

ABSTRACT

Praying Toward Deification: A Study in the Theology of Contemplation

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The last century of patristic scholarship has seen a striking revival in the study of the Cappadocian Fathers, with particular attention given to Origen of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor. These figures are unique thinkers in and of themselves; yet, their thoughts follow the same kind of theological trajectory, each drawing upon preceding figures to extend their contribution with characteristic insight and philosophic acuity. As Christian theology and practice developed, so too did the meaning, purpose, and forms of prayer; how Christians prayed has always been intimately connected to what they profess as doctrine, particularly in regard to christology. An examination of the theological contours of the three aforementioned figures reveals that for their vein of thought (largely associated with the content of Cappadocian theology), prayer was largely concerned with man's deification through the reception of the Logos of God. Origen offers an emphasis on receiving the Word through the letter of Scripture; Gregory expounds upon the fact that man is made in the "image of God" to explain how man receives the True Man, Christ, through contemplative prayer and virtuous living; finally, Maximus takes us through three stages of contemplation with the end to know the Unknowable insofar as human nature is permitted. Through this study, I shall demonstrate that each figure unites in a common thread to emphasize that receiving the nature of Christ is to partake in His *kenōsis* love, a love of self-emptying, in order to receive the Divine Nature. Deification, then, is the embodiment of God in the individual, insofar as God is love and man is a creature innately possessing the way to love. For the Cappadocians, contemplation is a recovery of the εἰκὼν [image] of God by which the human is made, and the restoration—also the radical expansion—of man's original state: spiritually attuned living amidst a corporeal world.

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PREFACE

Reading the Cappadocian Tradition of Spirituality

Throughout the corpus of study devoted to illuminating the place of Christ in the theology of prayer, particularly the way in which early Christians derived this notion,¹ it is evident that the examination of the forms of Christian worship shed light on the beliefs and practices fundamental to their identity as a people.² Jaroslav Pelikan writes, “The fact of prayer and the forms which it assumed in the church are the business of the history of piety and the history of liturgy; the meaning and purpose of prayer are a matter for the history of the development of Christian doctrine.”³ On a similar note, Robert Lewis Wilken writes that, “[Early] Christian thinkers were not in the business of establishing something; their task was to understand and explain something. The desire to understand is as much part of believing as is the drive to act on what one believes.”⁴ This early model of “faith seeking understanding” was, in many ways, the bedrock for the massive

¹ See Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1999); Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1964); Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); F.H. Chase, *The Lord’s Prayer in the Early Church* (Theological Studies 1.3: Cambridge University Press 1891).

² Hurtado explains, “At the risk of severe understatement, one of the characteristic things early Christians did was to worship. Early Christianity was [...] striving to orient adherents to the divine purposes proclaimed in its gospel message. If, therefore, we want to analyse major phenomena of early Christianity, Christians’ devotional practices are clearly key matters for attention.” (p. 1)

³ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, vol. I in *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 139.

⁴ Robert Lewis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 12.

corpus of exegetical writings that sought to expound the mysteries and profundities of the Biblical text. Understanding the text begets an understanding of the One who the text reveals; this process, exemplified in the Church fathers, informed, as Pelikan points out, how the church prayed.

Towards the end of his chapter on “The Mystery of the Trinity,” Jaroslav Pelikan writes that the formulations of Cappadocian trinitarianism opened the door for profound theological reflection on the nature of Christ. He explains the focal point of the matter, “For granted that it was appropriate to call Christ divine and to assert that he was *homoousios* with the Father, what did this mean for his also being *homoousios* with man—and with man the creature.”⁵ While this thesis is an exploration of the theology of contemplative prayer in the Cappadocian tradition,⁶ it is necessarily an exploration of Cappadocian Christology.⁷ The way that the soul interacts with both the divine and human elements of Christ was the content of the theology of contemplative prayer. Furthermore, this study takes us through interactions with Origen’s middle-Platonism and

⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, vol. I in *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 224-225.

⁶ In this thesis, I confine myself to a study of Origen of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor as representatives of the development and synthesis of the Cappadocian tradition. While I am aware of the risk of severe oversimplification, from here on, my use of the term “Cappadocian” refers more precisely to the present study of these three figures; references to figures such as Gregory of Nazianzus, Evagrius Ponticus, Basil the Great, and Clement of Alexandria are, regrettably, kept to a minimum.

⁷ Christian prayer was (and always has been), of course, understood as an act of worship. But Maurice Wiles makes the keen observation that Christians’ reverence for the person Jesus Christ informed the development of doctrine. He writes, “The continuing practice of invoking the name of Jesus in worship helped to ensure that when the time came for more precise doctrinal definition of his person it would be in terms which did not fall short of the manner of his address in worship.” See *The Making of Christian Doctrine: A Study in the Principles of Early Doctrinal Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 65. However, as Rebecca Lyman clarifies, “Public prayer was not formalized until the third and fourth centuries [...]. Jungmann therefore would see liturgy reflecting the continuity and diversity of devotional practices of early communities. He is therefore less certain of the doctrinal effects of liturgy in the first few centuries [...].” See *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Maurice Wiles*, ed. Sarah Coakley and David Pailin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 136.

the subsequent neo-Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor.⁸ From these lenses, we shall observe the relevancy of the controversies over Christ's nature and will in regards to contemplation. One of patristic theology's highest pursuits was to expound the content of soteriology: not only who God is, but also how He reveals Himself in history and creation and man's response to His extension of Grace.

Contemplation was understood as the means by which this interaction occurred. It fostered the disposition of the soul toward receiving the grace of God in the Incarnation of His Son. How—or to what extent—do we participate in the life of Christ? For many of these Cappadocian Fathers, the Eucharist typifies the reception of Divine nature. But the mystery of deification extends further into “praying continually,” a process that, in some senses, goes beyond the Eucharist and the liturgy. The goal of this thesis is not necessarily to explore these dimensions. The present author takes them for granted; it is from here that this project takes its point of departure. But it must be said at the outset that the liturgy was no small matter for the three figures of this study.⁹

A central verse, in principle, for the Fathers in this study was II Peter 1:4: “For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the

⁸ For a discussion of this shift, see John Rist, *Platonism and its Christian Heritage* (Variorum Reprints, 1985). Here, he thoroughly demonstrates that neo-Platonism emerged from the middle-Platonic structure around 360 AD. This shall bear significant relation to our discussion of Origen's treatment of the *logos* and Gregory's shift to emphasizing the *eikōn* of God in man.

⁹ See Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 406-416; , Hans urs von Balthasar, *The Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe according to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003); Balthasar,

Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa, trans. Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 133-170; Balthasar, *Prayer*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 108-127, 259-276.

world by lust.”¹⁰ In many ways, this thesis is a narrow history of the exegesis of this verse. “Partakers of the divine nature” was a phrase that fell upon ears heavily indebted to a middle-Platonic framework. From there, a powerful analogue was formed: sin is the fall of the soul into a body, and contemplation, through the Incarnation, is the ascent back to God. The process, for all three, culminates in various forms at the Resurrection. As we shall see in this study, Platonic influences go beyond this notion, but in a broad sense, it captures the center of their thought in tandem with II Peter.

But their use of Scripture was certainly not limited to II Peter; it goes without saying that Scripture was the starting point of their theologies—even Origen’s, who was allegedly labeled a heretic by the 5th Century Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople. The lens by which they read Scripture is too broad an issue for this thesis, but it cannot go without mention. Their differing interpretations bear significant weight to their theological contributions within the tradition. As we shall see, Gregory’s doctrine of the εἰκὼν [image], derived from Genesis 1:27, serves as the cardinal point for Christology, grace, and deification. For Origen, the interpretation of the “ἄρτον ἐπιούσιον” in the fourth line of the Lord’s Prayer serves as a significant image by which he understands Christ’s subordination, divinity, and man’s reception His nature to become divine. For Maximus the Confessor, these notions are in differing ways embedded into his work, but take on a more systematic form. He expounds the notions of πρᾶξις [practical prayer], θεωρία [spiritual contemplation], and θεολογία [theology] in a keen illustration of the spiritual sojourn on the way to deification. The Lord’s Prayer is for all three figures (Origen, Gregory, Maximus) a culminating point of model and

¹⁰ All quotes of Scripture in this thesis are from the NASB, unless indicated otherwise, in which case the translations are my own.

doctrine, and we shall see that in many ways, their theology of contemplative prayer is a broadening of the Lord's teaching on prayer.

Ultimately, the heritage of Cappadocian spirituality developed in tandem with Christology. What it means to pray to Christ revolved around the explication of His identity, especially in regards His nature and will. The point upon which their theologies converge is the *kenotic* love famously expressed in Philippians 2. Paul illustrates Christ's nature as self-emptying love:

ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ, ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβών, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος· καὶ σχήματι εὐρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου, θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ. διὸ καὶ ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα, ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων, καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσῃται ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρὸς.

[who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.]

As we shall see, “ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν [but He emptied Himself]” serves as the fundamental understanding of the imitation of Christ. By contemplation, man is initiated into the self-emptying of the will, the obedience to God's commands, and the state of humility before God. But, significantly, it is a kind of dance of love: the creature pours out his own possession and occupation of the earthly realm so as to ascend to the height of Divine beatitude. In the Cappadocian Fathers, we see beautifully connected the notions of seeing God, hearing Him, experiencing Him, and possessing knowledge of Him. But as His nature is Love, he who seeks to possess and know God seeks to participate in the outpouring and self-emptying nature of this Love. Deification, then, is

the embodiment of God in the individual, insofar as God is love and man is a creature innately possessing the way to love. For the Cappadocians, contemplation is a recovery of the εἰκὼν of God by which the human is made, and the restoration—also the radical expansion—of man’s original state: spiritually attuned living amidst a corporeal world.

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*Dedicated to Audrey, Catherine, John, Daniel, Mother, Father, Grandmother, and
Grandfather, whose support is a prayer in itself;
To my Cherié Michelle, whose joy never fails to keep me a wonderer;
To Grant, whose thought and presence are strides with which I delight to run;
To Preston, whose habit of being is an extraordinary gift;
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Christ on earth is the locus of the greatest possible tension, a tension he holds and endures between “spirit” and “flesh”, between direct vision of the Father and that “distance” from which is the response of obedience, going, in obedience, to the extremes of estrangement in the Godforsakenness of the cross.

—Hans urs von Balthasar, *Prayer*

CHAPTER ONE

Ἐπιούσιος Bread, Περιούσιος People: Origen's Theological Interpretation of Prayer

The renowned exegete Origen of Alexandria is an integral figure in the development of the “meaning and purpose” of prayer.¹¹ He is a significant figure in the development of Christian doctrine and exegesis,¹² and a close analysis of his theological aesthetics of prayer offers keen insight into how exegesis, doctrine, and an ever-broadening conception of prayer took shape in the Church. Origen's understanding of prayer is tied to his Christology, and while the acclaimed “Four Senses of Scripture”¹³ pervade his exegesis in various forms and operations, so too do both the sense of Christ's presence and communion with Him emerge as a dominant characteristic of his understanding of reading Scripture. These notions are all the more prevalent in regard to prayer. Throughout his work *On Prayer*, Origen's overarching theological agenda is to

¹¹ Origen. “Prayer,” in *Prayer and Exhortation to Martyrdom*, ed. John J. O'Meara, vol. XIX of *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1954). See I.I, XX.II. O'Meara writes that Origen “lived at a time when Church doctrine was in the course of being defined: indeed he more than anyone of his time helped towards its definition.” (p. 7) Concerning his treatise *On Prayer*, Westcott writes, “No writing of Origen is more free from his characteristic faults, or more full of beautiful thoughts.” (*Dictionary of Christian Biography and Literature*, London, 1911; 4.124)

¹² See Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. I in *The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. Mark Sebanc (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1998). He observes, “‘What most of the Fathers who lived after Origen,’ wrote Richard Simon, ‘did almost exclusively was to copy his commentaries and his other treatises on Scripture,’ and ‘the very persons who were the most opposed to his opinions could not help reading them and profiting from them.’” (p. 154)

¹³ It goes without saying that Origen is foundational figure in the development and implementation of the four sense of reading Scripture (Literal, Moral, Allegorical, and Anagogical). For a superb discussion on the issue, see De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*.

refer all *praxis* and contemplation back to the Divine Word,¹⁴ which for him is not necessarily a lucid concept; his thinking is steeped in a rigid economy oscillating from Jesus the λόγος, the Wisdom of God,¹⁵ and Scripture the letter that drives his exegesis.¹⁶ Yet, as John O’Meara notes, Origen insisted that prayer proper, προσευχή [prayer], “must be addressed to the father alone [sic].”¹⁷ While this is consistent in Origen’s thought,¹⁸ there is a twofold dimension of the operation and presence of Jesus in prayer that is derived from one underlying insight: prayer is primarily an act of receiving Jesus the λόγος of God. From here, two points follow, and I shall expand upon them at length in this chapter. First, He is intercesor and redeemer of our rational nature; second, and at the same time, the reading of Scripture is itself an act of prayer in which the faithful encounter in the reading the presence of Christ.¹⁹ The former is a Spiritual communion

¹⁴ Origen, “On Prayer,” I.1: “It is impossible, for example, for human nature to acquire wisdom by which all things were made [...] yet from being impossible it becomes possible through our Lord Jesus Christ, who of God was made unto us wisdom and justice and sanctification and redemption.”

¹⁵ See Origen, “On Prayer,” I.1.

¹⁶ The debates concerning Origen’s supposedly erroneous “allegorisms” has been revived in modern theology and patristic scholarship. For the early disagreements that arose concerning Origen and his interpretive method, see introduction to Origen’s *Homilies on Judges*, trans. Elizabeth Ann Dively Lauro, in *Fathers of the Church*, CXIX (Catholic University of America Press, 2010). The revival of modern scholarship concern is put succinctly by Richard Simon in his work *Histoire critique des principaux commentateurs du Nouveau Testament* (1693), criticizing Origen for relying on “the spiritual sense so far that he seems to destroy the truth of history,” p. 46-47. However, and for the purposes of this paper, I side with de Lubac, who reminds us that Origen holds that “for enlightened minds, he says again, the stories of the Bible are true [that is, historically factual, relevant to the Christian], but they contain a hidden sense besides.” de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture according to Origen* (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, CA, 2007), 37.

¹⁷ John J. O’Meara, introduction to “On Prayer and Exhortation to Martydom,” 9. I shall discuss Origen’s emphasis on prayer to God alone later in the paper.

¹⁸ Later in the paper, I shall briefly explore the way in which Origen’s theology, being largely misunderstood, lent toward heresy as a result of this emphasis. However, for the purposes of this paper, Origen’s method itself ought to be noted.

¹⁹ See de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 385: “[For Origen] Scripture is Logos, and it proclaims the Logos. [...] What does it reveal to us? The response is contained in one word: Christ, which is to say, the Logos of God, the Logos God, come among us. Christ is the subject of all the Holy Books; he

with Jesus through speaking the words of prayer to God through Jesus Christ; the later is Spiritual communion through reading the words that reveal the character and person of Jesus, the λόγος of God. But before discussing these at greater length, we must turn our attention to Origen's understanding of the Lord's Prayer.

For Origen, the Lord's Prayer is the model by which the soul orients itself toward receiving the Divine Word in its incarnate nature. It is the development of a disposition. Integral to this understanding of reception is the fourth line, "give us this day our daily bread."²⁰ In accordance with his usual approach of interpretation and exposition,²¹ Origen stitches his understanding of the petition together with a broad mosaic of Scripture,²² formulating Christ's role as mediator and the soul's interaction with Him through prayer. In Origen's understanding, praying for, as Matthew 6:11 has it, "ἄρτον [...] ἐπιούσιον" represents human nature receiving the Divine nature and a subsequent unification of the two.²³ Furthermore, the petitioner encounters and, in a sense, receives the Divine λόγος in the form of Scripture; the act of reading Scripture itself thereby becomes a kind of prayer. These interrelating components are prevalent across the corpus of Origen's work. As I shall show, through the Lord's Prayer, God's people are made into His περιούσιος

is the key to them, and if we read them accordingly, we will discover his divinity everywhere." Indeed, "we have the mind of Christ." (I Cor. 2:16)

²⁰ See O'Meara introduction, p. 6; see Origen, "On Prayer," XXVII.

²¹ There is no room here to discuss Origen's method in full; I seek to illuminate his method and use his understanding to read the wider narrative of Scripture as it relates to prayer in his theology. For a superb discussion on the whole matter, see de Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 385-416.

²² Certain conclusions Origen draws from these methods result in misleading, and, it has been argued, heretical theological stances. An issue pertinent to this paper is the subordination of Jesus to the Father, which shall be addressed later.

²³ Surprisingly, Eucharistic dimensions are not prevalent in his exegesis here, especially regarding the Lord's Prayer. As this paper deals with Origen's exegesis concerning the Lord's Prayer, I will not address Eucharistic theology. For a treatment of Origen's Eucharistic theology, see de Lubac, *op. cit.*, 406-416.

people, “as [those] abiding with the [οὐσία] of God and partaking in it,”²⁴ a claim he makes in conjunction with the ἄρτον ἐπιούσιον of Matthew 6:11.

Before further discussing Origen’s understanding of receiving the Divine nature in prayer, it is relevant to our present purposes to first understand his interpretation of “τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον [Give to us our daily bread today].”²⁵ Origen concludes that ἐπιούσιον (modifying ἄρτον and σήμερον) was coined by the gospel writer,²⁶ and signifies “super-substantial bread.”²⁷ His translation flows from a specific theological reading. He rejects the notion that ἐπιούσιον is formed from the compound ἐπι and ἔναι (participial form of εἶμι) which gives the notion of “daily,” or, “coming”; instead, he argues that the compound is formed from ἐπι and οὐσία (derived from the feminine participial form of εἰμί),²⁸ resulting in a word which signifies “above,”

²⁴ Origen, “Prayer,” XXVII.7.

²⁵ Matt. 6:11; or, as Luke 11:3 has it, τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δίδου ἡμῖν τὸ καθ’ ἡμέραν (“Give us each day our supersubstantial bread,” Origen, *On Prayer*, XVII.1). Origen’s emphasis is not on the discrepancy between the two, but rather, on the translation of ἐπιούσιον; therefore, I shall follow Origen in relying on the Matthean version. It is significant to note, furthermore, that Jerome’s translation of the Matthean from the Greek follows with a similar notion to that of Origen’s: “*supersubstantialem* [necessary for sustenance].” (Matt. 6:11) However, his translation of Luke 11:3, interestingly enough, is “*cotidianum* [daily].”

²⁶ See B.M. Metzger, *Historical and Literary Studies, Pagan, Jewish and Christian*, Leiden, 1968, p. 64-66. Metzger records that ἐπιούσιον, apart from *Didache* VIII.2 and the gospels, occurs on an Egyptian grocery list, but the papyrus can no longer be found, and doubt is cast upon whether or not it is a valid occurrence.

²⁷ Origen, “Prayer,” XXVII.I. *Επιούσιος* generated ample discussion throughout the patristic period. Lightfoot’s summary (p. 169) of the Greek fathers’ discussion includes Athanasius (*De Incarn* 16.I), Gregory of Nyssa (*De Orat. Domin.* 4.I), Basil (*Reg. Brev. Tract.* CCLLI.II), Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catech.* XXIII.*Mystag.* V.IV), St. Chrysostom (*De Ang. Port.* 5.III; *Hom. St John* XLIII.2.VIII), Cyril of Alexandrai (*On Luke* XI.3), and later writers, Damascene (*Ortho.Fid.* IV.13.I) and Theophylact (*On Luke* XI.3). For modern discussions, see J.B. Lightfoot and Richard C. Trench and C.J. Ellicott, *The Revision of the English New Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1873), 163-184; F.H. Chase, *The Lord’s Prayer in the Early Church*, ed. J. Armitage Robinson (New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2004), 42-58; W. Foerster TDNT vol. 2 p. 590-599.

²⁸ See Origen, “Prayer,” XXVII.3, XXVII.13. Lightfoot *op.cit.* 163 rejects Origen’s translation, arguing at length for the compound ἐπι and ἔναι; See Chase *op.cit.* 42-58 for an argument in support of Origen’s translation. Foerster *op.cit.* argues for “the daily ration,” or, “the measure necessary for each one.”

or, “*in addition to*” nature, the divine οὐσία. Furthermore, the prefix ἐπι, for Origen, charges οὐσία with a connotation of nature that is at once beyond and utterly fulfilling of the οὐσία basic to man.

His philological understanding informs his theological understanding of the Divine substance. He maintains that divine οὐσία, “properly understood, is regarded as incorporeal by the philosophers who insist that the pre-eminent reality is incorporeal.”²⁹ Here, Origen’s use of philosophical terms in expounding the ἄρτον ἐπιούσιον is representative of a project typical in his exegesis, to “examine the opinions of the heretics and what the philosophers professed to say about the truth.”³⁰ Origen combats the supposition that the divine οὐσία is an incorporeal reality with no fixed form or determined operation. This doctrine, results in a passive form or entity that takes a variety of shapes, solely dependent upon the thing acting on it.³¹ This mutable and divisible nature is the opposite of Origen’s doctrine of the immutable and indivisible Word of God, the divine substance which was made flesh. Origen understands the Word of God as the prior substance that not only became incarnate, but as that substance which is now become bread in a spiritual sense, for the petitioner’s sake. He writes,

We must therefore think here of *ousia* as being the same nature as bread. And just as material bread which is used for the body of him who is being nourished enters into his substance, so the living bread and that which came down from heaven offered to the mind and the soul, gives a share of its own proper power to him who presents himself to be nourished by it.³²

²⁹ Origen, “Prayer,” XXVII.VIII. O’Meara notes, “For example, the Platonists, cf. Plato, *Tim.* 34C” (n.483).

³⁰ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 31; citing Origen from Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* VI.XIX.12.

³¹ This view, notes O’Meara, is associated with the Atomists, Epicureans, and Stoics (n. 484).

³² Origen, “Prayer,” XXVII.IX; Origen quoting from John 6:51.

In further support of these claims, he quotes heavily from John 6:26, “You seek me not because you have seen miracles, but because you did eat of the loaves and were filled.” Those praying the Lord’s Prayer strive to “understand the Son of God more perfectly,”³³ and the Living Bread is the proper nourishment for the rational nature. Origen devotes extensive sections of his *Commentary on John* to expounding the “Spiritual Food.”³⁴ Central to his understanding here is the conversation with the woman at the well in John 4, and the subsequent discussion of the “imperishable food” of John 6.

Significantly, Origen takes particular note of Jesus’ words when his disciples find their Lord interacting with a woman. They say, “Rabbi, eat [ῥᾶββι, φάγε].” Jesus replies, “I have meat to eat which you do not know.”³⁵ For Origen, Jesus’ words are self-referential; he beckons His disciples to ask for Himself. *He* is the Meat because, as he says in John 10:30, “I and the Father are One.” Origen understands this meat as nourishment for the rational nature of man: “When the parts of that nature which exceeds physical bodies [man’s rational, spiritual nature] are not nourished by the kind of foods mentioned above [“incorporeal thoughts, words, and sound actions”], they lose their distinctive character.”³⁶ Origen goes on to distinguish certain kinds of “thoughts words and sound actions” into separate categories of food, namely, “milk,” “vegetables,” “grassy,” and finally, “spiritual bread.”³⁷ In a fascinating expression of Origen’s

³³ Origen, “Prayer,” XXVII.II.

³⁴ Origen, “Commentary on The Gospel According to John Books 13-32,” trans. Ronald E. Heine, vol. LXXXIX of *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Hermigild Dressler (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), XIII.203; cf. John 4:32.

³⁵ John 4:32.

³⁶ Origen, “John,” XIII.204.

³⁷ Origen, “John,” XIII.220; cf., I Cor. 3:2, Rom. 14:2, Ps. 23, Matt. 6:11, Ps. 103:15.

particular genius, he equates each of these substances with a kind of stage in Christian maturity. The “spiritual bread” is for the “spiritual man [νοητός ἄνθρωπος].”³⁸ Origen’s use of “νοητός” is a polysemy. Derived from νοέω, “to perceive by the mind, apprehend,” νοητός identifies the aspect of human nature that is unique to itself: rationality. A secondary meaning to the adjective νοητός implies a reflective and thoughtful being. Therefore, the “spiritual bread” nourishes the rational component of man, and is granted to the one who progresses through the stages of the soul’s nutrition, the highest of which is reflection and “θεωρία [contemplation].” Sharpening his remarks on the “spiritual bread,” Origen’s emphasis is for the believer to desire that spiritual food which is “from Jesus himself [...] [who] receives his foods from the Father alone, without the intervention of any other being.”³⁹ His exploration of this concept lays the ground for him to declare, “Jesus [...] in perfecting the work of God, [...] perfects [...] [the rational creature] in the same way [...] these activities are the one distinctive food of Jesus, namely to do the will of the one who sent him and to perfect his work.”⁴⁰

This notion of obedience and its relation to the spiritual bread is advanced further in John 6. While Origen’s commentary on John 6 is lost, his use of the passage is so wide-spread that one can nearly stitch it together from his extant work. Consistent with his reading we previously examined, Origen argues from John 6:27 that God answers the prayers of the faithful with the eternal and imperishable “food,” the living bread. Indeed, the spiritual food serves as the remedy for human nature, which, as he consistently emphasizes, is rational. But the major shift for Origen occurs when he explains that

³⁸ Origen, “John,” XIII.213; see n. 229.

³⁹ Origen, “John,” XIII.220.

⁴⁰ Origen, “John,” XIII.245.

prayer, in light of what we have examined thus far, is the primary means by which humans ask for (or hunger after) conformity to His nature. Obedience to his will is the primary form that this takes.

Here, we see a lucid expression of Origen's notion of receiving the Divine nature through prayer. Another characteristic illustration takes shape in his homilies on Judges, where Origen follows St. Paul in urging his hearers to partake not as babes who are "nourished with milk," but partake in the "bread of life," [having been restored] we are incited to battle."⁴¹ Furthermore, Origen connects the "true bread" from John 6:32 to the "image of God," what he calls the "true man," in Genesis 1:27.⁴² Christ is the sanctification of man's soul "to the image of Him that created him,"⁴³ the petition to receive the Heavenly Bread is the central means by which the two natures are united. As seen above, "progress" is necessary in understanding the act of receiving the various spiritual foods, of which the "spiritual bread" is paramount.

The notion of spiritual progress will factor in at later point in the paper; presently, I shall focus on the content of Origen's connection of the "living bread" from John 4-6 as the nourishing element of the "true man" of Genesis 1:27, and how these are united in Jesus the *λόγος*. Origen states that, "every form of nourishment is called "bread" in the Scriptures [...] "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the soul."⁴⁴ Therefore, when the petitioner prays for "τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον," he

⁴¹ Origen. "Judges," VI.II; Cf. 1 Cor. 3:2.

⁴² Origen, "Prayer," XXVII.II. See also Origen's discussion of "Our Father," XXII.3-4.

⁴³ Origen, "Prayer," XXVII.II. To form this understanding, Origen draws from Gen. 1:26-27, Col 3:9, John 6:32; cf. John 1:1, 14, 14:6, Luke 11:49, 1 Cor 1:24.

⁴⁴ Origen, "Prayer," XXVII.4; Cf., John 6:52, Duet. 9:9.

joins in the Body of Christ (ἡμῶν) striving toward that spiritual bread (τὸν ἄρτον τὸν ἐπιούσιον), which is Christ Himself. Yet, as Origen is keen to point out, Christ is imparted unto the soul through prayer and through the movement of grace. The rational, “νοητός” nature is nourished unto the likeness of Christ, the image and head of the Body.

Upon this point, Robert Wilken notes that, “Origen makes the extraordinary statement that knowledge of God begins not with the ascent of the mind, but with God’s descent to human beings in a historical person.”⁴⁵ The notion of prayer involved in the νοητός ἄνθρωπος is not to be understood as an act of mental ascent; rather, it is a spiritual progress by which rational creature receives the λόγος that became incarnate in accordance with their nature. At the center of this understanding is the mediatory role of Christ because he is the “Word made flesh,”⁴⁶ come in order to redeem all flesh.

