pure, and the intellectual is manifest. All of them, in Gregory's mind, have to do precisely with the distinction between perceptible and intelligible realities, and an exegesis involving "transposition" is seen as necessary because (1) the text at hand

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117. Homily preface, pp. 5–6 (Jaeger).
118. Ibid., pp. 4–5.
119. Ibid., p. 6. "Intellectual discernment" renders ἡ κατὰ νοῦν θεωρία.
120. Homily 1, pp. 22–23 (Jaeger). "Intellectually discerned" renders τὸ … νοούμενον.
121. Ibid., p. 29.
122. Homily 9, p. 262 (Jaeger).
123. Homily 6, p. 190 (Jaeger).

gives an account of perceptible realities, but (2) the reality it ultimately concerns is of the intelligible order. It is the gap between these that "allegory" bridges. Thus when Gregory proposes to employ the narrative account of Moses' life in Exodus to delineate the nature of human "perfection," he must face the objection that the particular circumstances of Moses' life do not correspond with the circumstances of the person to whom *De vita Mosis* is addressed. Gregory's response is to say that the particular details of Moses' life (e.g., that his early life was led in Egypt) are not what he and his correspondent are interested in or bound to imitate. Rather, he says, they must cultivate a "more subtle" habit of mind and "keener sight," so that the narrative may teach them what kind of Egyptians *they* must escape so as "to enter upon the blessed life."[124] In other words, they must transpose the meaning of the text to a higher level by way of an analogy or "likeness," so that the Egyptians of the text may be seen to be not merely the oppressors of the literal and historical Israel but also symbols of vice, that is, of every sort of "evil" that constrains and contorts human life.[125]

Alongside this image of allegory as an "ascent" from perceptible to intelligible, from literal to spiritual, from particular to universal, there stands another, for Gregory less central, image that portrays it as involving a move from the "external" to the "internal" sense of a text. A form of this image occurs at the very opening of homily 2, where in an eloquent introduction Gregory contrasts the plainness and dullness of the exterior hangings of the tent of witness with the glories of its interior—and then explains that the Song of Songs is "the true tent of witness," its text, taken literally, being as it were an exterior clothing of the holy of holies that lies within. Again, when considering the *sixty mighty men* of Song 3:7, Gregory observes that he is certain that the number sixty there has a "mystical meaning," but being uncertain whether he is sufficiently gifted with the Spirit to seek that meaning out, he announces that in this case "all is well with those who are satisfied by the surface meanings of the text." He then justifies this statement. Alluding to Num 9:11–12, he likens the hidden sense to the "secret marrow" that is concealed within the bones of the Passover lamb, bones that Moses forbade the Israelites to break.[126] The literal sense, then, encloses and conceals—and perhaps protects—the spiritual sense of the text. This image in its way no doubt echoes Origen's description of the Scriptures as "the outward forms of certain mysteries."[127]

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124. *Vit. Mos.* 1 (GNO 7.1:6,8ff.)
125. Ibid. 2.100–101, 112 (GNO 7.1:63,17ff.; 67,9ff.). Cf. homily 3, p. 76 *ad fin.* (Jaeger).
126. Homily 6, p. 193 (Jaeger). Cf. *Vit. Mos.* 2:111 (GNO 7.1:67,5–8.)
127. *Princ.* 1 preface 8.

