

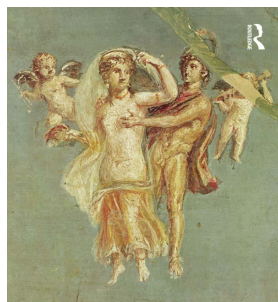
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The Cappadocians: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa

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**THE CAPPADOCIANS:
BASIL OF CAESAREA, GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS,
GREGORY OF NYSSA**

Anthony Meredith

Prior to the advent of the Cappadocian Fathers – Basil of Caesarea (c.330–79), his friend Gregory of Nazianzus (329–89), and Basil’s brother Gregory of Nyssa (c.335–c.395) – Cappadocia, to the north-east of modern Turkey, seems to have been something of a cultural backwater. Hence comes the epigram, ‘It is as hard to teach turtles to fly as to teach Cappadocians to write good Greek’. The three Fathers came from very respectable and prosperous families, and at any rate two of them received a good classical education in the university of Athens for about five years. An elaborate account of their life is provided by Gregory of Nazianzus’ *Oration 43*, a panegyric of his friend and younger contemporary, Basil.

Unfortunately what we should most like to know, the nature of their philosophical background, is much more difficult to arrive at. The education at Athens was largely rhetorical and we know little or nothing about the sort of philosophy they would have encountered. A general acquaintance with some sort of Platonism must be assumed. But that apart, we are reduced to conjecture. The great period of revived Neoplatonism was to occur during the fifth century, with Proclus and Macrobius being worthy of note, the former because of the influence he exercised on Pseudo-Dionysius. Although the fifth century saw an increased interest in Platonism, this came too late to affect the Cappadocian approach.

It is true that Eunapius (346–414), in his *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists* (hereafter *Lives*), does mention some disciples of Iamblichus, among whom were Maximus and Chrysanthius, who, although much admired by the Emperor Julian, were theurgists or miracle workers, rather than philosophers in the strict sense. Aedesius, himself a Cappadocian and also the preceptor of the Emperor Julian, was indeed a philosopher but we know next to nothing about what he taught from the account in Eunapius (*Lives* 461, in Philostratus 1921: 376). Aedesius died c.355 and no writings of his survive.

Before an account of the nature and influence of philosophy on the teaching of the Cappadocians is offered it is important to note that the actual word ‘philosophy’ in their writings refers less to their systematic use of Plato, Aristotle and the

Stoics than to a particular way of life, above all, a moral and ascetic one. Basil regularly applies the word ‘philosophy’ to the monastic life, as does his brother Gregory of Nyssa in his *Life of Macrina* (section 1) and in the prologue to his treatise *On Virginity*. (The whole subject has been thoroughly treated by Malingrey 1961.)

The basic assumption underlying what follows is that the three Cappadocian Fathers, and above all Gregory of Nyssa, ought to be treated seriously as philosophers. However, it must be admitted at the outset that this is not a self-evident proposition. It not only seems to contradict certain explicit statements of all three Cappadocians, but has also been vigorously contested by several scholars, particularly by Christopher Stead (1976). It cannot be denied that the two Gregories, in particular, were renowned preachers. Gregory of Nyssa, despite his apparent lack of formal rhetorical education, was much valued by the emperor, Theodosius I, and two funeral orations for the emperor’s wife, Flaccilla, and daughter, Pulcheria, survive. This indicates that there is in Gregory of Nyssa, as in many ancient writers, a tension between rhetoric and philosophy.

The question of the influence exercised by Platonism in its various forms on the thought of the Cappadocian Fathers, above all Gregory of Nyssa, has been variously answered at least as far back as Cherniss’ seminal article, “The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa” (see Cherniss 1934). For Cherniss, Gregory was little more than a Hellenized wolf in the clothing of a Christian sheep. In other words, although Gregory continues to use the language of Christian tradition, the meaning he attaches to this language is Hellenic rather than Christian. Doerrie (1983), however, preferred to use the language of *Umdeutung*, or transformation, with which to define the approach of Gregory. On this view, Gregory did indeed take over the language and some of the ideas of philosophy, notably those to be found in Plato’s *Phaedo*, *Theaetetus* and *Timaeus*, but (on this hypothesis) Gregory did not do so uncritically, instead giving these philosophical concepts and ideas a meaning distinct from that found in the Platonist tradition. Stead (1976), by contrast, radically questions Doerrie’s whole approach, and does not treat Gregory as a philosopher at all, but rather as a rhetorician without a coherent point of view. There is some truth in this, as Gregory does not provide us with a clearly articulated standpoint on the subject of the person of Christ or the relation of freedom and salvation.