But to what extent, in Origen’s understanding, does Christ maintain Divinity while becoming σὰρξ [flesh], and how does this factor into prayer? Joseph Trigg comments that, “The divine nature, God’s Logos, fully shares [...] in the Father’s eternity and incorporeality [...] Origen discusses how the Logos also shares our full human nature. His taking flesh does not simply mean animating a body, but taking a human soul as well.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, Trigg explains that the “union of the Logos with his human soul actually precedes and makes possible his assumption of a human body.”⁴⁸ While this idea

⁴⁵ Wilken, *Early Christian Thought*, 12.

⁴⁶ John 1:14

⁴⁷ Joseph W. Trigg, “Origen,” in *The Early Church Fathers*, ed. Carol Harrison (New York: Routledge Press, 1998), 25. Trigg citing from Origen’s *Peri Archon* 2.6.2.

⁴⁸ Origen says that, “It was not possible for God’s nature to combine with a body without some medium.” (*Peri Archon*, 2.6.3) Here, it is significant to note that Origen thought all souls to be preexistent. They “fell” into bodies at creation.

links to his problematic doctrine of the preexistence of souls⁴⁹—even Christ’s—this Christological formulation maintains the integrity of the distinction in the natures, united in Christ: His rational human soul was necessary for Him to become man; yet, He remained “one fully God.”⁵⁰ It is through this inseparable unity that Christ is able to be the one Mediator between God and humanity, so that, as Trigg puts it, “Christ not only unites the two natures but mediates between the absolute and simple oneness of God and the multiplicity of created beings.”⁵¹

It is upon this point that Origen has been traditionally noted as sowing seed for Arian heresies.⁵² While he holds that in Christ both natures are united, Origen also maintains that the Son was in some sense “subordinate to the Father.”⁵³ However, Trigg notes that “the subordination of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the Father was consistent with Middle Platonic understandings of the relationship between the divine hypostases [...] [and] was an unproblematic characteristic of Christian thought in Origen’s time. Origen [...] needed the New Testament [to support the claim], in which the Son acknowledges the Father’s superiority and acts in obedience to him.”⁵⁴ This claim, argues Trigg, is representative of Origen suggesting a kind of subordination he saw warranted in the pages of Scripture, an error adjusted by the council of Nicaea; the claims of Arius

⁴⁹ For a concise discussion of this issue, “Pre-Existence,” and “Mystical Thought,” in John Anthony McGuckin, “The Westminster Handbook to Origen” (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 154 & 178.

⁵⁰ Trigg, “Origen,” 26. He notes, in conclusion, that this formulation “anticipates and foreshadows Chalcedonian orthodoxy.

⁵¹ Trigg, “Origen,” 26.

⁵² See de Lubac, *op. cit.*, 15-42 for an excellent summary on the matter.

⁵³ Trigg, “Origen,” 26.

⁵⁴ Trigg, “Origen,” 24.

“come not out of Origen’s influence, but from theological conservatism.”⁵⁵ Trigg insists that blaming Origen for “importing into Christian doctrine a Platonic understanding of the relationship of the divine hypostases, in which the second is clearly inferior and subordinate to the first,” is a serious misunderstanding.⁵⁶ Rather, by “subordination,” Trigg insists that Origen was merely referring to the obedience of the Son to the Father.⁵⁷ In other words, Christ was subordinate in the sense that He “emptied Himself”⁵⁸ and became obedient to the Father unto death. But the notion of *kenosis* is diminished in the light of Origen’s doctrine of the Incarnation. The preexisting soul of the λόγος took the form of a body (the “Christ”) in a “downward” movement, but this understanding conveys a sense of acquiring, contrary to the fuller sense of *kenotic* emptying expanded upon later in Gregory and Maximus.⁵⁹

It is with this understanding of Christ that Origen uses the image of “Heavenly bread,” “the Bread of Life,” to undergird the fourth line of the Lord’s Prayer. The petition, and thereby, the purpose of the Lord’s Prayer, is to partake of and thus conform to Christ and His life. The soul is nourished, sustained, and shaped toward full maturity in the nature of the Word, the nature of a servant who, though possessing the divine οὐσία,

⁵⁵ Trigg, “Origen,” 24.

⁵⁶ Trigg, “Origen,” 24. This is not to fully dismiss the critics of Origen, nor is it to deny his method Platonic-allegory. Rather, it is to gather a valuable emphasis on Christ’s humanity and role as mediator in the place of Christian prayer.

⁵⁷ For a detailed argument supporting this, see Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London, Darton: Longman and Todd, 1987). However, for our purposes, “subordination” is an anachronistic description for Origen; he did not consider his explication of Christ’s obedience to be problematic or mitigating toward His Divinity.

⁵⁸ Phil. 2:8.

⁵⁹ I shall discuss this at later points in this thesis, particularly chapter four.

emptied Himself in conforming His will to the Father's.⁶⁰ This is sense of subordination conveys the extent and function of how the Divine nature is received in the "Heavenly bread."

From here, Origen illustrates the relation of the moral path to the act of prayer and receiving the λόγος. His approach to reading and interpreting Scripture enables this kind of connection.⁶¹ In an example of what de Lubac pinpoints as the "moral interpretation," Origen argues that receiving the ἄρτον ἐπιούσιον as the divine nature is inseparable from the reception of the moral character of Jesus. This is keenly demonstrated in Origen's treatment and use of John 6:27, in which laboring for "meat" represents the work of God. He locates this activity as, "that you believe in Him whom he hath sent."⁶² This understanding is also figured in the act of consuming bread: He is the "bread of God [...] which cometh down from heaven and giveth life to the world."⁶³ Thus, in asking for ἄρτον ἐπιούσιον, the petitioner receives Christ as his model, the exemplar of full obedience to the Father. The Word of God is received by faith, and the Divine nature unites with the rational nature of man to produce the life of obedience, ontologically and spiritually united to God. As Origen emphasizes in the character of Christ, obedience is

⁶⁰ I shall discuss the role of obedience in Christ's "subordination" later in the paper.

⁶¹ For a fuller account of Origen's exegetical methods, see de Lubac *op.cit.*; Trigg *op.cit.*; and, Jean Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans. Dom Wulstan Hibberd (Ex Fontibus, 2011); see also by Daniélou, *Origen*, trans. Walter Mitchel (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward Publishing, 1955) and Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. A.S. Worall (T. & T. Clark, 1990).

⁶² Origen, "Prayer," XXVII.II; John 6:28.

⁶³ Origen, "Prayer," XXVII.II; Origen quoting from John 6:32-33.

fundamental to the relations of the Trinity,⁶⁴ and it is this reciprocated obedience that the believer is invited into on a relational level. As Christ freely became “obedient unto death, even death on a cross,” so the believer is united in will with God by his own obedience. Origen explains, “As the living Father hath sent me and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, the same also shall live by me.”⁶⁵ Ultimately, the petitioner is invited into the *kenotic* and freely unified life of the Trinity, just as Christ demonstrated: “I and the Father are one.”⁶⁶

He furthers the point in his Homilies on Ezekiel. “Just as the priest does not eat food in his own house or in any other place but in the holy of holies, so my Savior alone eats bread [...] while no one is able [...] when he eats, he draws me to eat with him. I stand and knock [...].”⁶⁷ Here, Origen alludes to the use of ἐπιούσιον and σήμερον found in Matthew 6:11, adding that Jesus eats “daily bread from the nature of the Father.” In doing so, Origen indicates that we, invited into his life of obedience, partake daily in His nature by asking for ἄρτον ἐπιούσιον, the “heavenly bread.”⁶⁸ The nature of Christ’s mediation, then, is that He unites His nature, and so His characteristic life of freely chosen obedience, to the one who prays.⁶⁹ Indeed, this is typical not just of those who pray the petition of the Our Father; rather, this conception demonstrates Origen’s scope

⁶⁴ See Trigg, “Origen,” 23. As noted, obedience characterizes the Son’s relationship to the Father and expresses the unity of their will.

⁶⁵ Origen, “Prayer,” XXVII.IV; Origen quoting from John 6:54-57.

⁶⁶ John 10:30.

⁶⁷ Origen, “Homilies on Ezekiel,” ed. Thomas P. Scheck vol. LXII of *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 2010), XIV.III.II; Cf. Rev 3:20.

⁶⁸ Origen, “Ezekiel,” XIV.III.III.

⁶⁹ A significant image concerning this point that has not been discussed in this paper is Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42); it shall be discussed at a further point in the paper.

of prayer on the whole. For Origen, prayer is the communion with God by which Jesus invites the one in prayer to participate in the Divine nature with Him (Jesus). In receiving the Bread of Life (His Divine nature) through His mediation, those in prayer may be sanctified according to the life typified in Jesus, who was obedient unto death and in His unity of will with the Father.

Before concluding the present section on Origen's understanding of prayer as a reception of the λόγος, two interrelated components of his theology ought to be presented: ecclesiology and eschatology. These elements pervade the corpus of Origen's writing and demonstrate how his exegesis concerning prayer forms a coherent whole—a rare feat in the work of Origen—grounded in the model of the Lord's Prayer and the reception of the ἐπιούσιον ἄρτον.

Prayer is more than the individual's reception and communion upon receiving Christ the λόγος. It is the shared experience of the Church embodying the λόγος and carrying forth His work upon the earth. Mariano Magrassi writes, "For Origen this identity becomes a dominant theme of exegesis. 'I am the Church, I am the spouse,' he repeats over and over."⁷⁰ Origen insists that these words are an individual affirmation that is universally affirmed through prayer. Each individual that composes the Body speaks these words as an individual, just as the whole Church, through prayer, receives the λόγος. This is a noteworthy component of Origen's theology of prayer, derived from his exegesis of the Lord's Prayer and the subsequent influence on his larger corpus of Biblical commentaries and homilies. In *On Prayer*, investigating the word ἐπιούσιον further, Origen references a key verse, Exodus 19:5 (LXX): "Ἔσεσθέ μοι λαὸς περιούσιος

⁷⁰ Mariano Magrassi, *Praying the Bible: An Introduction to Lectio Divinia* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 9.

ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἔθνῶν [you shall be to me a peculiar people out of all of the nations].”⁷¹ Here, Origen points out the philological similarities between “περιούσιος,” and “ἐπιούσιος;” namely, that “both words derive from the word οὐσία.”⁷² While ἐπιούσιος indicates the Divine οὐσία uniting with the οὐσία of man, περιούσιος refers to the ecclesiastical unity of God’s people as the new Israel, being formed by and partaking in the οὐσία of God. Through the posture of reception, the Body of Christ is formed more and more into the Image, the Head. Origen’s commentary on the Song of Songs offers insight into the unity of the church in participating and desiring after the Word of God. Prayer, he includes, is the essential identity of the περιούσιος people, for they have received the ἐπιούσιον bread as the completion of their being.

In his commentary on the Song of Songs, Origen illustrates the participatory longing of the Church toward the λόγος through prayer. “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood [...] in his shadow I desired and sat, and his fruit was sweet in my throat.”⁷³ Participation in the divine substance, for Origen, is an experience with the senses of the soul. He goes on, tying this sensual experience to prayer. “[He] appeals equally to the soul’s two senses: taste and smell. For wisdom furnishes her table for us with a variety of riches: she not only sets thereon the bread of life, she also offers us the Flesh of the Word.”⁷⁴ It is through prayer that one receives the “bread of life,” “the flesh

⁷¹ The Douay, “You shall be my peculiar possession above all people;” the RSV, “ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me from among all peoples.” O’Meara notes (n. 482) that περιούσιος (*peculiar*) occurs likewise in Exod. 23:22, Deut 7:6, 14:2, and 26:18 (cf. Titus 2:14).

⁷² Origen, “Prayer,” XXVII.VII. Cf., Ex. 19:5.

⁷³ Origen. “Homilies on the Song of Songs,” ed. R.P. Lawson, vol. XXVI of *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1957), III.V; Song. 2:3.

⁷⁴ Origen, “Song,” III.V; cf. John 6:32, 51.

of the Word;” furthermore, this passage resonates with the ἔπιούσιον bread of the Lord’s Prayer, when Origen comments, “The word whose fruit, moreover, she [the Church] finds sweet in her throat by continual meditation on the law of God, chewing as it were the cud thereof like a clean animal.”⁷⁵ Origen creates an understanding of prayer that is sensual, communal, and ecclesial. The Church ought to receive Christ as a lover, as the object of meditation and desire. Perhaps most vivid is the way that Origen demonstrates participation in Divine οὐσία as a sensual experience of the soul: “Understand the ‘breasts,’ as [...] the ground of the heart in which the Church holds Christ, or the soul holds the Word of God, fast bound and tied to her by the chains of her desire. For only he who with [...] his whole love holds the Word of God in his heart, will be able to perceive the odour of His fragrance and His sweetness.”⁷⁶

These elements of Origen’s exegesis illustrate prayer as both a reception of and a desiring after the Word of God. Furthermore, these elements characterize God’s περιούσιος people. The Church is the new Israel, gathering the Heavenly Manna into the heart, desiring after its wisdom and blessing. It is a kind of yearning, though, that is characteristic of the name: “Manna means, what is this?”⁷⁷ The new Israel yearns to “eat” and to “receive,” and to know the word of God. This is participating in His οὐσία: partaking of ἔπιούσιος bread while being formed as the περιούσιος people under the Word of God. While receiving the ἔπιούσιος bread is essential to the notion of becoming

⁷⁵ Origen, “Song,” III.V; See Footnote 34: “See ps. 1:2 and Lev. 11.1-4. Origen writes, in *In Lev.hom.7.6* (GCS.29.389.1-3): “I think that he is said to “chew the cud” who gives his efforts to knowledge and meditates on the law of the Lord day and night.”

⁷⁶ Origen, “Song,” II.X.

⁷⁷ Origen. “Exodus Homilies,” in *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. and ed. Ronald E. Heine, vol. LXXI of *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Hermigild Dressler (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1981), VII.V.

the faithful *περιούσιος* people by which the Word is made known to the world, Origen insists on a specific eschatological dimension as well. Again, as his ecclesiology, the conception of prayer exemplified in asking for the *ἐπιούσιον* bread in the Lord's Prayer forms the eschatological basis. As before, his understanding is embedded in a particular translation of *ἐπιούσιον*.

Origen sees two problems with deriving *ἐπιούσιον* from the *ἐπι + ἔναι* compound. First, the translation would amount to a tautology. Translating *ἐπιούσιον* from *εἶμι* connotes the translation, "the coming day," resulting in a petition, when modifying "σήμερον" that would read, "Give us this day our bread for the coming day." Origen argues this as redundant and theologically misleading. Second, deriving *ἐπιούσιον* from the *εἶμι* participle would imply that we are presently, "bidden to ask for the bread that properly belongs to the age that is to come."⁷⁸ If *ἐπιούσιον* signified bread for "the coming day," we must associate this with the "coming age," for the word "day" is often used in Scripture to signify an entire age, period, or era.⁷⁹ Yet, for Origen, it is an essential theological pillar that this kind of knowledge and experience with the Divine is not revealed to those in the present age. This world is a "shadow of the things to come," and only God who has set signs before us knows exactly to what they refer.⁸⁰ In these terms, asking for bread is asking for the knowledge of and direct participation in the age to come, an unattainable comprehension for the human mind, and uncharacteristic of the

⁷⁸ Origen, "Prayer," XXVII.XIII.

⁷⁹ To support this claim, Origen cites Gen. 19:37-38, Matt. 28:15, Ps. 94:8, Os. 22:9, and Ps. 89:4. Perhaps the last example is the most pertinent: "For a thousand years in Thy sight are as yesterday which is past." Here, Origen understands "yesterday" to be the entire age that is past.

⁸⁰ Origen, "Prayer," XXVII.XIV, Origen quoting from Heb. 10:1. For Origen, the coming age signifies the age in which "Jesus hath appeared for the destruction of sin," and when "God will show the riches of His grace in His bounty (Heb. 9:16; Matt. 12:32)." Cf. Hebrews 9-10.

condition of human nature in the present age. Origen maintains that the ἔπιούσιον bread is given to prepare the recipients by continual spiritual progress *for* the age to come through communion with the οὐσία of God; the future age does not touch this one on the level of being. In regards to the understanding of eschatological hope, Origen insists that the future age shapes the present; but at the same time, the coming age is something to be desired after, giving meaning to the preparation and sanctification. The περιούσιος people are a not-yet people. While asking to partake in the “heavenly bread,” which is the Word of God made flesh in Jesus the Messiah, they do not receive Him in full. The soul experiences God through its spiritual senses and His effects, but does not fully partake in His nature.

This is emphasized in the Homilies on Ezekiel. He writes, “my Savior alone eats bread,” and “when he eats, he draws me to eat with him. I stand and knock [...]”⁸¹ Today, we are to make ourselves worthy through preparation insofar as we are granted by divine grace, asking God to give that bread through which comes, as Origen quotes, “the things that eye hath not seen, greater than ear hath not heard, greater than that hath not entered into the heart of man.”⁸² Embedded at the heart of his understanding is Jesus the Messiah as the λόγος, who both mediates between God and man on the path of holiness, and within that role, functions as the very Bread which sustains the soul in the journey. Christ is “He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world,” the bread on

⁸¹ Origen, “Ezekiel,” XIV.III.II.

⁸² Origen, “Prayer,” XXVII.XVII, Origen quoting from I Cor. 2:9.

whom the hungry soul feasts.⁸³ It is through prayer that the περιούσιος people, His Body, receive Him.

These theological contours pervade Origen's exegesis surrounding ἄρτον ἐπιούσιον, demonstrating Scripture's cohesive narrative and bringing to light the role and function of Jesus as Mediator. He gives His own nature, a kind of subordinate unity of divine and human natures, in the form of Heavenly Bread for the soul so that man's nature might be restored unto his Maker upon receiving Him. Obedience is the fruit indicative of participation in the divine οὐσία, a characteristic fundamental to the identity of the Trinity and imitative of the life of Christ. In conclusion, as he puts it, "May the Lord, Judge of all, give us living bread, that having been fed and strengthened by it we may be able to make the journey to heaven, glorifying God almighty through Christ Jesus."⁸⁴ Origen's efforts provide us with a fuller understanding of the way Scripture illuminates itself, and a greater understanding of the weight behind the theology of receiving the λόγος through the life of prayer.

The life of prayer, however, is not limited to the reception of the λόγος through a spiritual communion, even within the Model Prayer. For Origen, the reading of Scripture is an act of prayer because, in Mariano Magrassi's paraphrase, the Scriptures "remain filled with the Spirit of God."⁸⁵ The substance of the Scripture is Christ; the subject of the Scripture is Christ; the revelation of the Scripture is Christ. The faithful encounter Christ in the reading of Scripture, and further, the faithful receive Christ through the reading of Scripture, the same kind of reception that occurs through prayer. De Lubac says of

⁸³ John 6:33.

⁸⁴ Origen, "Ezekiel." XIV.III.III; Cf. John 6:51-53.

⁸⁵ Magrassi, *Praying the Bible*, 28, paraphrasing Origen; Cf. *De Principiis* IV.I.7.

Origen's understanding concerning Christ and Scripture, "He himself dwells there [in the Scripture], not just some idea of him."⁸⁶

The topic of Origen's understanding of Scripture is abundantly complex, well researched, and heavily debated.⁸⁷ For our present purposes, I will confine myself to a discussion of how Origen's sense of reading Scripture is closely related to his theology of prayer.⁸⁸ At the heart of this idea is the understanding that Christ the *λόγος* of God and Scripture the letter are, in a sense, interchangeably related. The relation is similar to the language Origen uses in conveying the sense by which the one in prayer receives the Divine οὐσία in the form of "Heavenly Bread." Here, Scripture the letter reveals Christ, the object of the soul's contemplation and longing. Yet, the understanding of receiving the "Heavenly Bread" applies to the understanding of Scripture, as well: "These 'mysteries of the Logos' with which Scripture is full are those of Jesus Christ, whom it proclaims [...] This nourishment for our souls that is the Word of God is assuredly Holy Scripture, but it is also and at the same time Jesus himself, 'living Bread come down from heaven.'"⁸⁹ Here, as De Lubac suggests, Origen links the spiritual sense of Scripture to the spiritual sense of the Eucharist. This present essay, however, does not have the space to address this rich topic.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 389.

⁸⁷ For the most insightful and encompassing discussion of this topic, see De Lubac, *op.cit.*

⁸⁸ Therefore, I avoid discussions of the relation between Scripture and the Eucharist, although there is a sense in which Scripture, prayer, and the Eucharist are interrelated. See De Lubac's discussion, *op.cit.*, 406-416.

⁸⁹ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 387. Citing from Origen's "Homilies on Leviticus," V.X

⁹⁰ See De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 406-416.

The nourishment of the Bread of Life does not come for just any soul who picks up the pages of Scripture and searches them. Origen relies on John 5:39 to convey the point that many read Scripture for vain and destructive purposes: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.” The only context by which one can come to Christ is in prayer because the posture of prayer is the disposition of humble reception characterized by both the life and words of Christ Himself; therefore, in coming to the Scripture, Origen urges his hearers to search for the hidden sense of the words, because the hidden sense conceals Christ, the soul’s longing. He says of the gospels, “Is there not hidden there also an inner, namely a divine sense, which is revealed by that grace alone which he had received who said, ‘But we have the mind of Christ, that we might know the things freely given to us by God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teaches, but which the Spirit teacheth?’”⁹¹ Necessary to the reading of Scripture is a posture by which he who prays can receive the “things freely given to us by God.” Indeed, for Origen (as we shall see in Gregory and Maximus), this is expressed in the beatitude, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”⁹²

He who prays gathers the λόγος into his soul like the Israelites gathered manna in the desert: He is the spiritual food of the believer.⁹³ Another sense in which Origen

⁹¹ Origen, “*De Principiis*,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IV: *Fathers of the Fourth Century: Tertullian, (Part 4), Minucius Felix, Commodian, Origen, (Parts 1 & 2)*, trans. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), IV.I.10. For the text of *De Principiis*, I rely on Rufinus’s latin translation.

⁹² Matt. 5:8; see Origen, “Prayer,” VIII-IX.

⁹³ Cf. Exo. 16. See De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 388.

conveys that the reading of Scripture is likened unto prayer is the way by which the soul is “pierced” by the word of God in the same way that the rational component of the soul is nourished, enlivened, and completed by the Divine οὐσία in the form of the ἐπιούσιον bread. Regarding this vein of thought in Origen’s work, Henri De Lubac states, “If I need Scripture in order to understand myself, I also understand Scripture when I read it within myself.”⁹⁴ Indeed, Origen writes, “Where we must seek God is our heart [...] see then, that there is also most certainly within each of our souls a well of living water, like a certain heavenly perception and latent image of God.”⁹⁵ The proximity of the λόγος to the believer is that of an intimate participation. A key verse driving this understanding is I Corinthians 2:12: “now we have received [...] not the spirit of this world, but the Spirit that is of God: that we may know the things that are given us from God,” which Origen quotes at the beginning of *On Prayer*. Origen frames his theology of prayer in the context of a kind of reflection upon the λόγος, and a subsequent recognition of the presence of the image of God latent upon the soul. De Lubac advances this point when he glosses Origen’s text, saying, “May the meditation of the Holy Books help us discover little by little the divine secret that lies in our heart.”⁹⁶

He is the Word living and active that pierces the hearts of men, revealing the self to the self. In his homilies on Genesis, Origen expands this notion acutely when he says that, “You, too, then, purify your spirit so that a day will come when you will drink from

⁹⁴ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 397-398.

⁹⁵ Origen, “Homilies on Genesis and Exodus,” trans. Ronald E. Heine, vol. LXXI of *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Hermigild Dressler (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), XIII.3; Cf. Lk. 24:32, 2 Cor 6:16, Lv. 26:12.

⁹⁶ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 399.

your own fountains and when you will draw living water from your wells.”⁹⁷ The λόγος of God is placed within us by faith; the soul is made with a disposition toward receiving the Word. Prayer is the process of recovering the sanctity and the fullness of that posture towards Divine Grace. The soul requires the ἐπιούσιον bread to nourish the rational nature toward a kind of recovery and recognition of the image of God in man. Prayer is at once a reception and a recognition of the Divine οὐσία: a reception in that the one in prayer asks to receive the divine nature; a recognition in that the one in prayer looks upon the image of God created within him and is once again animated toward a life of communion and intimacy with God.

Therefore, in the reading of Scripture, the soul is not the interpreter, but the interpreted. Scripture is the living and active Word of God, which itself reads and translates the soul of he who comes to read. The reading of Scripture is an act of prayer insofar as the soul comes to the pages and receives the λόγος of God revealed in the letter. The person of prayer receives the Word in the depth of his being: mankind was created for conversation, which begins with humility and reception. Of critical importance, as mentioned before, is the way in which one comes to the Scriptures, and the way one prepares to read them. Origen insists that receiving the λόγος is intimately related to the anagogical sense of interpretation and reading.⁹⁸ It is through the anagogical sense that the reader may come to, “Gather this logos into their baskets;”⁹⁹ that is, only

⁹⁷ Origen, “Homilies on Genesis,” XII.5.

⁹⁸ As cited before, few studies match De Lubac’s in this area. See De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, as well as *Medieval Exegesis*, *op.cit.*

⁹⁹ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 388.

through spiritual understanding in the attitude of contemplation can the Word be perceived in the words of Scripture.

False exegetes “crucify the Word of Truth”¹⁰⁰ through their reading; true exegetes magnify the Word of Truth through their reading. Origen writes “As by the veil of the flesh, he is covered here by the letter, so that this literal meaning might be considered like flesh, while the spiritual meaning that lies within might be sensed like the divinity.”¹⁰¹ Those who willfully mistake, pervert, and obscure the letter do so to Christ Himself. He is the key, the Divine subject of the words, taken as one Word. Therefore, it is the posture of prayer, of reception of the Word, which brings us toward the “spiritual meaning.” Reading Scripture as an act of prayer, as an act of willfully encountering the λόγος of God, allows the one in prayer to receive Christ Himself through the reading of Scripture. Reading Scripture must start with the recognition of receiving Christ; it is recognition that Scripture is not πολυλογία [many words], not λόγοι [words], but λόγος [word]. The presence of Christ is “hidden” in the letter so that the soul will encounter Him in the hidden component of His being, “perpetuated in the midst of us by the conversation of Scripture within the Church.”¹⁰²

Indeed, ultimately, for Origen, reading Scripture with the disposition of prayer is central to the life of the Church. In his Homilies on Isaiah, he writes, “No, there is no word comparable to that received by the Church, by which she is saved, this Word who

¹⁰⁰ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 388; De Lubac referencing Origen’s Homilies on John, XX.6.

¹⁰¹ Origen, “Homilies on Leviticus,” trans. Gary Wayne Barkley, vol. LXXXIII of *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Hermigild Dressler (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), I.I.

¹⁰² De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 389.

was in the beginning with God.”¹⁰³ The Incarnation shapes Origen’s view of Scripture, and is closely tied to his understanding of prayer. De Lubac writes, “The mystery of Scripture and the mystery of the Incarnation would continue to be related as concerning the same Logos, the unique Logos.”¹⁰⁴ De Lubac continues to argue that Origen’s allegorism was not a method of biblical interpretation, but a paradigm reflex of human thought. Origen saw history as culminating in the Incarnation, and Scripture, along with its interpretation, the very essence and lenspiece by which the human intellect ought to view creation and Creator. The subject of Scripture demands an “allegorical reading,” and so the mind must see not only Scripture, but all of creation in light of the truth of Scripture. In *De Principiis*, Origen says of reading Paul’s epistles, the “clearness of incalculable light appears to be poured into those who are capable of understanding the meaning of Divine wisdom,” and “we are instructed by Scripture itself in regard to the ideas which we ought to form of it.”¹⁰⁵ Finally, it is the embodiment of Christ through the Church that Scripture is interpreted. His περιούσιος people are those of whom it is written, “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”¹⁰⁶

But the Word of Scripture is concealed by a seemingly dark letter. Of this obscurity, he writes, “The very interruption of the narrative might, as by the interposition

¹⁰³ Here, I am relying on De Lubac’s translation from *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte. Origenes: Vol. 8 (1925): Homilies on Isaiah, Jeremiah (Latin), Ezekiel*, ed. Baehrens, VII.3

¹⁰⁴ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 393.

