

= Gregory of Nyssa =

Gregory of Nyssa , also known as Gregory Nyssen ( Greek : ????????? ; c . 335 ? c . 395 ) , was bishop of Nyssa from 372 to 376 and from 378 until his death . He is venerated as a saint in Roman Catholicism , Eastern Orthodoxy , Oriental Orthodoxy , Lutheranism , and Anglicanism . Gregory , his elder brother Basil of Caesarea , and their friend Gregory of Nazianzus are collectively known as the Cappadocian Fathers .

Gregory lacked the administrative ability of his brother Basil or the contemporary influence of Gregory of Nazianzus , but he was an erudite theologian who made significant contributions to the doctrine of the Trinity and the Nicene Creed . Gregory 's philosophical writings were influenced by Origen . Since the mid @-@ twentieth century , there has been a significant increase in interest in Gregory 's works from the academic community , particularly involving universal salvation , which has resulted in challenges to many traditional interpretations of his theology .

= = Background = =

In the book of Acts , it depicts that at on the Day of Pentecost , that there were visiting Jews who were " residents of ... Cappadocia " in attendance . In the First Epistle of Peter , written after AD 65 , the author greets Christians who are " exiles scattered throughout ? Cappodicia . " There is no further reference to Cappadocia in the rest of the New Testament .

Christianity arose in Cappadocia relatively late with no evidence of a Christian community before the late second century AD . Alexander of Jerusalem was the first bishop of the province in the early to mid third century , a period in which Christians suffered persecution from the local Roman authorities . The community remained very small throughout the third century : when Gregory Thaumaturgus acceded to the bishopric in c . 250 , according to his namesake , the Nyssen , there were only seventeen members of the Church in Caesarea .

Cappadocian bishops were among those at the Council of Nicaea . Because of the broad distribution of the population , rural bishops [ ????????????? ] were appointed to support the Bishop of Caesarea . During the late fourth century there were around fifty of them . In Gregory 's lifetime , the Christians of Cappadocia were devout , with the cults of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste and Saint George being particularly significant and represented by a considerable monastic presence . There were some adherents of heretical branches of Christianity , most notably Arians , Encratites and Messalians .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life and education = = =

Gregory was born around 335 , probably in or near the city of Neocaesarea , Pontus . His family was aristocratic and Christian - according to Gregory of Nazianzus , his mother was Emmelia of Caesarea , and his father , a rhetorician , has been identified either as Basil the Elder or as a Gregory . Among his eight siblings were St. Macrina the Younger , St. Naucratus , St. Peter of Sebaste and St. Basil of Caesarea . The precise number of children in the family was historically contentious : the commentary on 30 May in the Acta Sanctorum , for example , initially states that they were nine , before describing Peter as the tenth child . It has been established that this confusion occurred due to the death of one son in infancy , leading to ambiguities in Gregory 's own writings . Gregory 's parents had suffered persecution for their faith : he writes that they " had their goods confiscated for confessing Christ . " Gregory 's maternal grandmother , Macrina the Elder is also revered as a saint and his maternal grandfather was a martyr as Gregory put it " killed by Imperial wrath " under the persecution of the Roman Emperor Maximinus II . Between the 320 's to the early 340 's the family rebuilt its fortunes , with Gregory 's father working in the city of Neocaeasaria as an advocate and rhetorician .

Gregory 's temperament is said to be quiet and meek , in contrast to his brother Basil who was known to be much more outspoken .

Gregory was first educated at home , by his mother Emmelia and sister Macrina . Little is known of what further education he received . Apocryphal hagiographies depict him studying at Athens , but this is speculation probably based on the life of his brother Basil . It seems more likely that he continued his studies in Caesarea , where he read classical literature , philosophy and perhaps medicine . Gregory himself claimed that his only teachers were Basil , " Paul , John and the rest of the Apostles and prophets " .