Of the Cappadocians’ philosophical education, as has already been mentioned, we know very little. Their own at times disconcertingly hostile attitude to secular philosophy, coupled with their failure to mention any contemporary pagan philosopher, may lead to the false conclusion that they were uninfluenced by what they either ignored or affected to despise. So, for example, Basil on several occasions in his letters – with echoes of 1 Corinthians 2:6, where the wisdom of this age is contrasted with the wisdom of Christ – criticizes the value of human learning (e.g. *Letters* 223:2, 258:2; nor are these the only examples we could cite). Even so, Basil is not entirely consistent at least in his attitude to classical culture in general, if the correspondence between him and Libanius in his *Letters* 335–59 is genuine

(part of it is certainly so). We also need to remember that Tertullian, in the beginning of the third century, despite his apparent total rejection of philosophy as a poisonous root (*Apology* 46:18), was happy elsewhere to speak of the Stoic philosopher Seneca as “our Seneca”.

Again, Basil’s friend Gregory of Nazianzus, in a well-known passage in *Oration* 23.12, writes that it was fishermen rather than students of Aristotle who spread the Gospel. Even Gregory of Nyssa, arguably the most philosophically literate of all three Cappadocians, is happy to attribute the errors of Eunomius to the influence of Aristotle, which he does in *Against Eunomius* 1.46 and elsewhere. The last two examples more than suggest that Aristotle was regarded by some Christians as at least a suspicious ally in their attempts to articulate their faith. Yet, in *Against Eunomius* 2.404 and 405, Gregory of Nyssa accuses Eunomius of being overly influenced by the *Cratylus* of Plato in his treatment of the nature of language as natural rather than conventional.

It should in fairness be stated that a similar wall of indifference or hostility existed on the pagan side also. For example, two fifth-century pagan philosophers, Macrobius and Proclus, provide no indication at all of their awareness of the existence of Christianity. The same is true also of Sallustios and Iamblichus. By contrast, Porphyry provided learned ammunition for the persecution of Diocletian in 305 in the shape of a fifteen-volume *Against the Christians*.

An exceedingly useful summary of the various possible approaches to the problem of the differing degrees of influence exercised on the Cappadocian Fathers, notably Gregory of Nyssa, by non-Christian philosophy is provided by Jaroslav Pelikan in his 1992–93 Gifford lectures, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (1995: ch. 1). Pelikan alerts the reader to the ambiguous character of the Cappadocians’ approach to classical culture, for although they were happy to use the philosophical tradition, as we have seen they affect on occasion to despise it.

The central aim in what follows is to explore the extent to which, in all three Cappadocian Fathers, it is possible to detect evidence of the influence of philosophical ideas in their different writings. I shall distinguish three differing ways in which such influence may be discerned:

- (i) An actual acknowledged citation from a non-Christian writer, of the type of reference we find, for example, in Augustine’s *City of God*: “As Porphyry says in his work entitled *The Letter to Anebo*” (10.11).
- (ii) A verifiable citation from a classical author, but one that goes unacknowledged. Some such usages will occur in passages from the Cappadocians, later to be discussed.
- (iii) An unacknowledged and general dependence on a classical (especially philosophical) author, but without any clear verbal echoes. So, for example, Gregory of Nyssa’s treatise *On Virginité* portrays the upward progress of the created soul in an idiom unmistakably influenced by the *Symposium* of Plato, but shorn of any precise citation of any length.

(I) AN ACKNOWLEDGED CITATION FROM A NON-CHRISTIAN WRITER

It can be asserted at the outset that in none of the Cappadocian Fathers does there occur any example of category (i). This is quite remarkable: although both Basil and Gregory Nazianzus had an elaborate education at Athens from 350 to 356, nowhere in the writings of either do we find any mention of their pagan preceptors or contemporaries. This may be owing to the fact that their education in Athens was rhetorical rather than philosophical in content.