¹⁰⁵ Origen, “*De Principiis*,” IV.I.10. In further support of this argument, Origen writes “Now, an opportunity is afforded us of understanding of what those things which happened to them were figures, when he [the apostle Paul] adds: “‘And they drank of that spiritual rock which followed them, and that Rock was Christ.’” He references I Cor. 9:9-10, I Cor. 10:4, 11, Gal. 4:21-24, and Col. 2:16.

¹⁰⁶ Jer. 31:33; Cf. Heb. 8:10, 10:16.

of a bolt, present an obstacle to the reader.”¹⁰⁷ This signifies that it is the Church, the embodiment of God’s salvation narrative, which, by the Spirit working in the midst of the faithful, intimately knows the Word of God through the reading of Scripture. Thereby, the Church is the interpreter of the mystery. Origen writes further that, “The chief object of the Holy Spirit is to preserve the coherence of the spiritual meaning.”¹⁰⁸ The work of God is to draw His people to Him through the reading and receiving of His word. This is enacted through the posture of the Church in prayer, embodying the λόγος of God.

In sum, the reading of Scripture is the process of man coming to know himself through the reception of the Divine οὐσία (ἐπιούσιον ἄρτον) and the recognition of the image of God within. Through a posture of prayer, the Church receives the λόγος and embodies Him in the world, fulfilling God’s purpose of making for Himself a faithful people (the notion of περιούσιος¹⁰⁹). Origen writes that, “If even through neglect the mind falls away from a pure and complete reception of God, it nevertheless contains within it certain seeds of restoration and renewal to a better understanding, seeing the ‘inner,’ which is also called the ‘rational’ man, is renewed after ‘the image and likeness of God.’”¹¹⁰ This process of the “renewal” of the “rational” man is prayer. “Every rational creature needs a participation in the Trinity,”¹¹¹ he writes, and, “Participation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, varying with the degree of zeal or capacity of mind.”¹¹² Prayer is the

¹⁰⁷ Origen, “*De Principiis*,” IV.I.15.

¹⁰⁸ Origen, “*De Principiis*,” IV.I.15.

¹⁰⁹ Exo. 19:5 (LXX): “Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine.”

¹¹⁰ Origen, “*De Principiis*,” IV.I.36.

¹¹¹ Origen, “*De Principiis*,” IV.I.32.

¹¹² Origen, “*De Principiis*,” IV.I.35.

posture of receiving the λόγος of God so that man may be invited into the life of the Trinity. The reading of Scripture is the means by which man's rational nature encounters the λόγος "in earthen vessels."¹¹³ Through prayer, the wisdom of God is inscribed upon the heart of man, and through such a reception and recognition, God's people "hold forth the word of life"¹¹⁴ into a broken world, inviting humanity into the redemptive purposes of the Creator.

¹¹³ II Cor. 4:7. Origen cites this verse, writing, "But as the existence of divine providence is not refuted by those especially who are certain of its existence, but who do not comprehend its workings or arrangements by the powers of the human mind; so neither will the divine inspiration of holy Scripture, which extends through its body, be believed to be non-existent, because the weakness of our understanding is unable to trace out the hidden and secret meaning in each individual word, the treasure of divine wisdom being hid in the vulgar and unpolished vessels of words." (*De Principiis*, IV.I.7)

¹¹⁴ Phil. 2:16.

CHAPTER TWO

Μετουσία and Κοινωνία: Prayer as Divinization in Gregory of Nyssa

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Origen's theology of prayer is centered on his understanding of Jesus as at once Mediator and that Divine Nature which is received by the one in prayer. Through spiritual communion, He grants to the petitioner His ἐπιούσιον nature; that is, He unites the divine substance of God with the human nature of the petitioner in the form of Christ's unity of will with God. In this chapter, I shall turn to discuss the relationship between the soul and God in Gregory of Nyssa's theology of prayer, showing his emphasis to be less on a specific role that Christ plays in prayer and more on the soul's ascent to God, a significant shift from the exegesis of Origen. The Second Council of Nicaea in 381 deemed him as the "Father of Fathers,"¹¹⁵ and Jules Gross called him the doctor of "divinization."¹¹⁶ Von Balthasar once wrote that, "the text of his works is [presently] the most neglected of the whole patristic era,"¹¹⁷ but interest in Gregory of Nyssa has since revived with great interest.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, it is recognized with nearly universal accord that the influence of Origen on Gregory is a tenable link in

¹¹⁵ Edward R. Hardy, introduction to *Gregory of Nyssa*, in *The Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 235.

¹¹⁶ Jules Gross, *La Divinisation du chrétien après les pères grecs: Contribution historique à la doctrine de la grace* (Paris: Galbalda, 1938), 219.

¹¹⁷ Hans urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, trans. Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 15.

¹¹⁸ See, for instance, *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Sarah Coakley, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

the tradition of theological thought during the Cappadocian era.¹¹⁹ While Gregory borrows much from Origen,¹²⁰ his departures result in a unique and philosophically robust theology.¹²¹ Prevalent throughout Gregory's thought is the concept, as von Balthasar puts it, "the divinization"¹²² of man. This is seen in Origen with expression that is given greater lucidity and expansion in Gregory. The idea of man's divinization recurs throughout Gregory's corpus. Its relation to prayer shall be the focus of the present chapter.

Von Balthasar notes that the "mystical aspiration" sought by Origen was to "go beyond the sphere of the Son in order to reach the kingdom of the Father."¹²³ Gregory picks up on this notion and gives it radical elaboration. He conceives of prayer as a metaphysical ascent into three realms: the realm of souls, the realm of angels, and the Transcendent One. While for Origen the Transcendent One was accessible in the

¹¹⁹ For expositions on this connection, see Hardy *op.cit.*; Balthasar *op.cit.*; Hilda C. Graef, introduction to *The Lord's Prayer and The Beatitudes*, trans. Hilda C. Graef (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1954), 5-20; Pelikan, *Christian Doctrine* (I), 52-52, 218-225.

¹²⁰ See Hardy's discussion in his introduction to Gregory of Nyssa, *op.cit.* Additionally, see Graef's introduction, *op.cit.*

¹²¹ In Gregory, we get crystallized conception of what it means for the soul to partake in and commune with the divine nature. However, ironically, Gregory's understanding of this communion is altogether 'darker' than Origen's; that is, for Gregory, prayer is a mystical experience with the οὐσία of God but with Origen, prayer is a direct reception and participation in the divine nature through the obedience of and unity with Jesus. As Balthasar puts it, "In Origen's Trinity, the Son, and the Spirit, even though they were formally affirmed as being God, served as ontological mediators between the Father and the Word." (Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 18) In the previous chapter our study showed that Origen understands prayer as a kind of initiation whereby Christ serves as an ontological mediator—though, for Origen, still affirmed as God—between the Father and the world. However, after the Arius wars and the resolutions of the council of Nicaea, this kind of Christological formulation is dismissed, and no longer a dominant thread in the fabric of Christian doctrine and theology. Balthasar notes pg. 46 in *Contra Eunomium*, 2 vol., Berlin 1921, Letter XXIV (III 1089 D): "For it cannot be that one Person is more incomprehensible and the other less so. But there is only one basis for incomprehensibility in the trinity. For this reason we [...] say that there is no difference of being in the Holy Trinity."

¹²² Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 178.

¹²³ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 19, quoting Origen: "τῷ ὑποκειμένῳ ἔν πολλὸ ταῖς ἐννοίαις [the one for lying beneath is many for the thoughts in the mind]." (*In Je.* 8, 2 M. 13. 338.)

mediation of the Word, for Gregory, “Being is not graspable. The feeling of presence (αἴσθησις μαροθσίας τινός) reveals it [Transcendent Being] only indirectly [παραδηλοῦν].”¹²⁴ Yet, as is typical of Gregory’s thought, this matter is steeped deeply in paradox. In *The Life of Moses*, he explains, “This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness.”¹²⁵ While von Balthasar’s text does not address the subject of “prayer,” it draws out Gregory’s understanding of contemplation of the Divine Word, characterized as the “movement” of the soul to God.

At a cursory reading, it would seem that Gregory’s entire understanding of the relationship between the soul and God has little to do with prayer but rather an “ascent” of the soul toward God through a kind of moral flourishing and participation in the Divine Being. But it is my present purpose to demonstrate that this ascent *is* prayer. Through a reading of his sermons on the Lord’s Prayer and the Beatitudes, it is evident that his understanding of the virtuous life is derived from the acts of contemplation and prayer; θεωρέω and προσεύχομαι are used with nearly interchangeable expression in Gregory’s theology.¹²⁶ “Past history,” writes Gregory, “furnishes thousands of other examples [...] which make it clear that of all the things valued in this life nothing is more

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 22; Balthasar quoting from *In Cant. 11; De comm. not. II*.

¹²⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: HarperCollins Press, 2006), 80. For a discussion on the “Luminous Dark,” see Martin Laird, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith: Union, Knowledge, and Divine Presence* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), 174-197.

¹²⁶ See, for instance, Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, II, p. 36; III, p. 46. Graef’s notes cover these terms extensively. See p. 183, n. 25 and p. 185, n. 57.

precious than prayer.”¹²⁷ His categories for prayer are nearly all encompassing throughout his theology. Von Balthasar notes that, “The life of Moses, the commentary on the Song of Songs, and the sermons on the beatitudes are mystical ascents without any possible end. [...] Since the object is infinite, the journey toward it is also infinite.”¹²⁸ Prayer for Gregory is a process of seeing God; the goal of human life is to see God, or “to become like God.”¹²⁹ The *Life of Moses* illustrates this in declaring Moses as the “example for life.”¹³⁰ Gregory’s sermons on the Lord’s Prayer and Beatitudes indicate that prayer is the act of “fixing” one’s “gaze” on God.¹³¹ Before further addressing the differing contours of Gregory’s on this issue, I shall discuss his understanding of the foundation of prayer. Man is able to pray due to the εἰκὼν of God. From this flows the conception of what man is to do in prayer, namely, ascend to God. And from these interworking elements comes the understanding of what, finally, the object of contemplation is: God Himself.

The basis of prayer, and Gregory’s fundamental understanding of human nature¹³² is understood from Genesis 1:26-27:

καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν καὶ ἀρχέτωσαν τῶν ἰχθύων τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ τῶν πετεινῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῶν κτηνῶν καὶ πάσης τῆς γῆς καὶ πάντων τῶν ἔρπετων τῶν ἔρπόντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ

¹²⁷ Gregory, *Lord's Prayer*, I, 25.

¹²⁸ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 45.

¹²⁹ Gregory, *Beatitudes* I, 89.

¹³⁰ Gregory, *Moses*, 8.

¹³¹ For example, he writes, “It seems to me that the Beatitudes are arranged in order like so many steps, so as to facilitate the ascent from one to the other. For if a man’s mind has ascended to the first Beatitude, he will accept what follows as a necessary result of thought, even though the next clause seems to say something new beyond what had been said in the first.” (p. 97)

¹³² See Gregory’s *Address on Religious Instruction* in Hardy, p. 275-277.

ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ ἐποίησεν αὐτόν ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ
ἐποίησεν αὐτούς.

[And God said, Let us make man according to our image and likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the flying creatures of heaven, and over the cattle and all the earth, and over all the reptiles that creep on the earth. And God made man, according to the image of God he made him, male and female he made them.]

This passage guides Gregory's thought on a number of levels.¹³³ In his reading, God's creation is made with an inherent beauty and goodness, a divine likeness. All thought regarding this point converges on the εἰκὼν by which God made (ποιήσωμεν) man; it is through the inborn image that we come to know God. In this light, contemplation is a journey into God through the nature of the self. As Hilda Graef notes, "By contemplating this image in ourselves we can form a conception of the Divine perfections."¹³⁴

Furthermore, this implies that mankind shares the attributes of God. Von Balthasar notes that, "Our being reveals to us the fact of creation and how it is in every way ineffable and incomprehensible."¹³⁵ This characteristic of ineffability is essential to humanity. Man is separated from the source of Being by a chasm: he is wholly other.

¹³³ Again, see Gregory's *Address on Religious instruction*, Hardy, 275-277. Gregory writes, "Man came into being [...] to participate in the divine goodness, he had to be fashioned in such a way as to share in this goodness." Further, in his treatise, "On the Making of Man," Gregory writes, "O marvelous! a sun is made, and no counsel precedes; a heaven likewise; and to these no single thing in creation is equal. So great a wonder is formed by a word alone, and the saying indicates neither when, nor how, nor any such detail. So too in all particular cases, the æther, the stars, the intermediate air, the sea, the earth, the animals, the plants,—all are brought into being with a word, while only to the making of man does the Maker of all draw near with circumspection, so as to prepare beforehand for him material for his formation, and to liken his form to an archetypal beauty, and, setting before him a mark for which he is to come into being, to make for him a nature appropriate and allied to the operations, and suitable for the object in hand." (*On the Making of Man*, trans. Philip Schaff, in vol. V of *Nicene-Post Nicene Fathers: Gregory of Nyssa: Domestic Treatises* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), III.I-II, p. 390) On this note, Robert Lewis Wilken remarks, "The Christian understanding of man has much in common with earlier Greek ideas: that human beings have free choice, that reason and speech set them apart from animals, that they are social beings." (*Early Christian Thought*, 150) But the Biblical doctrine of man's creation in the image of God sets Christianity apart from the philosophical contemporaries of its age.

¹³⁴ Graef, "Introduction," 17.

¹³⁵ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 28.

Gregory calls this “αἰών,”¹³⁶ and asserts that while made in the image of the Ineffable One, man is bound by time and space, a quality not shared by the one whose nature is Being (“ὁ τῆ αὐτοῦ φύσει τὸ εἶναι ἔχει”). Man pertains to time periods and ages (“αἰών”); God is removed from the linear nature of time. The soul finds itself entirely “other” than God, even while subsisting in the λόγος. Von Balthasar elucidates this tension as an “interval,” or “spacing” that illustrates the disparity between God and creation as an abyss traversed only through the life of contemplation and sojourning typified by Moses. Creation is distinct from God, but the journey of Moses is a crossing over space and time, the confines of creation. Hence, von Balthasar indicates, this movement is into “darkness that reigns over the abyss.”¹³⁷

Still, the soul is found to have nearly impenetrable depth in that it participates in the inexhaustible source of being. Gregory writes that, “[Divine Wisdom] has circumscribed each being within its own proper dimensions, by giving it a suitable rhythm as a limit, so to speak, so that it may be included in the rightful harmony of the universe.”¹³⁸ While man is distinctly other, he is unmistakably akin to God, having a sense of impenetrability. Indeed, “The soul would be lacking an element essential to the fidelity of the ‘image’ if God, who is ‘invisible in himself’, had not communicated his

¹³⁶ For a discussion on “Spacing,” see Von Balthasar, *op.cit.*, 27-37. Here, he uses διάστημα and διάστασις (*interval*) interchangeably with Gregory’s “αἰών.”

¹³⁷ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 30. I shall discuss the darkness of contemplation later in this chapter. For an extended and insightful discussion, see Laird, *Grasp of Faith*, 174-197.

¹³⁸ Von Balthasar quoting from Gregory, *Contra Eunomium* 9; II, 820 C. Additionally, the problem of conflating the creation with the Creator is solved in the “immobility,” “alterations of substance,” “harmonious aspiration,” so that “no part of the universe may be taken for divine, neither the heavens on account of their immutability nor the earth on the account of its stability.” (*Presence and Thought*, 40) In other words, the harmony of the world, although beautiful is founded upon the “rhythm of becoming [...] those elements in it that are, properly speaking, opposed to the divine.” (*Presence and Thought*, 40)

‘incomprehensibility of essence’ to her.”¹³⁹ Gregory’s logic hinges on God’s internal harmony reflected onto creation: each component is circumscribed with a specific function and nature. Man’s nature is most akin to God’s, and this subsistence sustains creation. Von Balthasar interprets Gregory as saying that it would have gone against God’s nature to create mankind other than with likeness to Himself and not give him a natural point of access back to Himself. In other words, God would not have thrown man into the dark without an internal light to lead him back. Contemplation is grounded in the nature of the self, a necessary component to creation’s harmony and God’s creational logic on the whole. On this point, Gregory notes, “Yet should the Lord command something so great that it completely surpasses our nature and the limits of its power? Surely not. He does not [...] bid creatures He has destined to sojourn on land to live in the water.”¹⁴⁰

Thus, in a surprising departure from Origen emphasis on receiving the Heavenly Bread in the Word, Gregory maintains that the good of contemplation lies first in grasping the fullness of the self, insofar as it shares in the Divine εἰκόν. The act of contemplation is a kind of gathering from the self of that in it which shares in the Divine, a process of coming to know God and participate in His nature through the Divine image. Gregory explains, “Hence nothing good enters into us from outside, but it lies with us to have what we will and to bring forth the good from our nature as if from some inner chamber. For from the parts we are taught about the whole, that there is no other way of

¹³⁹ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 93; Balthasar quoting from *Contra Eunomium* 12; II, 945 C and *De Beat.* 6; I, 1269 A.

¹⁴⁰ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, VI, 145.

obtaining one's desire except by procuring the good for oneself."¹⁴¹ Apart from the afore quoted Genesis 1:26-27, Gregory's Scriptural support for this idea comes most notably from Luke 17:21, "The Kingdom of God is within you," and Matthew 7:8, "And to him that knocks, it shall be opened."¹⁴²

This doctrine in Gregory's thought hinges upon free will: if one moves to receive the "Heavenly Good," then, because of the image inscribed upon him at creation, he shall receive what he asks for. On the other hand is the corollary: evil comes "into being wherever we elect it."¹⁴³ Just as desiring the good yields Divine fruit, so the desire for evil yields its own. This opens to Gregory's doctrine of the "τεχνικὴ δύναμις [art of power],"¹⁴⁴ namely articulated in the Christ the Word. This "artful power" springs forth from participating in and possessing likeness to the Divine Wisdom itself. Human nature possesses the quality of participating in the heavenly good. Gregory asks boldly, "Why do you shut out holy audacity which is inherent in the freedom of the soul because it has been joined to its very essence from the beginning?"¹⁴⁵ Because of Christ, who is ontologically one with God, man is too able to share in the Divine will and the Divine Being. In this regard, the foundation of prayer is the Incarnation. Indeed, the one who approaches the mountain of contemplation is elevated with Christ insofar as the

¹⁴¹ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, V, 135.

¹⁴² Gregory, *Beatitudes*, V, 135.

¹⁴³ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, V, 135. For a discussion on Gregory's understanding of evil, see Alden A. Mosshammer, "Non-Being and Evil in Gregory of Nyssa," *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Jun., 1990): 136. Mosshammer writes that, "The idea that evil has no reality of its own had become a commonplace both in the Greek philosophical literature of Gregory's time and in Christian teaching. Gregory knew such a doctrine, if from no other source, then from his brother Basil, who describes evil as "not a living essence but a disposition of the soul opposed to virtue, resulting through a falling away from the good." Basil adds, however, "that evil certainly exists, no one living in the world will deny.""

¹⁴⁴ Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 49, quoting Gregory, *In Hexaem.* 113, C.

¹⁴⁵ Gregory, *Lord's Prayer*, I, 72-73.

Incarnation affirms the human nature in such a way that enables any man to participate in an equal status. “In Christ, he [the contemplative] becomes Christ,”¹⁴⁶ says von Balthasar, summing Gregory’s thought on the matter. The δύναμις of the contemplative is the ability to draw upon such a Divine wellspring from within, which, Gregory emphasizes, displays itself in the form of humility. Christ exemplifies τεχνικὴ δύναμις in His obedience to God’s will and His poverty: “The right hand of the Lord raised him on high, and from being a slave he became Christ the King. From his humble state he became the most high. From being man he became God.”¹⁴⁷ The ultimate statement here is a striking summation of Gregory’s doctrine on the nature of man. Christ is the True man; man’s basis in contemplation is the humility that participates with the meekness of Christ, a humility endemic to human nature. Only the humble are exalted into true likeness to God. Finally, for Gregory, in light of these contours, humility is the basis of contemplation, while exaltation is its end.

Gregory understands, however, that human nature is not fit for this kind of contemplation and ascension without a cleansing of the soul. Wilken notes that, “‘The return to God’ must begin in ‘repentance,’ in turning away from sin.”¹⁴⁸ Gregory writes that, “Departure from the table of the Father,” to the life of “vile-smelling swine,” is a “defacing of the Image and the destruction of the Divine impress which was formed in us

¹⁴⁶ Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 176.

¹⁴⁷ Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 176, quoting from Gregory, *C. Eunom.* 5, II, 697 C. We see this Athanasian formula prevalent in Gregory’s Christology.

¹⁴⁸ Wilken, *Early Christian Thought*, 275; Wilken quoting from *Life of Moses* 2.32 (*GNO* 7, 1:42, ln. 20); *Homilies on the Lord’s Prayer and the Beatitudes*, VI (*GNO* 7, 2:144-5); *Against Eunomius*, 3.10 (*GNO* 1:293).

when we were first created.”¹⁴⁹ The groundwork for contemplation is also thus a kind of cleansing of the εἰκόν; it is a removal of the rust and decay that has set over the Divine Image. It must be purified in order to lead man into full participation in the likeness of God. This is the “common lot of man’s nature,” says Gregory. He continues, “Adam [...] as it were, living in us.”¹⁵⁰ But these “garments of skin” are to be shed off as we turn toward God in contemplation.¹⁵¹ Prayer and contemplation thus become a “sojourn in Paradise from which we have fallen.” This tension finds keen expression in Gregory’s exposition of “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”¹⁵² He writes, “The seeing has been made dependent on purity of heart,” but, mercifully, seeing is not “impossible to achieve because it [doest not] surpass our nature.”¹⁵³ I shall return to this notion—especially the concept of “seeing”—toward the conclusion of this chapter; presently, I shall continue to focus on the nature of contemplation as a return to the Father.

The disparity between the soul and God is recovered by God’s mercy: “like him [the prodigal son], we return to ourselves and remember the Heavenly Father.”¹⁵⁴ Here, again, Gregory emphasis that “we return to ourselves,” and then proceed to remember the

¹⁴⁹ Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, I, 75.

¹⁵⁰ Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, I, 76.

¹⁵¹ Gregory specifies this as a “turn towards the East,” while at the same time, acknowledging that, “He who is everywhere is not particularly apprehended in any part, since He comprises all things equally.” (p. 76) His point is to allegorize prayer as a journey from man’s original fall to restoration. Additionally, as Graef notes in n. 124, “Turning to the East was the ordinary attitude of prayer in the ancient Church. The mystical reason here given is reproduced elsewhere [...] where another reason is added, namely, that the light, a symbol of God, rises in the East.”

¹⁵² Matt. 5:8

¹⁵³ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, VI, 145.

¹⁵⁴ Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, I, 77. “Like him” is a reference to the prodigal son from Luke

Father, thereby asserting that gazing upon and recovering the self are the basis for the contemplation journey.¹⁵⁵ Because human nature is so dramatically affirmed in Gregory's thought, does his emphasis on contemplation as a kind of departure from the flesh contradict his starting principles?¹⁵⁶ Regarding contemplation, Gregory's thought must be understood in terms of progressing stages. The contemplative does not start out in the transformed state of participation in the Divine Being. Rather, as a creature of human nature, he starts with the potentiality of uncovering the εἰκόν, which functions to raise the human back to fellowship with God. Notably, it is only at the final moment of "super-elevation [ὑπερύψωσις]"¹⁵⁷ that "humanity loses all its own qualities [the senses and material forms]."¹⁵⁸ However, for Gregory, ὑπερύψωσις speaks of the goal of contemplation, not its basis. The senses, as von Balthasar notes, "are signposts for

¹⁵⁵ Von Balthasar carries this idea forward 68-9

¹⁵⁶ Catherine Poth, in her article, "Platonic and Pauline Elements in the Ascent of the Soul in Gregory of Nyssa's Dialogue on the Soul and Resurrection" (*Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Mar., 1992), pp. 20-30) sums up the debate over Gregory's alleged Platonism nicely: "In the dialogue On the Soul and the Resurrection, St. Gregory of Nyssa attempts to present the doctrine of the resurrection of the body in terms of the Platonic philosophical tradition but also in accord with the biblical revelation. There are those who believe that he failed to integrate his philosophy with his Christianity. Harold Cherniss in particular claims that Gregory was a Platonist in his heart, and that it was an intellectually dishonest concession to his overbearing older sister Macrina which made him insert Christian doctrine into his writings. Charalambos Apostolopoulos considers Gregory to be a Greek philosopher of notable originality who, because he feared the ecclesiastical authorities, disguised the boldness of his thought with pious formulas and biblical citations. Jean Danielou, on the other hand, believes that Gregory's thought is wholly Christian, though expressed in Platonic terminology."

¹⁵⁷ Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 176.

¹⁵⁸ Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 176. Gregory writes, "Weight, form, color, toughness, softness, quantitative delimitation. Nothing at all that one had been able to perceive in it persists when this mingling with the divine comes to raise up the lowliness of corporeal nature all the way to the level of divine attributes." (*C. Apollin.* II 1244 AB) For a discussion on Gregory's complex, and ultimately ambiguous conception of the eternal soul's relationship to the body, see Harold Fredrik Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa* (New York: Lenox Hill Pub. Co., 1930), 12-25. Cherniss notes that, "The use of the senses by the soul for the acquisition of knowledge goes back to the *Phaedo* (79 C) and is more closely treated in the *Theaetetus* (184 C ff.). Although the neo-Platonists also held that the soul pervaded the entire body, they seem to differ in this from Gregory, that they held the presence of the entire soul to be necessary in every part of the body." (23) Gregory did not attempt this at every turn of his theology. He does maintain that the soul, often depicted as νοῦς, is indivisible and present throughout each aspect of the body.

penetrating deeper into the invisible from the visible.”¹⁵⁹ Bodily senses play a vital role in the foundation and process of contemplation because man straddles the realm of spiritual activity and material movement, seeking to break forth into the sea of Immortality and Immutability.¹⁶⁰ In a way, the senses inform human thought, which directs the journey to God.¹⁶¹ Man, within the realm of time and reality of spacing [διαστήμα] between the Creator and creation, enters “into spiritual activity through the mediation of sensation.”¹⁶² Though caught in the tension of the διαστήμα, man retains an ability to reflect and carry

¹⁵⁹ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 49; Balthasar quoting from De. An. Et res. III, 41B. Meaning “Separation,” this word is essential to Platonic thought. For understanding this term used within the context of Gregory of Nyssa, see von Balthasar, *op.cit.* 47-69. The term is widely understood within the context of Plato’s *Phaedo*, 67D: “λύσις καὶ χωρισμός ψυχῆς ἀπὸ σώματος [releasing and separation of the soul from a body].” As Balthasar notes, Gregory “borrows the concrete universal” from Plato. (Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 49)

¹⁶⁰ Further supported by Cherniss’s critical questioning: “When the soul is viewed as related to the body in the process which is human life, this unity no longer suffices. The passionate character, for example, does exist in man; nor is it purely materialistic in character. How then is it to be related to the soul?” (*op.cit.*, 12-14) It seems that amidst the allusive nature of Gregory’s thought on this issue, one thing is clear: that man’s nature is tied to the passions of the body pertaining to the material world, and, at the same time, his nature is akin to God in that he ceaselessly desires to be free from these things.

¹⁶¹ See Enrico Peroli, “Gregory of Nyssa and the Neoplatonic Doctrine of the Soul,” (*Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (May, 1997), pp. 117-139. He writes, “Thus just as God is πανταχοῦ [everywhere] for everything proceeds from God and is in God, and also οὐδαμοῦ [nowhere], for he is not to be identified with any beings and he is not in them, so in the same way the soul is everywhere (πανταχοῦ) in the body, but it is not body and it is nowhere (οὐδαμοῦ). This opposition between antithetic predicates is clearly used in order to eliminate from the intelligible any notion related to the bodily reality: the soul is everywhere because it is nowhere; that is, to the intelligible no spatial category can be ascribed. At the same time, however, the omni-presence of the intelligible in the sensible is grounded on the absolute simplicity of the intelligible itself. This itself is a distinctive doctrine of Neoplatonism. Its origin can perhaps be traced back to Plato’s Parmenides, where the question is asked concerning the unitary and undivided presence of the Idea in the multiplicity, and the comparison is suggested with daylight.” (127) While in a sense tied together, the natures of the soul and body are distinct from one another. Furthermore, Gregory maintains with Platonic thought that the soul is not *in* the body. Thus, while seemingly no intelligible relation can be established from Gregory’s thought, the soul is related to the body in such way that it is πανταχοῦ, and this component enables the soul to receive direction from the senses and inform its ascent to God. It is to this understanding that the later Franciscan fathers, particularly St. Bonaventure, are indebted. For Bonaventure’s understanding of the “soul’s journey into God” see “Bonaventure: The Soul’s Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis,” trans. Ewert Cousins (Paulist Press, 1978). See also “On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology,” in *Works of Saint Bonaventure*, trans. F. Edward Coughlin (Ashland, OH: Bookmasters, 1996).

