

“Heavenly Man” and “Eternal Christ”: Apollinarius and Gregory of Nyssa on the Personal Identity of the Savior

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Although the opposition of the Cappadocian Fathers, on church-political as well as theological grounds, to Apollinarius of Laodicea and his followers is well known, it is more difficult to see precisely what their objections were to his conception of Christ, particularly since their own christologies seem, in many respects, quite similar to his. This essay argues that Gregory of Nazianzus and particularly Gregory of Nyssa saw in the christology of Apollinarius a soteriology radically different from their own: while he regarded Christ's role as savior as resting on his natural difference from our own fallen constitution, they understood the mystery of salvation as the incipient transformation of all humanity through the communication, by God the Word, of divine virtue and life to a complete and normal human being united personally to himself. This soteriological difference, in turn, had important implications for the differing anthropologies, eschatologies, and conceptions of God that one finds in the works of these authors.

Reading the documents of the controversy between Apollinarius of Laodicea and the Cappadocian Fathers over the identity and internal structure of Christ's person is, for someone schooled in the standard modern accounts of early christology, likely to puzzle at first, rather than to enlighten. The fragments and the whole treatises of Apollinarius that still exist, on the one hand, offer a portrait of Christ that is less bizarre, less classically docetic in its representation of his humanity, more coherent and persuasive in strictly theological terms, than modern *Dogmengeschichte* may lead us to suppose. Kelly McCarthy Spoerl has amply demonstrated, in a series of articles published since 1993, that Apollinarius' conception of Christ is inseparably connected to his unwaveringly Nicene,

Athanasian approach to the being of God, as well as to his controlling desire to resist the modalism, embodied in the specter of Marcellus of Ancyra, that haunted most mid-fourth-century Greek theologians.¹ Rowan Greer has pointed out similarities between Apollinarius' understanding of Christ and that of Irenaeus, and has shown the roots of both to lie in Paul's presentation of Christ as "the human being from heaven," in the words of 1 Cor 15.47f.: "Both [Irenaeus and Apollinarius] read the same texts," Greer writes, "both saw Christ as the new Adam; both treated the new humanity as transcendent of the old."² In the view of both Spoerl and Greer, Apollinarius' christology may have carried within it anthropological and theological assumptions that would prove disastrous for an understanding of Christ's solidarity with the rest of humanity, but its scriptural arguments and fundamental theological concerns were themselves neither strange nor particularly extreme, in the context of late-fourth-century Greek debate over the status and work of the savior.

Gregory of Nyssa's treatment of the person of Christ, on the other hand, is also difficult to fit into what modern writers usually take—with the Chalcedonian formula as their norm—as the terms of classical Patristic christology, even in their early stages of evolution. Gregory rarely speaks of one hypostasis or two natures in Christ, for instance;³ he generally

1. See Kelly McCarthy Spoerl, "Apollinarius and the Response to Early Arian Christology," *SP* 26 (1993): 421–27; "Apollinarian Christology and the Anti-Marcellan Tradition," *JTS* n.s. 43 (1994): 545–68; "The Liturgical Argument in Apollinarius: Help and Hindrance on the Way to Orthodoxy," *HTR* (1998): 127–52.

2. Rowan A. Greer, "The Man from Heaven: Paul's Last Adam and Apollinarius's Christ," in *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*, ed. William S. Babcock (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1990), 165–82, here 165–66.

3. Although Gregory follows Basil and Gregory Nazianzen in speaking of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as hypostases within the single substance (οὐσία) of God, he rarely uses this same vocabulary for Christ as a single subject, even though he strongly affirms that the Logos and the human Jesus are not two agents (e.g., *or. cat.* 79.3–12), and strongly denies the charge of proposing "two Sons" (e.g., *c. Eun.* 3, 3.57–69; *Ad Theophilum* [GNO 3.1:120.16–121.2; 126.14–127.10; *Antirrhetikos adv. Apollinarium* 39 [GNO 3.1:194.3–27]). For a thoughtful and balanced survey of the main features of Gregory's christology, still one of the most useful despite its age, see Karl Holl, *Amphilochius von Ikonium in seinem Verhältnis zu den grossen Kappadoziern* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1904; repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969), esp. 220–35. A more general survey of Gregory's christology, in the context of his understanding of salvation, is Jaroslav Pelikan, "The Mortality of God and the Immortality of Man in Gregory of Nyssa," in *The Scope of Grace. Essays on Nature and Grace in Honor of Joseph Sittler*, ed. Philip J. Hefner (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 79–97. On Gregory's christological terminology, see Jean-René Bouchet, "Le vocabulaire de l'union et du rapport des natures chez saint Grégoire de Nyssa," *Revue Thomiste* 68 (1968): 533–82.

avoids using the title *Theotokos* for Mary;⁴ prefers to speak of the human reality of Christ as a human being, an ἄνθρωπος, who is “taken up” or “appropriated” by God the Logos;⁵ and even identifies two πρόσωπα or speaking roles among the Biblical sayings of Christ;⁶ yet, like Gregory Nazianzen, he also frequently uses the language of “mixture” to describe the union of divine and human,⁷ and his portrait of the risen, glorified Christ, in at least three oft-cited passages, represents his entire humanity as swallowed up in the eternal reality of the glorified Son, like a drop of vinegar lost in a boundless ocean.⁸ So twentieth-century historians of doctrine have tended to ask themselves anxiously whether Gregory is basically Antiochene or basically Alexandrian in his christological orientation,⁹ or whether—if we assume those *are* the unchanging alternatives—

4. An exceptional passage is *ep.* 3.24, where Gregory insists, apparently against Apollinarian charges, that it is not *his* party who call “the holy Virgin, the Theotokos, also ἀνθρωποτόκος, as we hear that some of their party readily do.” Gregory’s other uses of the Theotokos-title are in his early treatise *De Virginitate* 14.1.24 and 19.6.

5. See, for instance, *antirrh.* 1197C (GNO 3.1:184.5–15): “What, after all, is the difference between ‘union with flesh’ and ‘the assumption of a human being?’”; also 1200A (GNO 3.1:184.20, 27, 30), 1212A (GNO 3.1:193.11) [ἀνθρώπου πρόσληψις]; *ctr. Eun.* 3.4 (GNO 2:139.17; 140.15); *antirrh.* 1212A (GNO 3.1:193.11) (ἀνάληψις); *c. Eun.* 3.10 (GNO 2:294.8); *ep.* 3.15 (προσοικειοῦσθαι). For language of “indwelling,” see also *ep.* 3.19–20.