While his brothers Basil and Naucratus lived as hermits from c . 355 , Gregory initially pursued a non @-@ ecclesiastical career as a rhetorician . He did however , act as a lector . He is known to have married a woman named Theosebia during this period , who is sometimes identified with Theosebia the Deaconess , venerated as a saint by Orthodox Christianity . This is controversial , however , and other commentators suggest that Theosebia the Deaconess was one of Gregory 's sisters .

= = = Episcopate = = =

In 371 , the Emperor Valens split Cappadocia into two new provinces , Cappadocia Prima and Cappadocia Secunda . This resulted in complex changes in ecclesiastical boundaries , during which several new bishoprics were created . Gregory was elected bishop of the new see of Nyssa in 372 , presumably with the support of his brother Basil , who was metropolitan of Caesarea . Gregory 's early policies as bishop often went against those of Basil : for instance , while his brother condemned the Sabellianist followers of Marcellus of Ancyra as heretics , Gregory may have tried to reconcile them with the church .

Gregory faced opposition to his reign in Nyssa , and , in 373 Amphilochius , bishop of Iconium had to visit the city to quell discontent . In 375 Desmothenes of Pontus convened a synod at Ancyra to try Gregory on charges of embezzlement of church funds and irregular ordination of bishops . He was arrested by imperial troops in the winter of the same year , but escaped to an unknown location . The synod of Nyssa , which was convened in the spring of 376 , deposed him . However , Gregory regained his see in 378 , perhaps due to an amnesty promulgated by the new emperor Gratian . In the same year Basil died , and despite the relative unimportance of Nyssa , Gregory took over many of his brother 's former responsibilities in Pontus .

He was present at the Synod of Antioch in April 379 , where he unsuccessfully attempted to reconcile the followers of Meletius of Antioch with those of Paulinus . After visiting the village of Annisa to see his dying sister Macrina , he returned to Nyssa in August . In 380 he travelled to Sebaste , in the province of Armenia Prima , to support a pro @-@ Nicene candidate for the election to the bishopric . To his surprise , he himself was elected to the seat , perhaps due to the population 's association of him with his brother . However , Gregory deeply disliked the relatively unhellenized society of Armenia , and he was confronted by an investigation into his orthodoxy by local opponents of the Nicene theology . After a stay of several months , a substitute was found - possibly Gregory 's brother Peter , who was bishop of Sebaste from 381 - and Gregory returned home to Nyssa to write books I and II of Against Eunomius .

Gregory participated in the First Council of Constantinople ( 381 ) , and perhaps gave there his famous sermon *In suam ordinationem* . He was chosen to eulogise at the funeral of Melitus , which occurred during the council . The council sent Gregory on a mission to Arabia , perhaps to ameliorate the situation in Bostra , where two men , Agapius and Badagius , claimed to be bishop . If this is the case , Gregory was unsuccessful , as the see was still contested in 394 . He then travelled to Jerusalem , where Cyril of Jerusalem faced opposition from local clergy due to the fact that he had been ordained by Acacius of Caesarea , an Arian heretic . Gregory 's attempted mediation of the dispute was unsuccessful , and he himself was accused of holding unorthodox views on the nature of Christ . His later reign in Nyssa was marked by conflict with his Metropolitan , Helladius . Gregory was present at a 394 synod convened at Constantinople to discuss the continued problems in Bostra . The year of his death is unknown .

= = Theology = =

The traditional view of Gregory is that he was an orthodox Trinitarian theologian , who was influenced by the neoplatonism of Plotinus and believed in universal salvation following Origen . However , as a highly original and sophisticated thinker , Gregory is difficult to classify , and many aspects of his theology are contentious among both conservative Eastern Orthodox theologians and Western academic scholarship . This is often due to the lack of systematic structure and the presence of terminological inconsistencies in Gregory 's work .