¹⁶² Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 59. Von Balthasar drawing from *In Eccles. 7; 1, 729 C*: “Through an analysis of time, always examining closely matters that are greater than those that are currently being discovered.”

on contemplation. Gregory calls this νόημα διαστηματικόν [a progressively integrated perception].¹⁶³ Wilken states that, “in Gregory’s view, the passions prepare the way for love of God.”¹⁶⁴ Thus, “the soul, freed from the movement of the passions, comes to no harm by them [...] she withdraws into herself and is able to know herself in her depths, such as she is in her very nature, and she contemplates the archetype in her own beauty as in a mirror and in image.”¹⁶⁵ Indeed, the senses play a vital role in the fundamental elements of contemplation: “[The eye] possesses in itself that natural gleam that permits it to comprehend what is homogeneous to it.”¹⁶⁶ However, Martin Laird makes a critical observation when he states that, “When Moses was instructed in the theophany, he was able to know that none of the things considered by the mind truly existed, but only the transcendent essence. This consideration or contemplation on the part of *dianoia* [thought or intention] is a straightforward discursive process [...] when *dianoia* sees that things exist only by participation.”¹⁶⁷ In light of this, Gregory reckons that the basis of contemplation is the mind’s ability to free itself from the bodily senses and move toward participation in the Divine Good.

¹⁶³ See *ibid*, Gregory, *De infantibus* III, 172 C. νόημα, “Perception, thought;” διαστηματικόν is unclear.

¹⁶⁴ Wilken, *Early Christian Thought*, 298.

¹⁶⁵ Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 122, quoting Gregory, *De An. Et res.* III, 89C.

¹⁶⁶ Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 113, quoting Gregory, *De infantibus* III, 173 D. Additionally, on this matter, see Robert Lewis Wilken, *Early Christian Thought*, p. 240, 250, . Wilken argues that certain material objects such as paintings carry a sense of sacramental value. Behind the iconography are events that comprise the faith and illustrate the Divine character to humans, who receive these stories through the senses.

¹⁶⁷ Laird, *Grasp of Faith*, 41.

Finally, and perhaps most fundamentally, the basis of the soul's contemplation is founded upon the commands of God,¹⁶⁸ which are fully revealed in Christ. Gregory writes, "May the beginning of the teaching He pronounces become to us the beginning of contemplation."¹⁶⁹ The very words of the Word are both the ladder by which the contemplative ascends and, as we shall see later in this chapter, the "summit of the mountain," by which one may look "down into the ineffable depths of His thoughts."¹⁷⁰ This is the point at which contemplation gathers upon that which is outside of the self. That act of contemplation is made possible by the purposeful creation of man's nature, the instilled ability to grasp Divine Being and Divine teaching. Ultimately, the soul in the contemplative posture is docile, ready to receive and act upon the words it hears. His commands pierce the heart, revealing, as we saw in Origen, the self to the self. Without the proper teaching, he "will not lift himself up to the height of the Giver, but wants the Divine power to descend to the mean, earthly level of his own desires."¹⁷¹

Thus, while the process of contemplation begins with a gaze at the self in a kind of affirmation as a creature of God, Gregory is keen to point out that contemplation does not remain on the self. The look toward the self will inevitably cause one to look further, look past the self, because of the beauty of the creature found within. Upon looking past, the contemplative first finds the commands and teachings of God, manifest fully in the words of Christ, particularly in the Beatitudes.¹⁷² The Word of God becomes the soul's

¹⁶⁸ For a discussion regarding the commands of God and their role in contemplation and the ascent of the mind, see Laird, *Grasp of Faith*, 44.

¹⁶⁹ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, I, 86.

¹⁷⁰ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, VI, 143.

¹⁷¹ Gregory, *Lord's Prayer*, I, 28.

¹⁷² See Gregory, *Beatitudes*, I, 85.

teacher; the soul sees all things in truth through the lens of the Word: “[He] specifies the nature and number of the things that are contemplated from this height. He points them out, as it were, with His finger; here the Kingdom of Heaven, there the inheritance of the earth that is above, then mercy, justice, consolation, kinship with the God of all creation.”¹⁷³ The beauty of creation indicates that its Creator is Himself Beauty;¹⁷⁴ innately, the creature is drawn back toward that beauty. Grasping, it fails to take hold not only because it is distinctly other, but because it longs after the Ungraspable. This is the longing that spurs the contemplative into further heights of the Divine beatitude.

He who prays shall be filled, Gregory notes, citing Matt. 7:7: “Ask and it will be given to you.” Furthermore, in being filled, “their desire will not be dulled but rather kindled anew.”¹⁷⁵ Von Balthasar points out that, “The mystical works of Gregory of Nyssa are built are all built on the idea of a perpetual surpassing of self: ‘Always higher, always greater than oneself [...] Since the object is infinite, the journey toward it is also infinite.’”¹⁷⁶ Indeed, von Balthasar is adamant that contemplation is not descent into self, but an ascent to Divine beatitude and participation (κοινωνία) in that Nature. In this section, I shall focus on what, for Gregory, the act of prayer as ascent to God constitutes.

Before fully discussing the act, typified in the Lord’s Prayer, it is essential to understand the extent to which the soul can know God and participate in His beatitude. For Gregory, the Christian life on the whole is understood as an act of contemplation, an

¹⁷³ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, I, 85.

¹⁷⁴ So insistent on this point that he remarks, “But what greater evil is there than not to look at the beauty of the Creator [...]?” (Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, I, 75) I shall discuss this toward the end of this chapter, in a section outlining the goal of contemplation.

¹⁷⁵ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, IV, 127.

¹⁷⁶ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 45.

“ascent” to God. Even the Divine virtues are cultivated as a result of increasing participation in the Divine nature, a process enacted by and cultivated through contemplation. This is seen principally in his interpretation of the beatitudes as rungs upon the ladder that leads the soul to God.¹⁷⁷ As the farmer labors toward cultivating fruits pertaining to the earthly realm, prayer is the cultivation of the beatitudes that pertain to the life of the spirit. Prayer “cultivate[s] the land according to his [the one in prayer] needs.”¹⁷⁸ In this vein, we can also understand Gregory’s conception of prayer as liberation and departure from sin: “Prayer prevents the [one in prayer] [...] from committing sin, [...] so that sin no longer enters together with the desire for more,”¹⁷⁹ and further, “For as the Divine Nature is altogether impassible [ἀπαθής], a man who is always entangled in passions is debarred from union with God.”¹⁸⁰

Prayer has numerous practical benefits,¹⁸¹ but, principally, it is “Intimacy with God and contemplation of the invisible.”¹⁸² That prayer is seeing the unseen explains the function of the νοῦς [mind]¹⁸³ as such a vital role in Gregory’s theology of prayer. On this point, he writes that, “The mind cannot reach that which IS; even if we continue to

¹⁷⁷ See Gregory, *Beatitudes*, I, 85; II, 97; V, 130; VI, 143.

¹⁷⁸ Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, I, 23.

¹⁷⁹ Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, I, 23.

¹⁸⁰ Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, I, 31.

¹⁸¹ See Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, I, 20-24.

¹⁸² Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, I, 24.

¹⁸³ For an excellent discussion of the “Flow of the Mind,” see Laird, *Grasp of Faith*, 34-56. Additionally, Cherniss, quoting Gregory, writes “In the *Canonical Epistle* Gregory [...] [explains] the virtue of the λογιστικὸν μέρος [part endowed with reason] is ἡ τοῦ καλοῦ τε καὶ κακοῦ διακριτικὴ ἐπιστήμη [the piercing knowledge of good and evil], the ἐπιθυμητικὸν [coveting] is to address the desire of the soul upward to τὸ ὄντως ἐπιθυμητικὸν καὶ ἀληθῶς καλὸν [the desire being even truly good], the duty of the θυμοειδές [courageous] is ἡ πρὸς τὸ κακὸν ἀπέχθεια [the hatred toward the evil].” (20)

think ever more sublime thoughts about It, yet no word can express what is meant.”¹⁸⁴

Further, “how can I grasp what is neither in place nor in time, which eludes all limitation and every form of definition?”¹⁸⁵ While Divine goodness enters into the contemplative’s consciousness, it “enters,” and remains unseen. Besides the invitation of Divine grace, a significant component in the act of prayer is the desire of the soul for the recovery of the image, and, therein, the Divine Being Himself. In prayer, God is the giver of Himself. Man always desires more of God, since each aspect of Himself reveals more of the Infinite. There is still an infinite amount *more* of Himself to know. The one in prayer is never satisfied while sojourning through the life of contemplation on earth.

Through contemplative prayer, and the life corresponding to such practice, a kind of holy sorrow is a product of the longing. The sorrow comes upon the realization that “we are separated from a good so great that we cannot even attain to its knowledge. Yet once we did share in this good that surpasses every power of perception.”¹⁸⁶ Here, Gregory returns to his theology of creation and εἰκόν, emphasizing that the soul in contemplation cannot help but see the disparity between himself and the Creator. This “διάστημα [spacing]” is also a consequence of sin. Thus, holy sorrow is produced also out of a recognition of man’s original state: “The human being seemed to be another such, since it was fashioned to the most exact likeness in the image of its prototype.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, I, 88.

¹⁸⁵ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, III, 112.

¹⁸⁶ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, III, 112.

¹⁸⁷ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, III, 112. It is worthy to note here that εἰκόν is the image by which “male and female, He created them.” (Gen. 1:26-27) This term has a particularly important role in the theology of the Cappadocian Fathers. Origen places εἰκόν in the soul as the rational part of man: “εἰκόν ... τοῦ Θεοῦ ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ ... εἰκόν δὲ τοῦ λόγου ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ ἀληθινός, ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ [the Image of God is His Word, but the image of the true man is the Word, the mind which is in man].” (“*Contra Cels.*” VI.63)

Regarding Gregory's conception of holy sorrow, von Balthasar writes, "There is a sadness in the creature, who knows that it will never see God as he is for himself."¹⁸⁸

Gregory cites Psalm 119:5, "Woe is me, that my sojourning is prolonged." Again, we see here that Gregory interprets "sojourning" as the act of contemplation itself, a seeking after God. Gregory continually reads this sojourning into the context of a pilgrim on his way back to God; prayer is the road that he travels. Indeed, "If a man does not seek, he will not find what comes only to those who seek."¹⁸⁹ The gift to the one seeking is the "operation of the Spirit,"¹⁹⁰ by which the one in prayer is drawn further into the Mystery.

Regarding the act of "sojourning" contemplation, the first movement in prayer is *away*: "So first my mind must become detached from anything subject to flux and change and tranquilly rest in motionless spiritual repose, so as to be rendered akin to Him who is perfectly unchangeable; and then it may address Him by the most familiar name and say: Father."¹⁹¹ While the first movement is away, the first word spoken in prayer is always "Father." Gregory insists that calling God "Father" necessitates a morally pure life: "For it is physically impossible that He who is good by essence should be the Father of an evil will, nor the Holy One of him whose life is impure."¹⁹² It would seem that this purity of life is held in tension with the passages discussed in the last section: while the senses and world of matter serve as signposts to direct one into right contemplation, they are in a

¹⁸⁸ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 104. The dissatisfaction of the creature are an "ontological constitution" between "diastema, time, becoming, indefinite progress." (104)

¹⁸⁹ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, III, 114.

¹⁹⁰ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, III, 116.

¹⁹¹ Gregory, *Lord's Prayer*, I, 38. For discussion of Gregory's Platonism as it relates to this issue, see n.40, 42-45, 67 and Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 49.

¹⁹² Gregory, *Lord's Prayer*, I, 37; Gregory quoting II Cor. 6:14: "There is no fellowship of light with darkness."

sense left behind as the soul rises to Divine κοινωνία [fellowship, communion]. Certainly, the νοῦς [mind, soul] becomes detached from the world of mutability insofar as it departs from sin, but it does not negate human nature: “the Beatitude commands moderation and meekness, but not complete absence of passion; for the latter is outside the scope of nature, whereas the former can be achieved by virtue.”¹⁹³ Wilken observes that Gregory of Nyssa echoes Aristotle in that happiness “is possession of all things considered good.”¹⁹⁴ In the same passage, he goes on to summarize, “The only *telos* that can bring genuine happiness is life with God, or, more precisely, a ‘*return* to fellowship with God.’” Gregory is keen on establishing a link between the life of prayer and the life of virtue. Prayer leads us to κοινωνία with God, but the soul cannot ascend to God, and thus the soul cannot truly contemplate, when conducting itself according to the passions alone. Prayer is analogous to the Christian life in that it informs the Christian life of virtue. Together, the two components lead to κοινωνία in Divine Beatitude, the *telos* of both prayer and the Christian life on the whole.

What is the fuller extent to which the act of contemplation separates the one in prayer from the creation, the realm to which he is set in by God at creation? Prayer is an “ascent” from the “low ground—from superficial and ignoble thoughts to the spiritual mountain of sublime contemplation.”¹⁹⁵ The ascent of contemplation can be understood in terms of the individual’s *thought*. Gregory illustrates, “[...] we are able to contemplate the transcendent land above the heavens, whose capital is the city of the King of which

¹⁹³ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, II, 103.

¹⁹⁴ Wilken, *Early Christian Thought*, 274.

¹⁹⁵ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, I, 85.

[...] glorious things are spoken [...].”¹⁹⁶ Depicted in his *Sermons on the Beatitudes* and *The Life of Moses*, in moving away, the νοῦς [mind] progresses up in an ascent to the top of the mountain, thereby leaving behind the things pertaining to the passions. Gregory describes the ascent in terms of mind related activity: “from the low ground—from superficial and ignoble thoughts to the spiritual mountain of sublime contemplation.”¹⁹⁷ In contemplation, a remarkable return to the physical realm occurs. The soul not only beholds God anew with each step in divine beatitude, but also beholds all things through God’s eyes. This is a present reality for the one in contemplation. This process is fulfilled when the soul finally beholds God Himself, contemplation’s aim. But the “return” of the soul to the physical is an act by which the νοῦς begins to *see* creation through the eyes of God. Here marks the sense in which the mind is drawn into a divinization through participation (μετουσία) and communion (κοινωνία). In this light, the act of prayer is understood as “Regaining of the Image:”¹⁹⁸ the soul begins to see itself and all things as creature and creation, as beautiful in the light of the Divine vision. Again, linking the act of contemplation with the Christian life on the whole, Von Balthasar points out that, “This earthly life is only an enforced sojourn, an existence (ἐν ἀτόποις). Our return to heaven will be a ‘reentry into our natural condition.’”¹⁹⁹

We see prayer unfolding to be not only the “intimacy with God and contemplation of the invisible,” nor the “enjoyment of things present and substance of the things to

¹⁹⁶ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, II, 99-100. See Roth, Peroli, Laird, *op.cit.*

¹⁹⁷ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, I, 85.

¹⁹⁸ Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, I, 41.

¹⁹⁹ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 69. Von Balthasar draws from *De Mortuis* III, 512 B; *De Beat.* 8; 1, 1292 B.

come,” but also a means by which man will “lift himself up to the height of the Giver.”²⁰⁰ Gregory says further that God “united Himself with our nature, in order that by its union with the divine it [our nature] might become divine.”²⁰¹ The divinizing element of prayer includes a participation (μετουσία) and communion (κοινωνία) in the earthly life, but what does Gregory mean by saying that man actually becomes divine? Contemplation is not limited to the cultivation of the life of virtue, as Martin Laird suggests,²⁰² and indeed, for Gregory, the Lord’s Prayer serves as the directing model by which man becomes divine. Here, Gregory strikes a similar note with Origen. But is the act of prayer a reception of the λόγος, as it was in the latter? Gregory’s emphasis in his sermons on the Lord’s Prayer rarely refer to the place of the λόγος; on the other hand, Origen’s exposition is thoroughly entrenched in the operation and function of the λόγος in prayer, particularly in addressing the way in which man participates in and receives the Divine nature to himself. Their exegetical styles differ in this regard, and it shall serve our present purposes to further examine Gregory’s sermons on the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer. The interplay between the cultivation of Divine virtue and the emphasis on ἀπάθεια are given greater clarity, shedding light on Gregory’s understanding of divinization and man’s limitation in becoming divine, especially on earth in the midst of contemplation. For Gregory, as for Origen, much of this understanding is channeled through the fourth line of the Lord’s Prayer.

²⁰⁰Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, I, 28.

²⁰¹ Gregory, *Religious Instruction*, 7-10. As Martin Laird properly notes, “The body experiences union through reception of the eucharist, the effects of which Gregory describes in the language of divinization.” (Laird, *Grasp of Faith*, 187-188) However, for the purposes of this paper, I shall limit my comments to Gregory’s conception of contemplative prayer, not addressing Eucharistic prayer.

²⁰² See Laird, *Grasp of Faith*, 187-189.

We have already seen how prayer is a return to man's natural state. For Gregory, on a similar note to Origen, understands divinization largely as the unification of man's will with that of God's. This is emphatically expounded upon in Gregory's interpretation of the Lord's Prayer. Concerning the fourth line, Gregory's translation of ἐπιούσιον is centered around, as he puts it, "the well-being of the soul."²⁰³ He argues for a kind of spiritual health that is fostered in the believer praying this petition. Furthermore, "Give us this day our daily bread," cannot be separated from the petition that proceeds it: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,"²⁰⁴ and the sequence of these two petitions cannot be separated from the story of creation, fall, and redemption.²⁰⁵ It is worthy to note Gregory's statement that, "the true Physician who cured the evil perfectly by its opposite" invited mankind out of the bondage of sickness, "uniting them to the Will of God."²⁰⁶ For Gregory, prayer is a means by which the Divine will is actualized in the lives of men. God's will, Gregory reminds his audience, is "the salvation of men."²⁰⁷ Additionally, Gregory emphasizes that the actualization of this will is an arduous process, "effected only with difficulty through much thought and medical skill."²⁰⁸ Here, medical skill is tantamount to salvation; it is through the process of prayer that His will is enacted through His creatures, because it is through prayer that man regains the Divine image and

²⁰³ Gregory, *Lord's Prayer*, IV, 57.

²⁰⁴ See Gregory, *Lord's Prayer*, IV, 58.

²⁰⁵ Gregory, *Lord's Prayer*, IV, 58. He begins, "Once upon a time the intelligent human being was healthy, for the movements of the soul [...] were evenly balanced in us according to the conception of virtue."

²⁰⁶ Gregory, *Lord's Prayer*, IV, 58.

²⁰⁷ Gregory, *Lord's Prayer*, IV, 59.

²⁰⁸ Gregory, *Lord's Prayer*, IV, 60.

discovers God's will. We thus see a soteriological dimension, and even a *telos*, in Gregory's conception of prayer. Furthermore, prayer creates a "charitable disposition," illustrated in terms of darkness and light. Entering the darkness corresponds to the human will given over to the passions and evils of the flesh; ascending in the light corresponds to the virtues in accordance with God's will.²⁰⁹ In praying this line, our will is conformed to His; our darkness is made light like His; our inward dispositions and outward actions are brought into a moral and spiritual accordance with His.²¹⁰

The phrase "on earth as it is in Heaven" fits into this notion of conformity, namely through contemplation. Prayer is the junction where the two realms ("lives") are meant to converge, the Spiritual ("incorporeal"), by the will of God, invading the earthly ("corporeal").²¹¹ This duality is explicit in Gregory's work, and it illustrates the place of contemplation as a kind of bridge between the two spheres of the incorporeal and the corporeal. The corporeal takes on the will of the Incorporeal. Prayer is a means by which the one in contemplation recovers his nature through the establishment of God's will, a decisive act of removing the evil that clings to the flesh. In light of this petition, Gregory's translation of ἐπιούσιον recurs. We are commanded to ask for bread because it is "what is sufficient to preserve our physical existence."²¹² While seeking to cleave from the earthly nature and cling to the Divine will, we must yet sustain our existence by asking for bread. Amongst the things of the physical realm, it alone is to be asked for;

²⁰⁹ This is separate from his understanding of the darkness at the top of the mountain, the goal of contemplation. I shall discuss this in final section of this chapter.

²¹⁰ See Gregory, *Lord's Prayer*, IV, 59.

²¹¹ See Gregory, *Lord's Prayer*, IV, 62.

²¹² Gregory, *Lord's Prayer*, IV, 63.

the remainder of our being, Gregory argues, ought to be concerned with seeking the heavenly nature through contemplation of the Divine will and repulsion of evil. True prayer addresses both facets. Thus, Gregory translates ἐπιούσιος, “daily bread,” or, “bread necessary for today.”²¹³ This paradoxical notion is precisely what, as von Balthasar points out, is so intriguing about the thought of Gregory of Nyssa. He states, “Gregory’s attractiveness lies in the perfect harmony that reigns between the ‘system’ and its religious realization, between the idea and the drama. There is in his Christian detachment a certain indefinable, naively fervent attachment to all the beauties of the earth, to all human and cosmic values.”²¹⁴ But it is also at this point that the extent of man’s divinization, while amidst the sojourning life of contemplation, is limited. Gregory explains, “But He who overcomes temptation does not eliminate hunger from nature, as if that were a cause of evil. [...] He scrutinizes and distinguishes what is foreign to nature by His subtle and most perfect contemplation. [...] He knows a bread that nourishes indeed, because the Word of God has adapted it to human nature.”²¹⁵ The bread adapted to human nature is the will of the Father, made manifest in the λόγος. Gregory quotes I Tim 2:4, saying, “But the will of the Father is manifest who will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”²¹⁶

Gregory urges his hearers to recognize the limitation of the flesh in relation to man’s divinization through contemplation. While bread is a necessary element to sustain our bodily nature, God needs no sustenance. Prayer is the balance between striving for

²¹³ Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, IV, 63.

²¹⁴ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 16.

²¹⁵ Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, Sermon IV, 63.

²¹⁶ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, VI, 124.

the Eternal Being while living amidst the finite. That man needs to seek such a balance is indicative of his limitation. For Gregory, the soul is ontologically linked to the body but needs a greater nourishment than that which is given for the body; thus, if a human person pursues those things satisfying only the temporal nature, the soul is “choked,” cut off from the Source which alone can nourish the rational nature.²¹⁷ “Give Thou bread,” Gregory paraphrases, “That is to say, let me also have the needs of life [...] let me have food through just labour.”²¹⁸ In this regard, Gregory forms his notion of prayer as an act of recognizing that God is Other, and man, while being made divine, is dependent upon the Creator. Thereby, Gregory also demonstrates how praying for “daily bread” is a reminder of the frailty and fallibility of man’s nature. “Daily bread” is the prayer for justice and moderate living, supplied from the natural order of God’s creation.²¹⁹ Examination of conscience “before you ask God for bread,” is, for Gregory, always a necessary step before opening the lips to ask in prayer.²²⁰

This leads into Gregory’s emphasis on man’s temporality in the phrase “this day.” “Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof,” he reminds his audience.²²¹ Praying for the “daily bread” precludes worry for the morrow. He draws his fourth sermon on the Lord’s Prayer to a conclusion that provides keen insight into his conception of what the act of prayer is: “The life of the body belongs only to the present, but that which lies beyond us

²¹⁷ Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, IV, 65. Cf. Gregory’s opening lines to Sermon IV, arguing for a holistically healthy human person, here laid out in full: have enough bread to sustain bodily existence, allowing the soul to long after the Divine nature.

²¹⁸ Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, IV, 67.

²¹⁹ Cf. Ps. 103:14, 146:9, 135:25, 144:16.

²²⁰ Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, IV, 68.

²²¹ Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, IV, 68, Gregory quoting from Matt. 6:34.

and is apprehended by hope belongs to the soul.” Here, we see Gregory’s conception of human nature and eschatology informs his entire understanding of prayer, and even, as in Origen, his translation of ἔπιούσιον. “Bread is for our use today; the Kingdom belongs to the beatitude for which we hope,” seems to make an even further distinction.²²² Yet, Gregory’s over arching point—easily missed in the array of seemingly Gnostic and dualistic statements—is embedded in the translation of ἔπιούσιον: in prayer for temporal bread, our lives are reassured of Divine providence and thereby informed by virtue toward a disposition of asking for and receiving the greater things of “everlasting realities.”²²³

Within this, Gregory instills the importance of cultivating ἀπάθεια, in likeness to God. As in Origen, this notion was connected to receiving the ἄρτον ἔπιούσιον in the form of Christ, the λόγος. But as we have seen, in Gregory, ἄρτον ἔπιούσιον does not represent the rational soul receiving nourishment in form of the divine nature; rather, it represents the one thing needed to sustain our flesh in this life so that our spiritual gaze may be constantly directed toward the Transcendent One. Gregory’s emphasis in prayer is an elevation of the soul, not, as Origen has it, as a reception of the λόγος who descended into the flesh of man. Therefore, for Gregory, the role of Christ the λόγος in prayer is that of exemplar: Christ exhibited ἀπάθεια toward all things of the transient realm, thereby displaying human participation (μετουσία) and communion (κοινωνία) with God at the apex of His purpose, a purpose set out by Divine design from the onset of

²²² Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, IV, 70.

²²³ Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, IV, 70.

creation. It is a purpose, however, that Christ willfully chose.²²⁴ For Gregory, the command to “be ye perfect as your father in heaven is perfect” had been “revealed in the person of Christ.”²²⁵ The Christ is the object in the act of contemplation. Likeness to God is equated to imitation of Christ, and the primary form that this takes is humility, poverty of Spirit. But, as Wilken keenly expresses it, Christ is not only the model of contemplation and exemplar of the virtuous man, but he is also “the goal.”²²⁶

God’s creation is the foundation for contemplation; participation and conformity to His beatitude is the act of contemplation; and, finally, He Himself is the Object of contemplation. Wilken notes that Gregory’s interpretation of the Beatitudes is aimed at Christ himself.²²⁷ The principle mode by which this takes form is *seeing*. For Gregory, seeing is participation and communion. The one who gazes upon God is thrust into his life, and born aloft into μετουσία and κοινωνία. Thus, seeing is knowing, and knowing is possessing. Unity with God is the goal of contemplation, a kind of prize that is fully taken hold of only at contemplation’s end: the Resurrection. Only at this moment is the soul snatched “from the horizontal plane of matter in order to elevate her to God, the infinite good, who is alone capable of freeing her from an unachievable concern for what is immanently infinite.”²²⁸ As demonstrated in the previous section, the act of contemplation is an analogue to the occupation of earthly life. Gregory draws his thought on this matter to conclusion, saying, “But all of them [the stages of human life] are

²²⁴ As I shall address later in chapter IV of this thesis, this differs from Origen’s conception.

²²⁵ Wilken, *Early Christian Thought*, 276.

²²⁶ Wilken, *Early Christian Thought*, 277.

²²⁷ See Wilken, *Early Christian Thought*, 278.

²²⁸ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 44.

merely a part of the journey we are making, a journey whose meaning and end term are none other than the reestablishment of the beginning, that is to say, the likeness of God.”²²⁹ This moment, “likeness of God,” has been a recurring point of focus in this chapter: it is the basis for contemplation, the revelation of the act of contemplation, and, here, it is actualized at contemplation’s end. Von Balthasar rightly points out that the “meaning” of this journey, the restoration to the “ancient beauty,”²³⁰ is none other than the Resurrection of the individual, typified in Christ, which has since expanded into the living community of God’s Body enacting His will on earth. The Resurrection of Christ is the end of contemplation for the individual, insofar as the one in contemplative prayer takes hold in part, but journeys toward the eventual transformation into the Resurrected state of Christ, in which μετουσία will reach its fulfillment.²³¹

In μετουσία, the aim of contemplation is the summit of the mountain. Gregory’s conception of envisioning this physical locale (“Kingdom of Heaven”) plays a significant part in his theology. The life of prayer—again, at many points, not least in the *Life of Moses*, analogous to the Christian life itself—is a journey up the mountain. His use of this language, however, is limited. He writes, “But, first of all, he leads us not to a mountain but to Heaven itself, which He has rendered accessible to men by virtue. Secondly, He gives them not only the vision of, but a share in, the Divine power, bringing

²²⁹ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 82, quoting Gregory, *De Mortuis* III, 517 D.

