

# THE UNFOLDING OF TRUTH

EUNOMIUS OF CYZICUS AND GREGORY OF NYSSA  
IN DEBATE OVER ORTHODOXY (360-381)

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## ABSTRACT

*This study is a new attempt to read the rich theological debates of the fourth century over the place and the meaning of the Nicene Creed. I focus especially on the debate between the radical Arians of second generation (epitomized by Eunomius of Cyzicus) and the most complete defender of orthodoxy (represented at best by St Gregory of Nyssa). By a short presentation of the struggle for orthodoxy during the fourth century, I frame St Gregory of Nyssa's polemics against the radical Arians into a historical context. Subsequently, I pay attention to Aetius' legacy in Eunomius' works and biography, and their strong breaking points with the former tradition. The argument is carried out by a short presentation of Gregory's rejection of Eunomius' theology. Consequently, I ponder upon the differences between the conflicting methodologies assumed by Eunomius and Gregory of Nyssa, respectively. The usage of rhetoric and dialectics for theological purposes is, in each case, highly significant. I point out the importance of Basil and Gregory's doctrinal and spiritual commitments, which I regard in continuity with the apostolic confession of Christ as 'Lord and God' (John 20: 24). I suggest that the Trinitarian controversy can be ultimately traced back to the most important question for the early Christian Church: the confession of Christ's divinity and lordship. The present study also attempts to show that this confession is intimately related to the hermeneutical task of reading the Scriptures. The Scriptures can always and very easily become an object of controversy when the traditional 'hypothesis' of Christ's natural sonship is lost on the way. Without this 'hypothesis', the texts of the Old and the New Testament are open to endless and polemical interpretations, and the borderline between 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' is lost.\**

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## Nicene Aftermath

The fourth century is widely regarded as the inaugural period of Christianity. For any modern reader, the vast complexity and the apparent violence of the theological confrontations during the fourth century is, at the first sight, stunning. It is probably the most researched period in the history of the early Church, and attempts to understand what happened between Nicaea 325 and Constantinople 381 have increased the amount exegetical literature to an unexpected degree of minutiae and precision. The reasons for this almost unique concentration of scholarly efforts do not even need to be mentioned: the perennial discussion about, respectively, the Hellenistic and the Jewish heritage of Christianity, the definitive setting of the scriptural canon of the early Church, the irrepressible rise of monasticism and other ascetic forms of life, the beginning of the end of paganism in the Roman Empire, the elevation of Christianity as religion of state under Constantine the Great, the first schisms in the Church, the missionary developments, the establishment of the Christian forms of art and, above all, the theological foundation of orthodoxy. All are interconnected issues, which deserve particular attention.

One of the most distinctive features of the fourth century is probably the dramatic search for truth on the side of the theologians, contrasting with the interest in political unity, of the emperors<sup>1</sup>. Although both the theologians and the emperors claimed to be Christians, this was not a sufficient incentive to assure simultaneously freedom, unity and tolerance within a deeply religious society. Nicaea I (325) did not exhaust all the problems raised by Arius and his followers, at the beginning of the same century<sup>2</sup>. The condemnation of Arius' teaching, solemnly pronounced by the Emperor Constantine, was accepted by most of the bishops, who rejected in fact a theology with no great antecedents in the acknowledged doctrines of the Church. Many bishops did regard Nicaea as an authoritative ecumenical council<sup>3</sup>, preferring to draw other lines of continuity with the

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<sup>1</sup> T. D. BARNES, 'Emperor and Bishops, AD 324-344: Some Problems', *American Journal of Ancient History* 3 (1978) 53-75; H. CHADWICK, 'The Role of the Christian Bishop in Ancient Society', in *Heresy and Orthodoxy in the Early Church* (Hampshire: Variorum, 1991), ch. III.

<sup>2</sup> ROBERT M. GRANT, 'Religion and Politics at the Council of Nicaea', *JR* 55 (1975), 1-12.

<sup>3</sup> H. CHADWICK, 'The Origin of the Title "Oecumenical Council"', *JTS* 23 (1972), 132-135; Chadwick points out that, although it called itself 'the holy and great

past. It is noteworthy that 'tradition' (*paradosis*) was not an authoritative concept only for the 'orthodox', and the mere recourse to an ambiguous past functioned as a foundational argument for both the Nicene and anti-Nicene parties.<sup>4</sup> It is very clear that the establishment of the *Creed* did not sort out all the problems, which needed additional interpretation. On the side of the orthodox, Athanasius had to justify formulae like '*homoousios*' and '*ek tes ousias tou patros*'. Arius' theology of the transcendent God (who remained unknowable even to his Son) still fascinated many theologians who regarded the Nicene 'theology' as problematic. But Arius' theology left a twofold possibility: some could accept the similarity of essence between the Father and the Son (the 'Homoians'), while others could exacerbate the ontological gulf between the Father and the Son, and make them 'dissimilar' (the 'Anomeans').

Arius' supporters were located outside his homeland (Libya, Palestine, Asia Minor), while Athanasius' enjoyed great sympathy among the simple Christians of Alexandria. Neither the condemnation, nor the deportation of Arius meant the final defeat of his heresy. Arius' revival was easily accomplished after a member of the orthodox group, Eustathius of Antioch, committed the sin of *lèse-majesté* against the Emperor. Already received by Constantine the Great at his court, in 327 Arius was vindicated by a local synod of Bithynia at 328, when Athanasius became bishop of Alexandria. Arius gained support in Libya, while in November 335 the emperor himself sent Athanasius 'for disciplinary reasons' into his first exile (out of five) in Gaul, where he wrote *Contra Gentes* and, probably, *De Incarnatione*. Eventually, sensing the perils of a new schism in the Church (wounded already by the Donatist split in North Africa<sup>5</sup>), Constantine compelled Arius to declare his agreement with the Nicene Creed. Surprisingly, as both Socrates and Sozomen recorded, Arius did not refuse; but Athanasius reported that Arius privately maintained his earlier convictions. As R. Williams concluded, 'Arius may have been a genuine repentant; but it

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synod' (*ē megalē kai agiasynodos*), and although it was 'the largest assembly of Christian bishops hitherto gathered in one place', Nicaea I was only retrospectively considered to be 'ecumenical', first by Eusebius of Caesarea (in *Vita Constantini* 3. 6 sq). Even more, the identification of the 'ecumenical' with the 'infallible' council was enhanced by the canons of Constantinople I (381). For the contemporary understanding of the Orthodox theologians of the authority of the ecumenical synods, see BISHOP BASIL (KRIVOCHINE), 'Authority and Infallibility of the Ecumenical Councils', *ECR* 7 (1975) 1, 2-8.

<sup>4</sup> See W. A. LÖHR, 'A Sense of Tradition: The Homoiousian Church Party', in M. R. BARNES and D. H. WILLIAMS (eds.), *Arianism after Arius*, (Edinburgh : T & T Clark, 1993), 81-100.

<sup>5</sup> T. D. BARNES, 'The Beginnings of Donatism', *JTS* 26 (1975), 13-22.

sounds as though he was, rather, struggling to find a peaceful compromise<sup>6</sup>. Yet, Arius died without being in communion with the Church, and this very fact shaped for a long time the perception of his doctrine as the 'archetypal heresy' during the whole fourth century. Constantine's attitude towards Arius remained fairly ambiguous, being himself baptised by an Arian bishop (Eusebius of Nicomedia) at the hour of his death, on 22 May 337. It would be reductive to claim that the 'Catholic model' sprang univocally from the political agenda of the Emperor, who obviously wanted a unifying religion for his people. However, Nicaea was far from bringing a monochrome religious identity and in fact Athanasius' victory over Arius was to be short-lived. Yet, it is significant that Arius never won great audience in the monastic circles of Egypt, while Origen remained, until the end of the fourth century, at highly esteemed among both cultivated and uncultivated monks.<sup>7</sup> Since monasticism was not yet subjected, in the middle of the fourth century, to any great episcopal or imperial pressure, one should probably understand the final eviction of Arius' doctrine as something deeper than a result of Constantine's merely arbitrary political decision. Arius' doctrine remained, at first, an internal matter of the Church, the theological autonomy of which was only *protected*, but not necessarily *decided*, by the secular institutions of the Roman Empire. In 336, Athanasius was deposed at the council of Tyra, while in 336, a congregation of pro-Arian bishops gathered at Constantinople and led by Eusebius of Caesarea (the author of *Contra Marcellum*) condemned his friend Marcellus of Ancyra on the basis of his alleged monarchian doctrine. Marcellus' authority over his see in Cappadocia was replaced by Basil of Ancyra, the future leader of the 'homoiousians' in the late 350s. Constantine

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<sup>6</sup> R. WILLIAMS, *Arius. Heresy and Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2001<sup>2</sup>), 80.