Why the Cappadocians were so reserved and why instead Augustine was so much more forthright is a question that deserves exploration. It may have been because of the pronounced hostility to Christianity portrayed by the celebrated School Law of Julian in June 362, which effectively excluded Christians from occupying teaching posts in universities. Even though Julian was dead within a year of this 'cruel' edict, it may well have challenged men of the intellectual calibre of the Cappadocians to be cautious in advancing too explicit a connection between Christianity and philosophy. Their reticence is all the more remarkable when it is set beside the *Preparation for the Gospel* by Eusebius of Caesarea, composed some time after the peace of Constantine in 312/313. There we find Eusebius quoting considerable and acknowledged extracts from Plotinus' *Enneads* 5.1 and 4.7 (at *Preparation for the Gospel* 11.17 and 15.10 respectively).

The only possible exception to this general approach occurs in Gregory of Nazianzus' *Third Theological Oration*, in the course of which Gregory offers an account of the derivation of the dyad and triad from the monad, from which all begins. But Gregory insists that this is *not* to be compared to the overflow of goodness, as from a *krater*, as "one of the Greek philosophers has dared to claim". The passage alluded to is, according to Arthur James Mason, Plato's *Timaeus* 41d (see Gregory of Nazianzus 1899: 76 n.2), but according to Hermann Josef Sieben it refers to Plotinus' *Ennead* 5.2.1 (see Gregory of Nazianzus 1996: 176 n.16).

(II) A VERIFIABLE CITATION FROM A CLASSICAL AUTHOR

When it comes to actual verbatim quotations, or ones that are nearly so, we have two good examples in Gregory of Nyssa. One, discovered by David Balás (1966: 168), is a passage from Plutarch's treatise *On Isis and Osiris* 25, which is cited, but without any reference to Plutarch, in Gregory's *Against Eunomius* 3.10.41. Gregory accuses the author, whom he terms "the wise theologian", of introducing the names of Egyptian gods into Christianity. Interestingly, this passage does not appear to occur in Eusebius' *Preparation for the Gospel*.

The only other passage where it may be possible to detect verbal dependence without any apparent acknowledgement is in the opening words of Gregory's treatise, *De Instituto Christiano* (in *Gregorii Nysseni opera* VIII.1.40.1), which may echo the opening words of Plotinus' *Enneads* 4.8.1. Even here direct dependence of

Gregory on Plotinus is denied by Staats (1984), although asserted by Mühlenberg (1966: 82).

(III) AN UNACKNOWLEDGED AND GENERAL DEPENDENCE
ON A CLASSICAL AUTHOR

Despite the relative paucity of extended, identifiable passages of philosophical provenance in all three Cappadocians, the attempt to articulate a certain basic Christian understanding within a largely Platonist framework is evident in them all. However, before the particular usage of Platonism is addressed it is important to remember not only that our knowledge of the Cappadocian philosophical education is slight, but also that it is unclear to what extent they depended on an actual knowledge of the Platonic corpus and how much they were indebted to now lost florilegia, the existence of which is vouched for by Henry Chadwick (1969).

This latter issue is raised because of the relative frequency with which certain phrases recur. Two instances illustrate the point and the difficulty. The ideal of perfection as “becoming as much like god as possible” is taken verbatim from Plato’s *Theaetetus* 176b. Again, the thought that, “It is hard to know and impossible to reveal to all the divine nature” is a quotation from Plato’s *Timaeus* 28c and is described by Chadwick in his note to Origen’s *Against Celsus* 7.42 as “perhaps the most hackneyed quotation from Plato in Hellenistic writers” (Origen 1953: 429). The Cappadocians make use of Platonic ideas, particularly in their spiritual writings: Basil in his *Rules*, and Gregory of Nyssa in his treatises *On Virginity* and *On the Soul and Resurrection*.

All three Cappadocian Fathers, but especially Basil, were well aware of the challenge presented to the Gospel, especially after Julian’s edict of June 362, by the use of Hellenistic letters. In order to face the issues raised for the Christian community by the surrounding culture, Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus put together a collection of texts from Origen, called the *Philocalia*, with the aim of drawing from Origen’s writings (mainly his *De principiis*) a defence of freedom and of an allegorical understanding of Scripture.