There are, then, points in the biblical text at which it is not positively wrong to be content with the text taken literally. On the other hand, there are points at which, for Gregory and the whole tradition he represents, the "surface meaning" more or less demands to be transposed to a higher level. In the dedicatory letter to Olympias, he mentions or illustrates the accepted indications that this is the case. These are the traditional "faults" in the literal sense of the text that Origen himself had pointed to. If the text "contains examples of evildoing," if it says something that is logically or physically impossible (as in the case of Gen 2:9, which indicates that two trees, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, both stood at the exact center of the paradise), if the text is theologically unacceptable (as in the case of the same verse, with its suggestion that God is the one who planted the tree that kills people[128]), if a text makes sense but is unprofitable for the life of virtue—in all cases of this sort anagogical or spiritual understanding is called for.[129] M. Alexandre points out that in addition to these occasions, Gregory—again not without precedent—appeals to κατάχρησις ("misuse"; i.e., use of a word to characterize something its normal connotation does not fit, hence figurative language generally—as when the heavens are said to "speak") to justify anagogy. He will also appeal to a "historical" inaccuracy to justify such a procedure: Song 1:9 refers to the Bride as *my horse among the chariots of Pharaoh,* but Gregory—taking no explicit notice of the fact that "horse" here is used figuratively—observes that the exodus narrative mentions "no cavalry force" that was "arrayed against the Egyptian army,"[130] and this circumstance induces him to look for his "horse" higher up in the orders of existence.

From all this, it should be plain that Gregory is serious when he says that he does not much care what his procedure is called: "anagogy" fits his conception of it better than does "allegory," but neither is inaccurate, any more than is "tropology." Nor is he unaware of the custom of taking events or persons or things referred to in the Law and the Prophets as "types"; he gives an account of it in homily 5[131] and again, more briskly, in homily 7, where he states that types "sketch out, in an anticipatory way, the power of the gospel."[132] Clearly, though, unlike many present-day scholars, he failed to discern any important difference between "typology" (a word for which he had no equivalent) and

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128. Cf. homily 12, pp. 349–50 (Jaeger).

129. See Heine 1984, 360; Alexandre 1971, 103–4.

130. Homily 3, p. 73 (Jaeger). In this passage, following Song 1:9, ἵππος is employed in the feminine and might well be translated "mare." Gregory, however, seizes upon a secondary meaning, that of "a body of horse."

131. Homily 5, p. 148 (Jaeger).

132. Homily 7, p. 201 (Jaeger); cf. p. 231.

"allegory." This may be attributable to the practice of Paul as Gregory perceived it, for the apostle in Galatians clearly takes Sarah and Hagar and their two sons as types but calls the resulting exegesis a case of "allegorizing" (see Gal 4:22–24). Gregory may also have recognized that the analogy or similarity discerned in the relation of type and antitype presupposed an "ascent" by way of abstraction to the level of intelligible reality, and in any case he sees the mysteries of the gospel to represent not just the higher form but also the higher sense of the law.

Gregory's allegory, then, is meant, like Origen's, to elicit from the text a portrayal of the "mysteries" of Christian faith. In his case, however, the mysteries in question are explicitly treated as forming an ἀκολουθία—an extended, logically connected sequence that brings about the actualization of a divine plan that is somehow implicit in the very ἀρχή of things. He had sought in his descant on Basil's *Homiliae in Hexaemeron* to show that this was the case with the "nature" that governs the perceptible order referred to by Moses as "heaven and earth." In the Song, however, he understands himself to be dealing with a work that concerns the human self—"soul"—in its relation to God. Its σκοπός is precisely, as we have seen, an account of how "the soul is in a certain manner led as a bride toward an incorporeal and spiritual and undefiled marriage with God,"[133] and that σκοπός specifies the "what" of which the Song's ἀκολουθία delineates the "how."

Once that is said, however, it is necessary to observe that in Gregory's practice, ἀκολουθία is discerned in two different forms. For one thing, there is a logically connected sequence proper to the text itself: a sequential order that governs the presentation of ideas or topics and in that way serves the intelligibility of the text. Thus Gregory notes in homily 15 that when the chorus of maidens, disciples of the Bride, asks her *Where has your kinsman gone?* (Song 6:1), they are speaking ἀκολούθως, that is, in accordance with a logical order, for their first question had been *What is your kinsman?* (Song 5:9), and it makes sense that "what" should come first and "where" follow it.[134] Similarly, Gregory speaks at the beginning of homily 2 of the "thought sequence" of the opening verses of the Song, which have portrayed the "maidens" of the poem as touched by a love for the Good that the Bride for her part has already experienced in the *kiss* of Song 1:2, the kiss that is at once "the illumination of the Word" and "the firstfruits of the Spirit."[135] Thus, seeing that the Bride has already experienced what they can only chase after, they say *Let us rejoice and be glad in you,* and accordingly—"consequentially"—they come to the