6. See, for example, *ref. c. Eun.* 83 (GNO 2:346.14–16: the speaker in biblical passages); *antirrh.* 1128A (GNO 3.1:133.12; 1181C (GNO 3.1:173.13) [in both of which τὸ δουλικὸν πρόσωπον is equated with “the form of a servant”].

7. Gregory uses various forms of μίξις; e.g., *c. Eun.* 3.4 (GNO 2:158.26); *antirrh.* (GNO 3.1:217.20); *cat. or.* (GNO 3.4:48.4; 79.6); various forms of κράσις; *c. Eun.* 3.1.45 (GNO 2:19.12); 3.4 (GNO 2:139.27) *antirrh.* (GNO 3.1:161.18; 225.12); *ep.* 3.15.

8. *Ad Theoph.* (GNO 3.1:126.17–21); *antirrh.* (GNO 3.1:201.10–17); *c. Eun.* 3.3.68 (GNO 2.125.28–126.3). For an interpretation of this image against the background of earlier Greek theories of fluid mixture and pharmacology, see Jean-René Bouchet, “À propos d’une image christologique de Grégoire de Nysse,” *Revue Thomiste* 67 (1967): 584–88.

9. See, for example, Holl, 235 (closer to Antiochene position); J. Tixeront, *Histoire des dogmes dans l’antiquité chrétienne* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1912), 2:128 (tendencies of both schools, more often “monophysite”); J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1976), 298–300 (closer to Antiochene). Elias Moutsoulas has argued that Gregory and the other Cappadocians stand somewhere between the main aims and emphases of Alexandria and Antioch, even though some of Gregory’s “bolder images” have an obviously “monophysite” color: “Παρατηρήσεις ἐπὶ τῆς Χριστολογίας Γρηγορίου τοῦ Νύσσης,” *Θεολογία* 40 (1969): 252, citing Moutsoulas’s earlier work, *Ἡ σάρκωσις τοῦ Λόγου καὶ ἡ θέωσις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου κατὰ τὴν διδασκαλίαν Γρηγορίου τοῦ Νύσσης* (Athens: [Organismos Panepistemiou Athenon] 1965), 219.

his christology is not simply immature, confused and inconsistent.¹⁰ As an opponent of Apollinarius, Gregory seems too similar to the enemy, at some moments, and too much like Diodore of Tarsus, at others, to carry the torch for classical orthodoxy.

I have already attempted, in an earlier essay, to argue that once one abandons the attempt to measure Gregory's christology by the conceptual or methodological norms of Chalcedon, or of the fifth-century controversies that led up to it, it is easier to see that christology as forming a consistent and powerfully convincing whole with the rest of his thought about God and human salvation.¹¹ The very difficulty of fitting his christology into either of the usual stereotypes of fifth-century Antiochene and Alexandrian thought seems, in fact, to reinforce a growing sense of unease in contemporary scholarship with the relevance of these hoary categories.¹² My purpose here, however, is rather to ask, in the context of the controversy between the three great Cappadocians and Apollinarius and his followers, which apparently began in the late 360s and had reached epic proportions by the mid-380s, just what the real difference between them was: more specifically, to ask what there was in Apollinarius' own well-integrated and strongly Nicene understanding of the person of Christ that seemed so theologically dangerous to the bishop of Nyssa, and how Gregory's presentation of the savior really differed from his.

On the surface, at least, they had much in common. Like all three Cappadocians, Apollinarius had been, all his adult life, an outspoken admirer of the great Athanasius, and a defender of the Nicene language of consubstantiality as the proper way to identify the godliness of the Son; he had been an equally determined opponent of the "economic modalism" of Marcellus of Ancyra, which seemed to imply a flattening-out of the real economy of salvation by making a personal incarnation of the Word, a personal presence of the Son in flesh, impossible.¹³ With regard to the person of Christ, Apollinarius and Gregory of Nyssa—both formidable verbal artists—use astonishingly similar language in places to speak

10. See, for example, Tixeront, 130; also Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* (London: Mowbrays, 1975), 1:371f., 376.

11. See "Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation: Gregory of Nyssa's Anti-Apollinarian Christology," *SP* 32 (Leuven: Peters, 1997): 87–95.

12. See, for instance, John McGuckin's sharp criticism of this terminology in *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 205.

13. For a thorough discussion of Apollinarius' trinitarian theology, see the three articles of Kelly McCarthy Spoerl mentioned in n. 1.

of what is unified and what is distinct in the Savior.¹⁴ Both tend to use the simple term ἔνωσις as the most basic category for describing the unique composition of Christ as a union of two real and irreducibly distinct elements;¹⁵ both speak of Jesus, the incarnate Word, as the “Lordly human being” (κυριακὸς ἄνθρωπος),¹⁶ a “man” taken up or dwelt in by the divine Logos,¹⁷ yet both are willing to apply strict limits to the sense in which we can speak of even the visible Christ simply as “human” (ἄνθρωπος);¹⁸ both affirm that “Christ” and “Lord” are proper titles of

14. For Gregory of Nyssa’s christological terminology, see Jean-René Bouchet, “Le vocabulaire de l’union et du rapport des natures chez saint Grégoire de Nysses,” *Revue Thomiste* 68 (1968): 533–82.

15. See Apollinarius, *Contra Diodorum*, frags. 140–42 (ed. H. Lietzmann, *Apollinaris von Laodicea und seine Schule* [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1904], 241.3–26); frag. 147 (Lietzmann 246.20–28); frag. 160–61 (Lietzmann 254.5–26); it is the union of Jesus’ flesh to the Word, not the nature of the flesh itself, that allows us to call his flesh divine. See also Gregory of Nyssa, *antirrh.* (GNO 3.1:184.27–30): “union [of the Word] with flesh (σαρκὸς ἔνωσις)” means the same thing as “assumption of a human being (ἀνθρώπου πρόσληψις)”; *or. cat.* (GNO 3.4:39.13–22); frag. of *Letter to the Monk Philip*, quoted in John of Damascus, *Contra Jacobitas* 112 (ed. B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 1981], 4:149.3–6).

16. Gregory Nazianzen, *ep.* 101.12 (SC 208:40), testifies to the characteristic use of this christological slogan by the Apollinarians. For a history of the use of this striking phrase, probably coined by Apollinarius but used by a variety of later writers with very different approaches to the mystery of Christ, see Aloys Grillmeier, “Κυριακὸς ἄνθρωπος. Eine Studie zu einer christologischen Bezeichnung der Väterzeit,” *Traditio* 33 (1979): 1–63 [= *Fragmente zur Christologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1997), 152–214].