Basil himself at a slightly later date composed a treatise, probably for the benefit of his nephews, entitled *To Young Men On How They May Be Helped By Greek Literature* (Letter 22). Basil here makes much use of the idea of *chresis* (use). The expression occurs on several occasions and the underlying thought is that when reading Homer the notion of moral usefulness should be to the fore. Nigel Wilson describes Basil’s thesis (as found in 2.37–39 of Letter 22) as follows: “the utility of all types of author, whether poets, orators or other prose writers are to be exploited, if they can lead to benefit for the character” (see Basil of Caesarea 1975: 10). This more positive approach to classical literature should make us cautious in taking too seriously the negative attitude previously mentioned in several

of Basil's letters. Both the *Philocalia* and the *Letter* indicate the importance the Cappadocians attached in making an alliance between Christianity and culture. It should be remarked, however, that Basil's approval of Homer and others is a moral, not a metaphysical, approval. In other words, although Basil admits that there is a close harmony between the moral outlook of pagans and Christians, he is not persuaded of the truth of pagan legends and philosophy.

But how in practice does this affect the other writings of Basil? Two examples of his method shed some light on this. In the preface to his *Longer Rules*, section 3 (*Patrologia Graeca* [hereafter PG] 31, 896b), and in section 1 of Rule 2 (PG 31, 909b–c), we find Basil in his description of the upward mobility of the created spirit using language that is clearly indebted to the *Symposium* of Plato. In the *Symposium*, Diotima, usually assumed to be the mouthpiece of Socrates himself, outlines the upward movement of the human spirit in terms of the search for absolute beauty, "the divine, the original, the supreme, the self-consistent, the monoeidic beautiful itself" (211e). In Rule 2, Basil writes: "By nature we desire beautiful things, though we differ as to what is supremely beautiful ... Now what is more marvellous than the divine beauty?"

Very similar language occurs in Gregory of Nyssa's treatise *On Virginity*, above all in chapter XI, especially in section 5, where the ascent of the created spirit to absolute beauty moves upward in precisely the same way as it does in Plato's *Symposium* 210aff. Clearly, in the moral and spiritual sphere Basil and Gregory seem to have experienced little difficulty in using language and ideas of Platonic provenance. But what of other areas?

Both Basil and his brother, Gregory of Nyssa, composed commentaries on the opening chapter of Genesis, entitled *Hexaemeron*, the six days of creation. Basil's work took the form of nine homilies delivered in Caesarea probably in the Lent of 375. Gregory of Nyssa's work is a treatise, which contains frequent references to his teacher, Basil, and was probably composed after his brother's death in January 379. Gregory's audience was very different from Basil's and was probably much less various than his brother's whom, as stated by Gregory himself, were many in number and not all of them academic (*in Hex.* PG 44, 65a). By contrast, Gregory of Nazianzus, who was later accorded the title of 'The Theologian', left no series of sermons on similar subjects, although he is the author of forty-five extant sermons.

The genre of Basil's work may account for the fact that there is some evidence in the sermons of Hellenic influence. The main source used is the *Timaeus* of Plato. This is hardly surprising in as much as Plato's dialogue, like Genesis, is concerned with the fashioning of the physical universe. In Basil's first homily (section 2), the primary motive for the creation of the universe is stated to be the goodness of God, without any trace of envy, a conception clearly borrowed from *Timaeus* 28b–30a and familiar already from Athanasius' treatise *On the Incarnation* 3.3. It is perhaps worth remarking that the popularity of Plato's *Timaeus* was not restricted to Christian authors. The index to Plotinus' *Enneads* (see Plotinus 1964–

82) reveals the interesting fact that that dialogue was more popular with Plotinus than were its near rivals, the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic*.

Despite his willingness to use the *Timaeus*, Basil makes it abundantly clear, especially at the beginning of his ninth homily, that the Bible is not a treatise on cosmology. It is not intended to answer the questions posed by physicists and philosophers alike as to whether the world is a sphere or a cylinder or a disc. Basil shows considerable awareness of the views held by secular philosophers and physicists. But, as Stanislas Giet points out in his introduction to the Sources Chrétiennes edition of Basil's nine homilies *On the Hexaemeron*, one of the difficulties in trying to evaluate the extent of Cappadocian dependency on philosophy is that "the realm of philosophy is too imprecise to allow of any neat comparison" (see Basil of Caesarea 1950: 46).

