

2.1 *Cappadocian Fathers*

Cappadocian Fathers: Introduction & St. Basil

PATRISTICS

Who Were They?

The Cappadocian Fathers, also traditionally known as the three Cappadocians, were a group of influential Christian theologians who lived in the 4th century AD. They were St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Gregory of Nazianzus. In present-day Turkey, the Cappadocia region served as a significant site for early Christian practices, largely due to the missionary efforts of St. Paul. Cappadocians played a pivotal role in shaping early Christian beliefs, particularly the doctrine of the Trinity. They are highly venerated as saints in both Western and Eastern churches.

St. Basil the Great was the oldest of the three Cappadocians. He was born in Caesarea, Cappadocia, in 330 AD. He was a brilliant student and went on to study rhetoric and philosophy in Athens. After his studies, he returned to Caesarea and was ordained a priest. In 370 AD, he was elected bishop of Caesarea.

St. Gregory of Nyssa was born in Nyssa, Cappadocia, around 335 AD. He was the younger brother of St. Basil the Great. He was also a brilliant student and studied rhetoric and philosophy in Athens. After his studies, he returned to Cappadocia and was ordained a priest. In 372 AD, he was elected bishop of Nyssa.

St. Macrina, the older sister of renowned saints St. Basil and St. Gregory of Nyssa, transformed the family's estate into a monastic community. The eldest among St. Macrina's brothers was St. Basil the Great. Another brother, St. Peter of Sebaste, also became a bishop. Their parents, St. Basil the Elder and St. Emmelia of Caesarea, are also recognized as saints.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus was born in Nazianzus, Cappadocia, in 329 AD. He was a close friend of St. Basil the Great. He was also a brilliant student and studied rhetoric and philosophy in Athens. After his studies, he returned to Cappadocia and was ordained a priest. In 380 AD, he was elected Patriarch of Constantinople.

The Cappadocian Fathers were all gifted theologians and made significant contributions to the development of early Christian theology. They are particularly known for their work on the doctrine of the Trinity. They argued that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons but one God. This teaching became the orthodox Christian understanding of the Trinity.

The Cappadocian Fathers were also influential in the development of monasticism. They founded several monasteries and convents in Cappadocia. These monasteries became centers of learning and spirituality.

Contributions to Theology

The Cappadocian Fathers, following in the footsteps of St. Athanasius, who championed Orthodox theology at the Nicene Council, continued the legacy of Orthodox theology. Their aim was to show that Christians could engage in intellectual discussions with Greek-speaking scholars and demonstrate that the Christian faith, while opposing many of the ideas of Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek philosophers, was a distinct and scientific movement. At its core, Christianity focused on the healing of the human soul and union with God, exemplified by monasticism.

The Cappadocian Fathers made significant contributions to the definition of the Trinity, which was finalized at the First Council of Constantinople in 381. They also played a key role in the development of the final version of the Nicene Creed. Additionally, they made substantial contributions to the doctrine of the Trinity and provided responses to various theological challenges, including those posed by Eunomius, Sabellian Arianism, Apollinaris, and the Macedonians.

Essentially, the Cappadocian Fathers aimed to demonstrate that Christianity could hold its own in intellectual discussions and that it offered a unique and scientific approach to the human soul's healing and union with God. Monasticism served as the epitome of this approach.

Arianism and Semi-Arianism

Following the First Council of Nicea in 325 AD, Arianism, a theological movement that questioned the full divinity of Jesus Christ, persisted within the Christian Church. The Council had established the consubstantiality (*homoousios*) of the Son (Jesus Christ) with the Father (God), affirming that they shared the same divine substance or essence. However, the controversy surrounding Arianism continued.

Among the dissenting groups were the semi-Arians, who proposed a compromise position. They argued for a "like substance" (homoiousios) view, suggesting that the Son was "like" the Father in essence but not identical or co-eternal. This view contrasted with the outright Arians, who denied the Son's likeness to the Father altogether, considering him a created being rather than divine.

In response to these divergent viewpoints, the Cappadocian Fathers, a group of influential theologians led by St. Basil of Caesarea, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, and St. Gregory of Nyssa, sought to reconcile the semi-Arians with orthodox Christian doctrine. They employed a now-orthodox formula that emphasized "one substance (ousia) in three persons (hypostaseis)."

St. Basil of Caesarea, a prominent Cappadocian Father, used a Platonic parallel to illustrate this relationship. He proposed that just as three distinct human beings share a common universal, their humanity, so too do the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share a single divine substance while maintaining their distinct personal identities. This formulation acknowledged the distinction between the three persons of the Trinity without compromising their essential unity:

"In a brief statement, I shall say that essence, (ousia) is related to person (hypostasis) as the general to the particular. Each one of us partakes of existence because he shares in ousia while because of his individual properties he is A or B. So, in the case in question, ousia refers to the general conception, like goodness, godhead, or such notions, while hypostasis is observed in the special properties of fatherhood, sonship, and sanctifying power. If then they speak of persons without hypostasis they are talking nonsense, ex hypothesi; but if they admit that the person exists in real hypostasis, as they do acknowledge, let them so number them as to preserve the principles of the homoousios in the unity of the godhead, and proclaim their reverent acknowledgment of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the complete and perfect hypostasis of each person so named."
(Epistle 214.4)

The Cappadocian Fathers' efforts helped to clarify and refine the doctrine of the Trinity, addressing criticisms that the Council of Nicea had obscured the distinction between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By emphasizing the unity of substance alongside the distinctness of persons, they laid the foundation for the orthodox understanding of the Trinity that continues to shape Christian theology today.

St. Basil the Great - Introduction

In the 4th century, as Arianism, semi-Arianism, and Eunomianism gained prominence within Christianity, a champion of faith arose. Amidst this theological landscape, St. Athanasius in Egypt, St. John Chrysostom in Greece, St. Ambrose in Italy, St. Augustine in North Africa, and St. Basil in Asia Minor emerged as staunch defenders of orthodoxy.

Born in 329 AD, St. Basil was nurtured by his sister, St. Macrina, alongside his brothers, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Peter of Sebaste. This extraordinary family, dedicated to serving the Lord, produced bishops and devoted individuals who left an indelible mark on the Church.

Growing up in the ungodly town of Cappadocia, Asia Minor, St. Basil received an exceptional education. His journey took him from Cappadocia to Constantinople and eventually to the prestigious School of Athens, where he forged a lifelong friendship with St. Gregory Nazianzen, also known as St. Gregory the Theologian, whose renowned Gregorian Liturgy we use to this day.

Upon returning to Cappadocia, St. Basil's brilliance shone as a successful lawyer and orator until a pivotal moment when his sister persuaded him to embrace a life of monasticism. Inspired by her spiritual wisdom, he relinquished his worldly possessions, distributing them among the poor. He then embarked on a transformative pilgrimage to Egypt's monasteries, seeking to immerse himself in the monastic way of life.

St. Basil's travels in Egypt left an indelible mark on his soul. He returned to Pontus, determined to establish monastic communities in the region. Drawing inspiration from the Egyptian monasteries, he emphasized quietude, devotion, and hard work as the cornerstones of monastic life. Through his tireless efforts, St. Basil became the first to establish monastic communities in the region, significantly contributing to the spread of Christianity and the preservation of orthodox teachings.

St. Basil the Great- Monastic Life

In his exemplary asceticism, St. Basil organized each day into precise hours dedicated to work, prayers, hymns, and alternating psalmody. His monks observed strict dietary restrictions, limited to a single daily meal of bread, water, and herbs. Sleep was permitted only until midnight, when all arose for further prayer.