<sup>7</sup> The myth forged by E. GIBBON (*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1776-88) about the illiterate monks of the Egyptian desert, challenged and rivalled only by the Alexandrine theological *élite*, simply cannot stand anymore. This polarised grid of reading was uncritically assimilated by some illustrious scholars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, like A. GUILLAUMONT, 'Un philosophe au desert: Evagre le Pontique', *RHR* 181 (1972), 29-56, reprinted in *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien: Pour une phénoménologie du monachisme* (Abbaye de Bellefontaine: 1979), 136-47; some pretty anachronistic social divisions (the peasantry *versus* 'les intellectuels') are taken as relevant for the understanding of the spiritual works of Egyptian monasticism (in particular, Evagrius of Pontus). These false divisions have been (unpolemically) deconstructed by Fr GABRIEL BUNGE OSB, 'Nach dem Intellekt leben? Zum sogenannten "Intellektualismus" der evagrianischen Spiritualität', in W. NYSSSEN (ed.), *Simandron – Der Wachklopfer: Gedenkschrift für Klaus Gamber* (Cologne, 1989), 95-109; S. RUBENSON, *The letters of St Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis, 1995<sup>2</sup>) thinks plausible a connection between St Antony's theology and that of the Alexandrian school of Origen.

He re-established Athanasius in his rights in November 337 at Alexandria. Next summer (338), the patriarch of the Egyptian desert visited Athanasius at Alexandria and assured him of the support of the monks (including the Pachomian monasteries). Meanwhile, the East resisted the orthodox doctrine and in January 339, an Antiochene synod deposed Athanasius. Anti-Nicene uprisings determined Athanasius and Marcellus to flee to Rome, where they found support in the person of Julius I, the pope who later invoked the authority of Peter in his defence of the Nicene Creed<sup>8</sup>.

### **Forty Years of Uncertainty (341-381)**

In 341 at Antioch, a council presided over by Constantius II, replied to Julius' vindication of Marcellus with two creedal documents, extremely scriptural in content, explicitly refuting Arius so that the Nicene theologian Hilary of Poitiers (who was considered sometimes 'the Athanasius of the West') could call Antioch 341 a '*sanctorum synodus*' and used it in the Latin West as an orthodox manifesto. The prospects for ecclesiastical unity between the East and the West were encouraging, but the personal animosities were probably prevailing against the dogmatic differences. The bishops convened at Sardica (Sofia) in 343 did not accept Athanasius especially because of his alliance with Marcellus, and their strong attachment to the concept of *homoousios*<sup>9</sup>. In Sardica, the Westerners bishops (led by the orthodox Ossius of Cordoba) showed in their doctrinal statement that their understanding of *ousia* and *hypostasis* was far from being clarified. 'We have received and been taught, and we hold the catholic and apostolic tradition and faith and confession which teach, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have one *hypostasis*, which is termed "essence" (*ousia*) by the heretics. If we were asked, "What is the *hypostasis* of the Son?" we confess that it is the same as the sole hypostasis of the Father; the Father has never been without the Son, nor the Son without the Father, nor is it possible that what is Word is Spirit.'<sup>10</sup> The Arian position was identified with the proclamation of three hypostases in God, which is exactly what the orthodox Council of Constantinople I (381 AD) did. Obviously, the Latin orthodox theologians could not make a difference between 'ousia' and 'hypostasis', which were both rendered happily through

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<sup>8</sup> Cf J. STEVENSON (ed.), *Creeds, Councils and Controversies. Documents illustrative of the history of the Church A. D. 337-461* (London: SPCK, 1966), 8-9.

<sup>9</sup> SOCRATES, *HE* II. 20. 7-11.

<sup>10</sup> THEODORETUS, *HE* II. 8. 38-41.

*substantia*<sup>11</sup>. In 345, the Easterners composed the so-called *Ekthesis Macrostichos*, which was meant to explain in depth to the Western audience the reasons for their resistance against both, respectively, the Arian (*lato sensu*) and the Nicene (*stricto sensu*) theology<sup>12</sup>. 'The Creed of the Long Lines' explicitly condemned the Arian phrase 'there was once when he [the Logos] was not', or the possible implications of the teaching about the Son's generation 'from nothing'; it also rejected the heresy of Tritheism and the adoptive Christology of Paul of Samosata; it threw anathemas also against Marcellus' teaching about the ending reign of Christ, against the Patripassians (who claimed that in Christ's passion the Father suffered), the Sabellians (the other name for the modalists). While rejecting all the inchoative Arian doctrines and many other heresies faced by the Catholic Church during the third century, the *Ekthesis* avoided carefully to mention anything about *homoousios*, replacing it with another expression: 'Christ has taken no recent dignity, but – the Eastern bishops said – we have believed him to be perfect from the first, and *like in all things* to the Father.' (§8) Despite its most reverential manner of speaking about the Son as 'God before ages', unseparated from the Father and whose generation cannot be compared to any extrinsic act of creation, and regardless of the open veneration of 'the all-perfect Triad', the *Ekthesis* of the Eastern bishops (led probably by Basil of Ancyra) did not touch the ecumenical sense of the Westerners. It was a situation similar to the painful experience of separation between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Church, over to the presence of *filioque* in the Latin Creed. The explicit subordinationism of the *Ekthesis* did not convince Athanasius about the orthodoxy of the Easterners, though it is likely that their sincere search for unity made him cool the relationship with Marcellus<sup>13</sup>. In 346, Athanasius returned to Alexandria while Leontius of Antioch, one of Arius' pupils, made Aëtius deacon. For his part, Aëtius envisaged the possibility of raising a more radical movement of opposition against Nicaea I, which could take profit from the disagreement between Athanasius of Alexandria and Basil of Ancyra. Consequently, Aëtius entered into conflict with some of the most faithful supporters of Nicaea in Antioch, two ascetics called Flavian and Theodoret, who coined for the first time in the East the doxological formula

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<sup>11</sup> J. T. LIENHARD, 'Ousia and Hypostasis: The Cappadocian Settlement and the Theology of "One Hypostasis"', in S. T. DAVIES, D. KENDALL and G. O'COLLINS (eds.), *The Trinity* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 99-121.

<sup>12</sup> SOCRATES, *HE* II. 19. 7-28.

<sup>13</sup> On Athanasius' ambiguous relationship with Marcellus, see J. T. Lienhard, 'Did Athanasius Reject Marcellus?', in M. R. BARNES and D. H. WILLIAMS (eds.), *Arianism after Arius*, (Edinburgh : T & T Clark, 1993), 65-81.

'Glory be to the Father, *and* to the Son, *and* to the Holy Spirit' (instead of '*through* the Son, *in* the Holy Spirit').<sup>14</sup> In spite of his Arian convictions, Leontius of Antioch tried to calm the imminent theological controversy, the dogmatic side of which was initially marked, *nota bene*, by a discussion over the liturgical forms of Trinitarian worship.

In the late 340s, Aëtius very probably met Eunomius in Alexandria, where he stayed until 351<sup>15</sup>. By the same time, Aëtius and Eunomius distinguished themselves from the moderate Arians, among whom the most important figures were Basil of Ancyra and the great ascetic Eusthatus of Sebaste. Gallus Caesar knew Aëtius very well and even appointed him to convert the future emperor Julian from paganism to Christianity. In 353, the Bishop Serapion of Thmuis visited the Emperor Constantius and expressed again the support of the Egyptian monks for Athanasius and the Nicene doctrine. They were probably the best entitled to confirm that *theosis* was the immediate and most important of the orthodox doctrines of incarnation.<sup>16</sup> By the time, Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem, started to defend the Nicene Creed in his famous *Catechetical Lectures*, while in North Africa the Church was torn apart by the Donatist controversy. The exuberant poet and ascetic theologian Ephraim<sup>17</sup> (†373) was conspicuously active in Syria on behalf of Nicaea activity, glorifying in innumerable hymns Christ's divinity. Though very seldom taken into account by scholars who specialise in the Arian controversies<sup>18</sup>, Ephrem's theology is probably the perfect antithesis, in both method and content, of the kind of theology promoted by Aëtius and Eunomius, which was paralleled only by Gregory of Nyssa's *Homilies to the Song of the Songs* and by Gregory of Nazianzus' *Theological Orations*.

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<sup>14</sup> I follow here T. KOPECEK, *History of Neo-Arianism* vol I (Cambridge Mass., 1979), 100; for a brief account, see DAVID RANKIN, 'Arianism', in PHILIP E. ESLER (ed.), *The Early Christian World*, vol II (Routledge: London and New York, 2000), 975-1004.

<sup>15</sup> KOPECEK, *History of Neo-Arianism* I, 111.

<sup>16</sup> I follow here the main argument of KRÂSTU BANEV, *The Concept of Deification in Athanasius of Alexandria (CONTRA GENTES/DE INCARNATIONE, CONTRA ARIANOS I & II)*, MPhil thesis, ms., Cambridge University, 2002. I thank the author of this thesis for allowing me to consult his as yet unpublished work.