According to Gregory of Nazianzus' *Panegyric on Basil* (*Oration* 43.23), the education that he and Basil received at Athens was not narrowly rhetorical but also embraced astronomy, logic and geometry. Even so, Basil's attitude to the classical culture he had received is decidedly ambiguous. On the one hand, he treats it with some reserve, if not outright contempt, when he calls it a foolish waste of time in Letter 223/2 and elsewhere. On the other hand, there exists a collection of letters between Basil and the leading pagan sophist of the day, Libanius (*Letters* 335–59). All may not be genuine, but they are enough to show that Basil possessed a divided mind on the subject of the value of pagan literature.

By contrast, Gregory of Nyssa, despite his apparently total dependence on his brother for education (Basil is invariably for him "the teacher", as at PG 44, 64b, 65b), is far more willing to treat Genesis 1 as a coherent account of the divine foundation of the universe, in which all is linked together by the idea of what he terms *akolouthia* or connection (as at PG 44, 76b, 85b, 117b). In fact, it is precisely in his search for the sequence of the narrative of Genesis 1 that Gregory consciously distinguishes his position from that of his brother (PG 44, 68b–d). As Gregory points out, Basil's work was a series of sermons designed for a popular audience, which could not be expected to grasp philosophical niceties (PG 44, 65a). Another word Gregory uses to articulate the stages of creation is *taxis* (order) or *heirmos* (close connection), as at PG 44, 76b and 77c, the prevailing assumption being that the power and will of God are inseparable and that God works in an orderly way.

It is a favourite device of Gregory to do this. For example, in his eight *Homilies on the Beatitudes* he is forever trying to relate the eight beatitudes to the ordered steps of a ladder leading up to God. A similar search for this sort of coherence dominates his *Catechetical Oration*, where more than twenty instances of the key word, *akolouthia*, occur. In his work on the six days of creation, Gregory is always on the search for the ordered sequence. The frequency with which Gregory employs the word *akolouthia* can be gauged from the fact that the *Lexicon Gregorianum* devotes no fewer than fifteen columns to the word itself, in addition to thirteen columns to its correlatives (Daniélou 1970: ch. 2).

Gregory is endeavouring to discover an ordered structure. In other words, he is searching for an overall design and to that end he is on the search for the meaning of the words and so to arrive at what he calls their particular *skopos* or direction. In order to further his search for coherence, Gregory appeals in chapter 5 of the *Catechetical Oration* to what he terms ‘common ideas’: that is, ideas or notions that are common to all rational enquiry, whether philosophical or Christian. With their help he endeavours to establish both the rational and the revealed basis of the doctrine of the Trinity. Saint Paul had attempted something very similar at Romans 2:15, where he appeals to a law written in human hearts. Origen, likewise, in his work *Against Celsus* 1.9, appeals to the universal ideas shared by all human beings. Basil, also, in his *Treatise on the Holy Spirit* (9.22) makes use of the expression “common or universal ideas”, but he is appealing there less to some general, philosophical background than to the unwritten or oral tradition of the Fathers.

This fact illustrates well one of the differences between Basil and Gregory. The latter uses the expression ‘common ideas’ very frequently, especially in *Against Eunomius* (e.g. at 1.186, 2.11), and this despite the fact that one of his complaints against his adversary is his dependence on Aristotle. Gregory even composed a treatise on the Trinity for the benefit of the Greeks with the title *From Common Ideas*, in the course of which he attempts to establish the rational character of the Trinity. In a not dissimilar fashion, the central purpose of Gregory’s *Catechetical Oration* was to enable catechists to deal with the articulate objections of those being prepared for baptism. (The expression ‘common ideas’ does not occur in Gregory Nazianzus’ *Five Theological Orations*, this possibly suggesting that he is primarily concerned with helping the faith of those to whom he was preaching.)