17. See Apollinarius’ *Anakephaliosis*, beginning with a provocative chain of syllogisms designed to lead repeatedly to the conclusion, “Christ is not a human being [ἄνθρωπος]”: Lietzmann, 242.24–243.28. The work then goes on, in the same syllogistic style, to prove that Christ is *not* “a human being in whom God dwells,” but that he *is* “God and a human being [θεὸς καὶ ἄνθρωπος]” (244.6–16), and *not* simply, as we aspire to be through grace, “a human being joined to God [ἄνθρωπος θεῷ παραζευχθείς]” (245.30). Apollinarius’ point, clearly, is not to deny altogether that Christ is a human individual, but to define just what kind of human he can be understood to be. Gregory of Nyssa, on the other hand, insists that while the Son is eternally “Christ” and “Lord,” he can only be called “human” for the limited period of his life on earth—not before his conception in Mary’s womb, nor after his ascension into glory: *antirrh.* (GNO 3.1:222.25–29).

18. According to Gregory of Nyssa’s *Antirrhethikos*, Apollinarius distinguished between an ἀνάληψις τοῦ νοῦ καὶ ὄλου ἀνθρώπου by the Word, which he rejected, and a πρόσληψις σαρκὸς, which he affirmed; Gregory considers this simply playing with words (GNO 3.1:193.6–18). Apollinarius also refers to Christ’s humanity as “the human being from Mary”: *Ep. ad Jovianum* (Lietzmann, 251.4–5); cf. the pseudo-Athanasian *Sermo maior de fide* 30 (ed. Eduard Schwartz, *Sitzungsberichte der*

the eternal Son, and express his relationship, respectively, to his Father and to creation;¹⁹ both speak of the human flesh of Christ as thoroughly divinized by its union with God the Word, as we shall see below—in Gregory’s case, so much so that although Christ’s humanity eternally remains, its fleshly characteristics and psychological and moral limitations are, for all practical purposes, abrogated by his ascent into glory.²⁰ Both Apollinarius and Gregory of Nyssa, too, presuppose a direct connection between our present moral struggle, our enduring lack of virtue, and the weakness and corruptibility of our bodies.²¹ And for both of them, the healing of our moral and physical corruptibility is only available through contact with the eternal, incorruptible Christ: a contact realized through faith in him, through careful imitation and ascetical self-discipline, and through the more physical encounter of the sacraments, especially the eucharist.²²

How, then, can we understand the intense, often bitter, opposition that evidently existed between Apollinarius and his followers and the Cappadocians and theirs, during the 370s and 380s? Some of it, clearly, was rooted in ecclesiastical and political issues. Apollinarius and Basil of

bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 1924 [6]: 27; PG 26:1285A): this is generally thought to be a work of the Apollinarian school.

19. Gregory, in fact, defends himself at some length against Apollinarius’ charge that he and his allies deny that Christ, as the Christ, is eternal: *antirrh.* (GNO 3.1:219.14–223.10). Because “the glory before the ages surrounding God the only-begotten is understood to be the Holy Spirit,” he can be called “Christ”—the one “anointed” by the Holy Spirit—simply in terms of his trinitarian relationships (GNO 3.1:222.15–21).

20. In debate with Apollinarius, Gregory is even willing to say, “He is always the Christ, both before the course of his earthly life [οἰκονομία] and after it; but he is human neither before it nor after it, but only during the time of his earthly life.” He immediately qualifies this, however, by suggesting that after the ascension he is simply not a human being in “fleshly” terms: “For the human being did not exist before [conception in] the Virgin, nor is the flesh in its own proper characteristics after his ascent into heaven.” (GNO 3.1:222.25–29).

21. See, for instance, Gregory of Nyssa, *or. cat.* (GNO 3.4:26.3–12; 35.16–36.16); Apollinarius, frags. 74–76 (Lietzmann, 222.6–24: the mind as changeable, inconstant); frags. 150–51 (Lietzmann, 247.22–248.7: the mind as self-determining but inconstant); *Letter to the Bishops of Diocaesaraea* 2 (Lietzmann, 256.5–6); *Anakephalaisis* 30 (Lietzmann, 246.13–17: the mind wars against the flesh).

22. For Apollinarius’ conception of the ways in which we make contact with the saving and healing presence of the incarnate Christ, see frag. 165 (Lietzmann, 262.28–263.14: by faith, by following him and imitating his behavior); frag. 116 (Lietzmann, 235.8–17: by being nourished by his life-giving flesh); cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *or. cat.* (GNO 3.4:93.1–98.7): nourishment of the Eucharist; *ibid.* (GNO 3.4:98.8–105.9): moral reform and imitation of Christ.

Caesarea had been mutually admiring correspondents during the late 350s; but when Apollinarius began gathering his hard-line Nicene followers in western Syria into what resembled more and more a dissident church, and was—like Paulinus of Antioch—uncanonically ordained their bishop, possibly during Julian's reign, his relationship with Basil seems to have changed, despite the fact that Basil himself occasionally pursued the same uncanonical tactics himself as metropolitan of Caesarea.²³ During the late 370s, when Apollinarius was ordaining likeminded bishops for other cities, even his former supporters in Rome and Alexandria seem to have broken communion with him, and by the early 380s the Apollinarians of Asia Minor and Syria were engaged in intense, polemical competition with the imperially sponsored form of the Nicene Church, in which the Cappadocians were key players.²⁴ Despite his intense commitment to the cause of Nicaea, Apollinarius had become a sectarian leader.

The core of the Apollinarian challenge to the established church, and the heart of orthodox arguments against the Apollinarians, however, was clearly felt by both sides of the debate to be theological rather than simply political: each side was convinced that the other took a distorted view of the person of Christ. In one sense, Apollinarius' basic conception of Christ, as the enfleshed divine Logos, was nothing new: the Antiochene synod that condemned Paul of Samosata in 268, and in the fourth century Arius, Athanasius, and even Origen's great admirer Eusebius of Caesarea,²⁵ had all simply assumed that the Logos, as the divine spiritual mind governing the universe, was also the mind of the savior, bringing to realization in him, as a single human composite, what it constantly achieved on a cosmic scale for the preservation of creation. But some drew unacceptable conclusions. Arius had taken this organic internal unity of Christ

23. For a plausible reconstruction of Apollinarius' career at this point, and of his changing relations with Basil, see G. L. Prestige, *St. Basil the Great and Apollinarius of Laodicea*, ed. Henry Chadwick (London: SPCK, 1956), 14–16. John McGuckin suggests that it was Diodore of Tarsus, one of the chief supporters of bishop Meletius of Antioch, who first persuaded Gregory of Nazianzus, and perhaps through him Gregory of Nyssa, of the theological and ecclesiastical dangers raised by Apollinarius and his associates: see *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's, 2001), 231–32.