²³⁰ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 82, quoting Gregory, *De An. Et Res.* III, 157 AB.

²³¹ There is a sense, then, in which the Resurrection of Christ also plays a significant role in the basis of contemplation. While it would serve to expand on this concept in the groundwork section, it is not emphasized in Gregory’s writing. The Resurrection comes into play chiefly in the exposition of contemplation’s goal: Christ-likeness in the unhindered participation in the Divine Being.

them as it were to kinship with the Divine Nature.”²³² For Gregory, the end of contemplation is the fullest state of knowing God insofar as our resurrected being is capable. We know through seeing, but we see “not His Essence, but His Goodness.”²³³ This is true of both Resurrected contemplation and even the earthly journey. Thus, Gregory’s doctrine of the unsearchable darkness of God comes into play here. With Moses, we journey to enter the darkness and see God in it.²³⁴ But at the summit of contemplation, man encounters the Divine Word that, “at the beginning forbids that the Divine be likened to any of the things known by men, since every concept which comes from some comprehensible image by an approximate understanding and by guessing at the divine nature constitutes an idol of God and does not proclaim God.”²³⁵ The journey to this point is a progression of knowledge of and gradual encounter with God, but the journey does not reach consummation until the Resurrection, and neither does the final stage offer distinctive knowledge of God’s essence. It lifts the creature in a perpetual cycle of yearning and satiation.

Man’s highest state of seeing and “possessing,”²³⁶ (in the Resurrection) as Gregory puts it, is a dynamic unknowing in darkness. Indeed, Von Balthasar notes that,

²³² Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, II, 35.

²³³ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, VI, 147.

²³⁴ Gregory, *Moses*, 80.

²³⁵ Gregory, *Moses*, 81.

²³⁶ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, VI, 144. He writes, “Hence the man who sees God possesses in this act of seeing all there is of the things that are good. By this we understand life without end, eternal incorruption, undying beatitude.” For clarity, Gregory here refers to the Resurrection and the everlasting exultation in God. It is the consummation of hope, the reality anticipated amidst the presently sojourn.

“From a static point of view, it must be said that the soul does not see God.”²³⁷ Gregory depicts the summit of darkness with vivid imagination, worth quoting at length here:

When he who has been purified and is sharp of hearing in his heart hears this sound [the trumpet] (I am speaking of the knowledge of the divine power which comes from the contemplation of reality), he is led by it to the place where his intelligence lets him slip in where God is. This is called darkness by Scripture, which signifies, as I said, the unknown and unseen. When he arrives there, he sees that tabernacle not made with hands, which he shows to those below by means of material likeness.²³⁸

The height of Divine vision and presence finds the soul at its pinnacle of moral purity. Gregory understands seeing God as “dependent” upon “purity of heart.”²³⁹ Indeed, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,”²⁴⁰ is the most succinct summarization of Gregory’s entire conception of contemplation, and this beatitude can be appropriately recast into a vision for the Christian life on the whole. From this understanding, we can revisit Gregory’s vision of the variation between sojourning contemplation and resurrected contemplation and how the former culminates in the latter.

During the act of contemplation within the transitory nature of creation, each time the soul grasps a representation of God, it is as if she had never begun the process in the first place. In other words, when, through contemplative prayer and the pure heart that is a fruit of such mental occupation, one “desires to see” God, the individual is at once granted participation in and intimacy with God insofar as his nature is capable of receiving.²⁴¹ This desiring is depicted in Gregory’s *Commentary on the Song of Songs*:

²³⁷ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 100.

²³⁸ Gregory, *Moses*, 82.

²³⁹ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, VI, 144.

²⁴⁰ Matt. 5:8.

²⁴¹ “No eye has seen that supreme goodness, even though it is always busy seeing. For he does not see God as great as he is, but rather he sees him as great as his eye allows him to grasp him.” (*In Cant.* 8; I, 941 B)

“The souls, therefore, draw to themselves a desire for their immortal bridegroom and follow the Lord God, as it is written. The cause of their love is the scent of the perfume to which they eternally run; they stretch out (ἐπκέτασις) to what is in front, forgetting what is behind. ‘We shall run after you toward the scent of your perfumes.’”²⁴² Here, Gregory’s thoroughly developed notion of ἐπκέτασις [extension] connotes the idea of striving after that Object which is ungraspable. There is a sense in which the creature is always pressing ahead into greater glimpses of Infinity. The Divine Being is never fully comprehended; thus, the creature exists in perpetual state of striving, because, as Gregory firmly believes, “There is in you, human beings, a desire to contemplate the true good.”²⁴³ But Gregory’s doctrine of ἐπκέτασις does not apply only to the progression of earthly contemplation.

Even upon receiving this Good Gift in the finality of the Resurrection, the soul, because no man can see God and live, desires anew that which has already been given. Gregory writes in *The Life of Moses* that, “the vision of God consists, in all truth, of the fact that it never grows weary of the desire to lift its eyes toward him.”²⁴⁴ The difference between the transitory nature of contemplation and the finality of the vision of the Divine is that in the latter, the soul has been fully transformed into divine nature and beholds

²⁴² Gregory, *Homilies on the Song of Songs*, ed. Richard A. Norris (Leiden; Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006), 39, XII. Gregory quoting from Hos. 11:10, Song. 1:4. We see similar notions expressed throughout the commentary, most notably on 366, XV: “The soul which looks to God and conceives that desire for incorruptible beauty always has a new desire for the transcendent, and it is never dulled by satiety. Such a soul never ceases to stretch forth to what lies before, going out from her present stage to what lies ahead. Anything great and marvelous always seems inferior in comparison to what succeeds it, since what the bride has found seems more beautiful than her earlier discoveries. Thus Paul died each day [1Cor 15.13], because at all times he partook of a new life, being dead to the past and forgetful of previous things.”

²⁴³ Gregory, *Beatitudes*, VI, 148.

²⁴⁴ Gregory, *Moses*, 106.

God without hindrance, whereas in the former, the soul gains similitude through participation and habituation of virtue. Gregory writes, “Do you realize to what height the Lord raises His hearers through the words of the prayer, by which he somehow transforms human nature into what is Divine? For he lays down that those who approach God should themselves become Gods.”²⁴⁵ Upon this point, Von Balthasar’s provides, for understanding Gregory’s conception of the finality of prayer, perhaps the most significant insight: “the final law is no longer that of analogy but that of identity.”²⁴⁶ Here we see Gregory’s doctrine of ἐπέκτασις link in full circle with “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Seeing God reaches its greatest height as an unhindered participation and communion in the Divine Being that is characterized by the ever extending and grasping (and then extending once again) notion of ἐπέκτασις. There, the soul rests in the occupation of one desire, constantly being satisfied in a never ending quest of seeing.

This final stage reaches a transformative culmination of prayer for Gregory in that the soul becomes as He is. The εἰκὼν by which the soul is made enables it to grasp the revelation of God in accordance with its own nature and desire. Contemplation for Gregory is both broad and paradoxical. Prayer is inseparable to the life of virtue in that while one draws into communion with God, he cannot enter into such Presence without first purifying himself through word and deed, the cultivation of virtue: “Hence the passage teaches us not to ask something from God without first having offered Him an acceptable gift.”²⁴⁷ Prayer both demands and enables purity of life. This process does not

²⁴⁵ Gregory, *Lord's Prayer*, I, 72.

²⁴⁶ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 123.

necessarily follow a strict paradigm; rather, it is experienced by the one in contemplation as a cohesive act, drawing him evermore toward Divine likeness. Furthermore, in the act of contemplation itself, man comes to “See God” in stages and glimpses, while at the same preserving the Holiness of His name: “It is necessary to make this before all else the principle part of prayer that the Name of God might not be blasphemed, but hallowed and glorified through my life.”²⁴⁸ This “sojourning” prayer, prayer within the realm of creation, draws one up to the summits of Heavenly beatitude that informs one’s conduct in tandem with the ascent. Finally, God Himself is the goal of contemplation, and, at the Resurrection, the creature is lifted into a μετουσία and κοινωνία that transform his very nature into divine identity. Until man reaches divinization, God grants an allotment of participation and communion for the sojourning state in accordance with the soul’s desires. Contemplation is the access point by which man walks forward along this journey, stepping with each new longing to greater and fuller revelation of He who created such a longing in His creatures.

²⁴⁷ Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, I, 37.

²⁴⁸ Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, I, 49. C.f. Matt. 5:16: “That men may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in Heaven.”

CHAPTER THREE

Πράξις, Θεωρία, Θεολογία: Deification as Conversion of the γνώμη in Maximus the Confessor

From numerous angles, Maximus the Confessor is a not only interpreter of the Cappadocian tradition from which he proceeds, but he stands—as do Origen and Gregory, in their own right—as a unique and foundational figure in the development of doctrine and theology.²⁴⁹ Contrary to what has been supposed, Maximus’s thought and contribution to the development of theology is not confined merely to the 7th century debate on whether Christ bears a single will or a will in accordance with divine and human natures.²⁵⁰ Maximus offers a perspective that at once draws upon the centrality of God’s purposes in His Son, the λόγος seen within the Cappadocian tradition, and thrusts the experience of the human encounter and reception of the Divine into a new light of deification. In Maximus, we see even greater clarity to the process of arriving at

²⁴⁹ Take, for example, his synthesis of the intentions of Pseudo-Dionysius in his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* with Evagrius Ponticus in *On Prayer*. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe according to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 317-321. Von Balthasar writes that, “Maximus has leaped over Pseudo-Dionysius and regained the old Alexandrian world of Origen, with its great symbolic pairings of earth and heaven, body and mind, Old Covenant and New, an old and a new world. The whole system, then, is a Chalcedonian Origenism: this the uniqueness of Maximus’ achievement and something wholly new.” (317) However, as Jaroslav Pelikan is apt to point out, much of their goal was to remain faithful as theologians. Thus, Maximus is not only a synthesizer of the Cappadocian heritage; he is a recipient of the Western tradition as well. However, for this thesis, I shall limit (most of) my comments to his continuity with Gregory of Nyssa and Origen of Alexandria. See Jaroslav Pelikan, introduction to *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans George C. Berthold (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 9.

²⁵⁰ This was, though, a large concern for Maximus. In 649, Maximus attended the Lateran synod in Rome, where he contributed to the controversy over, as Pelikan puts it, “whether Christ had one ‘will’ and ‘activity [*energeia*]’ or two.” (Pelikan, *Intro*, 4) Overall Maximus’s influence can be thought of in the cliché (as long as it is not elevated): “Maximus combined the speculative genius of the East with the soteriological genius of the West as few before or since had done.” (Pelikan, *Intro*, 2) Pelikan goes on, however, to argue for a broader conception of his influence.

knowledge of God, and knowledge of His λόγοι, the creation that bespeaks His name and purposes for humankind. These elements are, in continuity with Origen and Gregory, mediated by the λόγος.

In this chapter, I shall focus on Maximus's theology of contemplative prayer. Like Origen and Gregory, his thought on the matter encompasses several interwoven theological concepts. He enumerates seven mysteries revealed through Christ that the scope of prayer involves: "theology, adaption in grace, equality of honor with the angels, participation in eternal life, the restoration of nature inclining toward itself to a tranquil state, the abolition of the law of sin, and the overthrowing of the tyranny of evil which has dominated us by trickery."²⁵¹ Central for him is the mystery of the incarnation and to "recover [...] the power of the concreteness of the language of Scripture, and thoughtful participation in the drama of the divine liturgy."²⁵² However, it is significant to note with von Balthasar that Maximus, "begins from [the liturgy], only to move beyond it."²⁵³ What von Balthasar means to indicate is that, "The liturgy is [...] a way of drawing the entire world into the hypostatic union, because both world and liturgy share a Christological foundation."²⁵⁴ Furthermore, it must be emphatically noted that Maximus's theology is inseparable to its action and embodiment in the comprehensive realm of the liturgy. However, where this present work takes its point of departure concerns Maximus's theology that informs the liturgy, a theology that acts as a kind of precedent to it. The fact

²⁵¹ Maximus the Confessor, "Commentary on the Our Father," in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans George C. Berthold (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), I, 102-3.

²⁵² Pelikan, *Intro*, 2.

²⁵³ Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 317.

²⁵⁴ Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 322. Again, to emphasize the point that von Balthasar, as well as Pelikan, mean to make: "This is something new and original and must be regarded as Maximus' own achievement." (Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 322.)

that contemplative prayer and its goal of deification culminates in the liturgy, the Eucharist specifically,²⁵⁵ the present author takes for granted. Thus, this chapter shall first investigate what Maximus understands as the basis of prayer: the nature of Christ. From there, I shall explore the process and the goal of prayer through a consideration of the terms *πρᾶξις*, *θεωρία*, and *θεολογία*. Their rich depiction of the contemplative life provides a broad understanding of Maximus the Confessor's theology on the whole.

Maximus was well acquainted with the trajectory of thought that had branched from Aristotle and the neo-Platonists, through Philo, all the way up to Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Evagrius Ponticus, and Gregory of Nyssa.²⁵⁶ From this tradition, Maximus, as Pelkian puts it, develops the idea that there is “no spirituality apart from dogma and no dogma apart from spirituality.”²⁵⁷ As seen in Origen, this applied particularly to monastic spirituality. The line of thought continues to Maximus, whose theology of prayer cannot be properly understood unless viewed in the light of his monasticism. The goal of “pure prayer” in earthly life is detachment,²⁵⁸ which came through a mortification of the passions. Because of the act of literally renouncing every possession, this is only possible in the context of a monastic lifestyle.²⁵⁹ Detachment brings about knowledge of God, derived from participation in the oneness of the *λόγος* with God, the meditative way

²⁵⁵ For a discussion on the sacraments, see von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 317-330.

²⁵⁶ See Pelikan, *Intro*, 3.

²⁵⁷ Pelkian, *Intro*, 1.

²⁵⁸ I shall discuss the nuances of this term later in the paper. Here, it is apt to note a central supporting verse for Maximus (and even Gregory), II Peter 1:4: “He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.”

²⁵⁹ As to what degree Maximus believed that “pure prayer” was a state reserved exclusively for those who had taken up the life of a monk, I shall explore later in the paper.

men know God insofar as they are able.²⁶⁰ This knowledge of God does not come without an arduous process of denying the flesh and progressing in the way of divine love. This mortification of the passions is, in a sense, the foundational act of “pure prayer,” the way by which man begins his journey toward knowledge and love of God.

In Gregory, we saw that the theological basis of prayer is inherent in man’s creation after the εἰκὼν of God. How do we see Maximus’s view on human nature form the basis of his understanding concerning prayer? Maximus’s conception is centered on the nature of Christ. Natures are known by their “essential activity.”²⁶¹ Here, Maximus refers to Christ’s two natures in one person expressed in the Nicene Creed and affirmed later in the Chalcedonian Creed.²⁶² Additionally, the “essential activity” of Christ is understood by both his divine and human activities, portrayed for the human comprehension in Scripture and thus the very life of Jesus. Scripture, and the tradition that carries it’s teaching forth,²⁶³ is the form by which God reveals Himself in the λόγος

²⁶⁰ For a discussion Maximus’s topic of ‘mediation,’ see Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor (Second Edition)* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1995), 331-429.

²⁶¹ Anastasius, “The Trial of Maximus,” in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans George C. Berthold (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), VIII, 23.

²⁶² Pelikan writes that, “Maximus made his principal contribution to the rescue of Dionysius through his orthodox restatement and reinterpretation of the Dionysian structure both in his theology and even more in his spirituality. What Maximus achieved was nothing less than the restoration of the balance between Neo-Platonism and Christian orthodoxy in a Christocentric piety whose roots lie deep in the Cappadocian tradition of Basil and the two Gregories.” (Pelikan, *Intro*, 6) In a sense, Maximus rescued the Dionysian system from the influence of Neo-Platonism that had been at work in Cappadocian spirituality. This is, Pelikan goes on to note, primarily in the form of a Trinitarian and Christocentric reorientation. He opposed the Christology of Pyrrhus and of other proponents of the theories of “one nature” or of “one will” or of “one activity.” Maximus declared that Christ had a human and a divine will: one person in two natures. The different wills correspond to the different natures present in the person Christ. Underneath his adamant confession, he recognized that the language used to formulate one nature, one activity, and one will doctrines was an expression of a genuine desire for union with God. Maximus, through his own life and work, exemplifies carries forth this desire in a way that upholds orthodoxy and teaches others to follow in his footsteps.

²⁶³ God incarnate both “wills and works in both his divinity and in his humanity” not only through Scripture, but also through “the holy doctors and councils.” (Anastasius, “Trial,” IX, 24.)

so that the mind may know Him. In Scripture, we see His actions, hear His words, and taste His bread. Furthermore, Scripture is the transmission of His revelation, for He spoke through the writers of Scripture as one does through a scribe who listens attentively to the words conveyed. Therefore, as a confessor of the tradition and orthodoxy established at Nicaea before his time, Maximus declares that if we do not confess his whole nature, we are “corrupting the whole mystery [of God made flesh].”²⁶⁴ Maximus puts his orthodoxy into clear expression in the *Commentary on the Our Father*, saying that the same God is “truly Unity and Trinity: Unity according to the principle of essence and Trinity according to the mode of existence. The same reality is wholly Unity without being divided by the Persons, and wholly Trinity without being confused in unity.”²⁶⁵

What has the “mystery” of His two natures to do with the fundamentals of contemplation? The incarnate Word prefigures the goal of contemplation, and is thus the foundation for the human practice of contemplation. Pelikan writes, “The countours of that future [deification and eternal life] had already become discernible in the incarnate Logos and in his humanity, which had been deified but not destroyed in the Incarnation.”²⁶⁶ A central passage for Maximus the Confessor is II Peter 1:4: “He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.” Concerning this passage, Thunburg writes that the promise has been fulfilled in the Incarnation and Resurrection. The revelation and the triumph of God in Christ form for man the process of deification, and are thus the beginning points of

²⁶⁴ Anastasius, “Trial,” IX, 24.

²⁶⁵ Maximus, “Our Father,” IV, 111.

²⁶⁶ Pelikan, *Intro*, 10-11.

contemplation. It is significant to note that this takes place on a paradoxical plane: God becomes man *insofar* as “man has deified himself.”²⁶⁷ Thunburg means to say that Maximus’s understanding of deification is a reward for receiving the gift of God in Christ, an act conferred by grace but received through willing humility. Pelikan writes that, “The Biblical declaration, ‘You are Gods,’ was not to be understood to mean that man had the capacity by nature or by his present condition to achieve deification; he could achieve it and receive this sublime name only by adoption and the grace of God.”²⁶⁸ Indeed, Maximus clarifies that, “The soul takes on the divinity in the same measure that the Word of God willed to empty himself in the incarnation of his own unmixed glory in becoming genuinely human.”²⁶⁹ In this light, prayer is a “request of what God gives to men in a way which is fitting to himself.”²⁷⁰

What is fitting for man’s nature is God’s gift of salvation, embodied in the union of Christ’s natures. It is a perfect balance of divine and human fitness. Thus, both Christ’s nature as God-man and His passion narrative form the basis for man’s contemplation of God because His redemptive work sets man free to return to the

²⁶⁷ Thunburg *Microcosm*, p. 457-458.

²⁶⁸ For Gregory, on the other hand, Christ is the reward that uncovers the gift already given in the εικόν.

See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)*, vol. II in *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 11. “[...] Deification was not a matter of human power, but of divine power alone.” The special gift of Eastern Christian spirituality was that it managed to hold these two emphases together far more successfully than theology ever did.

²⁶⁹ Maximus, “Our Father,” II, 103.

²⁷⁰ Maximus, “Our Father,” III, 105. Besides drawing upon the Cappadocian tradition to which Maximus is indebted, he references Ps. 76:12 (also quoted by Gregory of Nyssa), John 2:10, I Sam. 1:11, 2 Chr. 32:20. The vows of David, Hannah, Hezechiah, and Amos, demonstrate the one who wills for what they ask for to be brought to the enjoyment proper to what they have asked. He explains, “prayer is the reward of virtue, that God gives back with the greatest joy.” (Maximus, “Our Father,” II, 105)

condition for which he was made. The fall was a perversion of his capacities for love of God and fellowship with Him.²⁷¹ However, the significance of the Incarnation is given its greatest clarity when Maximus writes that the Word, “remained in possession of his own mind and life, contained in essence by no other than the Father and the Spirit.”²⁷² Thus, the Spirit of Christ generates a will that is freely directed toward fellowship with God. Christ’s incarnation and subsequent defeat of death is the liberating act that enables communion with God. Thunberg writes that man’s sinful disposition of the will (γνώμη [a means of knowing]), “affects nature as far as it is misused, and it is only through Christ’s Incarnation that the human composite is again freed from its slavery, and man’s volitional capacities can be freely used in a converted γνώμη. Christ’s disposition of will was of unity with the Father; His Resurrection enables the one in prayer to partake in the kind of obedience and communion that Christ exemplified. Christ’s life is then analogous to ours.”²⁷³ In light of this expression, Thunberg argues that “They [the human soul and body] are regarded as unconfused but indissolubly united, and, if we have been right in assuming that the *perichoresis*²⁷⁴ idea is at the heart of Maximus’ Christology, then the analogy would imply to him even more, i.e. an interpenetration of body and soul

²⁷¹ For a discussion of this matter, see Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 226-230.

²⁷² Maximus, “Our Father,” II, 103.

²⁷³ See Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 100-103. The analogy of man to Christ is not a simple matter in Maximus. For example, Thunberg states that, “If we go to the texts where Maximus expresses most clearly his idea of man as a composite nature (φύσις σύνθετος), we also find two other characteristic features in the argumentation: 1) that the idea of a composite nature in the case of Christ is explicitly ruled out; 2) that the union of Christ is later described as a composite hypostasis (ὑπόστασις σύνθετος). [...] The point of comparison is the fact that both are unions of composition (σύνθεσις).” He goes on to argue that σύνθεσις is a synonym for hypostasis. At the Council of Constantinople in 553, σύνθεσις was accepted as an orthodox expression.

²⁷⁴ περιχώρησις [rotation]. See von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 330-358.

as well.”²⁷⁵ Body and soul exemplify hypostatic union; both are the unity of two natures that correspond to one person. For this reason, the extent of human freedom is not fully realized until it participates in Christ’s own. This serves as the basis for understanding the act of contemplation as a gradual conformity not only to the will of Christ, but to His nature as well. Maximus’s Christology so closely concerns contemplation because human nature is perfected by meditation upon the image and nature of Christ. He showed the unity of created nature; He embodied an internally coherent Word, uniting what is divisive in the soul with that which is distant from the soul: unreason is redeemed through the divine nature.²⁷⁶ Reason, the expression of the λόγος and sustenance of creation, is in part the code for the internal state of human nature, the relationship between soul and body. In Christ, the distant nature of divinity is received and united with the fleshly nature of the one in prayer; Christ is the unity of natures unto the man who prays. Not only is the unity of human nature figured in Christ’s hypostasis, Christ’s nature is conferred upon the one in contemplative prayer in a redemptive completion of that which was broken.

The Spirit enacts and enables the use of reason as a function of the mind toward contemplation and participation in Christ’s nature. “In it [reason] the holiness of the divine image has been naturally included to persuade the soul to transform itself by its free will to the likeness of God and to belong to the great kingdom which subsists substantially with God, the Father of all. It becomes a radiant abode of the Holy Spirit and receives, if one can say it, the full power of knowing the divine nature insofar as this

²⁷⁵ Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 104.

²⁷⁶ See Maximus, “Our Father,” I, 103.

is possible.”²⁷⁷ The willful animation of reason toward its proper use is thus an essential component to contemplative prayer and even salvation. “Man is always in movement toward God by his mind,”²⁷⁸ and thus his reason, because the *voũç* is the natural capacity which God has given him to do so.

Furthermore, Maximus comments that to those in Christ, there are no distinctions of nature: “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision.”²⁷⁹ Here, Maximus allegorically relates Paul’s notion of “circumcision” to repudiating the creation and accusing the Creator as a mastermind of an evil reality. The later corresponds to a kind of pantheism, where the creation and the passions are elevated, thereby set in opposition to the jealous love of the Creator. Maximus argues for an identity of worshiping Christ, who is “All in all.”²⁸⁰ Thus, in prayer, man’s nature becomes like His in that He surpassed nature *and* law (“neither circumcision nor uncircumcision”), the configuration of a kingdom that has no end or beginning. Participation in the nature of Christ comes through a direct reception of His grace. Maximus writes that, “He gives a sharing in the divine life by making himself food for those whom he knows and who have received from him the same sensibility and intelligence.”²⁸¹ Relying on imagery from both the Lord’s Prayer and the Psalms, Maximus conveys that he who tastes the Lord in worship is he who

²⁷⁷ Maximus, “Our Father,” IV, 110.

²⁷⁸ Maximus, “Our Father,” IV, 112.

²⁷⁹ Maximus, “Our Father,” IV, 108; Maximus quoting from Gal. 5:6.

²⁸⁰ I Cor. 15:28.

²⁸¹ Maximus, “Our Father,” II, 103.

receives the true knowledge that the “Lord is good.” More significantly, He deifies those who “taste” since “he is clearly called bread of life.”²⁸²

In light of this notion, Prayer occurs on the basis of the transformation and restoration of man’s nature to the image of Christ. In Gregory, we saw that the basis of contemplation was largely God’s creation of man in His own εἰκόν. To what extent is this present in Maximus’s thought? While Maximus holds that it is God’s grace and His action in Christ that liberates man to fellowship with God, he adds, “A nature endowed with reason and understanding participates in the holy God by its very being, by its aptitude for well-being [...] and by the free gift of eternal being. In this way it knows God; and things created by him [...] This wisdom exists in the mind as simple and without substance of its own.”²⁸³ God, through the fact of creation, conveys to man’s understanding a fourfold sense of revelation: being (that is, man’s own being), God’s eternal being, goodness, and wisdom. These things are inherent in creation and serve to preserve His creatures. To be made “in the image and likeness of God” means that we find His being in ours, and in each component of creation, a facet of God himself that points the creature in contemplation. Maximus calls these the λόγοι²⁸⁴ of creation. Creation, “substance of beings,” is not coeternal with God.²⁸⁵ Man received his individual qualities upon creation; he did not possess them in coexistence with the eternal God. This is reminiscent of Gregory’s doctrine of διάστημα; Maximus writes, “true being [is] by

²⁸² Maximus, “Our Father,” II, 104. I shall discuss this at greater length in terms of ἐπιούσιον ἄρτον from the Lord’s Prayer, later in the present chapter.

²⁸³ Maximus, “Four Hundred Chapters On Love,” in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans George C. Berthold (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), III.XXIV, 64.

²⁸⁴ I shall discuss this term at greater depth later in the present chapter.

²⁸⁵ This is certainly in contrast to Origen, who maintained the pre-existence of souls.

participation.”²⁸⁶ The soul is enabled to choose its movement based on the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ.

Following Christ’s Resurrection, His believers are granted the Spirit by which He, Christ, offers prayers. Maximus writes, “If, according to the apostle, ‘Christ dwells in our hearts by faith,’ and ‘all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in him,’ then all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in our hearts. They are revealed to the heart in proportion to each one’s purification by the commandments.”²⁸⁷ The grace of Christ dwelling within the believer is the soul’s access to Divine knowledge and participation. In this sense, pray is “from”²⁸⁸ the soul because it is the repository upon which Christ’s own wisdom, character, beatitude, and divinity is laid. Thus we find a beautiful expression of Maximus’s intimate thought toward God at the opening lines of *Commentary on the Our Father*: “It is yourself that I received, you who come to me through your praiseworthy letters.”²⁸⁹ And, even more pertinent to our present purposes, “Through the working out of the commandments the mind puts off the passions.”²⁹⁰

This concept opens up to Maximus’s emphasis on the place of Christ’s commands in the beginning stages of contemplation. Because Christ lives within the one who calls upon the “Father,” He becomes the Teacher who unfolds the mystery of the Trinity, the dispensation of the Incarnation, the incorporeal world and the visible world, the Resurrection, and the Judgment. This wisdom and knowledge is the lofty goal of the

²⁸⁶ Maximus, “On Love,” III.XXIX, 65.