One of the primary consequences of the importance Gregory of Nyssa assigns to common ideas in the *Catechetical Oration* is his endeavour to establish the fact that the doctrine of the Incarnation, which lies at the heart of the divine economy, does not conflict with the idea of what it is fitting to predicate of God, that is, with *theoprepeia*. This does not include, perhaps rather surprisingly, the notions of either incomprehensibility or infinity; nor does it include the notions with which Gregory articulates the nature of God and the soul’s approach to him in the *Life of Moses* and *Homilies on the Song of Songs*. Rather, Gregory is establishing from the outset of his *Catechetical Oration* (*Gregorii Nysseni opera* III.IV.8 3,4) four basic ideas – the goodness, justice, wisdom and power of God – which are also to be found in Origen’s *Against Celsus* 3.70. Gregory’s debt to Origen is everywhere evident.

The remainder of Gregory’s treatise is devoted to showing in a quite unusual way how the salvation of the world was realized by God without him acting in a tyrannical or unjust way to the devil, who had his rights. Gregory, in common with other Christian writers, was anxious to exonerate God from the injustice of stealing from the devil his lawful prey, which the devil had won by human folly and his own cunning. Chapter 20, above all, is devoted to establishing precisely this point. It begins with the words, “Everyone agrees that we must believe not only in the power of God, but also in his justice, goodness and wisdom.” It looks

very much as though Gregory is determined to do what Plato had done in book 2 of the *Republic* and establish the nature of God by reflection on those characteristics that help define human excellence. In other words, our perception of what it means to be a good person determines our perception of the nature of God.

In order to substantiate this theory of the justice of God in dealing with the rights of Satan, Gregory employs the celebrated image of the fish hook in chapter 22 and following. The devil swallows the bait of the humanity of Jesus and in the process is overcome by the hidden divinity of Christ. The deceiver is deceived. God is not unjust.

Although Origen's homily *On Matthew* (16.8) seems to have been the source of what Gustaf Aulen (1970) has called "the ransom theory of atonement", this theory found no favour at all with Gregory Nazianzus in his *Oration* 45.22. The point is that Gregory of Nyssa seems to have elaborated his theory in order to establish the justice of God in dealing with fallen humanity. This fact reinforces a point already made; namely, that Gregory of Nyssa, in his eagerness to interpret the message of the Gospel in ways acceptable to our ideas of justice, removes the mystery of redemption in so doing. But it should also be remembered that his motive is the desire to render the Gospel message acceptable and palatable to pagan converts. Such an approach is far less evident in the other two Cappadocians, who write 'from faith to faith'.

Little has so far been said about the attitude adopted by Gregory Nazianzus towards philosophy. As was noted previously, it is to him that we owe in his third *Theological Oration* (section 2) any direct reference to Greek philosophy. There Gregory refers to the metaphor of an overflowing cistern with which to explore and explain the organic relationship between Father and Son. The Father is treated as some sort of overflowing vessel from which the Second Person springs. A similar illustration does indeed occur in Plotinus' *Enneads* 5.2.1. However, despite his acquaintance with the passage in question, Gregory is not happy about employing it, because it seems to make the generation of the Son too organic and necessary. "Let us", he writes, "never look on this generation as involuntary, like some natural overflow, hard to be retained, and by no means befitting our conception of the deity" (*Theological Oration* 3.2). The upshot is that, despite Gregory's awareness of this Plotinian image, he mentions it only to reject it.

Gregory Nazianzus' *Oration* 21, a sort of funeral oration in honour of Athanasius who had died in 373, is very instructive on Gregory's general attitude towards classical culture. On the one hand, he is clearly aware of the terminology of Neoplatonism. In section 13, for example, he uses the language of 'triad', as he had done in his *Third Theological Oration* (section 2) as well as in *Oration* 23.8. The question is how much this tells us about his commitment to philosophical ways of thinking: probably very little. Later on in *Oration* 21 (section 12), Gregory launches an attack on the destructive effect of philosophy in the last third of the fourth century. Gregory reinforces his point by likening the heretics of his own day to the philosophers encountered by St Paul on the hill of the Areopagus at Acts 17:21.

In general, therefore, Gregory is much more reserved about the value of philosophy than the two brothers. Like Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus had indeed censured Eunomius for reducing religion to philosophy and, above all, to the atheistic philosophy of Epicurus and to the philosophy of Aristotle with its denial of providence (*First Theological Oration*, section 10). Gregory of Nazianzus, however, is more consistent in this respect than are Basil and Gregory of Nyssa.