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133. Homily 1, p. 15 (Jaeger).
134. Homily 15, pp. 434–35 (Jaeger).
135. Homily 1, pp. 39–40 (Jaeger). Gregory seems to identify the "kiss" with baptism.

Bride as to their teacher, and she "starts off her account of the good by taking up matters that are requisite for souls in the status of learners."[136] Ἀκολουθία refers, then, in these two instances, to a logical—a comprehensible—course of action that is reflected in the ordering of a particular portion of the text.

A second and somewhat different use of this idea appears later on in the same homily. There the Bride is found asking the Word to speak to her. *Speak to me,* she says, *you whom my soul loves* (Song 1:7). She wants her Bridegroom to say where he pastures his flock, so that she may go to him there and "be filled with heavenly nourishment." But, Gregory observes, the Bridegroom does not answer her, for "she is not yet deemed worthy" of hearing his voice. Instead, the "friends of the Bridegroom" give her advice about the way she can safeguard "the good things that she presently possesses." Their advice (Song 1:8), as it turns out, is somewhat obscure—but not, Gregory says, because one cannot see the *point* of their words, for that, he says, "is apparent from the ἀκολουθία of the passages we have already studied." In other words, one can see in Song 1:8 a meaning that is the—or a—logical sequel of the sense of the preceding verses, and this circumstance legitimates Gregory's way of reading it. On the basis of this assurance he can proceed both to clarify the obscurity of some of the phraseology and to give his overall interpretation of the verse.[137] In this case, then, the ἀκολουθία embraces more than a particular passage in the Song, and the meaning assigned the individual verse is determined by its consistency with the course taken, the trend followed, by Gregory's interpretation of previous passages.

The same criterion is even more obviously at work in homily 11, where Gregory confronts some words of the Bridegroom: *Open to me, my sister, my close one, for my head is covered with dew and my locks with the drops of the night* (Song 5:2). Here he begins his exegesis by summarizing what he takes the general meaning of the verse to be. He opens this summary by appealing to God's successive self-manifestations to Moses as he had already treated them in his *De vita Mosis:*[138] "The revelation of God to … Moses began with light as its medium, but afterwards God spoke to him through the medium of a cloud, and when he had become more lifted up and more perfect, he saw God in darkness."[139] Moses is then—as often in the *Homilies*—taken as a pattern for the soul that is the Bride. It is suggested that the Bride's progress begins with her enlightenment, as she is liberated from "false and erroneous notions about God." Then she graduates to "apprehension of hidden realities,"

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136. Homily 2, p. 46 (Jaeger).
137. See the whole passage: homily 2, pp. 61–63 (Jaeger).
138. See *Vit. Mos.* 2.162–163 (GNO 7.1:86).
139. Homily 11, p. 322 (Jaeger).

that is, to awareness of the "invisible realm," though in doing so she enters a "cloud that casts a shadow on everything that appears" (cf. Exod 19:9; 34:5). Then the soul passes to still "higher things" and enters the "divine darkness"—the darkness in which perception and intellection alike are left behind and where God dwells (Exod 20:21 lxx).