<sup>17</sup> S. BROCK, *The Luminous Eye* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> As already noted, in a volume of more than eight hundred pages (*The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), R. P. C. Hanson never mentions his name or his contribution to the victory of the Nicene Creed. Important reparations were made by P. BRUNS, 'Arius Hellenizans? Ephraem der Syrer und die neoarianischen Kontroversen seiner Zeit', *ZKG* 101 (1990/91), 21-57; also PAUL S. RUSSELL, *St Ephrem the Syrian and St Gregory the Theologian Confront the Arians* (Kottayam: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Center, 1994).

Between 350-361, Constantius was the sole emperor in search for the middle ground between the Nicene position and the radicalism of the Anomeans. In 356, Constantius sacked Alexandria in search for Athanasius, who took refuge in the monastic caves of Upper Egypt. In the wake of the decisions taken at Sardica in 343, Ursacius of Singidunum and Valens of Nursa (both from Ilyria), 'and the rest of their comrades in crime (a splendid lot of Christian bishops!)', as Jerome described the friends of Constantius the Emperor<sup>19</sup>, composed in 357 at Sirmium a Creed that starkly refuted any ontological language about God (both *homoousion* and *homoiousion*), claiming that 'it is not contained in the divine Scriptures and it is above man's understanding.'<sup>20</sup> In 358, at Ancyra, another non-Nicene body of bishops questioned the contentions of Aëtius, who 'was extremely addicted to contention, very bold in his assertions on theological subjects, and prone to have recourse to a very subtle mode of argumentation.'<sup>21</sup> They persuaded Constantius about the radical intention of Eudoxius, Aëtius and Eunomius, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 359, at Sirmium, the immediate result was seen in the condemnation of their 'innovations'. There, the Synod presided over by 'the most religious and gloriously victorious Emperor Constantius Augustus', decided that the term 'essence' (*ousia*) 'gives offence as being unknown to the people', and suggests its removal, despite the Nicene formula. The Creed of Sirmium concluded that 'the Son is like the Father in all things' (recalling the *Ekthesis Macrostichos*).<sup>22</sup> But another council held at Ariminum, gathering more than 400 bishops, invalidated the decisions taken at Sirmium, supporting Nicaea. Meanwhile, during the winter of 359 at Seleucia<sup>23</sup>, the Emperor along with 180 moderate Arian bishops imposed again the doctrine of similarity between the Father and the Son.

This is precisely the moment when the radical Arians became more visible in their theological activity. There are important historical clues<sup>24</sup>, which suggest that Eunomius could have published his *First Apology* (an attack on the Homoians) in late 359<sup>25</sup>, almost simultaneously with Aëtius' *Syntagmation*<sup>26</sup>,

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<sup>19</sup> JEROME, *Dial. Contra Lucif.*, 19 (PL 23, 181b).

<sup>20</sup> HILARY, *De Synodis*, II; ATHANASIUS, *De Synodis*, 28; SOCRATES, *HE* II. 30-31-41.

<sup>21</sup> SOZOMEN, *HE* IV. 12. 1-2.

<sup>22</sup> ATHANASIUS, *De Synodis* 8; SOCRATES, *HE* II. 37. 18-24.

<sup>23</sup> SOZOMEN, *HE* IV. 22.6-10.

<sup>24</sup> L. R. WICKHAM, 'The Date of Eunomius' *Apology* of Eunomius: a reconsideration', *JTS* 20 (1969) 231-240; KOPECEK, *History* vol II, 299-306.

<sup>25</sup> Rightly saying that 'ancient speakers from the dock allowed themselves much more latitude in answering charges than we are used to', Professor HANSON (*op. cit.*, 618, n. 83) suggests another variant, supported by the testimonies of both Basil and Gregory, who claim that Eunomius was given the

while some indications favour another chronology, which dates it two years later<sup>27</sup>. What is sure is that, in January 360, the second session of a council started at Seleucia in late 359 took place at Constantinople. It is very likely, though not for sure, that Eunomius and Basil, both deacons at that time, met there *tête-à-tête* for the first time. The radical neo-Arians were not entirely successful, and the minority faithful to Athanasius desperately needed to join forces with the moderate wing of the Arians. The latter shored up the idea of similarity of essence between the Father and the Son, and were led by Basil of Ancyra and Eustathius of Sebasta (friend, for a while, of Basil of Caesarea).<sup>28</sup> In 361, Julian the Apostate took power and censored any public debate on theological matters, setting up in fact some favourable circumstances for the adversaries of Nicaea. From that year, Aëtius, a former instructor in religion of Gallus, half-brother of Julian the Emperor,<sup>29</sup> became a *persona non grata*. There are some hints that he was anointed bishop somewhere in Libya, where the Arian sympathies were stronger.<sup>30</sup> Sozomen<sup>31</sup> also tells us about a council held around time in Antioch, having an explicit Anomean agenda. After a short pro-Nicene *intermezzo* (under Jovian, 363-364), Valens, the Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, gave a strong political support to the moderate Neo-Arians (the Homoians). From Valens' stiff opposition to the Nicene Creed, many orthodox Christians suffered exile, while the activity of the neo-Arians flourished. Between 360-70, Eudoxius, an associate of Aëtius and Eunomius, ruled over the Archbishopric of Constantinople (already the most influential see in the Middle East), eliciting the venom of the Orthodox writers. For them, this was 'a time out of joint', in which – as St Jerome put it – the whole world 'groaned to find itself Arian.'<sup>32</sup> It is true

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see of Cyzicus as a reward for his *First Apology*. Summing up his deductions, Hanson presumes that *Apologia* 'could have been the reply made to his accusers by Eunomius later in 360, when was arraigned at the capital for teaching the anhomioion and successfully defended himself' (*ibidem*).

<sup>26</sup> J. LEBRETON, 'AGENNĒTOS dans la tradition philosophique et dans la littérature chrétienne du II<sup>e</sup> siècle', *RSR* 16 (1926), 431-43; L. R. WICKHAM, 'Aëtius and the Doctrine of Divine Ingeneracy', *SP* 9 (1972), 259-63; a thorough analysis of Aëtius' work and a genealogy of 'aggenetos' is provided by T. KOPECEK, *History of Neo-Arianism*, 227-97.

<sup>27</sup> VAGGIONE, *Eunomius of Cyzicus*, 302: '[the first *Apology*] was probably worked up into publishable form during the summer of 361'.

<sup>28</sup> At least one side of the history of their relationship is documented in Basil's letters (*Ep.* 79, 119, 125, 244 and 263); more on this, see M. SIMONETTI, *La crisi ariana nel IV secolo* (Roma: Institutum Patristicum 'Augustinianum', 1975), 411-418.

<sup>29</sup> PHILOSTORGIUS *HE* VI. 7; SOZOMEN *HE* V. 5. 9.

<sup>30</sup> HANSON, *Doctrine of God*, 602.

<sup>31</sup> SOZOMEN, *HE* IV. 29. 1-4.

<sup>32</sup> JEROME, *Dial. Contra Lucif.*, 19. PL 23, 181b.

also that under Valens' administration, both Eunomius and Gregory spent a long time in exile, and were unable to engage one another in theological polemic.

### The Emergence of the Cappadocians

Gregory started his literary career in the early 370s, probably before his wife was dead<sup>33</sup>, and by the same time, he was made bishop. Gregory's favourite topic was the ascetic theology, of which a paramount example is his disquisition *On Virginity*<sup>34</sup>. Later on, Gregory composed other homiletic and exegetic works (like *De oratione dominica*, *In inscriptiones Psalmorum*, *Orationes de beatitudinibus*). He probably began his dogmatic composition *Contra Eunomium* in 381, finishing the last book in 383.<sup>35</sup> The most famous and long-lasting of all Gregory's books were written after 379, if one counts *Vita Macrinae*<sup>36</sup>, *De Vita Moysis*<sup>37</sup> and also *Orationes in Canticum Canticorum*.<sup>38</sup> Only the ascension of Theodosius (379) as new emperor of the *Oriens* gave the promise of success to the ecclesiastical representatives of the Nicene party, among whom the best theologians were Gregory of Nyssa – who later on was praised as 'teacher of the world (*ho tēs oikoumēnes didaskalos*)'<sup>39</sup> and 'Father of the

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<sup>33</sup> J. DANIELOU, 'Le mariage de Grégoire de Nysse et la chronologie de sa vie', *REA* 2 (1956), 71-78.

<sup>34</sup> M. R. BARNES, "'The Burden of Marriage" and Other Notes on Gregory of Nyssa's *On Virginity*', *SP* 37 (2001), 12-19.

<sup>35</sup> I follow here M. CANEVET's dating from *Grégoire de Nysse et l'herméneutique biblique. Etude des rapports entre le langage et la connaissance de Dieu* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1983), 10.