= = = Conception of the Trinity = = =

Gregory , following Basil , defined the Trinity as " one essence [ ????? ] in three persons [ ????????? ] " , the formula adopted by the Council of Constantinople in 381 . Like the other Cappadocian Fathers , he was a homoousian , and Against Eunomius affirms the truth of the consubstantiality of the trinity over Eunomius ' Aristotelian belief that the Father 's substance is unengendered , whereas the Son 's is engendered . According to Gregory , the differences between the three persons of the Trinity reside in their relationships with each other , and the triune nature of God is revealed through divine action ( despite the unity of God in His action ) . The Son is therefore defined as begotten of the Father , the Holy Spirit as proceeding from the Father and the Son , and the Father by his role as progenitor . However , this doctrine would seem to subordinate the Son to the Father , and the Holy Spirit to the Son . Robert Jenson suggests that Gregory implies that each member of the Godhead has an individual priority : the Son has epistemological priority , the Father has ontic priority and the Spirit has metaphysical priority . Other commentators disagree : Morwenna Ludlow , for instance , argues that epistemic priority resides primarily in the Spirit in Gregory 's theology .

Modern proponents of social Trinitarianism often claim to have been influenced by the Cappadocians ' dynamic picture of the Trinity . However , it would be fundamentally incorrect to identify Gregory as a social Trinitarian , as his theology emphasises the unity of God 's will , and he clearly believes that the identities of the Trinity are the three persons , not the relations between them .

= = = Infinitude of God = = =

Gregory was one of the first theologians to argue , in opposition to Origen , that God is infinite . His main argument for the infinity of God , which can be found in Against Eunomius , is that God 's goodness is limitless , and as God 's goodness is essential , God is also limitless .

An important consequence of Gregory 's belief in the infinity of God is his belief that God , as limitless , is essentially incomprehensible to the limited minds of created beings . In Life of Moses , Gregory writes : " ... every concept that comes from some comprehensible image , by an approximate understanding and by guessing at the Divine nature , constitutes a idol of God and does not proclaim God . " Gregory 's theology was thus apophatic : he proposed that God should be defined in terms of what we know He is not rather than what we might speculate Him to be .

Accordingly , the Nyssen taught that due to God 's infinitude , a created being can never reach an understanding of God , and thus for man in both life and the afterlife there is a constant progression [ ????????? ] towards the unreachable knowledge of God , as the individual continually transcends all which has been reached before . In the Life of Moses , Gregory speaks of three stages of this spiritual growth : initial darkness of ignorance , then spiritual illumination , and finally a darkness of the mind in mystic contemplation of the God who cannot be comprehended .

= = = Universalism = = =

Gregory seems to have believed in the universal salvation of all human beings . Gregory argues

that when Paul says that God will be " all in all " ( 1 Cor . 15 : 28 ) , this means that though some may need long time of purification , eventually " no being will remain outside the number of the saved " and that " no being created by God will fall outside the Kingdom of God " . Gregory also described God 's work this way : " His [ God 's ] end is one , and one only ; it is this : when the complete whole of our race shall have been perfected from the first man to the last ? some having at once in this life been cleansed from evil , others having afterwards in the necessary periods been healed by the Fire , others having in their life here been unconscious equally of good and of evil ? to offer to every one of us participation in the blessings which are in Him , which , the Scripture tells us , ' eye hath not seen , nor ear heard , ' nor thought ever reached . " That this is what Gregory believed and taught is affirmed by most scholars . A minority of scholars have argued that Gregory only affirmed the universal resurrection .

In the Life of Moses , Gregory writes that just as the darkness left the Egyptians after three days , perhaps redemption [ ????????????? ] will be extended to those suffering in hell [ ?????? ] . This salvation may not only extend to humans ; following Origen , there are passages where he seems to suggest ( albeit through the voice of Macrina ) that even the demons will have a place in Christ 's " world of goodness " . Gregory 's interpretations of 1 Corinthians 15 : 28 ( " And when all things shall be subdued unto him ... " ) and Philippians 2 : 10 ( " That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow , of things in heaven , and things in earth , and things under the earth " ) support this understanding of his theology .