His monasteries served as schools of holy faith, banished from the Sees of Asia by imperial decrees. Undeterred, St. Basil embarked on regular circuits of neighboring towns, preaching the Nicene faith to the populace. This practice was not uncommon in the early church, where orthodox

doctrine faced suppression by heretical bishops and magistrates. In such times, monasteries remained steadfast and fearless custodians of truth.

St. Basil's asceticism was renowned for its rigor. He consumed only what was essential for survival, owning just one inner and outer garment. At night, he slept on a hair skin placed directly on the floor. St. Gregory the Theologian described him as "without a wife, without property, without flesh, and almost without blood."

While his severe asceticism weakened his physical frame and health, it also planted the seeds of maladies that would ultimately claim his life in later years. Yet, despite his frail condition, sustained by his resolute will and indomitable spirit, St. Basil tirelessly traveled throughout Asia Minor, exerting monumental efforts in defense of truth.

St. Basil the Great - the Archbishop

In 370 AD, St. Basil became the Archbishop of Cappadocia and the neighboring regions. St. Athanasius conveyed his congratulations to Cappadocia in a letter, expressing that every province should feel envious of having a bishop like St. Basil. Although Emperor Valens attempted to enforce Arianism in the region, he could not intimidate St. Basil. In response, the Emperor dispatched his Prefect, Modestus, to intimidate and threaten St. Basil. The renowned exchange of words between Modestus and St. Basil remains a significant event in history.

St. Basil: *"Have you no other threat? For none of these things can reach me."*

Modestus: *"How indeed is that?"*

St. Basil: *"Because a man who has nothing is beyond the reach of confiscation, unless you demand my tattered rags. Banishment is impossible for me, who do not count any land as my own, but all to be God's, whose guest and dependent I am. As for tortures, what can they do to this body that scarcely exists? Death is my benefactor, who will send me to God all the quicker."*

Modestus: *"No one has ever spoken with such boldness to Modestus."*

St. Basil: *"Perhaps you have never before met a bishop."*

In the face of Basil's unwavering fortitude and defiance of intimidation or threats, the prefect's menacing demeanor transformed into respect and deference. Overwhelmed by St. Basil's fearless attitude, the prefect dismissed him from his presence. Emperor Valens, impressed and intimidated by St. Basil's unwavering faith, decided against employing harsh measures and instead sought to compel Arian bishops into communion with Cappadocia.

During the Epiphany of 372 AD, Valens approached the main church of Caesarea, astonished by what he witnessed. The church was flooded with a sea of worshippers, their synchronized chants resembling soft thunder. The clergy surrounded the altar in a semicircle, and amidst them stood St. Basil, immersed in prayer, utterly unfazed by the emperor's abrupt entrance.

The unearthly majesty of the scene, the awe-inspiring order of the immense throng that resembled angels rather than men, overwhelmed the emperor, causing him to almost faint. He would have fallen to the ground had it not been for a quick-thinking clergyman who seized him for support.

Moved by pity, St. Basil accepted a gift from Valens' trembling hand, engaging him in a discourse on the orthodox faith. However, Arians convinced Valens that St. Basil posed a threat, leading to an order for his exile. To prevent riots, Basil departed at night, but he was apprehended and brought to the palace to pray for Valens' ailing son. Valens' wife attributed the boy's illness to his treatment of St. Basil. St. Basil agreed to pray for the boy on the condition that he be baptized, and the illness miraculously left the child.

Arian bishops insisted he be baptized at an Arian baptism. After the Arians baptized him, the boy again got sick and died the same night. Arians again convinced Valens to exile St. Basil, but everytime he tried to sign, the pen refused to write and then broke in his hand, which scared the emperor to leave the city of Cappadocia altogether. After that incident, Modestus became sick and asked St. Basil to pray for him. St. Basil's prayers healed the Prefect and from then on they became friends and the church in Cappadocia was protected from then on.

St. Basil the Great - Theological Works

At the age of fifty, he succumbed to a liver illness, leaving behind an immense body of work. Among his notable contributions, the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil holds particular significance for us Copts, as it remains in use to this day.

Against Eunomius

This text, comprising five books, serves as a refutation of the heresy propagated by Eunomius. The crux of this heresy lies in the catchphrase, "we believe that ingenerateness or unbegottenness constitutes the essence of God." This implies that "begotten" denotes inferiority and dissimilarity. Consequently, since the Son is described as "only-begotten," He is deemed lesser than the Father, who alone stands supreme in His unbegottenness.

St. Basil elucidates that Eunomius erroneously conflates God's un-begottenness, which is a mere negative title we ascribe to Him, with God's essence, a concept that transcends human understanding and expression. St. Basil cites St. Paul's words: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" If the great apostle himself experienced vertigo while contemplating God's majesty, what arrogance is it for others to claim that they have fully comprehended His essence?

"It is a terrible thing for us to coin names for Him to whom God has given a 'name which is above every other name.' We must not add to or subtract from what is delivered to us by the Spirit. Things are not made for names but names for things."

On the Holy Spirit

In 325 AD, the Nicene Creed concluded with "we believe in the Holy Spirit," leaving the church's understanding of the Holy Spirit's divinity and role undefined. During the ensuing 56 years, an Arian faction emerged, denying both the divinity of the Son and the Spirit, leading to their designation as "Pneumatomachoi" or "fighters against the Spirit."

However, at the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD, this deficiency was addressed when the clause "the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and Son is worshiped and glorified" was added to the creed, providing a clearer affirmation of the Holy Spirit's divinity.

St. Basil, in particular, had a profound understanding of the Holy Spirit's role in the Christian faith. He believed that through the Holy Spirit, believers experienced restoration to paradise, ascension to the kingdom of heaven, adoption as God's sons, and the ability to call God their Father. He also emphasized the Spirit's role in granting believers grace, being called "children of light," sharing in eternal glory, and inheriting the fullness of blessings in both this world and the world to come.

The Hexameron

The 'Six Days of Creation', commonly referred to as the hexameron, stands as a remarkable collection of nine homilies delivered by St. Basil the Great during the solemn period of Lent. These homilies focused on the profound subject of the universe's origin, as recounted in the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis.

St. Basil's hexameron was not an isolated work within the patristic tradition. Numerous other prominent Church Fathers also composed their own series of homilies on the first six days of creation. Notable among these were St. John Chrysostom, whose eloquent discourses captivated his listeners,

St. Gregory of Nyssa, whose philosophical insights illuminated the text, St. Ambrose of Milan, whose practical applications were relatable, and Bede the Venerable, whose historical and allegorical interpretations enriched understanding.

This widespread attention to the first six days of Genesis reflects the profound reverence that the early Church Fathers held for the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. They viewed these books as divinely inspired and authoritative, containing essential truths about God, creation, and humanity.

As a product of St. Basil's rigorous Athenian education, the hexameron exhibits a remarkable depth of analysis. He delved into a laborious examination of every verse and word of the creation narrative, leaving no detail unconsidered. St. Basil's aim was not merely to provide a superficial explanation of the text but to uncover its profound theological and philosophical implications.

St. Basil's hexameron was highly acclaimed during his lifetime and beyond. It was considered his most celebrated work, earning him widespread recognition as a gifted exegete and theologian. His homilies continue to captivate readers today, offering a timeless exploration of the wonder and mystery of creation and inspiring a deeper appreciation for the wisdom and beauty of Scripture.

The Letters

Throughout his lifetime, St. Basil engaged in an extensive correspondence with a diverse range of individuals, encompassing both friends and adversaries of the Christian faith. These letters serve as invaluable artifacts of Basilian literature, offering a vivid and firsthand glimpse into the saint's personal life and the historical events of his era.