24. See Gregory of Nazianzus, *ep.* 101.6–9 (SC 208:38–40); 202.4–7 (*ibid.* 88–90): they are a worse danger to the Church than the Eunomians or the Macedonians; Gregory of Nyssa, *ad Theoph.* (GNO 3.1:120.12–121.10): their charges against the Orthodox; *antirrh.* (GNO 3.1:132.15–25): they are “false prophets,” and their teaching must be tested.

25. On Eusebius' “logos-sarx” christology—surprising in view of his general adherence to Origen's theology—see Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* 1:178–79.

to be a proof that the Logos must himself be a creature; Apollinarius, affirming the consubstantiality of the Logos with the eternal Father but also insisting—against Marcellus—that the Logos’ distinct, filial relationship to the Father is part of the eternal structure of the mystery of God, naturally tended to conceive of the whole person of Christ as divine, and thus in some sense as eternal, building his argument on scriptural texts that spoke of Jesus as “the man from heaven.”²⁶

Gregory Nazianzen’s portrayal of Apollinarius’ christology, in his letter to Nectarius of Constantinople, surely oversimplifies the Apollinarian understanding of the “divine flesh” of Christ, but it probably gives us—despite Gregory’s attempts to reduce the Apollinarian position to absurdity—an accurate picture of the way the sect’s approach to the person of Christ was generally understood:

He asserts that the flesh which the only-begotten Son assumed in the incarnation for the remodeling of our nature was no new acquisition, but that that carnal nature was in the Son from the beginning. And he puts forward as a witness to this monstrous assertion a garbled quotation from the Gospels, namely, “no man has ascended up into heaven save the one who came down from heaven, the Son of Man who is in heaven” [John 3.13]. As though even before he came down he was the Son of Man, and when he came down he brought with him that flesh, which it appears he had in heaven, as though it had existed before the ages and been joined with his essence. For he alleges another saying of an apostle, which he cuts off from the whole body of its context, that the second man is the Lord from heaven. [1 Cor 15.47] Then he assumes that that man who came down from above is without a mind, but that the Godhead of the only-begotten fulfills the function of mind, and is the third part of this human composite, inasmuch as soul and body are in it on its human side, but not mind, the place of which is taken by God the Word.²⁷

The abundant remains of Apollinarius’ own writings reveal that while his Christology is not always consistent in all its details, it does lay central stress on the living, organic unity of the Logos, the divine Mind, with the soul and flesh of Jesus as “one person” (ὅν πρόσωπον) and “one living being” (ὅν ζῶον), so that “nothing should be adored like the flesh of Christ.”²⁸ Gregory of Nyssa paraphrases Apollinarius’ portrait of the

26. For a thoughtful analysis of Apollinarius’ use of scripture to support his picture of Christ, see Greer, “Man from Heaven,” esp. 166–74.

27. *Ep.* 202, to Nectarius, 10–14 (SC 208:90–92; tr. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, repr. in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward Rochie Hardy, LCC 3 [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954], 231 [alt.]).

28. *Apodeixis*, cited in Gregory of Nyssa, *antirr.* (GNO 3.1:204.31–205.1, 204.17–18).

unified, centrally divine person of Christ—based on sayings of Jesus in texts like John 17.5, “Glorify me . . . with the glory I had with you before the world was made”—in the following terms:

He says that the Son, who is enfleshed mind, was “born of a woman” [Gal 4.4], not having become flesh in the Virgin but coming forth from her as through a passage [παροδικῶς]; just as he was before the ages, he appeared at that time in visible form, being God in the flesh [σάρκινον θεόν], or—as he himself calls him—enfleshed mind.²⁹

In several extant fragments of his works, Apollinarius himself strenuously denies holding that the actual flesh of the man Jesus is heavenly or eternal, even though we adore it as “God’s flesh.”³⁰ Yet there are other passages where he does speak of Christ’s body simply as “God’s flesh”³¹ and insists that the Word exists “in the singleness of the mingled, incarnate divine nature”;³² for this reason, his body, although “consubstantial with us,” shares both in the name and the reality of his divine consubstantiality.³³ As Rowan Greer has pointed out, such language seems intended to assert the same mutual predicability of divine and human attributes in Christ that would later be called the “communication of idioms”; but it does so in language that was easily misunderstood, and perhaps not always fully under control.³⁴ One main reason for this, Greer perceptively observes, is that Apollinarius apparently lacks a sense of the importance of *time* or *history* in conceiving of the composite person of Christ: for him, “to speak of Christ is to speak of a timeless reality.”³⁵ Christ, in Apollinarius’ rather vaguely formulated soteriology, renews fallen human beings, whose unstable minds are held captive by fleshly passions, precisely because he is the perfect divine mind, ruling his flesh in sovereign freedom: unlike the flesh of a graced human being, who is simply “joined to God,”

29. *Antirr.* (GNO 3.1:166.24–28). Gregory of Nazianzus also criticizes the Apollinarians, in his celebrated *First Letter to Cledonius*, for suggesting that the Word, in becoming flesh, “passed through the Virgin as through a conduit, but was not completely formed in her, in a way at once divine and human” (*ep.* 101.16: SC 208:42).

30. *Ep. ad Dionysium* 7 (Lietzmann, 259.5–9): the Apollinarians confess to saying that Christ is “the Son of Man from heaven,” not that his flesh is from heaven; *Tomus synodalis* (Lietzmann, 262.27–263.4): the Logos took “flesh consubstantial with our flesh” and is united to it as the human spirit is united to our flesh. This latter passage comes from a brief declaration by “Apollinarius and those with me,” presumably intended to present their christology in a light more acceptable to the wider Church.

31. E.g., *Anakephalaiosis* 29 (Lietzmann, 246.2–7): for a quotation, see text below.

32. *Frag.* 9 (Lietzmann, 206.27–28).

33. *De unione* 8 (Lietzmann, 188.14–18).

34. “Man from Heaven,” 170–71.