However , in the Great Catechism , Gregory suggests that while every human will be resurrected , salvation will only be accorded to the baptised , although he also states that others driven by their passions can be saved after being purified by fire . While he believes that there will be no more evil in the hereafter , it is arguable that this does not preclude a belief that God might justly damn sinners for eternity . Thus , the main difference between Gregory 's conception of ????????????? and that of Origen would be that Gregory believes that mankind will be collectively returned to sinlessness , whereas Origen believes that personal salvation will be universal . This interpretation of Gregory has been criticized recently , however .

Attempting to reconcile these disparate positions , Orthodox theologian Mario Baghos notes that " when taken at face value the saint seems to be contradicting himself in these passages ; on the one hand he asserted the salvation of all and the complete eradication of evil , and , on the other , that the fire needed to purge evil is ? sleepless ? , i.e. everlasting . The only solution to this inconsistency is to view any allusion to universal salvation in St Gregory as an expression of God 's intention for humanity , which is in fact attested to when his holy sister states that God has ? one goal [ ? ] some straightway even in this life purified from evil , others healed hereafter through fire for the appropriate length of time . ? That we can choose either to accept or ignore this purification is confirmed by the saint 's many exhortations that we freely undertake the virtuous path . " Dr. Ilaria Ramelli has made the observation that for Gregory free will was compatible with universal salvation , since every person would eventually accept the good having gone through purification .

= = = Anthropology = = =

Gregory 's anthropology is founded on the ontological distinction between the created and uncreated . Man is a material creation , and thus limited , but infinite in that his immortal soul has an indefinite capacity to grow closer to the divine . Gregory believed that the soul is created simultaneous to the creation of the body ( in opposition to Origen , who believed in preexistence ) , and that embryos were thus persons . To Gregory , the human being is exceptional , being created in the image of God . Humanity is theomorphic both in having self @-@ awareness and free will , the latter which gives each individual existential power , because to Gregory , in disregarding God one negates one 's own existence . In the Song of Songs , Gregory metaphorically describes human lives as paintings created by apprentices to a master : the apprentices ( the human wills ) imitate their master 's work ( the life of Christ ) with beautiful colors ( virtues ) , and thus man strives to be a reflection of Christ . Gregory , in stark contrast to most thinkers of his age , saw great beauty in the Fall : from Adam 's sin from two perfect humans would eventually arise myriad .

Gregory was also one of the first Christian voices to say that slavery as an institution was inherently sinful . He believed that slavery violated mankind 's inherent worth , and the nature of humanity to be free ; a departure from classical , and Judeo @-@ Christian precedent which he rooted in Genesis , arguing that man was given mastery of animals but not of mankind . Although aspects of the slave system had been criticized by Stoics such as Seneca , this was the first and only sustained critique of the institution of slavery itself made in the ancient world .

In Homilies on Ecclesiastes , he wrote : " ' I got me slave @-@ girls and slaves . ' For what price , tell me ? What did you find in existence worth as much as this human nature ? What price did you put on rationality ? How many obols did you reckon the equivalent of the likeness of God ? How many staters did you get for selling that being shaped by God ? God said , Let us make man in our own image and likeness . If he is in the likeness of God , and rules the whole earth , and has been granted authority over everything on earth from God , who is his buyer , tell me ? Who is his seller ? To God alone belongs this power ; or , rather , not even to God himself . For his gracious gifts , it says , are irrevocable . God would not therefore reduce the human race to slavery , since he himself , when we had been enslaved to sin , spontaneously recalled us to freedom . But if God does not enslave what is free , who is he that sets his own power above God 's ? "

= = = Neoplatonism = = =

There are many similarities between Gregory 's theology and neoplatonist philosophy , especially that of Plotinus . Specifically , they share the idea that the reality of God is completely inaccessible to human beings and that man can only come to see God through a spiritual journey in which knowledge [ ?????? ] is rejected in favour of meditation . Gregory does not refer to any neoplatonist philosophers in his work , and there is only one disputed passage which may directly quote Plotinus . Considering this , it seems possible that Gregory was familiar with Plotinus and perhaps other figures in neoplatonism . However , some significant differences between neoplatonism and Gregory 's thought exist , such as Gregory 's statement that beauty and goodness are equivalent , which contrasts with Plotinus ' view that they are two different qualities .