²⁸⁷ Maximus, “On Love,” IV.LXX, 83; Maximus quoting from Eph. 3:8 and Col. 2:3

²⁸⁸ Maximus, “On Love,” IV.LXXXVI, 85.

²⁸⁹ Maximus “Our Father,” Prologue, 101.

²⁹⁰ Maximus, “On Love,” I.XCII, 45.

contemplative life, but it is a kind of seeing that begins with hearing the commandments of God, fully expressed, again, in Christ. Maximus writes, “By means of the commandments the Lord renders detached those who carry them out; by means of the divine doctrines he bestows on them the enlightenment of knowledge.”²⁹¹ Here we see reciprocity between detachment, the goal of the first stage of contemplation, and the commandments: the one who abides by the commandments progresses in detachment from the passions. Further, he adds that, “The whole purpose of the Savior’s commandments is to free the mind from incontinence and hate and bring it to the love of him and of one’s neighbor.”²⁹² This shall notion shall be developed in the next section of the present chapter, concerning the act of contemplative prayer itself. Here, however, it is to emphasize that the one in prayer dwells upon the commandments of Christ, and that the nature of such commands direct him toward this kind of charity.

This leads us to the final theological proposition that undergirds Maximus’s conception of contemplative prayer: the virtue of humility.²⁹³ The reception of Christ’s commandments creates a humble disposition in the one praying, and chiefly, this happens through the “Humbling of passions.”²⁹⁴ As we saw previously, hearing the commandments is a capacity enabled through receiving Christ Himself. Furthermore, as demonstrated previously in regard to the way in which the soul takes on the nature of Christ, humility first touches the capacity of the mind. Humility frees the mind from

²⁹¹ Maximus, “On Love,” I.LXXVI, 43.

²⁹² Maximus, “On Love,” IV.XLVI, 81.

²⁹³ Humility is certainly not only a foundational piece to prayer, but also something cultivated in the act and even a large component of the goal of prayer. These aspects will be addressed throughout the remainder of the paper.

²⁹⁴ Maximus, “Our Father,” II, 103.

conceit and vainglory, and, as Maximus writes, “Renders the mind modest and constantly prepares it to advance in knowledge.”²⁹⁵

More precisely, humility is a disposition of mind that is unseen; in other words, it addresses the motives of the heart. One’s motives guide the one in prayer through both stages of *πραξις* [practical prayer, *vita practica*] and *θεωρία* [contemplative prayer, *vita contemplativa*]²⁹⁶ in that one cannot move past the practical to true contemplation (“pure prayer,” *θεολογία*) if his motive is false. Inward motive ought to be love of God, for “God searches the intention of everything that we do, whether we do it for him or for any other motive.”²⁹⁷ The one in prayer must therefore start in the posture of Christ. For Maximus, the chief fruit of humility is to throw off self-love, the “mother of the passions.”²⁹⁸ It is the enemy of pure contemplation, the greatest weight that ties the one in prayer down to the passions and vices. Furthermore, “Humility is continual prayer with tears and suffering. For this constant calling on God for help does not allow us to trust foolishly in our own strength and wisdom nor to be arrogant toward others.”²⁹⁹

Primarily, Maximus interprets humility as the coming of God’s kingdom because humility is the example set forth by Christ’s life and actions, the culmination of which is the cross.³⁰⁰ Christ “is truly by nature and essence the great King.”³⁰¹ Humility is

²⁹⁵ Maximus, “On Love,” IV.LX, 82.

²⁹⁶ A discussion of these two critical terms shall be the bulk of the second section of this chapter.

²⁹⁷ Maximus, “On Love,” II.XXXVI, 52.

²⁹⁸ Maximus, “On Love,” II.VIII, 47.

²⁹⁹ Maximus, “On Love,” III.LXXXVII, 73.

³⁰⁰ Mary is mentioned at the end of “The Trial,” and her role is significant. After depicting the fruits of the “radiant resurrection,” (peace, joy, ascension to heaven, accession at the Father’s throne, a blessed place and name) he says, “May we obtain all these things through the prayers and intercessions of the all-holy supremely glorious Mary.” (Anastasius, “Trial,” XV, 28)

therefore a prerequisite to prayer: one cannot receive the kingdom without the disposition of Christ, for His presence *is* the kingdom. Humility, the life of Christ, is typified in the Lord's Prayer. By praying, "Father," we acknowledge his consubstantial and Trinitarian natures by which He has adopted us. Prayer disposes one's own life to take after the nature of God. Prayer is immediately reflected upon the way one lives; thoughts and acts make His name Holy and renowned on earth, speaking forth the name of God, just as the Son did.³⁰² Again, this is enacted in mortifying the concupiscent desires, making the passions immobile so as to allow the soul to ascend to θεωρία and the final stage of contemplation. As with Gregory, humility is key throughout the whole process of contemplation: "On whom shall I rest if not on the one who is meek, on the one who is humble and who fears my words?"³⁰³ Finally, as these notions culminate upon the cross of Christ, they are depicted in the *kenotic* hymn of Philippians 2:6-11. Maximus equates the act of emptying oneself the passions with Christ's "ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν [He emptied Himself]." As we have seen in both Gregory and Origen, this notion, in many aspects, defines the humanity of Christ and is the gift of His nature grasped and assimilated through contemplative prayer.

Our understanding of the basis of contemplative prayer flows into its practice. For Maximus, a very specific set of theological principles undergirds what it means to "pray continually," and, as expressed before, this practice is, in Maximus's

³⁰¹ Maximus, "Our Father," IV, 108.

³⁰² John verse, Jesus saying He reveals the name of the Father

³⁰³ Is. 66:2 (LXX). Indeed, as with Gregory, this notion is connected to the first beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Maximus reads this as saying that the humble receive the Holy Spirit by which men ascend in contemplation.

understanding, imbedded in the context of the monastic life.³⁰⁴ The monastic life aims to orient the soul's direction of thought toward Divine love, which the soul participates in through Christ. What we must elucidate at the outset of any explanation regarding the theology behind the very act of prayer is Maximus's distinction between *πρᾶξις* [active practice] and *θεωρία* [spiritual contemplation].³⁰⁵ These terms can be properly understood in light of *ἀπάθεια*, the goal towards which these two phases of prayer (and thus the life of the monk) tends.³⁰⁶ He writes, "The one who truly loves God also prays completely undistracted, and the one who prays completely undistracted also truly loves God. But the one who has his mind fixed on any earthly thing does not pray undistracted; therefore the one who has his mind tied to any earthly thing does not love God."³⁰⁷ Occupation with the passions separates the mind from God. The goal of prayer is to "think beyond not only things of sense but even this transient life of ours."³⁰⁸ Prayer flows from the simplicity of the commandments of God that orient the thoughts of men toward clarity in

³⁰⁴ For a discussion on this matter, see Andrew Louth, introduction to "Maximus the Confessor," in *The Early Church Fathers*, ed. Carol Harrison (New York: Routledge Press, 1996), 15-28.

³⁰⁵ I define these terms respectively "active practice," and "spiritual contemplation." Berthold notes that Maximus uses "*πρακτική*" and "*θεωρία*" to denote what Thunberg refers to as the "double concept of pure prayer:" the *vita practica* and the *vita contemplativa*. These two notions are prerequisite to *θεολογία*. See Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 364-368.

³⁰⁶ Thunberg notes that for the monk, there are three stages of contemplation. These are covered in the present chapter: *πρᾶξις*, *θεωρία*, and *θεολογία*. The "man of the world," as Thunberg puts it, can progress from *πρᾶξις* to *θεωρία*, or "pure contemplation," but cannot ascend to *θεολογία* because he has not renounced the world entirely. As Thunberg notes, Maximus departs from Evagrius on this point. Maximus argues that the one seeking *θεολογία*, the highest form of contemplation, ought to be a monk of the outer man: "The one who renounces the passionate representations of these things makes a monk of the inner man, that is, of the mind. Anyone can easily make a monk of the outer man [...] but it is no small struggle to make a monk of the inner man." Who in this life is deemed worthy of "pure and immaterial prayer?" (Maximus, "On Love," IV.L-LI, 80-81.)

³⁰⁷ Maximus, "On Love," II.I, 46.

³⁰⁸ Maximus, "On Love," II.III, 46.

obedience and love. Purity is not only abstinence from gratifying concupiscent desires; it is simplicity of desire, namely, God.³⁰⁹

However, if we look closer, we shall see a further distinction between the two key terms and their relation to detachment from the passions. The process of achieving *ἀπάθεια* is aptly illustrated as a kind of progression in love of God and thus detachment from the passions. Maximus's understanding of *πρᾶξις* and *θεωρία* concerns two separate though intimately related stages on the journey toward *θεολογία*, the third and final stage of contemplation.³¹⁰ More specifically, the consummation of *πρᾶξις* is *ἀπάθεια*, undistracted detachment from the passions. He explains, "The former [*πρᾶξις*] frees the mind only from incontinence and hatred while the latter [*θεωρία*] rid it also of forgetfulness and ignorance, and in this way it will be able to pray as it ought."³¹¹ But what Maximus calls "pure prayer" is not a result of a progression from *πρᾶξις* into *θεωρία*; it is a result of progression from *ἀπάθεια* to *θεολογία*. He writes that *ἀπάθεια*, achieved *through* *πρᾶξις* and *θεωρία*, "arises in the soul from the fear of God and an upright hope," while *θεολογία* is, "from divine desire and total purification."³¹² In *πρᾶξις*, the mind draws away from worldly considerations. When it reaches *ἀπάθεια*, the outcome of *θεωρία*, the mind looses itself from the desires that pertain to worldly concerns. It learns to renounce all things, including itself. For this reason, Maximus considers the monastic life the ideal way to participate in "pure prayer." Furthermore, in *θεωρία*, the mind has reached *ἀπάθεια* but is tempted to return to love of the self and

³⁰⁹ Maximus, "On Love," II.IV, 46-47.

³¹⁰ I shall discuss this term at length in the last section of the present chapter.

³¹¹ Maximus, "On Love," II.V, 47.

³¹² Maximus, "On Love," II.VI, 47.

distraction from the passions. The distinction is that in θεωρία, a kind of reinterpretation of the λόγοι of God's creation occurs. God's λόγος is elucidated to the vision of the one in prayer, thereby thrusting him into the last stage of contemplation: θεολογία. There, the soul, in totality, loses self-consciousness and consideration of any other thing in the light of the empyreal Love. While these notions are perhaps clearly defined, in order to understand Maximus more fully, a sharper understanding of the three stages is in order. First, I shall focus on πρᾶξις.

Maximus goes on to describe the tension inherent in contemplation: "When the mind begins to make progress in love of God, the demon of blasphemy begins to tempt him and suggest to him such thoughts as no man but only the devil their father could invent."³¹³ When the mind perfects prayer pertaining to πρᾶξις, the movement into θεωρία is wrought with resistance from the enemy of God and His children. But the temptation toward blasphemy in thought is present on every step of the journey of contemplation. Maximus emphasizes that thought, "νοῦς," is the *locus* in which contemplation occurs.³¹⁴ In this light, πρᾶξις takes on a whole new meaning. The notion goes back to what was previously expounded: motive of the heart. Maximus demonstrates that the idea of practical prayer not only produces an abstinence from the passions, but it creates a loving disposition toward one's brother. Through πρᾶξις, the one in prayer prevails over his thoughts, takes control of his passions, and comes to be at

³¹³ Maximus, "On Love," II.XIV, 48.

³¹⁴ On this point, as many others, Thunberg demonstrates that Maximus is thoroughly indebted to Evagrius Ponticus. See Thunberg *Microcosm*, 362-363. He writes, "we may thus conclude that pure prayer for Evagrius is closely connected with all the functions of the mind as man's intellectual faculty, not least with its purification from worldly things, and as such is hardly higher than 'natural contemplation.'" (363) Thunberg rightly notes that purification for Maximus, as well as for Evagrius, is purification "from" the passions. (p. 362)

peace with his brother through forgiveness and purity of thought. When the mind inclines toward God, it keeps the body as a servant and allows it nothing more than what is necessary for life. In this way, the commandments of Christ direct the soul in love, which manifests itself in the activity of prayer “for the one who curses you.”³¹⁵ But, despite all this, it is an essential distinction to make that for Maximus, the way of *πρᾶξις* is not intimately connected with pure prayer, what he calls “καθαρὰ προσευχή,”³¹⁶ but is rather the prerequisite to *θεωρία*.

Maximus’s notion of *πρᾶξις* prayer can be further understood in light of the way in which the mind apprehends objects. He asserts that, “The whole war of the monk against the demons is to separate the passions from the representations.”³¹⁷ For Maximus, “Things exist outside the mind while thoughts about them are put together inside.”³¹⁸ Misrepresentation is a foe to contemplation because it is a distraction from reality by which the mind is led astray from true thoughts about God. “Do not misuse thoughts,”³¹⁹ warns Maximus. We have seen before that he points toward the Incarnation and Resurrection as the gateway for the redemption of human nature. Here, he emphasizes again that the Spirit of Christ, through the words of the commandments, directs men to a use of mind in the context of *πρᾶξις* that leads toward *καθαρὰ προσευχή* [pure prayer]. A significant component is his understanding of the senses, which is largely Gregorian: “neither is the mind evil, nor is natural knowledge, nor the things, nor the senses, for

³¹⁵ Cf. Maximus, “On Love,” III.XIII, 63; Matt. 5:43-48.

³¹⁶ Thunberg emphasizes this point on p. 363.

³¹⁷ Maximus, “On Love,” III.XLI, 66.

³¹⁸ Maximus, “On Love,” II.LXXIII, 57.

³¹⁹ Maximus, “On Love,” II.LXXVIII, 58.

these are all works of God.”³²⁰ While he does not go to the extent of Gregory with their function in prayer, he does affirm the goodness of the mind and the senses as created things. In a similar vein, evil is the “passion of natural representation.”³²¹ As the soul grows toward participating in θεωρία, thoughts regarding the natural passions can pull one from contemplation of God. Again, Maximus is arguing for a strict conception of “pure” prayer as “undistracted” gaze upon the Divine Light, revealed only in contemplation. Therefore, πρᾶξις leads toward καθαρὰ προσευχή, but is not attained until θεωρία.

What Maximus calls “spiritual contemplation,” the stage of θεωρία, is an unreserved and proper use of the faculties of the soul. Because misuse is “the concupiscible, the irascible,” proper use is “knowledge and prudence.”³²² Here, we find a lucid distinction between πρᾶξις and θεωρία: the cultivation of knowledge corresponds to πρᾶξις, and prudence to that of θεωρία. Lars Thunberg writes that “When it [*vita practica*] is connected with lower contemplation [...] it is presented as the true virtue of the mind as intellectual faculty, since it separates it even from the thoughts of things.”³²³ Here, πρᾶξις is put in the context of an activity of the mind, as we saw previously. Evil comes about through misuse, which stems from a mind that is bound to temporal and fleshly nature. Again, Maximus affirms the natural faculties of human nature: they are fulfilled and perfected through Christ and lead one to “pure prayer.” The “blameworthy”

³²⁰ Maximus, “On Love,” II.XV, 48.

³²¹ Maximus, “On Love,” II.XV, 48.

³²² Maximus, “On Love,” III.III, 61.

³²³ Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 364.

passions are movements of the soul “contrary to nature.”³²⁴ But one cannot reach the form of prayer associated with θεωρία until the soul is animated with “desirous love (ἔρως),”³²⁵ a movement of the will that involves the νοῦς but is not a mere “intellectual faculty.”

Love is the fruit of prayer that stems from a mind that has accomplished an undistracted disposition: “*undistracted prayer* on the basis of true fear and hope and *in the presence of God*, which is free from the thoughts (νοήματα) of the world.”³²⁶ The *vita practica*, πρᾶξις, is a kind of *negative* knowledge; its meaning lies in terms of an undistracted conception of the love of God. It is knowledge from without; that is, it is the detachment of the mind from things and passions. Indeed, the perfection of πρᾶξις prayer is ἀπάθεια, and this notion leads one into θεωρία. But ἀπάθεια is not merely a detachment from the passions; it is an achievement of equilibrium³²⁷ between spirit and flesh, soul and body. Indeed, it is a freedom of being—both will and intellect—born from love. Maximus gives this notion a positive contour when he defines love by tying together John 14:15, “The one who loves me will keep my commandments,” and John 15:12, “This is my commandment, that you love one another.” Ultimately, the one who renounces worldly matters by love is the one who shares in divine love and knowledge. “As the memory of fire does not warm the body, so faith without love does not bring

³²⁴ Maximus, “On Love,” I.XXXV, 38.

³²⁵ Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 364; Thunberg relying on “On Love,” II.VI

³²⁶ Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 364.

³²⁷ We see continuity here with Athanasius’s *Life of Antony*. Pelikan notes that Antony saw Christ as the ideal, having “ἀπάθεια—perfect self-control, freedom from passion—the ideal [...] striving for perfection. Christ, who was free [...] –ἀπαθῆς Χριστός—is his model.” (Pelikan, *Christian Doctrine* (I), 232; cf. Robert T. Meyer, ed. St. Athanasius. *The Life of Saint Antony*. Ancient Christian Writers, no. 10 (Westminster, Md., 1950), 126.

about the illumination of knowledge in the soul. As the light of the sun attracts the healthy eye, so does the knowledge of God draw the pure mind to itself naturally through love.”³²⁸

Love leads one from *πρᾶξις* into *θεωρία*. As indicated above, the virtue that corresponds to *θεωρία* is prudence. It is significant to note that “prudence,” for Maximus, does not here necessarily refer to a moral virtue. Rather, it indicates an elevated insight that is derived only from participation in Divine Love. Primarily, for Maximus, this is fulfilled in the Lord’s Prayer. All who call upon “Father,” are initiated into the mystery of the knowledge of created things and their first Cause. Prayer enables one’s vision to penetrate into reality, and direct adoration and veneration of the Trinity. Furthermore, for Maximus, “Kingdom” is analogous to the coming and subsisting presence of the Holy Spirit.³²⁹ *Θεωρία*, in a sense, enables one to “see” Christ, participate in the Kingdom, and understand creation as He does. Furthermore, the Divine is desirable, loveable, by nature; it is divine knowledge activated by love that holds a central place in Maximus’s thought as he reads the Church Fathers.³³⁰

If we view Maximus’s conception of love in light of his insistence on pure prayer as detachment from the passions, the broader understanding of *θεωρία* becomes clear. “Do not soil your mind by holding on to thoughts of concupiscence and anger, lest by falling from pure prayer you fall in with the spirit of discouragement. The mind falls

³²⁸ Maximus, “On Love,” I.XXXI-II, 38.

³²⁹ Maximus formulates this doctrine from a rare textual variant of Luke 11:2, quoted by Gregory of Nyssa in

Lord’s Prayer III, 44. Cf. Maximus, “Our Father,” IV, 107.

³³⁰ Maximus, “On Love,” I.XXIXV-LV, 40-43.

from familiarity with God whenever it consorts with wicked and foul thoughts.”³³¹ From these things, we see that the mind fixed on anger and concupiscence is the distortion of pure prayer. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of familiarity with God, the law written upon the heart of the one in contemplation. Indeed, for Maximus, a central idea is that, “love is the fullness of the law.”³³² All thought, attitude, habit, and treatment toward one’s brother ought to conform to this law. Concerning love, Maximus offers greater clarity regarding the passions and their relation to the body and the soul: “Some of the passions are of the body, some of the soul. Those of the body take their origin in the body; those of the soul from exterior things. Love and self-control cut away both of them, the former those of the soul, the latter those of the body.”³³³ Thus, love entails a kind of disciplining and reorienting of the soul, and *θεωρία* serves as the stage at which this culminates for the one in prayer. As in Origen and Gregory, the soul has senses by which it is moved. This process is love; love guides us from *vita practica* into *vita contemplata* (as Thunberg puts it), from detached contemplation to “pure prayer.” Love is the remedy for the irascible part of the soul, a component more difficult to heal than the “concupiscible [desire of carnal things].” On the contrary, sloth is the most pervasive of the vices and an antithesis to love; it grips all components of the soul (irascible, concupiscible, rational). The remedy for sloth is the command of the Lord: “In your patience possess your souls.”³³⁴

³³¹ Maximus, “On Love,” I.L, 40.

³³² Rom. 13:10; See Maximus, “On Love,” I.LVI, 41.

³³³ Maximus, “On Love,” I.LXIV, 42. Berthold notes that Aristotle had made this distinction, and Evagrius Ponticus adapted a similar construction.

³³⁴ Luke 21:19; See Maximus, “On Love,” I.LXVII, 42.

This is the pinnacle of Maximus’s conception of “prudence” as it relates to θεωρία. “When the mind is completely freed from the passions, it journeys straight ahead to the contemplation of created things and makes its way to the knowledge of the Holy Trinity. When the mind is pure from the passions and takes on ideas of things, it is moved to contemplation above that of *πρᾶξις*, namely θεωρία. But when it has become impure by carelessness, it imagines mere ideas of other things, so that receiving human ideas it turns back to shameful and evil thoughts. When in time of prayer no ideas of the world ever disturb the mind, then know that you are not outside the limits of detachment.”³³⁵ Prudence is the knowledge of things past the level of detachment. It is knowledge of the invisible things; but more, it is knowledge of things from the wisdom of God. Maximus writes that, “Just as the beauty of visible things attracts the eye of sense, so also the knowledge of invisible things attracts the pure mind to itself.”³³⁶ The invisible characteristic that the one in θεωρία understands is, for Maximus, knowledge of the nature of things. As *πρᾶξις* is the detachment from natural things, θεωρία is the wise-hearted *return* to them. Thunberg calls this “natural contemplation [θεωρία φυσική],”³³⁷ as its objects are the λόγοι of creation, but seen through a higher plane. This is the significant distinction between *πρᾶξις* and θεωρία.

³³⁵ Maximus, “On Love,” I.LXXXVI-XXXIX, 45.

³³⁶ Maximus, “On Love,” I.XC, 45.

³³⁷ Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 343. Thunberg writes, “In later Platonism this understanding was converted into a slightly less intellectual concept, with a greater stress on purification as a necessary preparation, and on its own particular character as supreme ‘vision.’ [...] [But here it] only concerns the lower part of contemplation, that is to that kind of contemplation which is related to the created world, contemplated in its λόγοι.” (343)

Concerning θεωρία φυσική, Maximus writes that, “The active life is ‘a place of pasture’; knowledge of created things is ‘water of refreshment.’”³³⁸ Why is knowledge of created things the water of refreshment? Because, says Maximus, we begin to see as God sees, an integral step toward divinization. Further, “a pure mind sees things rightly.”³³⁹ Included in this is knowledge of the Trinity and its creation, termed “λόγοι.” In gazing upon the true nature of God’s creation, the one in θεωρία prayer sees all equally and is equally disposed toward all. Maximus recognizes that there is “neither Greek nor Jew [...] but Christ is everything and in everything.”³⁴⁰ The λόγοι point to the λόγος; the creation reveals the Creator; the one in θεωρία participates in the vision and love of God Himself, and, more specifically, God’s love for creation.

It is significant to reiterate that in Maximus’s doctrine, the two differing stages of prayer that we have examined thus far correspond with moral dimensions. This stems from the foundational component of contemplative prayer in the commandments. The Lord’s Prayer provides a kind of model by which the one in prayer is charged with moral implications in accordance with the commandments: “For we should ask in the prayer only what should be sought after according to the commandment.”³⁴¹ The commandments are oriented toward love and justice; therefore, prayer, because of the centrality of the commandments in the life of contemplation, produces a posture of obedience to Love. In the same vein, since bread is the only thing asked for in the Lord’s Prayer, we should not ask for any physical possession beyond what is prescribed therein.

³³⁸ Maximus, “On Love,” II.XCV, 61.

³³⁹ Maximus, “On Love,” II.XCVII, 61.

³⁴⁰ Maximus, “On Love,” II.XXX, 51.

³⁴¹ Maximus, “Our Father,” IV, 114.

The moral dimension of contemplative prayer is expressed, in other words, in what one receives from God. Maximus writes, “Thus in saying the prayer he will be heard and will receive from God a double instead of a single grace, the forgiveness of past offenses as well as the protection and ransom from future sins. God will not let him enter into temptation, nor allow the Evil One to enslave him.”³⁴² He who prays undergoes a significant spiritual formation by which his natural faculties are transformed into their proper use: love of God and neighbor. For Maximus, the way we use rationality or irrationality determines whether we become either virtuous or wicked. This illustrates the level of discernment that Maximus calls “prudence,” achieved in θεωρία, associated with the progress of formation from πρᾶξις prayer.³⁴³ In other words, πρᾶξις prayer has immediate moral implications that are perfected in θεωρία. Seen particularly from the perspective of the monastic life, this progression is primarily realized in the context of relation to one’s brother. Maximus states that, “By prayer you separate the hurt from the memory of the evil which he [your brother] did you and in becoming loving and kind you completely obliterate passion from the soul.”³⁴⁴ Furthermore, “The soul is moved reasonably when its concupiscible element is qualified by self-mastery [πρᾶξις], its irascible element cleaves to love and turns away from hate, and the rational element lives with God through prayer and spiritual contemplation.”³⁴⁵ He who is not free from hatred

³⁴² Maximus, “Our Father,” IV, 117.

³⁴³ Cf. Maximus, “On Love,” I.XCII, 45.

³⁴⁴ Maximus, “On Love,” III.XC, 73-74.

³⁴⁵ Maximus, “On Love,” IV.XV, 77.

does not “perfectly forgive those who offend him and does not present to God a heart purified of rancor and shining with the light of reconciliation with one’s neighbor.”³⁴⁶

Only “When the mind has become stripped of passions and enlightened in the contemplation of beings, then it can be in God and pray as it ought.”³⁴⁷ Furthermore, he writes, “There is only a deiform principle created by divine knowledge and one single movement of free will which chooses only virtue.”³⁴⁸ Here, we reach the pinnacle of Maximus’s thought on the matter. We see that the contemplative achieves the “deiform principle” from a unified and unabated—though self-abased in humility—will that decisively acts upon virtue, love of neighbor and God. A key principle for Maximus is expressed in David’s words, “the counsel of God remains forever, the thoughts of his heart from generation to generation.”³⁴⁹ The counsel is the “mysterious self-abasement”³⁵⁰ of the Son, which, received and embodied through the integrative movement from *πραΰσις* to *θεωρία*, results in the “deification of our nature.”³⁵¹ In this way, human deification is directly related to the Incarnation and received in

³⁴⁶ Maximus, “Our Father,” IV, 116.

³⁴⁷ Maximus, “On Love,” II.C, 61.

³⁴⁸ Maximus, “Our Father,” IV, 110. For Maximus, this is couched in the balance between two extremes. He writes, “Thus there is no dissension by a plurality of natures, the Greek error, nor an affirmation of the oneness of hypostasis, the Jewish error, because being deprived of the Word and the Spirit or qualified by the Word and the Spirit, God is not honored as Mind, Word, and Spirit [...] The nature and power of the divinity is one, and therefore that there is one God contemplated in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

³⁴⁹ Ps. 33:11; See Maximus, “Our Father,” Prologue, 102.

³⁵⁰ Here, the term Maximus for “self abasement” is *κένωσις*, drawn from Phil. 2:7: “ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβὼν, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος καὶ σχήματι εὐρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος [But, taking the form of a slave, He emptied Himself becoming in the likeness of men, and he was found for appearance just as a man.] Berthold notes that the concept of *κένωσις* [self-emptying] is term widely referred to in the corpus of patristic literature. Its strongest echoes can be find in Athanasius’s famous axiom, “He became man that we might become God.” For continuities with Gregory, see von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 176, and Gregory, *C. Eunom.* 5, II, 697 C.