<sup>36</sup> R. WILLIAMS, 'Macrina's Deathbed: Gregory of Nyssa on Mind and Passion', in L. WICKHAM & C. BAMEL (eds.), *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 227-246; F. CARDMAN, 'Whose Life Is It? The *Vitae Macrinae* of Gregory of Nyssa', *SP* 34 (2001), 33-50.

<sup>37</sup> P. F. O'CONNELL, 'The Double Journey in Saint Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses', *GOTR* 28 (1983), 301-324; R. E. HEINE, *Perfection in the Virtuous Life. A Study in the Relationship Between Edification and Polemical Theology in Gregory of Nyssa's De Vita Moysis* (Philadelphia, 1975); T. BÖHM, 'Die Wahrheitskonzeption in der Schrift *De vita Moysis* von Gregor von Nyssa', *SP* 27 (1993), 9-13; T. BÖHM, *Theoria. Unendlichkeit. Aufstieg. Philosophische Implikationen zu De Vita Moysis von Gregor von Nyssa* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

<sup>38</sup> J. B. CAHILL, 'The date and setting of Gregory of Nyssa's commentary on the Song of Songs', *JTS* 32 (1981), 447-460; M. LAIRD, 'Apophysis and Logophysis in Gregory of Nyssa's *Commentarius in Canticum Canticorum*', *SP* 34 (2001), 126-132; A. MEIS, 'El Ocultamiento de Dios en los *Comentarios al Cantar de los Cantares* de Gregorio de Nisa y Pseudo-Dionisio Areopagita', *SP* 34 (2001), 194-205.

<sup>39</sup> MAXIMUS CONFESSOR, *Op. theol.* (PG 91, 191).

Fathers<sup>40</sup> - and Gregory of Nazianzus (or 'the Theologian')<sup>41</sup>. Peter Brown has concisely described these political circumstances in the Eastern Roman Empire: 'From Theodosius I onwards, pagans and heretics were increasingly deprived of civic rights and forced to conform the Catholic Church. The sense of an otherworldly mission affected the Roman state. The Christian emperor, too, would have to answer to Christ for the souls of his subjects'<sup>42</sup>.

In 381, at least theoretically, the heresy of Aëtius and his followers was officially rejected by the majority of the Church bishops gathered at the Emperor's call, and who, in the first synodal canon, repudiated all the heretics by name: 'the Eunomians, the Anomeans, the Arians or the Eudoxians, the Semi-Arians or the Pneumatomachi, the Sabellians, the Marcellians, the Photinians or the Apollinarians.'<sup>43</sup> Practically, as we are told by the early Byzantine historians Sozomen<sup>44</sup> and Socrates<sup>45</sup>, Eunomius' defence was not complete. Large areas of Asia Minor were still influenced by his teaching. Because of the civil disturbances caused by the longest religious 'war' (Orthodoxy *versus* Arianism) of the fourth century, Theodosius the Great thought of different conciliatory stratagems, finally to establish Orthodoxy by consent and not by means of coercion.<sup>46</sup> The Emperor received in the late days of 383 a new doctrinal exposition (*ekthesis tes pisteos*) of Eunomius<sup>47</sup>, a fact that triggered Gregory's prompt reaction. It might well have happened that Gregory assisted in person Eunomius' address at the 'conference of the heresiarchs', which Theodosius set up in June 383 at Constantinople.<sup>48</sup> In front of the assembly severely

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<sup>40</sup> MANSI 13, 293. These references does not confirm A. Meredith's complain that Gregory of Nyssa was not 'canonized at the same degree as they', and that 'no luminous halo surrounds him', cf A. MEREDITH, *Gregory of Nyssa* (London: Routledge, 1999), 129. On the other hand, I cannot follow the sectarian and ultra-traditionalist approach of M. AZKOUL, *St. Gregory of Nyssa and the Tradition of the Fathers*, (Texts and Studies in Religion, vol. 63, New York: Edwin Mellen, 1995).

<sup>41</sup> It is noteworthy that the Orthodox Church has assigned this title only to three figures: John the Evangelist, Gregory of Nazianzus and Symeon the New Theologian.

<sup>42</sup> PETER BROWN, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1971), 108.

<sup>43</sup> *Canon 1* in NORMAN P. TANNER SJ (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (Sheed&Ward: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 31.

<sup>44</sup> *HE VI*, 29.

<sup>45</sup> *HE V*, 10.

<sup>46</sup> Retaliations against the heretics will be taken late in 390s.

<sup>47</sup> For a detailed presentation of the historical context of the emergence of Eunomius' last writing, see VAGGIONE (1987), 131 sq.

<sup>48</sup> Even after Gregory's death (around 395), the Eunomians (together with the Novatians) were still active in Constantinople. Socrates Scholasticus (*HE 6. 8*)

supervised by Nectarios, the Archbishop of Constantinople, Eunomius presented a compendium of his teaching divided into four short parts, and framed by an introduction and a conclusion. As R. P. Vaggione characterised it, Eunomius' work 'is chiefly notable for what does *not* say'<sup>49</sup>, suiting at best his missionary activities. But since *omitting* is by far more blameworthy than *committing*, Gregory had every reason to worry about the propagandistic potential of Eunomius' *ekthesis*, and decided to cross swords with him again. Thus, he wrote a short treatise named in W. Jaeger's edition *Refutatio Confessionis Eunomii*, which in the collection of J. P. Migne (*PG* 44) has been published as the second among the twelve books *Contra Eunomium*<sup>50</sup>. Probably three or four seasons before writing his *Refutatio* (winter 383-384), St Gregory composed his 'Answer to Eunomius' Second Book' (identified as *CE* II in Jaeger's edition).

There are clear indications that Gregory composed this theological masterpiece in the wake of the second council of Constantinople, when he was relatively old<sup>51</sup>, and enjoyed a good reputation at the imperial court<sup>52</sup>. *CE* III, which obviously grapples with Eunomius' *Apologia Apologiae* (written, respectively, in 378/9 and 382/3), represents the major source of documentation for Gregory's doctrine of the 'divine names'. It is noteworthy that Gregory felt obliged to refute systematically Eunomius' works written immediately after the death of St Basil of Caesarea (†379). It is very important to keep in mind the fact that the first clash between the Nicene orthodoxy and the radical Arian doctrine of God becomes public in St Basil's answer to Eunomius' first *Apologia*. St Basil wrote his rejection of Eunomius' ideas sometimes between 363/4, 'during his years of monastic solitude

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claims that St John Chrysostomus invented the antiphonal singing during his struggle with the Arians; John's treatise *Peri akataléptou* (ed. A.-M. MALINGREY, SC 28bis, Paris: 1970) is determined by the same pastoral concern.

<sup>49</sup> VAGGIONE (1987), 133.

<sup>50</sup> The only existing English translation of *CE* follows this division. Thus, Gregory's *Refutatio*, published under the title 'Book II', can be found in NPNF V, pp. 101-134. Details about the tradition of the manuscripts of *Contra Eunomium* can be found in Jaeger's presentation (finely synthesised by R. Vaggione in his introduction to Eunomius' *Expositio Fidei*, op. cit., 138-140).

<sup>51</sup> NPNF V, 311b (GNO I. 403. 6-7): "For a man like myself, *who has lived to grey hairs*, and whose eyes are fixed on truth alone, to take upon his lips the absurd and flippant utterances of a contentious foe, incurs no slight danger of bringing condemnation on himself". Jaeger's text is slightly different and instead of 'who has lived to grey hairs' says '*andri gar en poliazōnti*'.

<sup>52</sup> G. MAY, 'Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregor von Nyssa', 63: „Gregor hat in den Jahren 381 bis 383 eine gewisse Rolle in der staatlichen Kirchenpolitik gespielt“; more about this in G. MAY, 'Gregor von Nyssa in der Kirchenpolitik seiner Zeit', *Jahrbuch der österreichischen byzantinischen Gesellschaft* 15 (1966), 105-132.

at Annesoi<sup>53</sup>). In his first *Liber Apologeticus* (359), 'the logic-chopper' (*ho technologos*) in the neo-Arian party (*synagogē*), bishop of Cyzicus for approximately two years (360/2-64), had made some extremist theological assertions, to which even Arius probably never hoped to bear witness<sup>54</sup>. Following his mentor Aëtius, Eunomius made the central claim that 'ungeneracy' is the *proper name* of God which gives us full knowledge of God's essence, and that such appellation 'is based neither on invention, nor on privation (*mete kat' epinoian mete kata steresin*)'<sup>55</sup>. In *CE I*, Gregory of Nyssa works out the presuppositions of his Trinitarian theology with an elaborate epistemology, and a correlative theory of language. Gregory only refreshes the questions already tackled by St Basil in his two-fold treatise *Adversus Eunomium*, bringing forth new arguments and dealing at length, especially in his third book, with the problem of theological language and knowledge. But if the genealogy of Gregory's ideas can be, at least in part, traced back to Basil, the much-loathed Eunomius has to be understood in close connection with his not less notorious teacher from Antioch, Aëtius.