35. *Ibid.*, 171.

the flesh of God is an instrument of life, conformed to our passibilities for the sake of achieving God's plans; the thoughts and actions of the flesh are not proper to it, but being subjected to our passibilities in a way that befits flesh, it is strong against those passions, because it is God's flesh. In this way, it leads the way towards impassibility for those bodies which are not like it, but which live in a similar way.³⁶

For Apollinarius, Christ's role as savior rests primarily on the fact that he is *unlike* us; he is unique and sovereign because although he shares our tripartite structure, he is by nature God. As such, he becomes a "new Adam" for us by taking on flesh similar to ours, and offers us a new model for imitation, a new form for living our own lives now, as enfleshed minds, in a divine way: in Apollinarius' words, Christ "gives a share in pure virtue to every mind that is subject to him, to all who are made like Christ in mind and who are not unlike him in flesh."³⁷ It is, above all, through obedience to and imitation of this Christ who is radically different from ourselves in his dominant energies, and yet who shares the same composite structure of mind, soul and flesh that we possess, that Apollinarius believes we may come to share in his moral and physical incorruption.

A good deal of the polemical response of the two Gregories to Apollinarius' theology consists in their denial of his charge that any other approach to the mystery of Christ apart from his own ends in the worship of two Sons, or in the introduction of a fourth person—the divinely inspired, yet human person of the savior—into the Trinity of the Church's traditional faith. Yet clearly both Gregories go further than simple rebuttal; drawn by Apollinarius' challenge, as well as that of the radically subordinationist Eunomians, both attempt to develop a vision of the person of Christ that is intrinsically connected to their own understanding of salvation, of the human person, of eschatological hope, and of the very being of God. What I hope to show here, in fact, is that their real objection to Apollinarius' portrait of Christ is not simply the absence there of a human soul; it is, rather, his failure to see in Christ the source and type of God's project of reshaping all of humanity together, and every human person individually, in God's image, through the inner communication of divine life to a complete and normal human being. For them, on

36. *Anakephalaiosis* 29 (Lietzmann, 246.2–7).

37. Quoted by Gregory of Nyssa, *antirrh.* (GNO 3.1:199.5–7, 14–15). Cf. another quotation in the same work: "The self-moved mind in each of us shares in redemption, to the degree that it allows itself to belong to Christ" (GNO 3.1:192.17–18).

the other hand, such a soteriological christology is a central, determining feature of any sound and thorough understanding of the Christian gospel.

In many ways, the celebrated phrase in Gregory of Nazianzus' first letter to Cledonius puts the whole Cappadocian position in a nutshell: "That which he has not assumed he has not healed; but that which is united to his Godhead is also saved."³⁸ We are saved from sin and death not simply by remodeling our humanity after the enfleshed divine mind, but through a real union of God with humanity that begins in the united person of Christ. As a result, the person of Christ must be a union of God the Word, in his full divine substance and personal presence, with a complete human being; God's "assumption"—his *ἀνάληψις* or *πρόσληψις*—not simply of *σάρξ* but of an *ἄνθρωπος* is the central action of God's historical work of salvation.

In Gregory of Nyssa's version, this "assumption of a human being" to form the incarnate person of Christ is worked out in the distinctive terms of Gregory's own comprehensive theological and spiritual synthesis, in what one might call a "christology of transformation."³⁹ Gregory summarizes this christology in a passage in his *Antirrhētikos* against Apollinarius, marked by the use of some favorite terminology and scriptural allusions:

The Logos, who "is in the beginning and is with God" [John 1.1], has "become flesh" [John 1.14] in these last days [Hebr 1.2] out of love for humanity, by sharing in the humble reality of our nature; by this means, he mingled with what is human [*τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ἀνακραθεῖς*] and received our entire nature within himself, so that the human [*τὸ ἀνθρώπινον*] might mingle with what is divine and be divinized with it, and that the whole mass [*φύραμα*] of our nature might be made holy through that first-fruit [*ἀπαρχή*: Rom 11.16].⁴⁰

38. Gregory of Nazianzus, *ep.* 101.32 (SC 208:50; Hardy, 218). Gregory summarizes, in this famous aphorism, a principle important in patristic christology since the late second century: see, for instance, Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 5.14.1–2 (SC 153:182–88), who argues on these grounds that Jesus' humanity "recapitulates" the flesh and blood of the whole race; cf. Tertullian, *De carne Christi* 10 (SC 216:256). The closest early parallel to Gregory's formulation is found in Origen's *Dialogue with Heraclides*: "For the whole human being would not have been saved, if [Christ] had not taken on a whole human being" (SC 67:70). For the use of this principle by other theologians in the fourth century and later, see the excellent summary article by Aloys Grillmeier, "Quod assumptum non est, sanatum non est," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (Freiburg: Herder, 1963), 8:954–56.

39. See my article, "Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation" (above, n. 11).

40. *Antirrh.* (GNO 3.1:151.14–20).

The striking feature of Gregory's account of salvation and the savior here is its *narrative* structure: unlike Apollinarius, who focuses on the distinctive ontological characteristics of the incarnate Word and suggests they are held in a timeless, even eternal balance of mind and flesh, Gregory puts the accent on the incarnation as *event*, as the beginning of decisive and life-giving change within changeable human history and the ever-changing human person.⁴¹ To put it more precisely: in Gregory's terms, the point of the Nicene creed is not simply to proclaim that the Son is "of one substance with the Father," but also to confess that "he came down from heaven and *became* flesh, so that his flesh is understood not to have existed before his descent."⁴² The point, similarly, of the "hymn" of Philippians 2.6–11 is, for Gregory, its affirmation that the one who, as "equal to God," had no perceptible form at all, *took on* that form which we can see and understand, only when he "emptied himself" in time: "*at that point* he came to be in a form, when he took up form and wrapped himself in it."⁴³ Gregory's conclusion may seem at first sight rather startling: we can only call the Lord a "human being" during the time of his earthly life,⁴⁴ even though as divine Son he is always "the Christ," because he is always "anointed" by the glory of God, which is poured out in the Holy Spirit. As a result, what *changes* in the narrative of God's "self-emptying" is not God, nor even Christ as an eternal divine person, but the "human being" in which he "formed himself" to meet the capacities of our senses:

Since the human is changeable, while the divine is unchangeable, the divinity is unmovable with respect to change, neither varying for the better nor for the worse (for it cannot take into itself what is worse, and there is nothing better); but human nature, in Christ, undergoes change towards the better, being altered from corruption to incorruption, from the perishable to

41. For Gregory's frequently-asserted conviction that "everything that depends upon creation for existence has an innate tendency to change," see *or. cat.* (GNO 3.4:24.3–6); cf. *vit. Moys.* 2.2–3 (GNO 7.1:33.19–34.14); *De perfectione* (GNO 8.1:213.1–214.6). On the importance of physical change in Gregory's thought, see Jean Daniélou, *L'Être et le temps chez Grégoire de Nysse* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 95–115.