In his fifth *Oration*, for instance, Gregory Nazianzus is clearly aware of the existence of various analogies to illustrate the unity and trinity of God. But he also perceives (in section 32) that employing the analogy of the sun and its rays to illustrate the relation of Father and Son is problematic. He is anxious to avoid the suggestion that only the Father has an independent personality. Gregory therefore writes, "Neither the ray nor the light is another sun, but they are only effulgences from the sun and qualities of its essence". It may be that Gregory Nazianzus' reserve towards philosophy accounts for his subsequent reputation as 'The Theologian'.

CONCLUSION

What has emerged from the above is that any discussion of the philosophy of the Cappadocians is primarily concerned with Gregory of Nyssa. This is in many ways surprising. We know next to nothing about his philosophical training or indeed of any other form of education he may have had. He was also cautious about spreading his views. Even so, the use to which he put the *Symposium* in his treatise *On Virginity*, and his use of the *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus* in his treatise *On the Soul and Resurrection*, together with his search to find structure and order in creation and revelation and to relate the mystery of the Trinity and the Incarnation to the realms of common ideas and God-fittingness, mark him out as a thinker of some originality and importance. A negative consequence of this approach is that it can easily be interpreted as an abandonment of the divine mystery. To insist on the importance of justice, order and goodness alongside power may have the effect of reducing the wonder of faith. But this is a risk that any serious attempt to grapple with the divine mystery is bound to undergo.

What underpins Gregory's whole approach is the conviction that there is an ultimate harmony between Hellenism and Christianity, between faith and reason. In this, as in other respects, he is a disciple of Origen, under whom Gregory the Wonderworker, the apostle of Cappadocia, had studied. And the same Gregory had also instructed Gregory of Nyssa's and Basil's grandmother, the elder Macrina, in the faith, as Basil tells us in Letter 204.

The two other Cappadocians have less to offer on this front. They were more concerned with establishing peace and order within the Church and with defending and expounding Christian teaching for the benefit of those who already believe. Basil indeed had dealings with outside culture. His *Philocalia*, however, does not seem to have affected his attitude to, or use of, philosophy. The same is

also true of Gregory of Nazianzus, who despite editing the *Philocalia* along with Basil and displaying great verbal familiarity with the philosophical language of his day, does not hesitate to attribute all adverse criticism of St Athanasius to philosophical perversity (*Oration* 21.12).

All three Cappadocians owe a considerable debt to Platonism. This can be summed up in the emphasis we can detect in each of them on the reality and importance of the spiritual world within and outside us, and in their insistence that God is real, good and beautiful, language that recalls Plato's *Timaeus*, *Republic* and *Symposium*. Alongside these obvious points of contact there exist two points of divergence: (i) both Basil and Gregory of Nyssa (the latter in *Against Eunomius* 1.271–4) emphasize the radical distinction, even within the spiritual realm, between creature and creator, something not readily found in the Platonic tradition; and (ii) the Platonic insistence on the importance of the soul needed to be modified by the Christian conviction that the body was also made by God and made for salvation, and that Christ had a body in addition to his soul (Gregory of Nyssa, for instance, insists on the bodily resurrection of Christ and on our bodily resurrection in *To Theophilus*, and also on the importance of the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist in *Catechetical Oration*, chs 32–7).

FURTHER READING

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On CHRISTIANITY see also Chs 10, 14, 18; Vol. 5, Ch. 12. On COSMOLOGY see also Chs 6, 8, 14; Vol. 2, Chs 4, 10, 16. On CREATION see also Chs 9, 13; Vol. 3, Ch. 9; Vol. 5, Ch. 5. On PLATONISM see also Chs 11, 14, 15; Vol. 5, Ch. 16. On SCRIPTURE see also Chs 9, 13; Vol. 2, Ch. 19; Vol. 3, Chs 3, 4, 15; Vol. 4, Ch. 3; Vol. 5, Ch. 12. On THE TRINITY see also Ch. 14, 20; Vol. 2, Chs 2, 8, 15; Vol. 3, Chs 3, 9, 17; Vol. 4, Ch. 4; Vol. 5, Chs 12, 23.

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