Having in these terms summarized the truth that he thinks Song 5:2 reflects and, taken anagogically, conveys, Gregory asks himself whether the verse under consideration really does exhibit compatibility (συγγένεια: "kinship") with his summary. He finds his answer in a reconstruction of the Bride's progress from the days when she was "dark," through her baptism and enlightenment (the "kiss" of Song 1:2) and her rest in the "shadow"—the cloud—of the Incarnate Word (Song 2:3b), to the point where, as Song 5:2 intimates, "she is already surrounded by the dark night, in which the Bridegroom draws near but is not manifest."[140]

This procedure, in which Gregory states the meaning of a line or verse as he understands it and then sets about fitting the words of the text to his exegesis, seems less arbitrary if one understands that what he is attempting to do is to fit the line or verse in question into what he takes to be the ἀκολουθία of the Song as a whole. The σκοπός of the Song is, as we have seen, the way of salvation, the way on which, by love, the Bride comes to a "marriage" with God, a marriage that is consummated in that "likeness" to God that itself involves both knowledge of God and virtue. This way of salvation lies beyond the scope of sense perception. It is grasped, therefore, only when the text is allegorized, that is, transposed to the level of intelligible reality, and this process, since it pierces beyond the literal/corporeal realm to which the language of the Song refers, is a delicate and often uncertain one. Like the search for the ἀκολουθία of "nature" in his exegesis of Gen 1, it involves "guesswork," that is, a certain divinatory skill, not to mention the assistance of the Spirit.[141] Gregory does not, however, for all the difficulty of the task, see any reason to give up on this enterprise of discernment, for he is confident that "the Word follows a certain path and a certain ἀκολουθία in adapting human nature to God."[142]

In these two passages the ἀκολουθία that Gregory has in mind is the "logic" that governs the progress of the Bride on the way to union with God, and I think there is little question that this "logic" represents the dominant theme of the Song. As one would expect, the heart of it—the truth that it

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140. Ibid., pp. 322–24.
141. See, e.g., on this score, the introductions to homilies 10 and 12, pp. 294 and 340–42 (Jaeger).
142. Homily 5, pp. 144–45 (Jaeger).

spells out sequentially—lies in Gregory's picture of the structure of reality and of the destiny of humanity within it. That is, it presupposes both (1) the distinction between perceptible and intelligible reality and (2) the ineffable and infinite Deity that embraces and transcends both of these, and it rehearses the progress by which the human person, moving from perceptible through intelligible to their "Beyond"—from light to cloud to darkness—is transformed into the "image and likeness" of that infinite Good, in accord with God's original purpose in the creation of humanity. Ever and again Gregory summarizes this progress as the Song in his reading presents it. The progress obviously begins, for him, with baptism—the "kiss" through which the Bride is turned from addiction to "things that appear" to a preliminary awareness of the transforming grace and beauty of the true Solomon. It continues, he thinks, as she first *hears* the Bridegroom and then, eventually, *sees* him—and ultimately, comes to "that time when, since all have become one in desiring the same goal, and there is no vice in any, God may become all in all persons, in those who by their oneness are blended together with one another in the fellowship of the Good in our Lord Jesus Christ."[143] This theme of unending change, growth, and transformation moves into the background of Gregory's exegesis only in those passages where one or other of the lovers is found engaged in a passionate enumeration of the beauties of his or her consort. At these points Gregory's allegory, or anagogy, tends to dwell upon the Bride's virtues, the character of the divine Word incarnate, or the "members" of the body of Christ, the church.

There is, however, another dimension to this ἀκολουθία, this "logic" that governs (as Gregory sees it) the progressive restoration of the Bride to her paradisal state. It is necessary to remember that this "Bride" is a symbolic figure for Gregory and that what she symbolizes is not only the exemplary believer but also the collective "church," and indeed the human species as such, for as Gregory sees it, these two are in the end—that is, in the age to come—to coincide (since, as he repeatedly notes, "God our Savior … desires all to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth" [1 Tim 2:3–4]). Consequently, Gregory intermittently slides from tracing the logical pattern that defines the progress of the paradigmatic soul to sketching the logical pattern of the universal history of salvation—the focus of which, needless to say, is the incarnation, itself a marriage of divinity and humanity. He remarks, as we have seen, that "Members of the realm of being"—that is, beings of the intelligible and intellectual order—"are not re-created in the same order [τάξις] and sequence [ἀκολουθία] in which they were created." What this means