42. *Antirrh.* (GNO 3.1:143.7–9; emphasis mine).

43. *Antirrh.* (GNO 3.1:160.1–2; emphasis mine).

44. Gregory may well be thinking here of the passage in Apollinarius' *Anakephalaliosis* described in n. 17. The final section of the argument is a similar set of syllogisms arguing that Christ is, in any case, not what each of us is: "a human being joined to God [ἀνθρώπος Θεῷ παραζευχθεῖς]." For text, see Lietzmann, 242.24–245.30.

the imperishable, from the short-lived to the eternal, from the bodily and the formed to what is without either body or form.⁴⁵

At the end of part 3 of *Contra Eunomium* 3, Gregory deals with the neo-Arian charge that scriptural witness to the elevation and glorification of Christ, in such passages as Acts 2.36 (“God has made both Lord and Christ this Jesus, whom you crucified”) suggests that the Son, who is “made Lord and Christ,” is changeable and therefore a creature. Here Gregory again makes the argument that it is the full human being, the ἄνθρωπος “assumed” by the Logos, rather than the Logos as such, who is changed by receiving divine glory: in a telling Greek pun, Gregory asserts that “the Godhead is emptied [κενοῦται], so that it might become receivable by human nature; the human being is renewed [ἀνακαινοῦται], becoming divine by being mingled with the divine.”⁴⁶ Gregory’s point is that the process of transformation which the gospels show to have taken place in Christ—the change from humility to glory, from growth in “wisdom, age and grace” to the mysterious splendor of the resurrection—although it is a change only in his humanity, reveals precisely whose humanity this has been from the beginning.⁴⁷ Appealing, as he so often does, to the natural science of his time for a likely metaphor, Gregory compares the personal divinity of the man Jesus to the element of fire which always lies hidden within a piece of wood, only to be revealed when the wood is set ablaze; so

he who thought little of human shame, because he is Lord of glory, concealed, as it were, the flame of life within his bodily nature in the course of events [οἰκονομίᾳ] that led to death, but he enkindled it and fanned it into flame again by the power of his own divinity, warming the body that had died and so infusing that meager first-fruit of our nature with the infinity of divine life, and made that, too, into the thing he himself was . . . , making everything that is piously understood to be in God the Word also to be in the one assumed by the Word. As a result, these no longer [i.e., after his resurrection] seem to exist separately on their own, according to some kind of distinction, but the mortal nature, mingled with the divine in a way that overwhelms it, is made new, and shares in the divine nature—just as if,

45. *Antirr.* (GNO 3.1:223.2–10); cf. Athanasius, *or. III c. Arianos* 34, 53.

46. *C. Eun.* 3.3.67 (GNO 2:131.19–22).

47. Cf. Gregory’s *ep.* 3.16–22 (SC 363:136–42), where Gregory insists that one must not understand this progressive transformation of Christ’s human nature in the sense that Jesus the man only gradually became God; it is rather to be understood as “a true theophany” (*ep.* 3.16), in which the presence of God is more and more luminously revealed within creatures—in Christ’s case, most dramatically revealed in the manner of his entering the world and in his ascension into glory (*ibid.*, 22).

let us say, the process of mixture were to make a drop of vinegar, mingled in the sea, into sea itself, simply by the fact that the natural quality of that liquid no longer remained perceptible within the infinite mass that overwhelmed it.⁴⁸

Gregory thus comes to speak of progress, of a process of change, within the humanity of Jesus, which both represents and opens the way for a similar process in us. If his humanity has been, in the end, overmastered and absorbed, as far as its perceptible natural characteristics went, by the divinity to which it is united, the theological promise in this transformation rests on the fact that his humanity was, and in a paradoxical way still is, completely normal, completely similar to ours. Although as Word he is Wisdom itself, “we do not doubt that that part of our flesh that was united to the divine Wisdom received a share in the good thing that Wisdom is”;⁴⁹ so, too, he struggled to remain “obedient unto death [Phil 2.8], for since death entered in because of the disobedience of the first human being, for that reason it is driven away through the obedience of the second human being.”⁵⁰ Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane reveals that the Word has taken on, as part of God’s deliberate strategy of salvation (ἐξ οἰκονομίας), a human will and human vulnerability (πάθος);⁵¹ it is this human will, with its natural freedom to determine action, that enables Jesus to share in “pure virtue.”⁵² And just as the result of the “first man’s” disobedience was death (Rom 5.19), the divine reward for the “second man’s” obedience unto death is resurrection and entry into glory, a transformation not only of his own individual humanity but of humanity itself:

For this reason he became “obedient unto death” [Phil 2.8], that through his obedience the wound of disobedience might be healed, and through his resurrection from the dead he might make death vanish, which entered along with disobedience. For the resurrection of the human [Jesus] from the dead is the point at which death disappears.⁵³

In the resurrection and ascension of Jesus into glory, Gregory argues, the glory which belongs to the Word from all eternity as God, the glory in which he is “anointed” by the Holy Spirit and which is the foundation of his title “Christ,” comes to belong also, “at the end of the ages, to the one

48. *C. Eun.* 3.3.68–69 (GNO 2:132.14–21, 24–133.4).

49. *Antirr.* (GNO 3.1:175.10–12).

50. *Antirr.* (GNO 3.1:160.27–29).

51. *Antirr.* (GNO 3.1:181.14–22).

52. *Antirr.* (GNO 3.1:198.1–7; cf. 199.6–11).