The subject matter covered in these letters is remarkably varied, reflecting St. Basil's wide-ranging interests and expertise. They have been categorized into several distinct categories:

Letter Type	Description
Historical Letters	Provide insights into significant historical events and developments of St. Basil's time, such as the Arian controversy, the Council of Nicaea, and the political and social landscape of the Roman Empire.
Dogmatic Letters	Explore and expound on various doctrinal and theological issues, defending orthodox beliefs and refuting heretical teachings. Address topics such as the nature of the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and the relationship between faith and reason.

Moral and Ascetic Letters	Offer guidance and instruction on Christian living. Discuss virtues such as humility, charity, and temperance, emphasizing the importance of self-discipline, prayer, and detachment from worldly desires.
Disciplinary Letters	Address matters of church discipline and administration. Provide practical advice on issues such as the selection and training of clergy, the resolution of disputes among believers, and the maintenance of church order.
Consolatory Letters	Offer comfort and support to individuals facing various challenges and hardships. Demonstrate empathy and compassion, reminding recipients of the hope and strength found in faith.
Commendatory Letters	Recommend individuals for positions of trust and responsibility within the church or society. Highlight their virtues, abilities, and commitment to Christian principles.
Familiar Letters	Reveal a more personal side of St. Basil, as he corresponds with friends and family members. Provide glimpses into his daily life, his relationships, and his thoughts on various personal matters.

The letters of St. Basil transcend their historical context, offering timeless wisdom and guidance to believers across generations. They illuminate the saint's profound intellect, unwavering faith, and compassionate heart, making them a cherished resource for those seeking spiritual nourishment and deeper understanding of the Christian faith.

St. Basil the Great - Works of Mercy

St. Basil, known for his unwavering commitment to assisting the marginalized and needy, dedicated his life to serving the poor and needy. His philanthropic endeavors extended beyond the boundaries of Caesarea, reaching across Cappadocia and beyond. He established numerous hospitals, refuges, orphanages, and harbors of safety for various vulnerable populations.

One of his most notable philanthropic establishments was an enormous hospital for the poor in Caesarea, the capital city of Cappadocia. This hospital was a testament to St. Basil's unwavering commitment to providing comprehensive care for the sick and impoverished. The hospital featured a church, an episcopal residence, rooms for the clergy, hospices for the sick and poor, and even workshops for artisans and laborers.

Understanding the unique needs of individuals, St. Basil ensured that the hospital had a specialized department dedicated to the care of lepers. He personally tended to these individuals, demonstrating his deep compassion and unwavering dedication to serving the most marginalized

members of society. The hospital, due to its immense size, became renowned as the "New Town" and later "Basileiad."

However, St. Basil's philanthropic work was not without its challenges. His enemies, envious of his influence and popularity, used the hospital as a pretext to denounce him to the governor. They falsely accused him of attempting to seize undue power for himself. St. Basil, with his characteristic wisdom and eloquence, defended himself by reminding the governor that the hospital's existence and services were in the best interests of the community. He emphasized that his sole intention was to alleviate suffering and provide a haven for those in need.

St. Basil's unwavering commitment to serving the poor and needy, exemplified by the establishment of the hospital in Caesarea, continues to inspire generations. His legacy serves as a reminder of the transformative power of compassion, service, and the ability to make a lasting impact on the lives of others.



Review Questions

1. Who were the three Cappadocians? (A: St. Basil the Great, his younger brother: Gregory of Nyssa, and a close friend, St. Gregory of Nazianzus.)
2. When was the Creed written up? (A: 325 AD)
3. What heresy did St. Basil fight against? (A: The heresy by Eunomius.)
4. What are The 'Six Days of Creation' also known as? (A: The hexameron.)
5. True or false? St. Basil and Modestus had a famous exchange. (A: True)
6. Name one of St. Basil's accomplishments. (A: He wrote our most used Divine Liturgy.)
7. Name three aspects of St. Basil's asceticism and how rigorous it was. (A: He ate only what was necessary, owned one inner and one outer garment, and at night he slept in hair skin on the floor.)
8. Which emperor could *not* stand up to St. Basil regarding Arianism? (A: Emperor Valens)
9. Name some of his works of mercy. (A: He was always serving the poor and needy. He built many hospitals for the poor, refuges for virgins, orphanages, as well as harbors of safety for slaves.)
10. What was St. Basil's, "New Town," establishment later named? (A: Basileiad)



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2.1 *Cappadocian Fathers*

Cappadocian Fathers: St. Gregory of Nyssa

PATRISTICS

A blessed family

St. Gregory, a remarkable figure in the history of Christianity, was the sibling of the esteemed St. Basil the Great. Their familial bond extended beyond mere bloodline, as the two brothers shared a profound intellectual and spiritual connection. In collaboration with other luminaries of the early Church, such as St. John Chrysostom and St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory of Nyssa contributed to a substantial legacy of theological thought, liturgical practices, and spiritual literature that continues to shape Eastern Christianity to this day.

The significance of their collective work lies in its interpretation of Eastern Christianity's theology, liturgical structure, and the very nature of God. Through their writings and teachings, St. Gregory and his brother St. Basil played a pivotal role in establishing our understanding of the Trinity and the distinctive nature of Christ within it.

St. Gregory, in particular, expressed his deep gratitude for his elder brother's guidance and mentorship in a letter addressed to St. Peter. He referred to St. Basil as "our father and master," acknowledging the profound influence St. Basil had on both himself and their younger brother. St. Basil's wisdom, piety, and unwavering commitment to the faith left an enduring mark on St. Gregory, shaping his own theological perspectives and spiritual journey.

Together, St. Gregory and St. Basil formed an intellectual powerhouse, delving into profound theological discussions and exploring the mysteries of faith. Their collaboration resulted in a rich body of literature that addressed various aspects of Christian doctrine, including the nature of God, the role of Christ in salvation, and the significance of the sacraments. Their writings not only influenced their contemporaries but also continue to inspire and guide believers throughout history.

St. Gregory's contributions to Eastern Christianity cannot be overstated. His theological insights, liturgical innovations, and spiritual writings have left an indelible mark on the faith and practice of millions of believers. Through his collaboration with St. Basil the Great and other influential

figures of his time, St. Gregory helped shape the contours of Eastern Christianity and laid the foundation for its enduring legacy.

His Life

In 335 A.D., St. Basil was born and received a quality education. His younger brother, St. Gregory, however, had a different path in mind. St. Gregory initially pursued a career as a teacher of rhetoric, studying the art of effective public speaking and writing. However, his family, including his powerful bishop brother, St. Basil, did not approve of his choice and urged him to serve the Church. Despite their initial disagreements, St. Basil, along with St. Gregory's friends and sister, St. Macrina, eventually convinced him to become a priest. Soon after, St. Gregory was elevated to Bishop of Nyssa. Like his brother, he devoted his life to defending the Christian faith against the challenges posed by the Arians.

St. Gregory of Nyssa faced numerous hardships and conflicts throughout his life. Despite being falsely accused by heretics, he was deposed twice from his position as bishop. However, in 378 AD, justice prevailed, and he was finally restored to his see. However, the following year, his beloved brother, St. Basil the Great, passed away. The two brothers shared a deep bond, and St. Gregory was profoundly grieved by this loss. To honor his brother's memory, St. Gregory composed a moving funeral oration and dedicated himself to completing St. Basil's unfinished work, the *Hexaemeron*. This series of nine sermons, delivered during Great Lent, explored and elaborated upon the Genesis account of the world's creation in six days.

St. Gregory's trials and tribulations did not end there. The following year, he experienced another loss when his sister, St. Macrina, also passed away. To preserve her legacy, St. Gregory authored a hagiography, meticulously detailing her life and virtues.

Amidst these personal sorrows, St. Gregory remained steadfast in his commitment to defending Orthodoxy. He attended the Council of Antioch, a local synod, where he passionately advocated for the perpetual virginity of the Theotokos (Mother of God). The council's objective was to refute a heresy that denied this fundamental tenet. Additionally, the council forbade the worship of the Theotokos as God or part of the Godhead, emphasizing the distinction between divine and human nature.