³⁵¹ Maximus, “Our Father,” Prologue, 102.

contemplative prayer. The manifestation of the “counsel of God,” the “thoughts of his heart,” the intention of God’s plan from “generation to generation” is, for Maximus, the deification of “our nature.”³⁵² It occurs “in our life,” and not only in the culmination of the Resurrection, as we saw in Gregory. As for Origen and Gregory, the Lord’s Prayer is the model by which the deification of our nature is actualized insofar as it can be on this earth. For Maximus, the Lord’s Prayer contains great “mysteries” that enacts a participation in the life of Jesus, namely in his “self-abasement,”³⁵³ a reality made present by His Spirit. Christ is the mediator between God and men in the sense that he made manifest the Father whom “they [men] did not know,”³⁵⁴ and he leads men back to Himself. But the soul does not return to God through the integration of *πρᾶξις* and *θεωρία* alone.

Θεωρία must lead to “*θεολογία*.”³⁵⁵ Thus, a cognizance—beyond what we have encountered in the beginning stages of contemplation—of God follows *Θεωρία*. He writes that “theology,” is the first of the seven pillars of contemplation that leads toward the participation in eternal life and the restoration of human nature inclining toward a tranquil state.³⁵⁶ Simply put, *θεολογία* is knowledge of God, a knowledge that is

³⁵² Maximus, “Our Father,” I, 102.

³⁵³ Maximus, “Our Father,” I, 102. It is essential, for Maximus, to maintain the Son’s self-abasement amidst without compromising His divinity.

³⁵⁴ Maximus, “Our Father,” I, 102. For further discussion on the nature of Christ’s mediation, see Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 331-429.

³⁵⁵ This is an Evagrian term. Thunberg develops its evolution and use, (second ed.) *op.cit.*, 332-335. There, he points out that Origen’s work provided the basis upon which Evagrius distinguished between the two stages already expounded on in this chapter (*πρᾶξις* and *θεωρία*). As demonstrated in ch. II of this thesis, Gregory of Nyssa provided the distinction in “separation,” the second stage of contemplation that “takes place ‘through the phenomena,’ while the third and final union is the Resurrection which is ‘outside of the phenomena.’” (Thunberg *op.cit.*, 334, citing Daniélou, *Platonisme* p. 19f.)

³⁵⁶ Maximus, “Our Father,” I, 102-3.

participatory by virtue of God's nature. As explained previously, one arrives at θεολογία by persisting through the way of practical prayer, the "ethical philosophy"³⁵⁷ and natural prayer, by which man detaches from the passions, receives the wisdom and love of God in light of His λόγοι, and is finally worthy of participating in θεολογία. Before we turn to understand the extent of man's knowledge of God, we must further examine the fact that here, in θεολογία, man reaches the highest sense of detachment from the passions.

Since prayer is the means by which the mind "attains" God and "abides with him,"³⁵⁸ it is also the means by which man enters into the fullest love of God. "Scripture calls material things the world, and worldly people are those who let their mind dwell on them. Against these is the very sharp reproof: 'Do not love the world nor the things in the world; the concupiscence of the flesh and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life are not from God but from the world.'"³⁵⁹ Thus, in the life of a monk, θεολογία is apt for embodiment because the vow of the monk is a renouncement of the world, whereby man is enabled to love God unhindered and oriented toward a right use of knowledge (gained in Θεωρία and perfected in Θεολογία).³⁶⁰ Maximus writes that, "It is said that the supreme state of prayer is when the mind passes outside the flesh and the world and while praying is completely without matter and form. The one who preserves this state without compromise really 'prays without ceasing.'"³⁶¹ Θεολογία is a continual

³⁵⁷ Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 335

³⁵⁸ Maximus, "On Love," II.LII, 54.

³⁵⁹ Maximus, "On Love," II.LIII, 54; Maximus quoting from I John 2:15-16.

³⁶⁰ Maximus, "On Love," II.LIV, 54.

³⁶¹ Maximus, "On Love," II.LXI, 55; Maximus quoting from I Thes. 5:17. Maximus writes concerning three stages of the monk: to rid one's life of sin, to rid one's thoughts of passions in the soul, and to "look with a detached mind on the forms of women or of those who have offended us." (Maximus, "On Love," II.LXXXVI, 59)The poor man is one who, living in the world as it were, has severed himself

state of abiding in God through thought that is “separated from the thoughts of the world.”³⁶² Here, a crucial distinction ought to be made concerning the difference between contemplation of things, done solely in θεωρία. Maximus writes, “Created things are indeed outside the mind, but it receives their contemplation inside it. This is not so with the eternal, infinite, and immense God, who freely bestows being, well-being and eternal being on his creatures.”³⁶³ In this way, Maximus displays the keen difference between ἀπάθεια, the state that the contemplative abides in at the perfection of θεωρία, and θεολογία: in the former (ἀπάθεια), the mind is detached from the λόγοι but reenters contemplation of them through Divine prudence and in so doing, becomes like Christ; in the latter (θεολογία), the mind receives the Divine Being and thereby loses its any notion of ‘form’ or likeness. Maximus explains, “When the mind receives the representations of things, it of course patterns itself after each representation. In contemplating them spiritually it is variously conformed to each object contemplated. But when it comes to be in God, it becomes wholly without form and pattern.”³⁶⁴ Here, the soul itself is in a way dissolved in God. Since God is light, the soul takes on a similar pattern, scattered in the Eternal One. Again, at the height of his thought on this issue, Maximus turns the reader back to understand this concept in terms of love. The passion of holy love “binds the mind to spiritual realities and persuades it to prefer the immaterial to the material and intelligible and divine things to those of sense.”³⁶⁵

from attachment to the world and “entrusted himself to the care of God and of religious men.” (Maximus, “On Love,” II.LXXXVIII, 59)

³⁶² Maximus, “On Love,” II.LXI, 56.

³⁶³ Maximus, “On Love,” III.XXIII, 64.

³⁶⁴ Maximus, “On Love,” III.CCVII, 74-75.

³⁶⁵ Maximus, “On Love,” III.LXVII, 70.

Finally, the soul in θεολογία has reached a state in which its sole contemplation is God. We have seen that πρᾶξις and θεωρία lead us to detachment from the passions through contemplation of the λόγοι of creation. In θεολογία, the soul stretches past those things to gaze purely upon He to whom all these things (particularly the λόγοι) point. The final stage of contemplation immediately invokes humility because when the mind experiences knowledge of the Divine and perceives part of the Transcendent One which it seeks, the realization of its own lowliness is that of Isaiah the prophet: “Woe is me for I am stricken at heart.”³⁶⁶ For Maximus, this is not a notion of guilt, but of Holy fear, because perfect love “casts out fear.”³⁶⁷ Instead of a servile fear, the soul is lifted, as we saw before, to a passionate and cyclical love for God (“ἔρως”). “For the mind of the one who is continually with God even his concupiscence abounds beyond measure into a divine desire and whose entire irascible element is transformed into divine love.”³⁶⁸ As Berthold writes, “Human eros under the influence of God’s grace becomes transformed into divine love.”³⁶⁹ This is of chief importance in understanding the relation between man’s deification and θεολογία. Through the process of “pure prayer,” man is not only freed from his passions, but he is transformed to use his passions to the end of loving God. Θεολογία is man “being in God.” Maximus writes that, “Once it is in God, it is inflamed with desire and seeks first of all the principles of his being but finds no satisfaction in what is proper to himself, for that is impossible and forbidden to every created nature alike. But it does receive encouragement from his attributes, that is, from

³⁶⁶ Maximus, “On Love,” I.XII, 37; Maximus citing Is. 6:5.

³⁶⁷ I John 4:18.

³⁶⁸ Maximus, “On Love,” II.XLVIII, 53.

³⁶⁹ See n. 96 of Maximus, “On Love.” Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 2, 231.

what concerns his eternity, infinity, and immensity [...] and the very fact of knowing nothing about him is to know beyond the mind's power."³⁷⁰ This is a thoroughly *kenotic* notion of love; it is a self-emptying love because here, the soul persists in unknowing. We have seen that Maximus's understanding of contemplation largely concerns the human γνώμη, the way of knowing. That all men by their nature seek to know and grasp their Creator is evident from Maximus's stages of contemplation. But when the soul ascends to the height of contemplation and finds his total knowledge denied, he is, surprisingly, at once humbled and satiated in knowing the Unknowable.

This opens our focus to Maximus's apophatic theology. For Maximus, monks can reach full knowledge of God, insofar as He permits human nature in this life. The divine illumination can presently occur "with God even [in] his [the monk's] concupiscence." Needless to say, though, through the Resurrection, concupiscence is eradicated. Maximus explains his understanding of the extent of human knowledge of God: "The perfect mind is the one that through genuine faith supremely knows in supreme ignorance the supremely unknowable, and in gazing on the universe of his handiwork has received from God comprehensive knowledge of his providence and judgment in it, as far as allowable to men."³⁷¹ God is knowable only through ideas about him, but He is unknowable in himself.³⁷² Θεολογία is the pure contemplation of the Divine, just as θεωρία is pure contemplation of His λόγοι. Furthermore, a noteworthy component of Maximus's thought on this point is that the creature can only know God through

³⁷⁰ Maximus, "On Love," I.C, 46. Berthold notes cf. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 38, 7 (On the Theophany), PG 36:317C.

³⁷¹ Maximus, "On Love," III.XCVII, 74-75.

³⁷² Cf., Maximus, "On Love," IV.VII, 76.

participation.³⁷³ Since God is an incorporeal being, the only way to participate in him and receive his wellbeing is through contemplation.³⁷⁴ Participation in God through pure knowledge of Him is the height of contemplative prayer; it is at this point that man is divinized.

Finally, a valuable image that Maximus relies on to illustrate man's deification is the reception of the ἐπιούσιον ἄρτον, the bread in the fourth line of the Lord's Prayer. We have already noted Maximus's understanding of the Eucharist in the context of his liturgical theology. Upon this note, he falls in direct harmony with Origen, saying, "For by such a manner of life according to our vows, we shall receive as a supersubstantial and life-giving bread to nourish our souls and to keep in good condition the goods with which we have been favored, the Word who said, 'I am the bread which has come down from heaven and which gives life to the world.'"³⁷⁵ Maximus sides primarily with Origen when interpreting the fourth line, "give us this day our daily bread." For Maximus, "this day" means present history, "our bread" means the reception of that "nourishment by the bread of life and knowledge triumph over the death of sin."³⁷⁶ A man receives in accordance

³⁷³ Here, it is noteworthy to note the unfolding of Maximus's ecclesiology and thought concerning Christian community. He exhorts the monastic community, "examine your conscience with all honesty to determine whether it is your fault that your brother is not reconciled. Do not be dishonest with it since it knows your hidden secrets, accuses you at the time of your passing, and becomes an obstacle in prayer." (Maximus, "On Love," IV.XXXIII, 79) Prayer is a means of withdrawing from the vices that are opposed to community. There is a strong emphasis on intercessory prayer in Maximus. If one participates in the Divine Love, he is moved by God's commandments to pray for his brothers and cease to bear grudges or other vices toward one another.

³⁷⁴ Cf. Maximus, "On Love," IV.XI, 76. As we saw in, this is a thoroughly Gregorian notion, in that things exist insofar as they participate in the Divine Being.

³⁷⁵ John 6:33; we saw this passage used prominently in Origen's exegesis of the Lord's Prayer and the Gospel of John.

³⁷⁶ Maximus, "Our Father," IV, 113.

with his own desires, the extent to which he has mortified the flesh and detached from the passions.³⁷⁷ The ἐπιούσιον ἄρτον is the sustenance of the one in prayer:

From there he leads us finally in the supreme ascent in divine realities to the Father of lights wherein he makes us sharers in the divine nature by participating in the grace of the Spirit, through which we receive the title of God's children and become clothed entirely with the complete person who is the author of this grace, without limiting or defiling him who is Son of God by nature, from whom, by whom, and in whom we have and shall have being, movement, and life.³⁷⁸

Thus, Maximus represents a notion of balance and proper possession of both human and divine characteristics. The soul receives the divine nature in a proportional manner to the willingness of Word of God in that he emptied himself through the incarnation. As we have seen, the spiritual journey takes the soul through the “Humbling of passions,”³⁷⁹ which leads to the integration of πρᾶξις and θεωρία and culminates in the ascension to θεολογία. But with this *kenotic* notion that represents the proper balance of the human being, Maximus emphasizes that the entire journey of contemplation is typified in the life of Christ. The reconciliation of Christ is that of a harmonizing of the human and divine natures, for He created in Himself “one new man in place of two.”³⁸⁰ God's design in this light is for the end that those with faith in Christ—and, Maximus wants to say, those progressing on the spiritual journey through contemplation and unity with God—would be undivided in will and nature. In this sense, it is man's γνώμη [way of knowing] that is converted through the reception of Christ. Maximus emphasizes that

³⁷⁷ As Berthold acknowledges, Maximus is pulling straight from Origen. Cf. “Chapters on Knowledge,” II.CVI

³⁷⁸ Maximus, “Our Father,” V, 118; Maximus quoting from Jas. 1:17, II Pet. 1:4, Acts 17:28.

³⁷⁹ Maximus, “Our Father,” II, 103.

³⁸⁰ Maximus, “Our Father,” II, 104; Maximus quoting Eph. 2:14-16.

the purification of nature is exhibited in a soul free from the tyranny of the law,³⁸¹ liberated to choose God willfully. But, as we saw, choosing God's willfully does not occur in the life of the contemplative until he journeys through stages. In *πρᾶξις*, we see the detachment of the mind from the passions; in *θεωρία*, we see the mind return to viewing the *λόγοι* of God's creation in light of His Son; finally, the mind receives perpetual vision and knowledge of God anew in *θεολογία*. Each step involves the *νοῦς* integrating the ways of seeing and knowing that are exemplified in Christ. Being of two natures, Christ chose obedience and love with a singular and unwavering will. Maximus writes, "For since reason that is free by nature has rejected appetite and is not sensitive to its regard and has settled the complete force of its soul on the immovable divine freedom."³⁸² In this way, the *γνώμη* of man reaches a Christ-like, and thus a deified state. Furthermore, the will of God on earth is that men would worship him in mystical, spiritual knowing because it is only by this means that he is separated from the concupiscence of the passions. This man, has, in short, become the companion of angels³⁸³ and has achieved the goal set forth by Paul: to become citizens of "heaven."³⁸⁴ Prayer directs the faithful to participate in the mystery of deification so as to realize the full extent of the Incarnation in their own life and thought.

³⁸¹ Also, for Maximus, this is typified in the immaculate conception, the coming of God into the flesh without corruption, so that salvation might be "for those who desire it, not to those who are forced to submit to it." (Maximus, "Our Father," II, 104) Cf., Col. 3:5. Cappadocian anthropology is centered on human freedom; cf., "Chapters on Love," III.XXVII.

³⁸² Maximus, "Our Father," IV, 108.

³⁸³ Maximus, "Our Father," IV, 112.

³⁸⁴ Phil. 3:20.

CHAPTER FOUR

Κένωσις as Deification: The Heritage of Origen of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor

We have explored the theological contours of how Origen, Gregory and Maximus understand contemplative prayer. Indeed, we have confined our discussion to the soul's relation to the Divine and the various ways of how, through prayer, one ascends to participate in the transcendent nature of God. Their dynamic thought constitutes a broad understanding of Scripture and its interpretation. Alongside of this element, we have seen in the three figures a consistent interaction and influence with Platonic philosophy. Moreover, a characteristic trait of the Cappadocian Fathers, worthy of note here in the final chapter, is mistaken originality; that is, each Father, in his own right, sought to be a faithful proponent of Church doctrine, but their differing approaches and projects produced unique interpretations. In many cases, their thought is an expansion from an idea developed in their forefathers. This final chapter shall draw to conclusion the differing notions that they bring to the conversation concerning prayer as deification, thereby characterizing the development of the Cappadocian tradition of prayer. First, I shall address the transformation of human nature as it relates to Christology and knowledge of the Divine. In conclusion, I shall show that the three figures are united in a thought that shapes their purposes and elucidates a prevalent strand in the development of Cappadocian theology as a whole: namely, the faithful share in the *kenotic* nature of Christ's, life, death, and Resurrection, here seen and experienced through the avenue of contemplative prayer.

From Origen, we understand that prayer forms a kind of analogue to the Israelites' act of gathering manna in their basket. Origen's typological reading serves as the basis for his notion of the transformation of human nature in prayer. It is apt to note at the onset of this section that while Origen's doctrine consists of an elegant conversation between key Scriptural passages, his thought on the matter lacks clarity. What, for Origen, does it mean for man to become divinized (θεώσις)? When does this occur? Jaroslav Pelikan argues that this ambiguity inherent in Origen's writings is due to the fact that at the time, "the church could not specify what it meant to promise that man would become divine until it had specified what it meant to confess that Christ had always been divine."³⁸⁵

However, the lack of development in Christian doctrine during Origen's time did not hinder him from reading the Scriptural narrative with an eye to piece together what it meant for man to become divinized, particularly through prayer. He starts, in many places, with the analogue between Israel and the Church: as the former gathered sustenance for the day, so too does the soul receive Christ (in the "ἐπιούσιον ἄρτον") as its sustenance. Origen sustains this interpretation throughout commentary on the Lord's Prayer; indeed, receiving the "Daily Bread" is analogous to the reading of Scripture. The soul encounters Christ in its pages because, as Origen expresses in a moment of analogical clarity, "The same wood of the Passion of Christ [the cross], placed in his Word, makes it a sweeter bread."³⁸⁶ Origen's purposes are not as much to demonstrate his Eucharistic theology, but to express the extent to which Scripture reveals the person of

³⁸⁵ Pelikan, *Christian Doctrine* (I), 155.

³⁸⁶ Origen, "Homilies on Exodus," XI.II.

Christ to the eager soul. Additionally, Origen understands that the soul shall receive in accordance with its desires. Thus, the imagery of bread plays a central role in his thought because by it, Christ, in declaring Himself the “heavenly bread,”³⁸⁷ serves as the nourishment to the soul in the same way that bread is to the body. But the passage from which Origen reads this point, John 6, further demonstrates the operation of receiving the Divine nature through prayer. Christ goes on to declare that, “My Father [...] gave you bread from Heaven.”³⁸⁸ Here, Origen’s point is that the bread asked for in the Lord’s Prayer is “heavenly” in nature; that is, prayer is a reception of the Divine nature insofar as the soul is able to receive it.³⁸⁹ This reciprocity is a notion adopted by Gregory and Maximus. As the soul receives more of the Divine nature, its desires grow in equal accord. The petitions of the Lord’s Prayer enact this “dance.”

In Origen’s theology, the soul is likened unto Scripture as a dwelling place of the λόγος.³⁹⁰ As Scripture the letter conceals Christ the λόγος, so too does the soul who has received the Heavenly Bread. Since the two form an analogous relationship in this sense, plumbing the depths of Scripture is also an act of plumbing the depths of the self. Here, Origen’s thought is lucid: contemplation is the earnest seeking by which one comes to realize the divinity of Christ bursting forth from within, which involves one to read the Scriptures and see that “Christ is the subject of all Holy Books.”³⁹¹ However, it is significant to understand that prior reception of grace is necessary; hence, Origen weighs

³⁸⁷ John 6:32, 51. Origen, “Prayer,” XXVII.2.

³⁸⁸ John 6:32.

³⁸⁹ See Origen, “Song,” III.V.

³⁹⁰ See de Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 397.

³⁹¹ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 385.

heavily upon the fourth line of the Lord's Prayer in which one petitions for the ἐπιούσιον ἄρτον. One cannot turn to the depths of the self and discover Christ without having received His grace.

However, Origen's thought takes a particularly fascinating turn on this matter. He is, of course, insistent that "the Logos of God is close to you," and that, "There is a kind of living water in you."³⁹² He means to say that the reception of the λόγος is largely an uncovering of the Divine Image. Human nature is made with the Divine Image imprinted upon the soul. The blemish of sin has tarnished the image, but it has not eradicated it. Therefore, in receiving Christ the "Heavenly Bread," prayer is an act of "digging"³⁹³ for the Divine Image. As Henri de Lubac expresses the concept it, "Let us draw, then, from the well of our own heart; let us draw from the wells of Scripture. May the water of the latter be mixed with the water of the former."³⁹⁴ The contemplation of Scripture enables us to uncover the divine mysteries that lie within our own hearts, namely, the Image of God upon the soul. This process is the way by which the soul is interpreted, and its key lies in the fact that Christ is both the revelation of Scripture and the "wisdom" by which God laid the foundations of the cosmos and made man.³⁹⁵ This offers us a clearer conception of human nature, sin, grace, and final redemption in Origen's thought. Grace is an uncovering of that aspect of man that is divine, and the receiving of Grace is an outpour of the sinful nature. In a *kenotic* tone, reception of grace is inherent to emptying the self because aspects of human sin that, in a sense, cover the soul must be eradicated

³⁹² Origen, "Homilies on Genesis," XIII.III-IV.

³⁹³ Origen, "Homilies on Genesis," XIII.III-IV.

³⁹⁴ De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 399.

³⁹⁵ See Prov. 8, Col. 1.

so as to receive grace. This is for Origen, admittedly, an arduous process, but accomplished by the desires of the soul and zeal for love of God. Deification is not based on the effort of man, however. Rather, it is an assimilation of the human will with that of God.

For Origen, this pattern is exemplified in Christ. As Trigg helps us to see, Origen's Christology maintains the integrity of the distinct natures, but falls into understanding Christ's nature as subordinate to the Father. Yet, for our purposes, it demonstrates the extent to which the human, in acknowledging the Father's superiority, acts in obedience to Him. Origen argues that from the example of Christ, the individual ought to align his will with the Father's out of a sense of love and desire. The example of Christ demonstrates for the individual a human disposition attuned to willfully obeying the divine commands. In fact, much of Origen's Christology hangs upon this point; if Christ did not willfully submit to the Father, then His human nature was compromised. Jaroslav Pelikan notes the significance of this point in Origen's thought: "Origen, opposing himself to those who denied the freedom of the will, defined the purpose of prayer in such a way as to insure both human freedom and divine providence; for divine foreknowledge was not the cause of man's actions, which he performed in freedom and for which he was accountable."³⁹⁶ Since Christ followed the Father's will unto death, so too should the individual who follows after Christ. In this light, Origen's understanding of *kenotic* love is that of emptying the human will and aligning with the Divine will. Origen's understanding of deification in regards to human nature is to follow after the life of Jesus, the passion narrative serving as the primary means by which man is initiated

³⁹⁶ Pelikan, *Christian Doctrine* (I), 282.

into the obedience of Christ. Origen's point is that the soul's reception of the Heavenly Bread bears the fruit of imitating the life, death, and suffering of Christ. Insofar as the soul receives Christ in the form of the ἐπιούσιον ἄρτον, he is thus enabled to participate in the communion and fellowship with God.

Where does Origen's thought leave us? He commended believers to habitually pray the "model prayer" after the words and teaching of Christ, a prayer containing a petition for the Divine nature. Within this, we see a relationship between the reading of Scripture and the imitation of Christ through unity of will with God, which leads to suffering for His sake. Origen's most crucial contribution to the formation of a Cappadocian theology of prayer—and his most lucid expression of prayer—is the fact that in receiving the nature of Christ, man is gradually transformed not into the old Adam, but the New, namely, Christ Himself. He is the deified human; thus, His life serves as exemplar on the way back to God. He is the "Heavenly Good,"³⁹⁷ whom the one in prayer receives as "being of heaven," so that he "will inherit the kingdom of heaven. [...] And the Father will supply you in due measure with what is required of the things of earth and what is small, because your bodies need them."³⁹⁸ There are two distinct frames of time concerning the reception of the ἐπιούσιον ἄρτον asked for in the Lord's Prayer. Here, we can read Origen with Origen. We have seen his concept set forth in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* that souls receive the Heavenly Bread in accordance with their desire. Because Christ contains both the divine nature in that he is the λόγος of God and human nature insofar as he is human, the soul receives Christ first

³⁹⁷ Origen, "Prayer," XIV.I.

³⁹⁸ Origen, "Prayer," XIV.I.

in His human nature, and ultimately in His Divine nature.³⁹⁹ In this light, we see Christ's role as mediator. He gives Himself in the form of the Heavenly Bread, and the soul is able to receive and become like Him only insofar as its capacities allow. He mediates according to our nature, but the final act of mediation is in accordance with His Divine nature: man becomes like Him in detaching from the corrupted elements of the flesh. In Christ, the spiritual senses inform the earthly disposition. When the soul finally reaches the Resurrection, Christ's divine nature transforms him into a state of likeness and complete separation from the world. But, it is significant to note Origen's heretical notions on this matter; his doctrine of the Resurrection is heavily dominated by middle-Platonic thought.⁴⁰⁰ Concerning the final *telos* of the soul, he taught that, "in the body there lies a certain principle which is not corrupted from which the body is raised in corruption."⁴⁰¹ Thus, *θέωσις* [deification] can be understood as yearning towards participation in the Divine nature, but a Divine nature separate from the human condition that it assumed in the Incarnation. Man's divinization is certainly not a presently occurring aspect of the Christian life; it is the goal of another life in another world. Yet, the nuptial imagery provides a firm analogue for the process: the soul does not become fully united to God, and thus divinized in its full capacity, until the wedding feast, or the Resurrection,⁴⁰² when the soul shall be fully transformed within the divinity of Christ.

³⁹⁹ For further support of this point, see Pelikan, *Christian Doctrine* (I), 155.

⁴⁰⁰ Origen also believed that all of creation was transformed into Christ-likeness in differing capacities. See John Anthony McGuckin, "The Westminster Handbook to Origen" (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 92.

⁴⁰¹ Origen, "Contra Celsum," V.XXIII. For a discussion on this matter, see Pelikan, *Christian Doctrine* (I), 47-49. That this train of thought expresses notions later declared heretical is significant for our study of Gregory.

⁴⁰² See Origen, *Song of Songs*, III.IV-VI.

Until then, the soul progresses in conformity to the will of God through the measure that he receives, a measure that is in accordance with his desire for the Heavenly Bread.

In Gregory of Nyssa, we see a similar but refined account of what it means for human nature to be divinized. His thought may have intimate connections with Origen's, but in Gregory, we see orthodox influences expand into new horizons of understanding *θέωσις*. For Gregory, a central verse is II Peter 1:4: "He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature." Yet, von Balthasar reminds us that St. Peter's exhortation to "mingle," or in Gregory's language, "μετουσία [participate],"⁴⁰³ is grounded in how "God has approached us"⁴⁰⁴ through the Word made flesh. For Gregory, the Incarnation is prefigured by the creation of man. The *εἰκὼν* is the basis upon which man maintains his distinct 'otherness' while being composed of divine attributes (namely, in von Balthasar's interpretation, "impenetrability"). Furthermore, the fact of the *εἰκὼν* expresses the character of God in that by it, the soul possesses the fundamental element that communicates the incomprehensible essence of God to it.⁴⁰⁵ The *εἰκὼν* is not only the attribute of God in the soul; it is the conveying of God's essence and presence to the soul. Thus, Gregory's thought argues for a presupposition of the unity of divine and human natures in the human being; by encountering the divine image in ourselves, we can form a conception of the Divine nature and perfections. From this, we see that, "Our being [*τὸ εἶναι*]

⁴⁰³ Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 139, quoting Gregory, *Or. Cat.* 37; II, 93 A.

⁴⁰⁴ von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 133.

⁴⁰⁵ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 93, quoting *Contra Eunomium* 12; II, 945 C and *De Beat.* 6; I, 1269 A.

reveals to us the fact of creation and how it is in every way ineffable and incomprehensible.”⁴⁰⁶ But the divine image is ensnared with sin, temporality, and corporality, which create what von Balthasar calls διάστημα [interval], a term interchangeable with Gregory’s αἰών [period of existence]. Here, a yawning gap spaces the ontological distance between man and God.⁴⁰⁷ In short, human nature constitutes man’s habitation of the αἰών; his divine nature constitutes his participation in God via the εἰκόν by which he was created. At the same time, through the fall, the Divine is at an eternal distance from man. For Gregory, this notion is carried over into man’s reunification with God. It remains an “ἔπέκτασις,” ever reaching but never grasping. In this light, the Incarnation is prefigured by the ontological unity of the divine and human natures.⁴⁰⁸ Christ is the paragon of human nature in that the Incarnation represents “the integrity of our nature.”⁴⁰⁹ He brings to us human life as it ought to be; His human nature is the key concern for Gregory’s understanding of contemplation.