53. *Antirr.* (GNO 3.1:161.1–5).

united to Christ⁵⁴—namely, or at least primarily and prototypically, to Jesus. And the effect of this glorification on the humanity of Christ is nothing less than its total transformation; as Gregory writes to Theophilus of Alexandria,

Everything that was weak and perishable in our nature, mingled with the Godhead, has become that which the Godhead is The first-fruits of the human nature which he has taken up—absorbed (one might say figuratively) by the omnipotent divinity like a drop of vinegar mingled in the boundless sea, exists *in* the Godhead, but not in its own proper characteristics. For a duality of Sons might consistently be presumed, if a nature of a different kind could be recognized by its own proper signs within the ineffable Godhead of the Son. . . . But since all the traits we recognize in the mortal [Jesus] we see transformed by the characteristics of the Godhead, and since no difference of any kind can be perceived—for whatever one sees in the Son *is* Godhead: wisdom, power, holiness, freedom from passion—how could one divide what is one into double significance, since no difference divides him numerically?⁵⁵

Along with this strong affirmation of the transformation of human nature by its taking on the characteristics (ιδιώματα) of the divine, Gregory does—less frequently—also affirm that the human structure assumed by God is not simply lost in the process, since God remains ever faithful to the commitment implied in the incarnation:

For the divine nature, as we have said, when it is mutually and naturally united with body and soul and has become one with both of them by mixture, is never separated from either of them—“for God’s gifts,” scripture says, “are irrevocable” [Rom 11.29]—but they remain forever. For there is nothing that can separate anyone from union with God except sin; and in one whose life is free from sin, surely union with God is inseparable.⁵⁶

The nature of this unequal union of God and the human in Christ, however, and the transformation of the human element that it brings about, result, in Gregory’s view, in a state of integrated existence in which the human, as such, is so dominated by the present reality of God that it is scarcely recognizable to our present understanding. It has itself become, in a participatory way, divine.

54. *Antirrh.* (GNO 3.1:222.4–21).

55. *Ad Theophilum* (GNO 3.1:126.17–127.10). Other passages sounding this theme of the transformation of human nature in the person of Christ include: *antirrh.* (GNO 3.1:169.24–170.14): the assumption of Elijah to heaven in a chariot of fire as a type of the transformation of Christ’s humanity; *c. Eun.* 3.3.34 (GNO 2:119.21–27); 3.43 (GNO 2:123.5–10); 3.62 (GNO 2:130.2–5); 4.43 (GNO 2:150.21–27).

56. *Antirrh.* (GNO 3.1:224.17–24).

What are the implications, within Gregory's remarkably coherent theology, of this way of understanding the relationship of the human nature and the human experiences of Christ to his own proper divinity?

1. First of all, as others have remarked,⁵⁷ this christology really is a *soteriology*. The transformation of a complete and normal human nature in Jesus is, for Gregory, the "first-fruits" of a transformation of all of humanity as a race: an active leaven in the "lump" of our common human dough.⁵⁸ Even his celebrated image of the "drop of vinegar in the ocean" may well be a hint at the "medicinal" effect on the rest of humanity of the resurrection of Christ, since vinegar in water was prescribed as a cure in some of the Hippocratic writings Gregory seems to have known.⁵⁹ For each of us, in Gregory's view, salvation from the corrupting, deadly disease of sin can only come about through a transformation of our human nature similar to that which we see in Christ, which draws its healing energy from him: a transformation that begins in our growth in virtue, a created reflection of the divine light⁶⁰ which is the true human glory,⁶¹ and which reaches its perfection, as far as the material side of our nature is concerned, in the resurrection of the body. So in the *Life of Moses*, his treatise on the dynamic process of human perfection, Gregory interweaves his discussion of the life of virtue, and of our human hope to share in the Paschal mystery, into an interpretation of the sweetening of the water of Marah in the book of Exodus:

For to the one who has left the pleasures of Egypt, to which he was enslaved before he crossed the sea, life seems at first hard to bear and unpleasant, because it is deprived of pleasures. But if the wood is cast into the water—that is, if one makes one's own [παραλάβοι] the mystery of the resurrection, which takes its beginning through wood (and when you hear "wood," surely you will think of the cross!)—then the life shaped by virtue

57. E.g., Bouchet, "À propos d'une image," 588; Moutsoulas, "Παρατηρήσεις," 265–70.

58. See, for instance, *or. cat.* (GNO 3.4:77.24–78.17).

59. See Bouchet, "À propos d'une image," for the argument and for references. For Gregory's knowledge of and interest in Greek medicine, see Mary Emily Keenan, "St. Gregory of Nyssa and the Medical Profession," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 15 (1944): 150–61.

60. See *hom. in Cant.* 9 (GNO 6:285.17): "Virtue is not outside the divinity"; *de an. et res.* (Roth, 86): "The divine nature is the source of all virtue." At the end of part 7 of *Contra Eunomium* 3, Gregory even says, "The Lord is virtue," just as he, Christ, is the supreme Good, "the fount of light and truth and of every good thing": *c. Eun.* 3.7.60–64 (GNO 2:236.10–237.18). See also *de Beatitudinibus* 4 (GNO 3.1:122).

61. *Antirr.* (GNO 3.1:164.21–24): "The glory of a human person is true glory: the life, that is, which is lived according to virtue."

is sweeter, more refreshing, than any confection that delights the senses with pleasure, for its pleasure comes from the hope of what is to come.⁶²

It is in the life of virtue, then, seen as part of a life of faith and of discipleship in the Church,⁶³ a life marked out and nourished by the sacraments of baptism⁶⁴ and the Eucharist,⁶⁵ that the transformation begins in each of us which also will end, like that of Christ's "assumed ἄνθρωπος," in complete divinization.

2. As Rowan Greer has remarked, the *anthropology* implied in Gregory's understanding of the person of the savior is clearly more optimistic than that of Apollinarius, who saw the human mind as naturally unstable and irreparably ensnared in the contaminating passions of the flesh, unless a new model should be given it in a "heavenly man."⁶⁶ In many of his works, by contrast, Gregory sees the changeability of creatures not only as morally neutral in itself, but as the ontological foundation for that endless progress towards the Good which is his definition of created perfection.⁶⁷ "Sin is a failure of nature," Gregory writes to three ascetic women in *Epistle 3*, "not a proper characteristic of it, just as sickness and deformity were not naturally ours from the beginning, but occur contrary to nature."⁶⁸ What is most natural in us, Gregory argues at eloquent length in his dialogue *On the Soul and Resurrection*, is our "original form," the image of God as created in Adam:⁶⁹ this form, now overlaid with "garments of skin"—for Gregory, passibility and mortality—as a result of the fall, will gradually be restored in each human being through the healing of the passions and growth in virtue, either in this life or in the purification which follows,⁷⁰ and will take on bodily form, in a way yet unknown to us, through our own resurrection.⁷¹ The final state of the human person, which is a restoration of our original state, "is nothing

62. *Vit. Moys.* 2.132 (GNO 7.1.74.24–75.9).

63. *Or. cat.* (GNO 3.4, 98.8–106.18).