Concurrently, St. Gregory continued his tireless fight against Arianism, a heresy that challenged the divinity of Christ. He played a pivotal role in the Second Ecumenical Council held in

Constantinople, where the final section concerning the Holy Spirit was added to the Nicene Creed. This addition solidified the understanding of the Trinity as consisting of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

His Works

St. Gregory's prolific theological endeavors and voluminous correspondence contribute an eloquent and intellectually distinctive body of knowledge to Orthodox theology and spirituality. His profound understanding of Christian beliefs is evident in his seminal work, the 'Catechism,' which serves as a testament to his theological acumen.

In his 'Life of Moses,' St. Gregory presents a mystical portrayal of God that is both audacious and humble, offering insights that remain unparalleled in Christian thought. His letters are characterized by their elegance, grace, and beauty, foreshadowing a writing and thinking style that would not emerge until the Romantic era of Western literature, over a millennium later.

St. Gregory possessed a rare gift for language, wielding it with skill and precision to persuade, engage the senses, and illuminate the intellect. This attribute set him apart from his contemporaries and even among the early Church Fathers. He reveled in the power of words, recognizing their capacity to transform hearts and minds.

St. Gregory's theological contributions extend beyond his written works. As a gifted speaker, he captivated audiences with his eloquence and passion. His sermons and homilies were renowned for their clarity, depth, and spiritual insight. He possessed a unique ability to communicate complex theological concepts in a manner that was both accessible and inspiring.

St. Gregory's legacy continues to influence Orthodox theology and spirituality to this day. His writings have been translated into numerous languages and continue to be studied and revered by scholars and laypeople alike. His insights into the nature of God, the human condition, and the path to salvation offer a timeless source of wisdom and guidance for believers seeking a deeper understanding of their faith.

Triadology

St. Gregory of Nyssa is principally remembered for two substantial contributions to the field of theology. Foremost among these is his doctrine of the Holy Trinity, which further developed the

theological understandings of his contemporary, St. Basil the Great, and their mutual friend, St. Gregory the Theologian.

Following the lead of St. Basil, St. Gregory proposed a thought-provoking analogy to comprehend the three "Persons" of the Trinity. He suggested that we can envision them along the lines of three members belonging to the same class. Similar to how Peter, Paul, and Timothy can be considered three distinct individuals, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can be understood as three distinct entities.

But why, then, do we not acknowledge them as three separate Gods? St. Gregory addresses this question by pointing out a crucial distinction. Typically, we can differentiate between members of the same class based on observable physical characteristics such as shape, size, and color. Even if they appear identical, they occupy different positions in space. However, these criteria are inapplicable to incorporeal beings like God.

Even lesser spiritual beings possess varying degrees of goodness that allow us to distinguish between them, but this distinction is also irrelevant in the case of God. Therefore, the only way to discern the three "Persons" of the Trinity from one another is through their mutual relationships.

In St. Gregory's words, "it is impossible to think of one member of the Trinity without thinking of the others too." He likens them to a chain of three inseparable links, each pulling the others along. This profound analogy encapsulates the interconnectedness and interdependence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within the Trinity.

Infinite, without beginning

St. Gregory's second significant contribution was his spiritual theology, in which he argued for the infinity of God. He countered the prevailing view of the time, influenced by Origen, which posited that God was limited. In Platonic philosophy, limitation was seen as essential for clarity and knowability. However, St. Gregory contended that if God were limited, it would imply the existence of something greater than God, which would contradict the concept of an all-encompassing and supreme being.

Drawing inspiration from neoplatonic philosophers like Plotinus, St. Gregory asserted that God is without boundaries, unbounded by any external force or concept. He argued that God's infinity defied human comprehension, as any attempt to grasp the entirety of God's essence would be futile. He is the first Christian to defend it, apart from some hints in the work of St. Irenaeus.

In contrast to Origen's notion of a spiritual journey characterized by increasing illumination and knowledge of God through Scripture, St. Gregory maintained that God's infinity rendered him incomprehensible to the human mind. He emphasized that the mystical experience was not about acquiring more information about God but about coming to terms with the unfathomable nature of the divine.

St. Gregory's spiritual theology had a profound impact on Christian thought and influenced subsequent theologians. His emphasis on the infinity and incomprehensibility of God challenged traditional conceptions of the divine and encouraged a deeper contemplation of the mystery of God's being.

Stages of Spiritual Progression

In his spiritual journey, St. Gregory identifies three distinct stages of spiritual progression. The first stage is characterized by an initial darkness or ignorance, where the individual is not yet aware of the spiritual realm. This stage is followed by spiritual illumination, where the individual experiences a sense of connection to the divine and receives insights into the nature of reality. However, the journey does not end there. St. Gregory emphasizes that there is a final stage, a darkness of the mind in contemplation of the God who cannot be comprehended. This is known as apophatic theology, which holds that God is beyond human understanding and cannot be fully grasped by human concepts or language.

St. Gregory draws upon the story of Moses as an allegory for this spiritual journey. Moses' first encounter with God occurs at the burning bush, a theophany of light and illumination. This represents the initial stage of spiritual awakening, where the individual experiences a glimpse of the divine. However, Moses' journey continues, and he later encounters God in the cloud, where he realizes that God cannot be seen by the eyes. This symbolizes the second stage, where the individual comes to understand that God cannot be limited to physical or sensory perception.

Finally, Moses ascends Mount Sinai and enters the "divine darkness." Here, he realizes that God cannot be known by the mind either. This is the third and final stage of spiritual progression, where the individual transcends rational thought and logic to experience a direct and ineffable connection with the divine. St. Gregory emphasizes that it is only through not-knowing and not-seeing that God can, paradoxically, be known and seen. This concept of unknowing as a path to knowledge

became highly influential in both Western and Eastern spirituality, thanks in part to the mystical writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

St. Gregory's ideas on spiritual progression and apophatic theology have had a profound impact on the development of mystical and contemplative traditions. He is widely regarded as a major figure in the history of these disciplines, offering insights into the nature of spiritual experience and the limitations of human understanding when it comes to comprehending the divine.

Epektasis, Constant Progress

Related to this is St. Gregory's idea of epektasis or constant progress. Platonic philosophy, which significantly influenced early Christian thought, held that stability represented perfection, while change signified deterioration. In contrast to this view, St. Gregory envisioned the ideal of human perfection as an ongoing journey of spiritual growth and moral excellence. He rejected the notion that perfection meant reaching a static, unchanging state. Instead, he emphasized the importance of continuous progress in virtue and godliness.

In St. Gregory's theological framework, God himself exists as the epitome of unchanging perfection. God has always been and will always remain perfect, without any need for improvement or transformation. However, humanity, in contrast, has a different trajectory. After the fall from grace in the Garden of Eden, humans were left in a state of imperfection and separation from God. The goal for humanity, according to St. Gregory, is not to return to an unchanging state of perfection but to embark on a continuous journey of becoming more and more perfect, striving to become more united to God.

Another significant aspect of St. Gregory's teachings relates to the question of universal salvation. While some early Christian theologians, such as Origen, speculated about the possibility of the salvation of all humans, St. Gregory took a more cautious approach. He acknowledged that it is impossible to know definitively whether or not all humans will be saved. However, he offered a hopeful alternative to theologies like that of St. Augustine, which suggested that at least some individuals were predestined to eternal condemnation. St. Gregory taught that faithful Christians should hold onto the hope and pray for the salvation of all, even after death. He believed that God's love and mercy extended beyond the boundaries of earthly life, offering the possibility of redemption and transformation even beyond the grave.