### **Aëtius' Legacy**

Most of the contemporary testimonies, save for Philostorgius' biased ecclesiastical history, portrayed Aëtius as an important but very controversial figure of the Church of Antioch. There is a major consensus among Sozomen and Socrates Scholasticus, confirmed by Gregory of Nyssa and Theodoret of Mopseustia, who used in their depiction of Aëtius a very rich palette of colours. Born some times at the beginning of the fourth century, Aëtius came from a plebeian background and had to struggle with the social barriers of his time. Having an unmitigated careerist agenda, Aëtius became very early the protégé of a long row of more or less Arian bishops: Paulinus, Eusebius of Caesarea, Leontius of Antioch, Eusthathius of Sebasta and, in the event, Eudoxius of Constantinople. Only the ambition would parallel his intelligence, which was naturally inclined towards 'logical studies (*epi tas logikas mathēseis*)'.<sup>56</sup> By mere coincidence or not, Aëtius developed the same organic empathy towards the Arius' theological ideas, as for the syllogistic

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<sup>53</sup> VAGGIONE (1987), 5.

<sup>54</sup> On Arius' posterity among the so-called neo-Arians circles, see M. WILES, 'Attitudes to Arius in the Arian Controversy', in M. R. BARNES and D. H. WILLIAMS (eds.), *Arianism after Arius*, (Edinburgh : T & T Clark, 1993), 31-44.

<sup>55</sup> A 8. 14.

<sup>56</sup> PHILOSTORGIUS, *HE* 3. 15.

exercises, in which he started training himself as a very young student. Looking ahead for success and reputation, Aëtius found early in his life that theological innovations could make him notorious. Therefore, he engaged in public disputations, through which he could impress some landlords in search of cheap pedagogues. In Kopecek's own words, 'he tended throughout his life to be both enthusiastically aggressive and outspoken.'<sup>57</sup> In the early 330s, he learned theology from Leontius of Antioch, a priest who followed very faithfully the canon established by the famous Lucian, the biblical exegete. Afterwards, Aëtius went to Alexandria<sup>58</sup>, where he enriched his knowledge of arts, studied medicine, logic, and rhetoric. With all these credentials, it is no wonder that Aëtius fulfilled Eunomius' gullible search for mastership over his own ideas. Apart from his secular skills, like Arius himself, Aëtius claimed to have inherited spiritual authority from the sacred tradition of the saints (alluding to the martyric death of Lucian<sup>59</sup>). Yet, as Sozomen assures us, 'many gave him the name of "atheist."<sup>60</sup>

By the early 350s, Aëtius had already made himself acquainted Athanasius' report in *De Decretis*, which emphasised the immovability of the Nicene formulae. He maintained that neither 'homoousios' nor 'ingenerate' were scriptural. He also claimed that the sonship of Christ can only be expressed but in two ways: either natural, or adoptive. Any third option was inconsistent, since 'similarity' (preferred by Basil of Ancyra *et alii*) between two terms can be established only within a class of congeneric elements. Only the natural sonship of Christ preserved his scriptural designation as 'icon of the invisible God' (Colossians 1: 15), or 'Word of God' (John 1: 1). Th. Kopecek considers that there is much evidence which 'suggests that Aëtius reacted to Athanasius' championing of *homoousios* ca. AD 350 by putting in response the formula "unlikeness."<sup>61</sup> In short, by the late 350's, Aëtius started professing his 'Heterousian gospel'<sup>62</sup> (to *heterousion kerygma*) on the basis of a monotheist model with clear precedence in the Arian theology. For Aëtius, God could only be one, self-sufficient entity, while within the Deity no process of generation was imaginable. He claimed that 'the ingenerate *is* his own essence (*autoousia*)'<sup>63</sup>. Yet, Aëtius differed

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<sup>57</sup> KOPECEK, *History of Neo-Arianism*, 67.

<sup>58</sup> For the Christian environment of Alexandria, by first half of the four century, see ROBERT M. GRANT, 'Early Alexandrian Christianity', *CH* 40 (1971) 133-144.

<sup>59</sup> also EUNOMIUS, *Apol.* 12. 1-6.

<sup>60</sup> SOZOMEN, *HE* 3. 15.

<sup>61</sup> KOPECEK, *History of Neo-Arianism*, 116.

<sup>62</sup> EPIPHANIUS, *Panarion* 73. 21. 4 (294).

<sup>63</sup> *Panarion*, 76. 11. 18 (356).

from Arius by maintaining between the Father and the Son not only an ontological gulf, but also a gnoseological difference. Following the philosophical principle (which, somehow, recapitulates the structure of the Cartesian 'ontological argument'), which says that any active cause is greater in being than the passively caused product<sup>64</sup>, Aëtius refused to the Son any equality with the Father. To Christ is acknowledged just a moral perfection, since he 'preserves the pure will of God'<sup>65</sup>. It is interesting to see how, claiming that only the ingenerate is God, Aëtius had to conclude that the Son of Mary was certainly not dual-willed.<sup>66</sup> In the fifth sentence of the *Syntagmation* (which originally included 300 statements, out of which only 47 were preserved), Aëtius explicitly says that 'his nature must be one (*mia*)', and so must Christ's human will. Holding to the hard line of Jewish monotheism, Aëtius consequently supported the Christological monothelism, which three centuries later was condemned by the Church at the Council of Constantinople (680).

As a consequence of his ineffective soteriology and adoptive Christology, Aëtius also held particular ideas about the scriptural language about God. The sonship of Christ being adoptive, the relationship Father/Son was homologated to the providential acts of carefulness, which God shows in the economy of creation. Among Christ's titles, no one could discern, in Aëtius' eyes, any relationship of consubstantiality. In a memorandum issued by Basil of Ancyra in order to defend the scriptural language Father/Son (against any substitution with abstract terms), many of the statements made by the radical Arians are recorded *verbatim*. We learn that they were happy with the doctrine of likeness if it was to bear this emendation: 'not in essence, but in the relation of will (*ou kata tēn ousian, alla kata ton tēs thelēseōs logon*).'<sup>67</sup> The radical Arians, headed by Aëtius and Eudoxius, were also against the ascription of the 'infinity' to the Son, and claimed that 'the name "Father" is not revelatory of essence (*ousia*), but of power (*exousia*), which made the Son to exist as a hypostasis before the ages as God the God (*hypostasēs ton hyon pro aiōnōn theon logon*).'<sup>68</sup> The arguments was that, 'if they [i.e., the Orthodox] wish that "Father" be revelatory of essence (*ousias*), but not of power (*exousias*), let them address also the hypostasis of the Uniquely-Generated by the name Father.'<sup>69</sup> In short, Aëtius refused to understand that the Father

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<sup>64</sup> *Panarion*, 76.11. 8 (353).

<sup>65</sup> *Panarion*, 73. 21. 3 (293).

<sup>66</sup> KOPECEK, *op. cit.*, 130.

<sup>67</sup> *ibidem*, 185.

<sup>68</sup> *idem*.

<sup>69</sup> *ibidem*, 186.

and the Son could have the same essence, while they bear different and not interchangeable names. There is an obvious inconsistency in saying that one name (i.e., 'ingenerate') defines essence, while the rest of the others (i.e., Father, Son) express relations of activity or passivity (to beget, to be begotten). This criticism becomes even more acute when one considers that 'ingenerate' (*agennētos*) is not a scriptural name for God, as it is the case with the names of Father and Son. But, as has been already noted<sup>70</sup>, despite his public claims, Aëtius had little concern to ground his theological doctrine on a scriptural basis<sup>71</sup>, while he preferred to set in motion ideas more close to the Aristotelian canon of thinking. Aëtius' metaphysical model was regarded as mandatory by his direct disciple Eunomius. In order to understand the roots of his conflict with the Cappadocian Fathers, a closer look at Eunomius' biography and ideas is essential.

### **Eunomius of Cyzicus**

Eunomius is well known as the *bête noire* of the neo-Arian movement, against whom more famous authors – from Basil the Great to Theodore of Mopsuestia – wrote long polemical treatises. R. P. Vaggione is the author of Eunomius' most detailed biography, which in fact is based on much of the sympathetic account given by Philostorgius' in *Historia Ecclesiastica*. From Vaggione's monograph, we learn that he was born 'toward the middle of the second decade of the fourth century'<sup>72</sup> in the north-west region of the province of Cappadocia. Born into a family of modest condition (unjustly patronized in the prose of his enemies), Eunomius, who enjoyed a Christian background, served as a pedagogue at a quite young age. By the early 340s, it is very likely that Eunomius looked for a better education in the new city of Constantine the Great. There, Eunomius might have got to know about the passionate theological disputes over the nature of Christ, which after the death of the emperor had been suddenly refreshed. In the capital of the Empire, the results of Nicaea were largely contested. In terms of private matters, Eunomius' trip on Bosphoros was not very successful, so that by 346 he was in Antioch. Having a population of almost 200 000,

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<sup>70</sup> HANSON, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine*, 610-611.