Eastern Orthodox theologians are generally critical of the theory that Gregory was influenced by neoplatonism . For example , Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos argues in Life After Death that Gregory opposed all philosophical ( as opposed to theological ) endeavour as tainted with worldliness . This view is supported by Against Euthonius , where Gregory denounces Euthonius for placing the results of his systematic Aristotelean philosophy above the traditional teachings of the Church .

= = Feast Day = =

= = = Eastern Christianity = = =

10 January

= = = Roman Catholicism = = =

10 January

The Roman Martyrology commemorates the demise of St. Gregory Nyssa on 9 March . In modern calendars which include the feast of St. Gregory such as the Benedictines , his feast day is observed on 10 January .

= = = Lutheran Church Missouri Synod = = =

10 January with Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzus .

== ELCA ==

Feast day for Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ( ELCA ) :  
14 June , with Macrina , Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil the Great .

== Anglican Communion ==

19 July , with Macrina

== Legacy ==

Gregory is revered as a saint . However , unlike the other Cappadocian fathers , he is not a Doctor of the Church . He is venerated chiefly in the East . His relics were held by the Vatican until 2000 , when they were translated to the Greek Orthodox church of St. Gregory of Nyssa , San Diego , California .

Gregory 's work received little scholarly attention in the West until the mid @-@ twentieth century , and he was historically treated as a minor figure in comparison to Basil the Great or Gregory of Nazianzus . As late as 1942 , Hans Urs von Balthasar wrote that his work was virtually unknown . In part due to the scholarship of Balthasar and Jean Daniélou , by the 1950s Gregory became the subject of much serious theological research , with a critical edition of his work published ( Gregorii Nysseni Opera ) , and the founding of the International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa . This attention has continued to the present day . Modern studies have mainly focused on Gregory 's eschatology rather than his more dogmatic writings , and he has gained a reputation as an unconventional thinker whose thought arguably prefigures postmodernism . Major figures in contemporary research include Sarah Coakley , John Zizioulas and Robert Jenson .

== Commentary on Gregory ==

In 787 AD , the Seventh Ecumenical Council of the Church , ( also known as the Second Council of Nicea ) honored Gregory of Nyssa :

" Let us then , consider who were the venerable doctors and indomitable champions of the Church ... [ including ] Gregory Primate of Nyssa , who all have called the father of fathers . "

Henry Fairfield Osborn wrote in his work on the history of evolutionary thought , From the Greeks to Darwin ( 1894 ) :

Among the Christian Fathers the movement towards a partly naturalistic interpretation of the order of Creation was made by Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century , and was completed by Augustine in the fourth and fifth centuries . ... [ Gregory ] taught that Creation was potential . God imparted to matter its fundamental properties and laws . The objects and completed forms of the Universe developed gradually out of chaotic material .

Anthony Meredith writes of Gregory 's mystical and apophatic writings in his book Gregory of Nyssa ( The Early Church Fathers ) ( 1999 ) :

" Gregory has often been credited with the discovery of mystical theology , or rather with the perception that darkness is an appropriate symbol under which God can be discussed . There is much truth in this .... Gregory seems to have been the first Christian writer to have made this important point ... "

J. Kameron Carter writes about Gregory 's stance on slavery , in the book Race a Theological Account ( 2008 ) :

" What interests me is the defining features of Gregory 's vision of the just society : his unequivocal stance against ' the peculiar institution of slavery ' and his call for the manumission of all slaves . I am interested in reading Gregory as a fourth century abolitionist intellectual .... His outlook surpassed not only St. Paul 's more moderate ( but to be fair to Paul , in his moment , revolutionary ) stance on the subject but also those of all ancient intellectuals -- Pagan , Jewish and Christian - from Aristotle to Cicero and from Augustine in the Christian West to his contemporary , the golden

mouthed preacher himself , John Crysotom in the East . Indeed , the world would have to wait another fifteen centuries -- until the nineteenth century , late into the modern abolitionist movement -- before such an unequivocal stance against slavery would appear again . "