St. Gregory of Nyssa on Virtues

The virtuous life begins with free will. It is a choice that flows from the deepest part of our being, a choice for goodness and truth. This choice causes distress to tyrants, for it undermines their power and authority. Virtue is not something that can be imposed from the outside; it must come from within. “When we lay bare the hidden meaning of history, scripture is seen to teach that the birth which distresses the tyrant is the beginning of the virtuous life. I am speaking of the kind of birth in which free will serves as the midwife, delivering the child amid great pain. For no one causes grief to his antagonist unless he exhibits in himself those marks which give proof of his victory over the other.”
(from *The Life of Moses*)

Unlike other pleasures, virtue is timeless and constantly fresh. It does not fade with time or become stale. This is because virtue is not based on external circumstances, but on our inner being. It is a quality of character that we carry with us wherever we go. “A greedy appetite for food is terminated by satiety and the pleasure of drinking ends when our thirst is quenched. And so it is with the other things... But the possession of virtue, once it is solidly achieved, cannot be measured by time nor limited by satiety. Rather, to those who are its disciples it always appears as something ever new and fresh.”

The soul follows Moses (commandments) and the cloud (spiritual meaning) to advance in virtue. This journey is not always easy. There are times when we must cross the Sea (purification), defeating enemies (temptations), tasting bitter life (suffering), and enjoying gospel springs and living water (grace and mercy). But if we persevere, we will eventually reach our destination: the contemplation of transcendent Being.

The contemplation of transcendent Being is the ultimate goal of the virtuous life. It is a state of perfect happiness and fulfillment. In this state, we are united with God and experience the fullness of His love. “The soul has followed Moses and the cloud, both of these serving as guides for those who would advance in virtue; Moses here represents the commandments of the Law; and the cloud that leads the way, its spiritual meaning. The soul has been purified by crossing the Sea; it has removed itself from and destroyed the enemy army. It has tasted of the waters of Marah, that is, of life deprived of all sinful pleasure; and this at first had seemed bitter and unpleasant to the taste but offered a sensation of sweetness to those who accepted the wood. Next it enjoyed the beauty of the palm trees of the gospel and the springs; it filled itself with the living water, that is, the rock. It took within itself the bread of heaven. It overwhelmed the foreign host—a victory due to the extended arms of the

Lawgiver, which thus foreshadowed the mystery of the Cross. Only then can the soul go on to the contemplation of transcendent Being.”

His Writings

St. Gregory, a prominent figure in the early Church, left behind a significant body of works that encompass various genres and address a wide range of theological, philosophical, and practical topics. Among his writings are dogmatic treatises against Eunomius, in which he refuted the heretical teachings of Eunomius of Cyzicus, who denied the full divinity of Christ. These treatises demonstrate St. Gregory's unwavering commitment to upholding orthodox Christian doctrine.

In addition to his dogmatic works, St. Gregory also produced ascetic and moral treatises on virginity and other topics related to spiritual growth and ethical conduct. These treatises provide valuable insights into his understanding of the Christian life and his emphasis on moral purity and the pursuit of virtue.

St. Gregory's philosophical works explore profound questions about the nature of humanity and the soul. His treatise "On the Making of Man" delves into the creation and purpose of humankind, while his work "On the Soul" examines the intricate relationship between the soul and the body. These philosophical inquiries reflect St. Gregory's deep intellectual curiosity and his desire to understand the mysteries of human existence.

Among his apologetic works, "The Great Catechism" stands out as a comprehensive exposition of Christian doctrine intended for catechumens preparing for baptism. In this work, St. Gregory systematically presents the fundamental beliefs and practices of Christianity, providing a clear and accessible guide for those seeking to deepen their faith.

St. Gregory's oratorical skills are evident in his funeral oration, which eloquently expresses his grief and profound respect for the deceased. This oration showcases his ability to craft moving and emotionally resonant language that resonates with his audience.

Lastly, St. Gregory's numerous letters encompass a wide range of topics and addressees, making up his most extensive body of writing. These letters offer a glimpse into his personal life, relationships, and pastoral concerns. They reveal his dedication to guiding and supporting his flock, his wisdom in resolving conflicts, and his compassionate response to the needs of others.

Through his diverse works, St. Gregory left a lasting legacy as a prolific writer, theologian, philosopher, and pastor. His writings continue to inspire and guide believers, providing insights into

the mysteries of faith, the pursuit of holiness, and the search for deeper understanding of human nature and the divine.

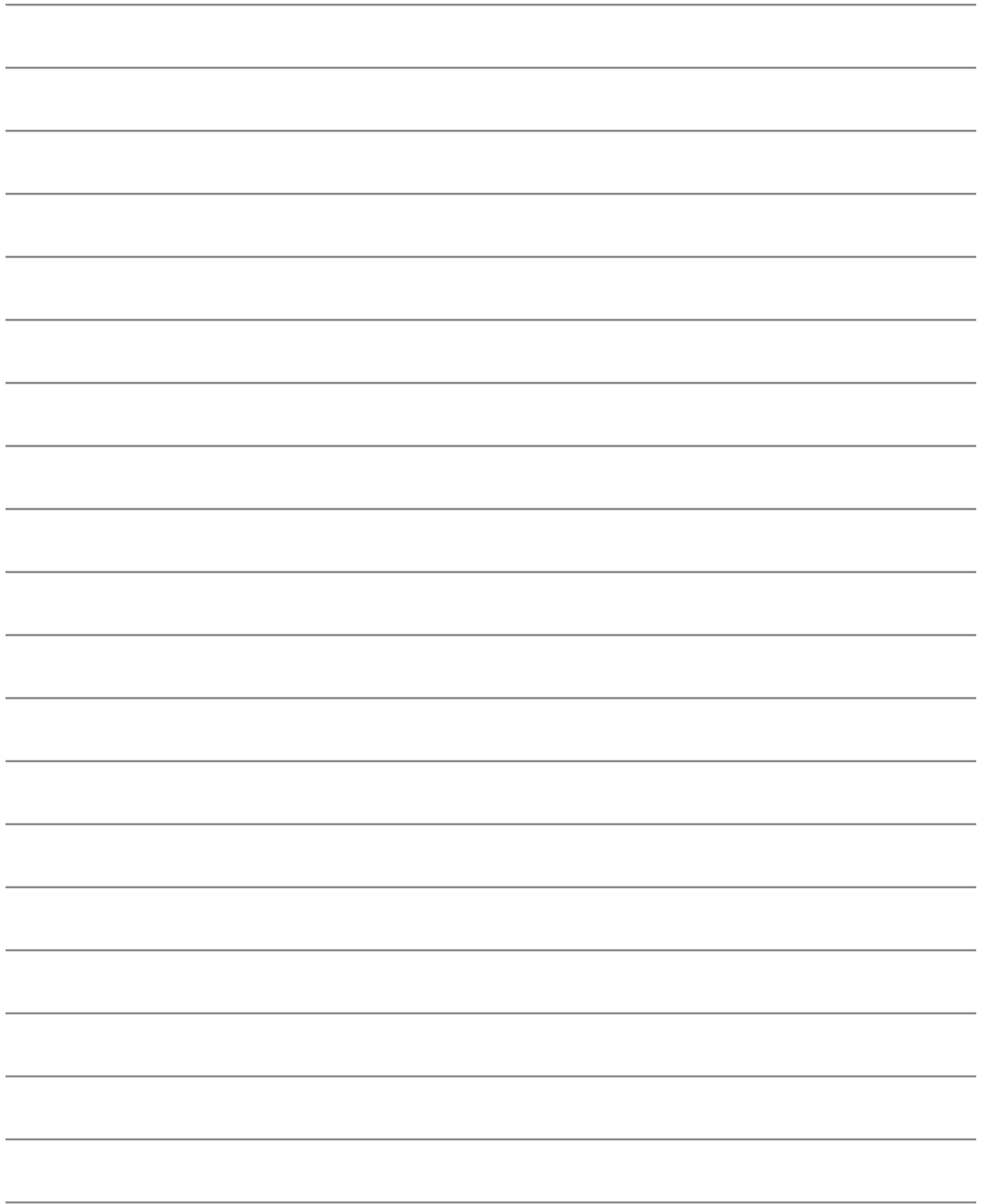
Category	Works
Dogmatic Treatises	against Eunomius, Triadology
Ascetic and Moral Treatises	On virginity, on infants' early deaths, and on pilgrimages
Philosophical Works	On the making of man, on the soul and the resurrection, and 'The Life of Moses'
Apologetic Works	'The Great Catechism'
Oratorical Works	'Funeral Oration on Meletius,' as well as regarding the baptism of Christ
Letters	To Eusebius, to the city of Sebasteia, to Ablabius, to Cynegius, regarding a testimonial, to Stagirus, to a friend, to a student of the classics, an invitation, to Libanius, a second letter to Libanius, on his work against Eunomius, to the Church at Nicomedia, to the Bishop of Melitene, to Adelphius the lawyer, to Amphilochius, to Eustathia, Ambrosia, and Basilissa, lastly, to Flavian