<sup>71</sup> AËTIUS, *Syntagmation*, intro: 'my little discourse is in accordance with the meaning of the Holy Scriptures (*kat'ennioian tōn agiōn graphōn*); cf L. R. WICKHAM, 'The Syntagmation of Aëtius the Anomoean', *JTS* 19 (1968), 532-68, here 545.

<sup>72</sup> VAGGIONE, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2.

this *polis* of Asia Minor could compete fairly well by that time with the imperial cities of Rome, Alexandria, and Constantinople. Antioch could provide the best opportunities for students willing to pursue a course in rhetoric, prestige of which was still undisputed among philosophers and theologians alike. There, Eunomius found first Aëtius. Eunomius' fate was determined by this decisive encounter with Aëtius, whose disciple he remained up to the end of his life.

By the late 340s, Eunomius encountered the Alexandrine theological milieu, from which both the presbyter Arius and the bishop Athanasius emerged as major opponents, much earlier. Eunomius became a more important figure in the late 350s. In the eyes of Constantius, who died by 360, Eunomius and Aëtius were two undesirable troublemakers who obstructed the emergence of the moderate Arian compromise. On the feast of Epiphany January 6 by 361, Eunomius scandalised his congregation from Cyzicus, when he mentioned that *Theotokos* had borne children to Joseph after Christ's nativity. Since told by Philostorgius<sup>73</sup>, a famous ally of Eunomius, this story satisfies all the criteria of credibility. By maintaining this position, Eunomius confirms that, in general, the understanding of Christ's incarnation dictates the formulation of the dogma of Trinity. Carefully analysing this episode, one can catch a glimpse of Eunomius' concept of holiness, in contrast with the defenders of Nicaea<sup>74</sup> (who ultimately invoked deification as the last consequence of Christ's incarnation<sup>75</sup>). For Gregory, the narrative of Christ included as a natural stage the moment of virginal birth<sup>76</sup>, whereas for Eunomius was ready to acknowledge it only as a miraculous event<sup>77</sup>, which after Jesus' birth ceased. This story shows Eunomius very prone to doubt, having a sectarian reading of the Scriptures, trying to find rationalistic explanations for crucial elements of the revelation.

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<sup>73</sup> PHILOSTORGIUS, *HE* 6. 2 (GCS 71. 3-9).

<sup>74</sup> GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *Ep.* 101 (PG 37, 177 C 4-6): 'If anyone does not believe that holy Mary is Theotokos, he is severed from the Godhead (*choris esti tēs theotēs*). If any one should assert that he passed through the Virgin as through a channel, and was not at once divinely and humanly formed in her (divinely, because without the intervention of a man; humanly, because in accordance with the laws of gestation), he is in like manner godless'.

<sup>75</sup> For thorough references, see N. V. RUSSEL, *The Concept of Deification in the Early Greek Fathers*, DPhil (Oxford, 1988), to be published in a modified version at OUP (forthcoming).

<sup>76</sup> *De Virg.* XIII (PG 46, 377D); *Ep.* 3. 24 (PG 46. 1022A). MICHAEL O'CAROLL, *Theotokos. A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier Inc., 1982), 161: 'Gregory is more insistent on the *virginitas in partu* than any of his contemporaries.'

<sup>77</sup> A I. 27. 7.

The leaders of the Anomean suffered exile for more than a year, and only the reign of Julian the Apostate brought them back onto the ecclesiastical scene. It took very little for Aëtius and Eunomius to recover from the disgrace suffered under Constantius: the first one became bishop without see somewhere in Lybia, while the latter was appointed bishop of Cyzicus. Vaggione tells us that their teaching did not satisfy the interests of some prestigious Arian leaders in the West (e.g.: Wulfila), who were spreading the Gospel without paying too much attention to Eunomius' celebrated *akribeia*. (Vaggione pointed out that one of the constant leit-motifs in Eunomius' writings is 'precision' (*akribeia*), which means not only doctrinal correctness, but also fidelity towards what, allegedly, the former teachers of the Church believed). After the death of Julian (361-363), Jovian (363-364) took power. A defender of Nicaea, he did not pursue any violent policy *adversus haereses*. His successor Valens railed, for not less than fourteen years (364-378), against Nicaea. But political intrigues and the lack of support of the Homoians (Basil of Ancyra and Eusthatius), brought Eunomius again into trouble. Though exiled in Naxos, he managed to write his second *Apologia*, in a comprehensive refutation of Basil's treatise *contra Eunomium*. The accession of the Spanish officer Theodosius to the imperial throne ensured that Eunomius' days were numbered. Theodosius' reign records a theological offensive against neo-Arianism, conducted in first instance by Gregory of Nyssa (Basil's youngest brother) and Gregory of Nazianzus ('the Theologian'). After the decisions taken at Constantinople in 381 confirming the documents of Nicaea, little hope remained for Eunomius. The seventh canon of this second ecumenical council required a new baptism of every member of the Eunomian community who wanted to be reconciled with the Catholic Church. This was an extremely severe measure which, interestingly enough, did not apply to the genuine Arians (admitted to the Church provided that they had accepted the orthodox Creed).

In June 383, Eunomius was given the last chance to be admitted to 'the great Church'. The Emperor, who used to 'speak loudly and carry a big stick'<sup>78</sup>, wanted a peaceful extinction of all the ecclesiastical and civil clamours around Nicaea's creed. Though dressed in finical biblical language, omitting completely *agennētos*, Eunomius' *Expositio Fidei* did not convince the Emperor. It seemed that Eunomius' fate was 'neither to die a martyr like Lucian, nor receive burial like Arius'<sup>79</sup>. He could not even die like a Roman poet (i.e., Ovid) in the remote province of

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<sup>78</sup> SOZOMENOS, *HE* 7. 12, 11-12.

<sup>79</sup> VAGGIONE, *Eunomium of Cyzicus*, 351.

Scythia Minor. Vaggione inspiringly tells us the story: 'during the summer of 389 Eunomius was arrested at Chalcedon and exiled at Halmyris, an appropriately named fortress on the salt-flats of Danube delta. Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately), before Eunomius could actually arrive the river froze and the barbarians crossed over and captured the fort'<sup>80</sup>. In the spring of the next year, Eunomius was sent to Caesarea in Asia Minor, and in the meantime, the implacable process of the extinction of all the non-Nicene ecclesiastical factions started. In 396, consumed with rage over his bitter past, Eunomius died like an old 'troglodyte', hoping probably only for heavenly consolations.

### **Eunomius' Apologies**

According to Th. Kopecek's arguments<sup>81</sup>, Eunomius' *First Apology* was probably delivered in public at Constantinople (359), when the moderate Arians ('homoians') met the radical wing of the 'Anomeans'. The first *Apologia* sets out the whole premise of Eunomius' thinking, displaying his passionate conviction that by his arguments, he only 'honours the teaching of our Saviour Jesus Christ'<sup>82</sup>, kept in the 'governing tradition of the fathers'. In not more than three sentences, Eunomius made known the tenets of his faith, which, though different from what Nicaea had established in 325, looked, at least at the first glance, very biblical and unproblematic. Speaking on behalf of his community, Eunomius said:

We believe in one God, Father almighty, from whom are all things (*ex ou ta panta*)

And in one only-begotten (*eis hena monogenē*) Son of God, God the Word (*theon logon*), our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things (*di' ou ta panta*)

And in one Holy Spirit, the Counsellor (*ton paraklēton*), in whom is given to each of the saints an apportionment of every grace according to measure for the common good.<sup>83</sup>

Yet, the real meaning of this confession of faith comes in the subsequent lines, where Eunomius explained his

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<sup>80</sup> *ibidem.*, 356.

<sup>81</sup> T. Kopecek goes against the first dating of F. DIEKAMP, 'Literargeschichtliches zu der Eunomianischen Kontroverse', *BZ* 18 (1909), 1-13.

<sup>82</sup> A I. 2. 6.