Moreover, Christ is the true, “pure” man by which a “change in our very nature” occurs.⁴¹⁰ The change is rendered possible by the unity of the divine and human natures in Christ, a unity that makes him fully inhabit nature, but at once transcend it. In this

⁴⁰⁶ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 28.

⁴⁰⁷ Indeed, this distance is characteristic of the Latin Fathers. For a brief illustration of this point in regard to Augustine, a characteristically Latin Father, see Pelikan, *Christian Doctrine* (I), 299-301.

⁴⁰⁸ Gregory’s understanding of the Incarnation is pithily summarized by von Balthasar: “Christ assumed an individual and concrete nature, a nature that was in no wise “the” human nature as such. Yet what is more, by means of this partial contact, he touched nature in its entirety, a nature that is indivisible and continuous. And by this vital unity, he transmits grace, resurrection, and divinization to the entire body, thus uniting all men and, through them, all creation to himself.” (von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 135).

⁴⁰⁹ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 136.

⁴¹⁰ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 137, quoting Gregory, *De Virg.* III, 372 B; *In Pascha* I; III, 604 C; cf. 617 A.

way, He is still beyond nature.⁴¹¹ It is this unity that constitutes deification for Gregory. The soul's interaction and communion (Gregory's term, "κοινωνία") with God is a kind of interior approach by which the soul looks upon God as one does a mirror in order to see herself. This is the whole philosophy of "Image" expounded throughout Gregory's work. In contemplation, the soul descends within itself to discover the "integrity of our nature," brought to us in clarity and transmitted to our being by Christ. His presence in the soul offers an unveiling of the image, a recovery of that which was lost⁴¹² in the fall. As in Origen, however, the act is not a mere regaining of an Adamic state. In its finality at the Resurrection, a central component of Gregory's theology, the soul experiences the full unveiling of its nature. It is not, explicitly, a recreation of nature; this fact would deny the intention and goodness of God's original creation. Essential to Gregory's understanding is that humankind already possesses the "true image." Prayer, then, is the means by which the soul draws away from the passions and sin that mars that image. The Resurrection is the goal by which "the deepest roots of sin are extirpated, roots that sink themselves down [...] by means of the πάθη and death, into corporeality, indeed, into time itself."⁴¹³ Furthermore, there, the soul participates in Christ's raised humanity from the "same stock," but shall not share fully in His Divinity. At the same time, as in Origen, Gregory's notion of Resurrection is significantly influenced by neo-Platonic

⁴¹¹ In light of this, Gregory's theology of communion is largely an ontological "diffusion of divine grace through the whole body of humanity [...] which has only a remote likeness to the communion of Origen, which is also ontological, but purely spiritual and much more individual." (von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 138)

⁴¹² *Ibid.*

⁴¹³ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 137.

thought, resulting in a raised body that has departed in form and identity from the earthly body and its sinful state (σάρξ).

In continuity with Origen, this is prefigured in the Eucharist, and this anticipation of the Resurrection takes a similar form in the act of contemplation with the petition for receiving the ἐπιούσιον ἄρτον.⁴¹⁴ For Gregory, contemplation is a sojourning, a waiting for the full reception of the Divine nature to fully illuminate the true image. From this vein of thought, contemplation takes a positive relationship to the formation of the moral life. Gregory writes that, “It is physically impossible that He who is good by essence should be the Father of an evil will, nor the Holy One of him whose life is impure.”⁴¹⁵ This passage, and many like it scattered throughout his *Sermons on the Lord’s Prayer and the Beatitudes*, indicates the necessary moral dimension, the fruits of contemplation. However, that darkness cannot come from light is secondary to the underlying point. The object of contemplation is God, and from this standpoint, we see further that God’s revelation in the Incarnation communicates His Divine will and character to humanity in a form that is comprehensible to our intellect. The will of God, Gregory notes, is for all men to be saved and to lead virtuous lives.

But Gregory takes distinct departure from Origen in the doctrine of knowing. In contemplation, the soul “Lift[s] himself up to the height of the Giver,”⁴¹⁶ but it is a height upon which the soul is shrouded in the darkness of the μυστήρια [divine mystery] of God.

⁴¹⁴ Balthasar writes that, “Thus we see that the redemption as the restitution of the entire, intact man (ὁ ὅντως ἄνθρωπος) is joined together with the Eucharist: Christ in his entirety, flesh and soul, is the bread of life.” (*Presence and Thought*, 139) Yet, this is not purely a Eucharistic event; it is encapsulated in the life of contemplation.

⁴¹⁵ Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, I, 37; See pg. 39 for Gregory quoting II Cor. 6:14: “There is no fellowship of light with darkness.”

⁴¹⁶ Gregory, *Lord’s Prayer*, I, 28.

His focus here can be seen as a kind of ἀπάθεια and detachment from the passions on the way of ascent to God; yet, Gregory's occupation with this matter leaves room for his fervent fixation on the beauty of creation and the soul's temporary attachment to the αἰών. We can read this in tandem with Gregory's *apophatic* trajectory of thought. God is ineffable and unknowable: "You cannot see my face, for no man can see me and live."⁴¹⁷ The soul, therefore, finds itself in a state of formless unknowing: it has departed from the corporeal reality and persists in the vision of the Divine (the Unknowable). Christ serves as the mediator between Divine ineffability and human comprehensibility.

We saw that for Origen, there is a sense in which the reading of Scripture and contemplative prayer carry a *kenotic* register. The soul must empty itself of will and corporeal desires to receive the grace that reveals itself in fullness of a nature united with the Divine in the ἐπιούσιον ἄρτον. But in further departure from Origen, Gregory demonstrates the centrality of *kenotic* love in the sense that, at the pinnacle of the mountain where the "sound of the trumpet" and the Eternal Light pour forth to the soul, she rests in perpetual unknowing. The Ineffable One reveals Himself in such a way that human nature is dissolved in the resurrected state of identity with His Love for an eternal cycle of revelation and longing. It is a longing, however, that is continually satisfied upon vision. Thus, at the heart of Gregory's *kenotic* imagery of the Divine pouring out Himself and the soul pouring out to receive Him, lies satiation and delight eternal.

In another way, Gregory understands Christ's role in contemplation as the exemplar of human life lived in context of the αἰών [period of time]. He demonstrates

⁴¹⁷ Exo. 33:20.

how man comes to know God, to speak of Him,⁴¹⁸ and to participate [μετουσία] in His being by uncovering the εἰκὼν in which he was made. The Lord’s Prayer embodies these points. Here, Origen’s concept finds expansion in Gregory: from the λόγος proceeds the words by which man journeys through the stages of life and virtuous living in ascent back to Himself. More specifically, Christ’s words are the way of contemplation, the guide of the soul, because, “God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”⁴¹⁹

In the theology of Gregory, we see a broader understanding of both the Christian life and the Christian end take shape, and they do so in close relation to contemplative prayer. Gregory’s imagery sets the soul of the contemplative in an ascent to God in accordance with his desire, measured by the rungs of the ladder of beatitude by which he climbs. With each step, she is granted an increased knowledge of and participation in Divine Being. Contemplation of the Word, for Gregory, is a journey from likeness to identity; that is, the soul moves from tarnished image and clouded sight to renewed image with knowledge and participation in the Light that is God. Thus, the reading of Scripture is an essential component to knowing God, His commands, and the nature by which man journeys back to God. While finality occurs at the Resurrection, Gregory urges his readers forth with the injunction to understand one’s creaturely nature as a journey ever seeking His face. Indeed, the *telos* of human life is the vision of God, “an eternal process

⁴¹⁸ Properly, θεολόγια, a term developed more extensively in Maximus the Confessor. I shall focus on this term towards the end of the present chapter.

⁴¹⁹ II Cor. 4:6.

in which ‘one never reaches satiety in his yearning for God.’⁴²⁰ We have seen that this is characterized, but not fully realized, in the act of contemplation. For Gregory, as Wilken puts it, “Love is the one human endowment that moves us to seek the face of God.”⁴²¹ This notion of love emphasized by Wilken is critical for our understanding of Gregory’s doctrine of *kenotic* love and deification. The “endowment” is spurned by God’s self-revelation to the soul; insofar as man is able, the one who “sees God possess [...] all there is of the things that are good.” Possessing is a kind of interior knowledge, a taking hold through contemplation. Upon this point, we return to the hinge of Gregory’s entire theology: the εἰκὼν. Through the sojourning of earthly contemplation, the εἰκὼν is “wounded”⁴²² by love so as to progress with greater zeal. But for Gregory, the thought of God’s passibility was blasphemous,⁴²³ and, combined with the notion of His supremacy over creation, Gregory’s doctrine emphasizes that God is incomprehensible and ungraspable to the human intellect. The life of Christ (and Moses) serve to illustrate that the extent to which mankind can grasp the Divine nature was neither a petty nor outlandish matter. Rather, it was the center of all pursuit; it characterized the Christian life. But we see the notion of “grasping” combine with love, and more specifically, *kenotic* love exhibited by Christ. While he was fully God in the sense that He “grasped” Divine nature (He possessed it in full), He took the form of a servant. This, in short, is the most precise way to understand “grasping” God. The contemplative does so through

⁴²⁰ Pelikan, *Christian Doctrine* (I), 151; Pelikan quoting from *Vita Mos.*, II. (Jaeger 7-I:116).

⁴²¹ Wilken, *Early Christian Thought*, 293.

⁴²² Song of Sol. 2:5; see Wilken, *Early Christian Thought*, 291.

⁴²³ See Pelikan, *Christian Doctrine* (I), 53. Gregory’s influence from Platonism strongly influences his thought on this matter. The Divine Being is eternally separate from the corporal (Platon’s “χωρισμός”).

an interior transcendence that reaches through the resources of the self (*kenosis*) and ascends to the height of knowledge of the Divine. This notion is inherent to the fact that while “seeing” God is the goal of contemplation and no man shall ever see God, man is made in the εἰκών. God’s creation carries the purposes of self-emptying love; the state of the endless cycle of yearning and knowing is the embodiment of the *kenotic* nature of God.

Gregory shapes this notion to give human life a distinct function and purpose in contemplating the Word: what is true of Christ is open to the one who yearns to see Him. The unity of His human and Divine natures, His commands and moral example, and, significantly, His Passion (the exhibition of *kenosis*) all open the realm of identity through participation and communion [μετουσία and κοινωνία]. In this way, contemplation is the *locus* by which God, through the work of Christ who is “united with our nature,” transposes that union for human reception so that our nature “might become divine.”⁴²⁴

Divinization culminates in the full restoration of the εἰκών at the Resurrection, but is a present reality attainable on earth.⁴²⁵ It culminates While thoroughly indebted to neo-Platonic thought, Gregory nonetheless strikes a remarkable balance between contemplation as an act of ἀπάθεια, detachment from the passions, and the fact of the inherent beauty of creation. That his theology is largely centered on the recovery of the tarnished εἰκών speaks toward his fervent belief in the goodness of creation and the Creator’s purposes in restoring that which is fallen. Furthermore, Gregory draws out

⁴²⁴ Gregory, “Religious Instruction,” 7-10.

⁴²⁵ Gregory emphasizes this notion time and time again through his *Sermons on the Beatitudes*. See Gregory, *Beatitudes*, VI, 143-148.

God's use of the natural in restoration. This is exemplified in Christ, the true Εἰκὼν⁴²⁶ of God. In Him, the Eternal inhabits the temporal and becomes, for human comprehensibility, the exemplar of life and the mediator of Divine Being. His way leads to knowledge of God that is, while sojourning amidst the αἰὼν, shrouded in darkness by the unspeakable revelation of Being to the creatures becoming like Him through participation in that Source which moved all things. Yet, for Gregory, even at the unveiling of the εἰκὼν of man in Resurrection, this darkness only opens into a greater mystery of Light; man shall forever be in a state of unknowing.⁴²⁷ This endless and insatiable hunger is, as von Balthasar puts it, the "highest nobility of the creature, its quasi-divine infinity."⁴²⁸ This hunger is to be habituated and experienced through identifying in the self-giving love of Christ.

As we have noted, contemplation characterizes a life of harmony between Divine beatitude (virtuous action) and knowing (seeing) God. It is, furthermore, a reception of His ever arriving presence [παρουσία]. This, as Gregory asserts, is θεολογία, an occupation only meant for those whom the Church "chooses" (monks) to ascend the mountain and hear the ever-increasing call of the Holy "trumpet," the signal of Divine nature.⁴²⁹ This state of perpetual knowledge of God, θεολογία, is a kind of passage beyond the finitude of the creature, and for Gregory, includes an ontological ascent by which man transcends the present αἰὼν. But for Maximus the Confessor, man cannot bridge this gap through contemplative prayer alone. Only in the Resurrection is man

⁴²⁶ See Col. 1:9, II Cor. 4:4.

⁴²⁷ See von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 37-45.

⁴²⁸ Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 140.

⁴²⁹ Gregory, *Moses*, 128.

lifted beyond the temporal into Eternal Being. The movement of the intellectual creature in contemplation is “a middle term between the world and God” for Gregory.⁴³⁰ In Maximus, this movement is reached on the brink of the αἰών, when it ceases its motion as the temporality of creation. Von Balthasar notes that Maximus brings a clearer “metaphysical explanation of the identity of origin and goal in finite existence”⁴³¹ than Gregory was able to give, and it is summed in the “sacred dance.”⁴³² As Maximus puts it, “Nor will it [the intellectual being] rest until it comes, in its fullness, to enter into the fullness of what it loves, and is fully embraced by it, and accepts, in the utter freedom of its own choice, a state of saving possession, so that it belongs completely to what possesses it completely.”⁴³³ Here we see the prevalence of *kenotic* love emerge in Maximus’s thought as it did in Gregory: the soul, in pouring itself out for love of God, is “possessed” completely by Love Himself.

As we saw, Maximus understands the contemplative life in three differing phases of progression: πρᾶξις, θεωρία, and θεολογία, the end point resulting in the divinization of man. Similar to Gregory, Maximus posits a Christological emphasis at each point of contemplation. Pelikan writes that the Incarnation interprets the deification of man in “His humanity [...] had been deified but not destroyed in the Incarnation.”⁴³⁴ Central for Maximus the Confessor is II Peter 1:4: “He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world

⁴³⁰ Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 140.

⁴³¹ Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 143.

⁴³² Gregory, *Knowledge*, II.LXXVIII, 91.

⁴³³ Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 143, quoting Maximus, *Ambigua*; PG 91, 1073BD.

⁴³⁴ Pelikan, *Intro* to “Maximus the Confessor,” 10-11.

because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.” Reading these passages in tandem, Maximus’ conception of contemplation’s goal is lucid: in *πρᾶξις*, he who prays habituates the will of Christ in detachment from the passions and love of heavenly things; in *θεωρία*, he returns to the *λόγοι* of God’s creation with an elevated and more ‘Christ-like’ understanding; in *θεολογία*, God imparts knowledge of Himself so that the mind “passes outside the flesh and the world and while praying is completely without matter and form.”⁴³⁵

For Maximus, the progression of these differing forms of contemplative prayer lead to divinization. In Gregory, we saw that man, in a sense, divinizes himself through the uncovering of the *εἰκόν*—made possible only by the grace of Christ—but in Maximus, as von Balthasar notes, “we have, within our nature, no power capable of receiving [*δεκτικὴν δύναμιν*] divinization.”⁴³⁶ Man is assimilated into God through the gift from His “above” nature. Here, we see Maximus’ doctrine of the Spirit⁴³⁷ provide a horizon not fully depicted in Gregory of Nyssa, but similar to that of Origen. An instance that demonstrates this departure is that Maximus follows Origen’s interpretation of *ἐπιούσιον ἄρτον*: the contemplative receives the nature of Christ in the form of bread for the soul.⁴³⁸ It is the Spirit’s presence and operation in the life of Christ that enables Him to serve as the example of unity with God while living in the present *αἰών*.

⁴³⁵ Maximus, “On Love,” II.LXI, 55; Maximus quoting from I Thes. 5:17.

⁴³⁶ Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 149; von Balthasar quoting from *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 22; CCG 7, 145, 28-31.

⁴³⁷ See Pelikan, *Christian Doctrine* (II), 26-27.

⁴³⁸ Von Balthasar notes that Maximus’ Eucharistic theology is a “bridge between Origen” and Scotus Erigena. He writes, “In place of the transubstantiation of the bread into the Body of Christ, the central emphasis is on the transubstantiation of the communicant into Christ and into his “Spirit.” (*Cosmic Liturgy*, 324) He cites from *Mystagogia* 24; PG 91, 704A.

Contemplation in Maximus' framework places greater emphasis on the role of the Spirit than Gregory, and thus, the Divine attributes in mankind produce differing effects in contemplation. For Maximus, that the creature is, in a sense, shut off from himself, unable to understand himself, equates to a "radical openness to the transcendent."⁴³⁹ This is a thorough notion in Gregory, but he arrives at it from a different angle, namely, the Divine attribute of Ineffability.⁴⁴⁰

Their difference in this matter is striking. Gregory's contemplative prayer is the means by which the soul [νοῦς] progresses toward knowledge of the Divine and thus participation in Divine nature. But the focal point of Gregory's thought is the unveiling of the εἰκὼν through contemplative prayer, which involves the movement of the soul from temporality to knowledge of and participation in the Transcendent. For Gregory, knowledge of God is the perpetual dance of revelation and longing. Furthermore, the contemplative penetrates into the realm of mystical knowing and communion [κοινωνία] that at once grasps God's immanence and recognizes His otherness, a *kenotic* outpour of creaturely acceptance and love of God through Divine similitude discovered in the soul. Maximus characterizes the ascent to God not in terms of an inward recognition of the εἰκὼν, but, as he writes, "the highest union with God is not realized 'in spite of' our lasting difference from him, but rather 'in' and 'through' it."⁴⁴¹ His starting place is God's ineffability, which can be likened to Gregory's end point in the darkness at the top

⁴³⁹ Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 151.

⁴⁴⁰ Furthermore, as von Balthasar notes (*Cosmic Liturgy*, 151), Maximus writes that Christ "brings all things together and sums them up in his person, [...] he will prove that all creation is a unity that comes together through the cooperation of its parts and draws inward on itself through the totality of its being [...] [governed by the idea that] it comes from nothing." (*Ambigua*; Pg 91, 1176B.)

⁴⁴¹ Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 96.

of the mountain. In an extension of Gregory's Christological notions (primarily that of exemplar), Maximus conceives of the Incarnation as an increase in our ignorance of God. "He became comprehensible in nature to the very same degree as he has been revealed more fully, through this [human] nature, as the incomprehensible One."⁴⁴² The λόγος is the way by which the mystery of the Triune God appears in the world, the mystery that unfolds into salvation history.

This understanding of the Incarnation and its purposes set forth the Platonic strands of thought employed in Cappadocian spirituality and theology. Von Balthasar puts it lucidly: "above all they [the Cappadocian Fathers] saw it [the Incarnation] as the fulfillment (coming down from above through grace) of those fundamental yearnings, placed in the soul by the Creator, which need to be refined of the dross of original sin."⁴⁴³ But as we have seen, Christ's Incarnation unfolds upon much more than redemption from sin. A common point for our three Fathers is that through the contemplative way, man comes to be in the place of Christ's hypostatic union. The divinization of man is the unity of Christ's nature with the soul. Within this, we see not a rigid dualism of departure from the world to the heavenly realm, but a disposition of thought toward the world that is oriented toward spiritual ends. Contemplation is a kind of seeing, and, since God is its object, God's benefits are its fruits. In other words, as von Balthasar puts it, "the corporal world is governed and fashioned by the spiritual"⁴⁴⁴ because in contemplation, all the depths of the soul have been turned back to God. There is then a

⁴⁴²Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 97, quoting Maximus, *Ambigua*; PG 91, 1048D-1049A.

⁴⁴³ Hans urs von Balthasar, *Prayer*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 260.

⁴⁴⁴ Hans urs von Balthasar, *Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 265.

crucial truth expressed through thought so heavily influenced by a Platonic structure: “through sin we have forfeited our native home and have taken lodging in a lower region; we have fallen from a world governed by the Spirit to a world ruled by subspiritual laws.” The recovering of these senses is for the Cappadocian Fathers the embodiment of the Incarnation in the believer through contemplative prayer. Man cannot draw near to the mysteries of God, nor can he see the world through the “spiritual sense,” nor can he read Scripture’s “hidden” meaning unless through the Incarnation.

With this perspective, we see that the theology of contemplative prayer in the Cappadocian tradition developed in tandem with Christology. Primarily, the goal in Cappadocian prayer was to assimilate human will with the reception of Divine grace. Contemplation is founded on desire, the longing to increase in knowledge of the Divine. But knowledge forever implies participation: to see is to possess, to know is to be assimilated. As seen, these notions are incomplete without the underlying understanding of *kenotic* love, exhibited in the hymn of Philippians 2. In order to desire the Divine Being, man must reject his sinful elements, accept his creaturely identity, and depart in thought from this world. These notions require an outpour of human nature, what one intimately possesses along with the tarnished image of the εἰκὼν. The former obscures the latter. Thereby, from Origen to Maximus, we see that contemplative prayer, while an act of the νοῦς in a kind of detachment from the passions of the σὰρξ [flesh], bears significant moral implications on the way one lives. Thus, θεολογία and πρᾶξις are never separated from one another.

Maintaining the freedom of the will was an essential component of their theologies because, simply put, the denial of human freedom is the denial of the highest

good: love. In Cappadocian spirituality, Divine grace and human freedom are not antithetical; rather, they are at paradoxical accord in the life of Christ. The most vivid representation of this fact, and the most immediately relevant to the Christian life, is the nature of Divine *kenotic* love. This notion captures the thought of the Fathers studied in this thesis, and stands as the fulcrum upon which their understanding of contemplation hinges. Origen writes that,

First he suffered, and then he descended and took on visible form. What sort of suffering was it that he underwent for our sake? The suffering of love. And the Father himself, the Lord of all, who is long suffering and rich in mercy and compassion—does he not suffer as well in some respect. Or do you not know that when he death with human affairs he underwent human suffering? [...] God thus takes our ways upon himself, just as the Son of God bears our suffering.⁴⁴⁵

This depiction of Trinitarian love is a kind of procession, and in both the Lord's Prayer and the reading of Scripture, the believer opens himself up to receiving the self-emptying life of Christ. Divinization, in the Origenist sense, is conjoined to understanding of Christ's subordination. Origen read John I as drawing a distinction between *The God* (“ὁ Θεός”) and *God* (“Θεός”), whom he took to be the Son.⁴⁴⁶ For Origen, everything (including the Holy Spirit and the Son) is, in one sense or another, subordinate to the Father; things find salvation *in* contemplation because it is the act of beholding and inhering to The God. He writes, “The Son continues in the unceasing contemplation of the depth of the Father.”⁴⁴⁷ The Word, then, who ascended to deification, performs the ministry of deification to the creatures who partake in His example and nature.

⁴⁴⁵ Origen, “Homilies on Ezekiel,” VI.VI. De Lubac writes that this is “no doubt one of his most beautiful pages, both his most human and his most Christian.” (*History and Spirit*, 241)

⁴⁴⁶ See McGuckin, “Handbook to Origen,” 92.

⁴⁴⁷ Origen, “Commentary on John,” II.XVIII.

This notion gains great traction in the development of contemplative theology in the Cappadocian tradition, but is sharpened in accordance with the development of orthodoxy. We have seen that prayer is always linked to participation in the Divine nature because prayer is an act of seeing, which, insofar as the creature is able, is an act of possessing. Gregory uses different categories to address the act of contemplation. While Origen reads the Incarnation as the ministry by which Christ mediates between God and man through granting man participation in His nature, Gregory understands the Incarnation as the mediating presence between αἰών and eternity, comprehensibility and ineffability, πάθος and ἀπάθεια. Christ's ministry as the λόγος is to unveil the εἰκὼν of man, a ministry received through contemplation and the ladder of Divine beatitude. In Christ, both human nature and "more than" nature ("μείζω τῆς φύσεως"⁴⁴⁸) meet, rendering possible the return of humanity to its original condition: spiritual living, seeing, and knowing within the context of the corporeal world. Yet, as Gregory is keen to point out, while this return is reminiscent of the Adamic state, it is expanded in the revelation of Christ. Divine power transforms the soul from its connection with the σὰρξ [flesh] into a μετουσία [participation] with that being which is Infinite yet comprehensible in the Incarnation. Here, Gregory's indebtedness to Nicene orthodoxy (and his contribution to the sharpened formulation of Constantinople in 381) bears significant influence on his thought. For Gregory, man's fallen state is represented by the division of the two natures once bound together at the act of creation. Only in Christ, "by the very unity of the divine nature, which is found equally united to the two parts, the divided can once again

⁴⁴⁸ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 137, quoting Gregory, *Or. Cat.* 13; II, 45 D.

be united.”⁴⁴⁹ Within this, the orthodox perspective concerning the two natures brings a new emphasis on the freedom of the will in contemplation. While Gregory insists that Divine Being does not suffer (but rather that Christ the human suffers), he recovers the importance of the freedom of the will in regards to *kenotic* love. In Origen, the Son’s subordination diminishes the significance of “ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν [but He emptied Himself].”⁴⁵⁰ Origen’s thought too easily tends toward the notion that the Son attains to divinity through His obedience, a κένωσις in accordance with Divine mandate, rather than an emptying of what He inherently possesses in being very nature God and man. As previously noted, Origen explicitly argues for a notion of Christ’s freedom, but the degree to which his divinity is lesser than the Father’s diminishes the magnitude of his self-emptying love.

Origen’s understanding is heretical but not irrelevant. With Gregory’s perspective, Christ’s eternal equality with God makes the act of “ἐκένωσεν” a deeper expression of Divine love and Divine nature. As von Balthasar puts it, “The principle of divinization is universally posited: ‘Divinity empties itself so as to be graspable by human nature. Human nature, in its turn, is rejuvenated, divinized by its mingling with the divine.’”⁴⁵¹ In this light, Maximus the Confessor provides a capstone to what has been done through Gregory. He writes that, “The soul takes on the divinity in the same measure that the Word of God willed to empty himself in the incarnation of his own

⁴⁴⁹ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 137, quoting Gregory, *In Pascha* I; III, 17B.

⁴⁵⁰ Phil. 2:7.

⁴⁵¹ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 138, quoting Gregory, *C. Eunom.* 5; II. 705 D-708 A.

unmixed glory in becoming genuinely human.”⁴⁵² Contemplation, then, is a “request of what God gives to men in a way which is fitting to himself.”⁴⁵³

We have seen the varying ways in which theological reflection provides the framework for the life of contemplation in the Cappadocian tradition. The reading of Scripture is an integral component of understanding the revelation of God to men, and understanding the self in the light of Divine grace. Furthermore, within the context of this concept akin to *lectio divina*, man receives the means by which he speaks back to God, namely in the Lord’s Prayer. From the instruction of the Lord’s Prayer, the one seeking to know God embarks on a sojourn through the various stages of virtue and detachment from the passions. The soul ascends with increments of Divine knowledge, graces of God’s revelations that touch the νοῦς in contemplation, stirring his desire to climb ever further into the mysterious darkness that shrouds Divine Being. God’s revelation in Christ, however, is the basis upon which contemplation ebbs and flows, and the Fathers of the Cappadocian tradition have always understood that, necessarily, prayer is the disposition of receiving His nature. However, as Christological formulations were elucidated across the content of the Church’s understanding as a whole, the Fathers of the Cappadocian tradition sought to preserve the Divinity of Christ while calling attention to the necessity of a free human will. In this light, the notion of “ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν” reaches its fullest understanding, both in the context of Christ’s human nature and the nature that the faithful contemplative receives and habituates in prayer. Indeed, the theology of

⁴⁵² Maximus, “Our Father,” II, 103.

⁴⁵³ Maximus, “Our Father,” III, 105. Besides drawing upon the Cappadocian tradition to which Maximus is indebted, he references Ps. 76:12 (also quoted by Gregory of Nyssa), John 2:10, I Sam. 1:11, 2 Chr. 32:20. The vows of David, Hannah, Hezekiah, and Amos, demonstrate the one who wills for what they ask for to be brought to the enjoyment proper to what they have asked. He explains, “prayer is the reward of virtue, that God gives back with the greatest joy.” (Maximus, “Our Father,” II, 105)

contemplative prayer developed as an act of transforming the human nature into the nature that is both divine and human, that nature which is exemplified and given to us in Christ.

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