Review Questions

1. Who is St. Gregory's brother? (A: St. Basil the Great)
2. What is St. Gregory's first main contribution? (A: His doctrine on the Holy Trinity.)
3. What is St. Gregory's second main contribution? (A: He argued for the infinity of God.)

4. Name one of St. Gregory's great works. (A: The Life of Moses.)
5. True or false? St. Gregory believed humanity's goal is to become more and more perfect, like God, and that someday it could be achievable. (A: False)
6. True or false? St. Gregory was happy to be a cleric. (A: False)
7. True or false? St. Gregory had a good education. (A: True)
8. What are St. Gregory's three stages of spiritual progression? (A: initial darkness or ignorance, spiritual illumination, and a darkness of the mind in contemplation of the God who cannot be comprehended.)
9. True or false? In St. Gregory's theology, God himself has always been perfect and has never changed. (A: True)
10. Name three people he wrote letters to. (Sample A: Libanius, Flavian, and Stagarius.)



2.1 *Cappadocian Fathers*

Cappadocian Fathers: St. Gregory the Theologian

PATRISTICS

A Pillar of Christian Thought and Eloquence

St. Gregory the Theologian, also revered as St. Gregory of Nazianzus and St. Gregory the Younger, stands as a towering figure in the history of the Christian Church. Born in the 4th century, his influence as a great father and teacher of the Church remains profound.

Ordained as the Archbishop of Constantinople, St. Gregory possessed exceptional rhetorical skills, widely regarded as the most accomplished orator of the patristic age. His eloquent sermons and theological writings continue to inspire and captivate believers worldwide.

St. Gregory, alongside St. Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom, forms the illustrious trio known as the Three Holy Hierarchs. These three Cappadocian Fathers played a pivotal role in shaping Christian thought and practice, leaving an indelible mark on the development of theology and spirituality.

St. Gregory's classical education as an orator and philosopher enabled him to infuse Hellenistic philosophy into the early Church. His ability to synthesize Greek thought with Christian theology laid the foundation for Byzantine theologians and church officials. He left an enduring legacy in the realm of Trinitarian theology, significantly influencing both Greek- and Latin-speaking theologians. St. Gregory, along with St. Basil and St. Gregory of Nyssa, earned the title of "Trinitarian Theologian" for their profound insights into the relationship among the three Persons of the Trinity.

Remarkably, much of St. Gregory's theological work remains influential in contemporary theological discourse. His exploration of the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit continues to shape our understanding of the Trinity, providing a deep and meaningful framework for comprehending the nature of God.

St. Gregory the Theologian's contributions to the Church extend far beyond his theological writings. As a bishop, he tended to the spiritual needs of his flock with compassion and dedication. His

commitment to social justice and his advocacy for the poor and marginalized earned him the respect and admiration of his contemporaries.

His Education

St. Gregory Nazianzus was born in Arianzus, Cappadocia, in 329 AD. His father, Gregory the Elder, became Bishop of Nazianzus, and his mother, Nonna, was a devout Christian. Both of his parents, as well as his brother Caesarius and sister Gorgonia, are recognized as saints by the Church.

St. Gregory's early education began in Caesarea of Palestine, where he studied rhetoric and philosophy. He then traveled to Alexandria, which was renowned for its philosophical and theological schools. In Alexandria, he delved deeper into the study of theology and came under the influence of the great Alexandrian teachers.

From Alexandria, St. Gregory set sail for Athens, the intellectual and cultural center of the ancient world. However, as his ship sailed across the Mediterranean Sea, a violent storm erupted. St. Gregory, who had not yet been baptized, feared for his life and salvation. In desperation, he cried out to God, promising to dedicate his life to Him if he was spared. Miraculously, the storm ceased, and St. Gregory was deeply moved by this experience.

Upon arriving in Athens, St. Gregory reunited with his childhood friend, St. Basil the Great. Their friendship blossomed into a lifelong bond of brotherly love and mutual respect. Another notable fellow student in Athens was the young Prince Julian, who would later become known as Julian the Apostate. Julian initially professed Christianity but later renounced his faith and actively promoted paganism during his reign as emperor. Even in Athens, before Julian's apostasy, St. Gregory recognized his unsettled mind and warned others about the potential danger he posed to the Roman State. Even in Athens, before Julian had thrown away his faith, St. Gregory saw what an unsettled mind he had, and said, "What an evil the Roman State is nourishing." (Orat. V, 24, PG 35:693) St. Gregory here clearly depicts the impacts of an environment to one's thoughts and salvation.

Consecration and Bishopric

After completing their studies in Athens, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus became Saint Basil the Great's fellow ascetic, adopting the monastic lifestyle alongside him for a period within the remote hermitages of Pontus. Saint Gregory's father, also named Gregory, recognized his son's spiritual devotion and ordained him as a presbyter of the Church of Nazianzus. Subsequently, Saint Basil, in his

capacity as Bishop of Caesarea, consecrated Saint Gregory as the Bishop of Sasima (or Zansima), which fell within the archdiocese of Caesarea.

However, this consecration proved to be a source of profound sorrow for Saint Gregory, leading to a period of misunderstanding between him and Saint Basil. Despite this temporary strain, Saint Gregory's unwavering love and admiration for Saint Basil remained unchanged. This love is evident in his moving Funeral Oration (Orat. XLIII) dedicated to Saint Basil, a testament to the enduring bond between these two remarkable figures.

St. Gregory in Constantinople

After the untimely demise of Valens, Theodosius, a staunch advocate of the Nicene Creed, assumed leadership. During this period, numerous local synods convened, and among the notable participants was St. Gregory of Nazianzus. In 375, St. Gregory had secluded himself within a monastery located in Seleukia, yet he agreed to actively engage in these discussions.

During his time attending these gatherings, St. Gregory's cousin, Theodosia, generously offered him a villa to serve as his residence. With characteristic zeal, St. Gregory promptly transformed a significant portion of the villa into a church, which he named Anastasia, a symbolic representation of "a scene for the resurrection of the faith." It was from this modest chapel that St. Gregory delivered five impactful discourses expounding on the doctrines of the Nicene Creed, meticulously elucidating the nature of the Holy Trinity and emphasizing the unity of the Godhead.