<sup>83</sup> A I. 5. 1-7.

understanding of such expressions as 'all things', or 'the Only-begotten'. Apparently, in Eunomius' phrase, the 'fatherhood' ascribed to the one God is not the result of an acquisition, as Nicene theology constantly reiterated. Yet, Eunomius disclosed his thinking when he said:

Anything which can be said to come into existence by the action of another (*hyph' heterou*) – granted that this is in fact the case – has itself to be placed among created beings, and must properly be ranked among things which have come into existence by the action of God.<sup>84</sup>

For him, the criterion for this analytic judgement is 'the innate knowledge' (*kata te physikēn ennoian*). If the Scriptures speak about Christ being begotten, this process is to be understood, in Eunomius' eyes, just as another way of bringing something (i.e.: the Logos) into being. It is not the only place where Eunomius' makes of 'being' or 'existence' the ultimate category of thought. He could not possibly imagine in God any activity that prevails over the concept existence, as was the case with, respectively, the Only-begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit who proceeded from the Father. On the contrary, for the Nicene theologians, 'to be' was not the last attribute for God. The Son could be born and yet, not *brought* into being *from* (real or notional) non-existence; the Holy Spirit could be proceeded, and yet, not brought into life *from* (real or notional) nothingness. For Eunomius, since the Son is begotten, he must have been non-existent once upon a time.<sup>85</sup> God himself can only be 'the unbegotten essence' (*ousia agennētos*), an appellation by which he thinks he acknowledges God as 'the one who is' (*tēn tou einai ho estin homologian*).<sup>86</sup> Obviously, Eunomius changes here the tonality and talks about the Trinity not as about the awe-inspiring and great mystery of the Christian faith, but of a sequential Triad, which he described dialectically, rather than prayerfully. Eunomius wants to bring Trinity into the realm of evidence, and his best image of God is that of a supreme Monad. In fact, Eunomius does not speak at all, in any of his writings, about the Holy Trinity, while suggesting that the assessment of consubstantiality cannot avoid the heresy of Sabellius and Marcellus of Ancyra, who 'have been excluded from the priestly

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<sup>84</sup> A I. 7. 7-9.

<sup>85</sup> A I. 14. 15-22.

<sup>86</sup> A I. 8. 3.

assemblies, fellowship of the sacraments (*koinōnias mysteriōn*).<sup>87</sup> (No reader should be misled by this statement, since, by the early 350s, the Anomeans themselves cut off any liturgical relationship with the Nicene communities.<sup>88</sup> Aëtius and Eunomius shared the same situation with the Sabellians and the followers of Marcellus.)

Eunomius' major problem was with the appellation of God as Father, which was justified by Jesus' own teaching about prayer. To accept fatherhood as a natural attribute of God meant for Eunomius that God was somehow involved in 'the passion of a communication of essence (*to tēs metousias pathos epi theou dia tēn tou patros prosēgorian*)'<sup>89</sup>. Therefore, he could explain the generation of the Son only as an act of creation, which from the philosophical viewpoint remained problematic. In his *CE I*, Gregory repeatedly reproached Eunomius for having introduced a double causality in God, as was suggested by loose expression such as: 'he [the Only-Begotten] alone was begotten and created [*gennētheis kai ktistheis*] by the power of the Unbegotten [*monos gar tē tou agennētou dunamei*].'<sup>90</sup> Gregory claimed that, instead of simplifying the scheme, Eunomius made it more complicated, introducing between God and the Only-Begotten another mediating structure, namely 'the divine power'; after God begot his Son, Eunomius presumes that the Son is charged with second-hand demiurgic responsibilities, like that of creating the angels<sup>91</sup>. Yet, he remains 'offspring' (*gennēma*) and 'thing made' (*poiēma*), essentially different from God.

As we have seen, Eunomius introduces already in the first *Apologia* some stark statements about the nature of language. In paragraph 18, we learn that 'since the names are different, the essences are different as well [*parēllagmēnōn tōn onomatōn parēllagmenas homologeîn kai tas ousias*]'<sup>92</sup>. In other words, 'the designations in fact indicate the very essences [*einai tōn ousiōn sēmantikas tas prosēgorias*].'<sup>93</sup> Eunomius had to answer the

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<sup>87</sup> A I. 6. 14-15. In 336, Marcellus suffered the condemnation of the synod of Constantinople. He was vindicated at the council of Rome in 340. For a general introduction, see R. HÜBNER, 'Gregor von Nyssa und Markell von Ancyra', in M. HARL (ed.), *Ecriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nysse. Actes du colloque de Chèvetogne* (22-26 septembre 1969) (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 199-229; J. T. LIENHARD, *Contra Marcellum: Marcellus of Ancyra and Fourth-Century Theology* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1999).

<sup>88</sup> W. ELERT, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries* ET by N. E. Nagel (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 166-167.

<sup>89</sup> A I. 16. 8-9.

<sup>90</sup> A I. 15. 15-16.

<sup>91</sup> A I. 17. 11.

<sup>92</sup> A I. 18. 13-14.

<sup>93</sup> A I. 18. 20.

problem raised by the indiscriminate scriptural usage of words like 'life', 'power', or 'light' about God and the Only-Begotten, respectively. His answer is that there is a specific light to God the Father, distinct from the one the Son spots<sup>94</sup>. It is obvious that Eunomius thinks the begetting of the Son in analogy with the other demiurgic actions, about which he says that they are 'neither without beginning (*ouk anarchon*), nor without ending (*out' ateleutēton*).'<sup>95</sup> An 'eternal begetting' of the Son is beyond Eunomius' power of comprehension. He prefers, therefore, to compare the begetting to the process of mirroring<sup>96</sup>. Christ is the 'image of the invisible God' (Colossians 15: 15), a definition which, read in Platonic terms, could very easily imply an ontological degradation. In short, for Eunomius, the name Father designates the activity of God, which has a beginning and an end, while 'agennētos' designates what God is *in se*.

Eunomius' first *Apology* was thoroughly refuted by Gregory of Nyssa in his *CE I*. In this book Gregory introduces for the first time his famous argument about the Son's eternal generation by reference to the divine *infinity*. Gregory had to defend what could be called the asymmetrical relationship between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, respectively. He had to show that this asymmetry of relation does not entail any form of subordinationism or emanationism. In the wake of Basil the Great, Gregory undertook the difficult task of speaking about the fellowship or the community of substance (*to koinon tēs ousias*)<sup>97</sup> within the Holy Trinity and, in the meantime, of dismissing any intellectual enquiry into the nature of God. How this affected the use of the scriptural language became clearer only in *CE III*.

In his second *Apologia*, Eunomius reiterated Aëtius's general opinions about God, in particular the idea that the divine essence is encapsulated by the concept of 'ungeneracy'. This statement was the laughing stock of Gregory's third book *CE III*, and the object of an impressive philosophical deconstruction, framed by stark theological references to the Scriptures and tradition (the latter being for Gregory paradigmatically incarnated in the person of Basil). At the very beginning of *CE III*, Gregory identifies the conundrum: 'Our opponents [*scil.*: Aëtius and Eunomius], with an eye to the evil object, that of establishing their denial of the Godhead of the Only-begotten,

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<sup>94</sup> It is probably useful to remark here that one of the strongest arguments of St Gregory Palamas in favour of the 'uncreated light' comes from this recognition of the Father and the Son sharing the same light. If the light revealed by Christ to his apostles was divine, it had to be also uncreated.

<sup>95</sup> A I. 23. 6-7.

<sup>96</sup> A I. 14 6-14.

<sup>97</sup> NPNF V, 79b (GNO I. 165, 10).

do not say that the essence of the Father is ingenerate, but, conversely, they declare ungeneracy to be his essence, in order that by this distinction in regard to generation, they may establish, by the verbal opposition, a diversity of natures.<sup>98</sup> In other words, Eunomius tried to find an attribute of the Father which, *eo ipso*, could not be assigned to the Son. This was, of course, *ungeneracy*, which for Eunomius, as well as for Gregory, meant 'without origin'. If Gregory – along with the previous Church Fathers<sup>99</sup> – had no problems in admitting it as one of the names ascribable to the Father, he objects to Eunomius' readiness to transform this qualification into the only legitimate one, on behalf of God. One has to admit that Gregory's claim was not easily understandable: for him, as for Basil, the essence of God could be called 'agennētos' and the Son – 'gennētos' *per se* – was *homoousios* with this 'ingenerate Deity'. The only possibility of understanding this dogmatic statement was through what S. Kierkegaard called 'the jump into paradox'. But why, among divine names, should 'ungeneracy' have priority over other attributes like 'simplicity', 'infinitude', 'righteousness', etc.? On the one hand, Eunomius seems to specify an essential attribute that could unfold all the other attributes of God. What Gregory is concerned about is that Eunomius professes 'ungeneracy' as *the* divine attribute, precisely because it cannot be ascribed to the Son. As one can easily see, Eunomius' trick was not to plainly reject Christ's divinity on the basis of scriptural evidence – an impossible task since Scriptures are *always* to be interpreted – but to do it from a different angle. Pretending to proceed methodically, starting from a low level of philosophical reflection, in fact Eunomius excluded *ab initio* from his deductive scheme the full participation of the Son in God's essence.

### The Orthodox Answer: St Gregory of Nyssa

There is a certain epistemological confidence behind Eunomius' claim that 'ungeneracy' is God's essence (and not that God's essence is – *inter alia* – 'ungenerate'),<sup>100</sup> namely the confidence in the ability of language to express adequately the realm of the divine. To Basil's affirmation<sup>101</sup> of the human character of any linguistic expression, including *agennētos*, Eunomius replied with a series of unparalleled theological

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<sup>98</sup> NPNF V, 252a (GNO I. 232. 26-233.1).