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143. Homily 15, pp. 468–69 (Jaeger).

is that the human species, as a consequence of its acquired "kinship with death" and "its inclination toward evil…, 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 [διά τινος ἀκολουθίας καὶ τάξεως]," for "in the process of restoration, lapses of time necessarily attend those who are retracing their way toward the original good."[144]

As to the landmarks along this road, Gregory indicates what some of them are in his exegesis of Song 2:8–9. First he explains the words *The voice of my kinsman: behold, he comes.* "These expressions," he says, "look forward to the economy of the divine Word [i.e., the incarnation], made known to us in the gospel." The word "voice" is an allusion to the prophetic announcement of what is coming. But, he continues, "the divine voice is attested by deeds, and to the word of promise its accomplishment is attached"; hence the sequel, *Behold he comes,* for as Hebrews bears witness, "In the last days he spoke to us by a Son" (Heb 1:2).[145] This pattern of promise and fulfillment, then, structures the ἀκολουθία of the process by which humanity is re-created in Christ.

Gregory reiterates this point in slightly different terms later on, when he comes to the words, *Behold,* [*the divine Word*] *stands behind our wall, looking through the windows, peeping through the lattices.* Here we see the order and the sequence by which the Word adapts humanity to God. "First of all, he shines upon it by means of the Prophets and the Law's injunctions" (for "the windows are the Prophets, who bring in the light," and "the lattices are the network of the Law's injunctions"). Gregory goes on: "After that, however, comes the Light's perfect illumination, when, by its mingling with our nature, the true Light shows itself to those who are in darkness and the shadow of death."[146] Whence it becomes fairly obvious what is being said in the oft-quoted passage of the Song celebrating the arrival of springtime (*For behold, the winter is past* [Song 2:11–13]). It means that "the Sun of Righteousness rises upon this harsh winter and brings the spring of the Spirit, which melts [the] ice [of idolatry] and … warms everything that lies beneath." And of course in the end this ἀκολουθία that defines the route followed in humanity's re-creation is also the route followed by the Bride of the Song: she too is enlightened by the Law and the Prophets, enlivened by the Spirit, and brought to share in that "mingling" of God and humanity of which the incarnation is the original manifestation.

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144. See ibid., pp. 457–59.
145. See homily 5, pp. 140–41 (Jaeger).
146. See ibid., pp. 144–45.

There is, then, a certain thoughtful quality about Gregory's use of allegory/anagogy; that is to say, he has attempted to think through questions about its function and use, though perhaps not with perfect self-consistency. It is requisite, he thinks, when language whose proper reference is to the perceptible realm is seen to intimate truth of the intelligible or spiritual order. Furthermore, its use is governed at once by the σκοπός of the Scriptures generally and by that of particular works within the Scriptures—a condition that is not inconsistent with Augustine's opinion that exegesis must be ruled by the church's faith (i.e., its baptismal faith, summed up in what is now called "creed") and by the double love commandment. Finally, its aim is by inquiry and discernment (θεωρία) to understand the principle or set of principles that govern human life at the spiritual level, and in the case of the Song of Songs these principles determine a coherent course of growth or transformation—an ἀκολουθία through which human persons are "re-created" and restored to their original destiny. To be sure, allegorical or anagogical interpretation does not reach far enough to speak *conceptually* about God or the divine "Nature," which transcends the intelligible order. Literal, corporeal language may be "transposed" to the level of intelligible reality—presumably because there is some stable analogy between them—but the language of the human intellect cannot be transposed in such wise as to conceptualize the things of God, who is known only indirectly, in darkness (Exod 20:21 lxx), and from behind (Exod 33:21–23), that is, through effects.[147] There are some purposes for which allegory is not useful.

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147. See homily 7, pp. 212–14 (Jaeger).