Emperor Theodosius, steadfast in his resolve to eradicate Arianism, took decisive action by expelling Bishop Demophilus from his position. Subsequently, St. Gregory the Theologian, a prominent figure revered for his theological prowess, was elevated as Archbishop of Constantinople. In 381, Theodosius convened the Second Council of Constantinople, over which St. Gregory presided. During this council, Macedonius, who had previously served as Archbishop of Constantinople, was condemned as an adversary of the Holy Spirit, a grave offense that could not be tolerated. The council's deliberations and decisions played a pivotal role in shaping the theological landscape of the time, solidifying the Nicene Creed as the orthodox standard and further marginalizing Arianism and other dissenting views.

Two years elapsed, and when St. Gregory departed from Constantinople, the once-flourishing Arian sect, which espoused a heretical understanding of Christ's divinity, found itself utterly

vanquished within the city's walls. Not a single Arian church remained standing, a testament to the transformative power of St. Gregory's teachings.

St. Gregory diligently guided the Church until the year 382, when he delivered his farewell address, known as the Syntacterion. This momentous speech, witnessed by an august assembly of 150 bishops and graced by the presence of Emperor Theodosius the Great, served as a resounding affirmation of the divinity of the Son. With profound humility, St. Gregory requested permission to retire from the See of Constantinople, a request granted by all in attendance. In a humble expression, St. Gregory, never having desired the responsibility and wanting to escape it like Jonah, boldly and humbly proclaimed: "Let me be as the Prophet Jonah! I was responsible for the storm, but I would sacrifice myself for the salvation of the ship. Seize me and throw me... I was not happy when I ascended the throne, and gladly would I descend it."

Returning to his beloved Nazianzus, St. Gregory spent the remainder of his days in contemplation and reflection. He continued to minister to his flock, offering spiritual counsel and guidance. At the age of 62, in the year 391, St. Gregory of Nazianzus passed from this earthly realm, leaving behind a legacy that would forever shape the course of Christian thought and practice.

Liturgical Works

St. Gregory the Theologian, a prominent figure in the Coptic Church, is renowned for his masterful composition of the Divine Liturgy to the Son. This liturgy holds a special place in the Coptic liturgical calendar and is celebrated primarily during the Major Feasts of our Lord. St. Gregory's exceptional eloquence and breadth of learning are evident in his extensive writings, which encompass both prose and poems in various forms.

The beauty of his writings surpasses that of the Greek writers of antiquity, earning him the surname "Theologian." Moreover, St. Gregory is particularly acclaimed as the "Trinitarian Theologian" due to his frequent references to the Trinity and the singular essence and nature of the Godhead in his sermons.

Some of the following excerpts show the beauty of his poetical style and eloquent display of theological knowledge. St. Gregory states in the liturgy that: "Ineffable is the power of Your wisdom, and no manner of speech can measure the depth of Your love toward mankind. You, as Lover of Mankind, have created me, as man. You had no need of my servitude, but rather I had need of Your lordship. Because of the multitude of Your tender mercies, You have brought me into existence when I

was not. You have raised heaven as a roof for me, and established the earth for me to walk upon...You have not left me in need of any of the works of Your honor.” Additionally, he mentions that: “You, O my Master, have turned for me the punishment into salvation.” Furthermore, he states: “For my sake, O my Master, You have not hidden Your face from the shame of spitting.” Moreover, St. Gregory includes this: “You have come to the slaughter as a sheep, even to the Cross.” Also, he mentions that: “I offer You, O my Master, the symbols of my freedom. I write my works according to Your sayings.”

St. Gregory's theological knowledge and poetic style shine through in several excerpts from his works. In the liturgy, he extols the ineffable power of God's wisdom and the immeasurable depth of His love for humanity. He acknowledges that God, as a Lover of Mankind, created him as a man, not out of necessity but out of His tender mercies. St. Gregory marvels at God's creation, acknowledging that He has provided a roof (heaven) and a foundation (earth) for him to dwell upon, leaving him in need of nothing.

“Ineffable is the power of Your wisdom, and no manner of speech can measure the depth of Your love toward mankind. You, as Lover of Mankind, have created me, as man. You had no need of my servitude, but rather I had need of Your lordship. Because of the multitude of Your tender mercies, You have brought me into existence when I was not. You have raised heaven as a roof for me, and established the earth for me to walk upon...You have not left me in need of any of the works of Your honor.”

Furthermore, St. Gregory emphasizes God's transformative power, stating that He has turned punishment into salvation for him, underscoring the depth of God's love and sacrifice: “You, O my Master, have turned for me the punishment into salvation ... For my sake, O my Master, You have not hidden Your face from the shame of spitting.”

Similarly another excerpt, St. Gregory draws a parallel between Christ's journey to the Cross and the sacrifice of a lamb, highlighting Christ's willingness to endure suffering for the sake of humanity. “You have come to the slaughter as a sheep, even to the Cross.” Accordingly, all these meditations lead us to surrender to Him, and thus, he proclaims: “I offer You, O my Master, the symbols of my freedom. I write my works according to Your sayings.”

These excerpts illustrate St. Gregory's deep theological understanding and his ability to express it in a poetic and eloquent manner, demonstrating his reverence for God and his profound appreciation for His grace and mercy. His writings continue to inspire and uplift, offering insights into the beauty of God's love and the transformative power of faith.

Writings

St. Gregory's preserved works encompass a collection of sermons, appropriately termed orations, as well as an extensive array of letters. These writings provide valuable insights into his theological thought, his personal life, and his interactions with contemporaries. His writings also include a lengthy autobiographical poem, commonly known as "Carmen de se ipso" or "Song Concerning One-self," along with numerous shorter poems, primarily focused on religious themes.

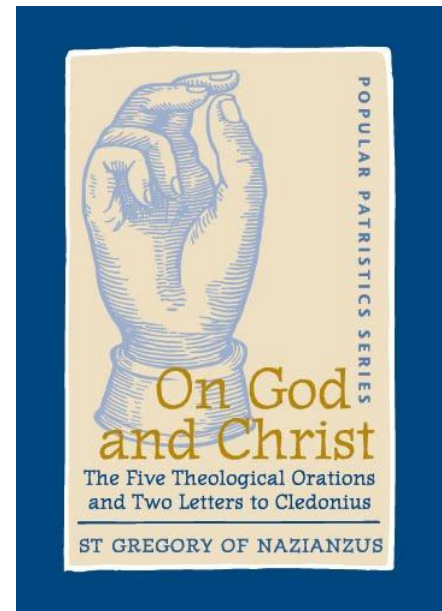
St. Gregory's body of work, known as the "Gregorian corpus," encompasses a rich and multifaceted collection of texts that provide invaluable insights into his theological thought, personal life, and interactions with his contemporaries. At the core of his preserved works are a series of sermons, aptly named orations. These masterful discourses, numbering around forty-five, cover a wide range of topics, from spirituality and morality to historical events and ecclesiastical affairs.

	Type	Description
45 Orations	De Fuga (Oration 2)	Justifying his flight from priesthood.
	Orations of Individuals	For Athanasius, Basil, Georgine, etc.
	5 Theological Orations (Orations 27 to 31)	Gregory's most significant theological contributions arose from his defense of the doctrine of the Trinity.
	Festal Orations (1,38,39,40,41,45)	Pascha, Nativity, Theophany, Baptism, Pentecost, another on Pascha.
~250+ Letters/Epistles		The letters offer a glimpse into his personal life, his relationships with other individuals, and the challenges he faced as a bishop
Autobiography		nearly 2,000 lines (commonly referred to as Carmen de se ipso, "Song Concerning One-self")
100 other shorter poems		These poems, which number around 100, showcase St. Gregory's poetic skills and his ability to express theological concepts in a creative and lyrical manner.

The Five Theological Orations

Among the orations, St. Gregory's defense of the doctrine of the Trinity stands out as one of his most significant theological contributions. His profound understanding of the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is evident in his detailed arguments and eloquent language. He is particularly noted for his contributions to the field of pneumatology, which focuses on understanding the nature and role of the Holy Spirit.