64. *Or. cat.* (GNO 3.4, 82.1–92.25); *antirrh.* (GNO 3.1:226.26–227.9): in baptism we voluntarily die along with Christ, are buried with him, and imitate his resurrection.

65. *Or. cat.* (GNO 3.1:93.1–95.23).

66. "Man from Heaven," 172, with references.

67. For references, see above, n. 39.

68. *Ep.* 3.17 (SC 363:136.142–45).

69. *De an. et res.* (Roth, 119); see also *de hom. opif.* 16–18. For a recent reinterpretation of the latter passage, and of Gregory's understanding of the role of gender in that "original form," see John Behr, "The Rational Animal: A Rereading of Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio*," *J ECS* 7 (1999): 219–47.

70. *De an. et res.* (Roth, 119–20).

71. *De an. et res.* (Roth, 115).

else, according to my judgment, but to be in God himself.”⁷² And it is precisely this moral and bodily transformation by union with God, brought to its fulfillment in resurrection from death, that Christian faith sees achieved in the person of Christ: Gregory’s anthropology of growth towards God, in other words, finds its paradigm in his “christology of transformation.”

3. Gregory’s christological dispute with Apollinarius seems even to have had its implications for their understanding of Christian *eschatology*. Gregory quotes a passage from the *Apodeixis* in which Apollinarius seems himself to be criticizing Gregory’s notion of resurrection as a thoroughgoing divinization of the human: “If after the resurrection he becomes God and is no longer human,” Apollinarius asks, “how will the Son of Man send out his angels? And how shall we see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven [Matt 24.30–31]?”⁷³ Apollinarius’ “timeless” christology seems to imply for him that the “heavenly man” will remain forever in the form in which he walked the earth, complete (as Gregory distastefully observes) with hair and nails—that God and the Logos and bodily nature are permanently fixed in their present relationships of need and grace. This understanding, indeed, may be part of the reason that the Apollinarians were accused, in a number of contemporary sources, of having millenarian expectations:⁷⁴ Paradise must be a bodily place, if Christ and his Church are to find their fulfillment there! Gregory, on the other hand, dismisses such difficulties contemptuously: it is promised that we will see Christ come again “in the glory of his Father” (Matt 16.27), and the glory of God is “purified of all form that can be contemplated visually,”⁷⁵ for “the divine lies beyond every bodily conception.”⁷⁶ For Gregory, the mystery of Christ’s resurrection reveals to us the mysterious, unimaginable character of the promised end of history—the mystery of Christ’s own form, as well as of our own fulfillment.

4. Ultimately, perhaps, Gregory’s quarrel with Apollinarius’ christology is really a quarrel about the nature of *God*. Towards the end of his

72. *De an. et res.* (Roth, 116).

73. *Antirr.* (GNO 3.1:228.18–22).

74. See, for example, Gregory of Nyssa, *ep.* 3.24 (SC 363:142–44); Gregory of Nazianzus, *ep.* 101.63–64 (SC 208:64); *ep.* 102.14 (ibid., 76); Basil of Caesarea, *ep.* 263.4; 265.2; Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* 77.36–38 (GCS 37:448–451: not Apollinarius but his followers). For further references, see Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 80.

75. *Antirr.* (GNO 3.1:230.9).

76. *Antirr.* (GNO 3.1:230.23).

Antirrhethikos, he quietly criticizes Apollinarius for what may be his underlying error: he thinks of God the Word simply as mind, and so sets the stage for inevitable competition and conflict between the powerful and holy divine mind and its poor human counterpart. “For if the Godhead takes the place of the mind [in Christ],” Gregory remarks, “one could not say that the Godhead is superior in comparison to mind, since it, too, like mind, would be given its place [in the incarnate Word] by nature.” In Gregory’s view, as is well known, God’s substance and nature are beyond all creaturely comprehension:

Who does not know [he asks] that the God who has appeared to us in flesh is, according to what reverent tradition tells us, immaterial and invisible and uncomposed; he was and is indefinable and uncircumscribed, he exists everywhere and penetrates all creation, but in perceptible mode he is seen in the circumscribed form of a human being?⁷⁷

The central paradox of the incarnation of the Word, Gregory realized, is simply the paradox of personal—and in that sense, ontological—union between the formed and what is beyond form, between the infinite, transcendent God and a perfect but limited human creature in time and space. God can “assume” this creature, Gregory knew, can make him his own—and in “assuming” him can “heal” all those who share the same human ancestry and structure—simply because God is utterly *different* from the human creature in every aspect of God’s being. God can assume and heal every aspect of humanity in Christ, because God can never be a competitor with any aspect of Christ’s humanity; his presence *within* that humanity as God, as Maximus Confessor would later make more explicit, is what allows it to be most fully and most freely itself.⁷⁸ Gregory puts the point more simply: “That which always remains the same cannot, by its

77. *Antirrh.* (GNO 3.1:156.14–18).

78. Maximus’ insistence on the two undiminished natural “operations” of the incarnate Word, and thus on his two “natural wills,” rests on the conviction, which Maximus often expresses in his christological writings, that the very union of divine and human elements in the mystery of Christ both relies on and guarantees the continuing distinctness and integrity of both. See, for example, *Opusculum* 8, to Nicandros: “The one [nature] is preserved by preserving the other, the one maintained by maintaining the other. For clearly it [i.e., the Incarnation] is a union of things only insofar as the natural distinction of those things is preserved. For when the one [i.e., the union] ceases, clearly the other [i.e., distinction] ceases, too, being made completely to disappear in the confusion of the two.” (PG 91:97A1–5). Cf. also *opusc.* 7, to Marinus (PG 91:73D–80 C); *Ambigua* 4 (PG 91:1056C–1060D); *ep.* 12, to John the Chamberlain (PG 91:408A–D); *Dialogue with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:309A–B:

nature, become anything other than what it is; it can come to be *in* another, surely, but it cannot *become* that other.”⁷⁹ Humanity changes, and there lies its hope; God never changes, because God’s nature lies beyond all limit and definition. It is a principle destined to be misunderstood and even misused in the christological debates of the century that was to follow; but in the context of Gregory’s theology, and of his “christology of transformation,” it seems to be both indispensable and true.

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the Word possesses the full human nature “in a divine way [θεϊκῶς].” And see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie. Das Weltbild Maximus’ des Bekenner* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961), 253–56. Here, as elsewhere, Maximus is clearly influenced by the Cappadocian tradition.

79. *Antirr.* (GNO 3.1:227.14–16).