In the bustling city of Constantinople in the year 380 AD, St. Gregory of Nazianzus delivered a series of five sermons, known as the "Theological Orations" or "Orationes Theologicae." These influential discourses served as a steadfast defense of Trinitarian theology, fervently opposing the heretical teachings of Arianism, Eunomianism, and Apollinarianism.



The Theological Orations, numbered 27 to 31, each address a specific aspect of the Trinity.

Oration	Topic	Key Points
27	The Character of a Theologian	Outlines the virtues and qualifications required to engage in theological discourse.
28	God the Father	Explores the concept of the uncreated and eternal being, the source and origin of all creation.
29	God the Son	Presents philosophical arguments in support of the divine nature of Jesus Christ, emphasizing the unity and equality of the Son with the Father.
30	Challenging Passages from Scripture	Provides exegetical insights, clarifying the meaning of these texts and defending the orthodox understanding of the Son's deity.
31	God the Holy Spirit	Emphasizes the Holy Spirit's role as a distinct person within the Trinity, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son.

In the 1st of five sermons, Oration 27, Saint Gregory first of all defines the characteristics of a theologian, and who may theologize, thus setting stage for proper refutation. Only those who are

experienced can properly reason about God, those who are successful at contemplation and, most importantly, who are pure in soul and body, and utterly selfless. He is clearly calling for holiness as a prerequisite for discussing theology. It is not meant to just have random and meaningless debates and dialogues, but it is fully in respect to our pursuit of love of God. We must first approach it with humility and respect. It is like St. Paul when he says: “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal.” 1 Cor 3:1-4

To reason about God properly is possible only for one who enters into it with fervor and reverence. It is also critical to know the ineffability of God, that is, to discuss only aspects within our grasp.

*“Discussion of theology is not for everyone, I tell you, not for everyone—it is no such inexpensive or effortless pursuit. Nor, I would add, is it for every occasion, or every audience; neither are all its aspects open to inquiry. It must be reserved for certain occasions, for certain audiences, and certain limits must be observed. **It is not for all people, but only for those who have been tested and have found a sound footing in study, and, more importantly, have undergone, or at the very least are undergoing, purification of body and soul.** For one who is not pure to lay hold of pure things is dangerous, just as it is for weak eyes to look at the sun’s brightness.”*

In Oration 28, St. Gregory the Theologian delves into Scriptural passages that describe the nature of God. One such passage states that "God fills heaven and earth" (paragraph 8). While our minds may interpret this as God physically occupying space, St. Gregory reminds us that God is immaterial and transcends physical dimensions. Therefore, these biblical passages serve as mental tools to help us comprehend God's incomprehensible essence. Human language falls short in describing God, but we must attempt to do so nonetheless. St. Gregory emphasizes that God has concealed His true essence from humanity. Furthermore, he asserts that individuals bound by physical bodies cannot perceive abstract concepts without incorporating corporeal elements.

“He can only be *incorporeal*. But the term “incorporeal,” though granted, does not give an all-embracing revelation of God’s essential being. The same is true of “ingenerate,” “unoriginate,” “immutable,” and “immortal,” indeed of all attributes applied, or referred, to God...The point of this is that comprehension of the object of knowledge should be effected **both by negation of what the thing is not and also by positive assertion** of what it is.”

To understand God, St. Gregory suggests we use two approaches:

1. **Cataphatic Theology (Positive Theology)**

- Describes the attributes of God, such as His love, wisdom, and power.
- It helps us understand what God is like by describing His qualities.

2. **Apophatic Theology (Negative Theology)**

- Describes what God is not, rather than what He is.
- It emphasizes that God is beyond our limited human understanding and language. We can't fully describe or comprehend Him.

St. Gregory believes that combining these approaches is essential because God's nature is infinite and incomprehensible. Using both positive and negative theology helps us appreciate the greatness and mystery of God.

In the third and fourth theological orations, Oration 29 and 30, is dedicated to God the Son. St. Gregory addresses 10 Arian Philosophical arguments for the creation of the Son. He presents philosophical arguments in support of the divine nature of Jesus Christ, emphasizing the unity and equality of the Son with the Father. For example, in the following excerpt, he addresses the eternal characteristic of the Son and the relation between God and the Logos.

So when did these last two originate? They transcend “whenness,” but if I must give a naive answer—when the Father did. When was that? There has not been a “when” when the Father has not been in existence. This, then, is true of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Put another question and I will answer it. Since when has the Son been begotten? Since as long as the Father has not been begotten.

Can anyone be a “father,” without beginning to be one? Yes, one who did not begin his existence. What begins to exist begins to be a father. He did not later begin to be Father—he did not begin at all. He is “Father” in the true sense, because he is not a son as well. Just as the Son is “Son” in the true sense, because he is not a father as well.

Finally, in Oration 31, he turns his attention to God the Holy Spirit. St. Gregory emphasizes the Holy Spirit's role as a distinct person within the Trinity, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son. He argues against the Apollinarian heresy, which denied the full humanity of Jesus Christ. He is the first to use the idea of procession to describe the relationship between the Spirit and the Godhead.

“The Holy Spirit which proceeds from the Father.”²⁵ Insofar as he proceeds from the Father, he is no creature; inasmuch as he is not begotten, he is no Son; and to the extent that procession is the mean between ingeneracy and generacy, he is God.” (P8)

While St. Gregory did not fully develop upon the concept, the idea of procession would significantly impact subsequent thinking about the Holy Spirit. He additionally declared the eternality of the Holy Spirit, noting that His actions were somewhat obscure in the Old Testament but became much more evident after Jesus' ascension into Heaven and the descent of the Holy Spirit during the feast of Pentecost.

Staying humble

In his Concluding Oration 31, St. Gregory addresses crucial theological concepts to safeguard the distinctness of the three hypostases (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and warns against mischievous theological deviations that could lead to the erroneous division of the three hypostases: “The aim is to safeguard the distinctness of the three hypostases within the single nature and quality of the Godhead. The Son is not Father; there is one Father, yet he is whatever the Father is. The Spirit is not Son because he is from God; there is one Only-begotten. Yet whatever the Son is, he is. The three are a single whole in their Godhead and the single whole is three in personalities. Thus there will be no Sabellian “One,” no three to be mischievously divided by our contemporaries.”

St. Gregory associates mischievousness with theological error because it involves attributing more significance to human words and opinions than to the divine revelations expressed in Scripture. This reminds us to be cautious against elevating personal interpretations above God's teachings, as this undermines the authority of divine truth.

Furthermore, this stresses the importance of vigilance and correctability for those who engage in theological discussions. A teacher of theological matters should be open to correction and should not merely express personal opinions. Theology, as a discipline, is not suitable for everyone, and it is crucial for individuals, particularly servants, to discern whether they possess the necessary aptitude and commitment to engage in theological discourse. It is to be noted that all lessons, to some degree, have theological matters and that the purpose of preparatory programs is to precisely alleviate such mischievousness.



Review Questions

1. What is the main topic that St. Gregory discussed? (A: the Holy Trinity.)
2. St. Gregory was the Archbishop of _____. (A: Constantinople.)
3. Along with St. Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory is also known as one of the _____ Fathers. (A: Cappadocian.)
4. How did St. Gregory come to know Christ in his lifetime? (A: As he was sailing from Alexandria to Athens, a sea storm threatened his life and salvation, since he had not yet been baptized. With tears he cried to God to spare him, and vowed to dedicate his whole life to Him, then the storm ceased.)
5. St. Gregory has ____ famous sermons, which discuss the characteristics of a _____, and who may theologize. (A: 5, theologian.)