<sup>99</sup> JUSTIN THE MARTYR, *Dial.* V. 4 (PG 6, 488B); ORIGEN, *De princ.* IV. 1 (PG 11, 357C); *agennētos* ('unborn' < *gennaō* = to beget) has been often confused with *agenetos* ('uncreated' < *gignomai* = to come into being).

<sup>100</sup> NPNF V, 252b (GNO I. 233. 11-17a).

<sup>101</sup> *Adv. Eun.* I. 6 (PG 29, 524B).

statements. In the first book of his second treatise *Apologia Apologiae*, Eunomius speaks of the natural meanings of the words<sup>102</sup>, claiming that God himself made use of these words before the creation of man<sup>103</sup>. In the second one, Eunomius pours scorn on Basil's<sup>104</sup> 'relativistic' account of language, saying that he rejected the Scriptures for the benefit of pagan wisdom<sup>105</sup>. Gregory's elder brother is labelled at once as a disciple of Aristotle, Epicurus<sup>106</sup>, and Valentinus<sup>107</sup>. In fact, Basil only claimed that the human mind has the freedom to choose the appropriate words which express better the activity of different real or imaginary entities. Contrarily, captive to a literal exegesis of Scripture, Eunomius supposes that, *ab initio*, God invented a catalogue of names befitting the essence of things<sup>108</sup>. He suggests that such ideas are implicit in the first two chapters of Genesis, but also in various other texts, like the Psalms<sup>109</sup> or the Gospels. Unsurprisingly, Basil's assessment of the relative character of all the predicates uttered on behalf of God, provoked on Eunomius' part the habitual reflex of accusing his adversary of blasphemy. In short, Eunomius introduced the notion of divine invention of names<sup>110</sup>, without specifying if it was only of *agennētos* or, of others names, as well. 'The Creator, says the heresiarch, by means of relationship, activity, and analogy, has appointed names suitable to each things'<sup>111</sup>. It is not clear what words like 'relationship, activity, and analogy' do really mean, but this conclusion is for Eunomius the result of two kinds of enquiries: one is scriptural (of which Moses, David and the evangelists bear witness), while the other is the result of logical deduction from 'a law of nature [which] teaches us that the status of names derives from the things named, not from the authority of the one who does the naming'<sup>112</sup>. Yet, Eunomius never managed to provide biblical evidence either for his prioritising of *agennesia*, or for his essentialist Trinitarian formula. At one point, he says that all names are divine products, and therefore no discrimination among them is acceptable. Then, Eunomius can claim that *agennesia* plays a top role, because of

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<sup>102</sup> NPNF V, 91b (GNO I. 201.3-5).

<sup>103</sup> NPNF V, 277a (GNO I. 303. 1-6).

<sup>104</sup> NPNF V, 248b (GNO II. 310. 25): '[Basil] has undertaken to write without any skill in logic'.

<sup>105</sup> NPNF V, 269b; 291b (GNO I. 281. 1-14; 345-346).

<sup>106</sup> NPNF V, 291b (GNO I. 345.9-346.11).

<sup>107</sup> NPNF V, 295a (GNO I. 356. 20-4); NPNF V, 297a (GNO I. 362. 7-11).

<sup>108</sup> NPNF V, 291a (GNO I. 345. 12-16).

<sup>109</sup> NPNF V, 298a (GNO I. 350. 6-9).

<sup>110</sup> NPNF V, 265 (GNO I. 270. 1-4).

<sup>111</sup> NPNF V, 284a (GNO II. 324. 1-4).

<sup>112</sup> NPNF V, 305a (GNO I. 385. 21-4).

theological reasons. One of the notorious motives for this fixation on a single word is, ultimately, God's simplicity, acknowledged as such by Gregory<sup>113</sup>. Simplicity of God – Eunomius suggests – should accommodate just one designation, namely *agennētos*. Actually, by saying this, Eunomius acknowledges the instant donation of the concept of *ungeneracy*, and the one of *simplicity*, the semantics of which can hardly dovetail.

In making *agennētos* prevail against all other divine names (like infinity, goodness, etc.), Eunomius proved to be, to say the least, inconsistent, since he wanted to demonstrate that, in fact, language is of divine institution. The natural consequence of this statement would be that not only *agennētos*, but also other names would necessarily enjoy the privileged status of concepts which reveal the essence of natures. Claiming that we are using a divine artefact, Eunomius arrived at a peculiar theory of univocal predication. To be sure, he did not say, like Duns Scotus one thousand years later, that 'to be' can be predicated in the same way about God as about any other creature. In this respect, he was too much of a Neoplatonic thinker, asserting for 'the first essence' the right 'to be', in the proper sense of the word<sup>114</sup>. Instead, Eunomius spoke of 'words belonging naturally to God'<sup>115</sup>, which nevertheless, come into our intellectual possession. In this respect, it is legitimate to speak about a linguistic (or semantic) univocity, which means that in Eunomius' thought there was no distinction between God's treatment of words and the human usage of them. Eunomius could make even more bizarre statements, for instance that 'things which have one and the same name are themselves one'<sup>116</sup>. Such a proposition is blatantly wrong even for the most profane observer of the living performance of any kind of languages, which include in their texture a considerable amount of homonyms (words which are identical in form but different in meanings).

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<sup>113</sup> NPNF V, 252b-253a (GNO I. 238. 11-42); B. KRIVOCHINE, 'Simplicité de la nature et les distinctions en Dieu selon Grégoire de Nysse', *Messenger de l'Exarchat du Patriarche Russe en Europe Occidentale* 23 (1975) 133-58; A. Meredith, 'The divine simplicity: *Contra Eunomium* I, 233-241' in L. F. MATEO-SECO and J. L. BASTERO (ed.), *El 'Contra Eunomium I' en la produccion literaria de Grigorio de Nisa* (Pamplona, 1988), 339-351; C. STEAD, 'Divine Simplicity as a Problem of Orthodoxy', in R. WILLIAMS (ed.), *The Making of Orthodoxy. Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1989), 255-269.

<sup>114</sup> NPNF V, 225a (GNO II. 251. 18-20): 'He who is in the bosom of I AM [Ex 3: 14] does not possess existence simply or in the proper sense'.

<sup>115</sup> NPNF V, 305b (GNO I. 388. 6).

<sup>116</sup> NPNF V, 193a (GNO II. 166. 11-16).

## **AGENNĒTOS: Privation and Correlation**

However, Gregory's objection is not just a moral one. He is very keen to show that the characterisation of God primarily as a 'ungenerate entity' is completely mystifies the understanding of the relationship between the Father and the Son, which was the object of Athanasius' theology<sup>117</sup>. In his *CE I*, Gregory spent a lot of energy in order to prove that the whole point of the biblical language about the Father and to Son is to stress in a paradoxical language – which, speaking of God, cannot be suspected of literal connotations – the essential identity and the hypostatic difference.<sup>118</sup> This is what characterises the mysterious, and the unfathomable God worshipped in the 'true religion' (*eusebeia*). For Gregory, the whole point was clear: if the Father always existed as a God, but not as a Father, then the Son would have come – the first among all creatures – though *not* 'ex nihilo', but out of divine will<sup>119</sup>. In other words, if one had to speak, like Eunomius, of God in terms of 'ungenerate essence', any explanation of the idea of 'fatherhood' would be done at the cost of introducing temporality into God. If God is described primarily as an 'ungenerate essence' one should say that he only *becomes* a Father by 'begetting' a Son (since 'ungeneracy' does not speak of 'fatherhood'<sup>120</sup>). Temporalisation of God is just the first step towards the restoration of mythology, which in Gregory's time had already began to be justified philosophically by various Neoplatonic thinkers<sup>121</sup> (among whom one should

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<sup>117</sup> E. P. MEIJERING, 'Athanasius on the Father as the Origin of the Son' in *God. Being. History. Studies in Patristic Philosophy* (Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing Company, 1975), 89-102

<sup>118</sup> NPNF V, 80a (GNO I. 165, 25-26): (*mia physis omologeitai par'emon en diaphorais tas hypostasesi*). Cf. S. GONZALES, 'La formula *mia ousia treis hypostaseis* en San Gregorio de Nisa', *AnGr* 21 (1939) 1-140; more generally, for the Cappadocian Fathers' Trinitarian theology, see the invaluable contributions of ANDRE DE HALLEUX, '„Hypostase" et „personne" dans la formation du dogme trinitaire', and 'Personnalisme ou essentialisme trinitaire chez les Pères cappadociens', in *Id. Patrologie et Oecuménisme* (Louvain: Peeters, 1990), 113-214; 215-268; also, L. AYRES, 'On Not Three People: The Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology As Seen in *To Ablabius: On not Three Gods*', *MT* 18 (2002) 4, 445-474.

<sup>119</sup> A I, 15. 8: 'we do not, however, include the essence of the Only-begotten among things brought into existence out of nothing, for no-thing is no essence (*epeiper ouk ousia to mē on*).'

<sup>120</sup> AA I (VAGIONNE, 103; GNO I. 190. 20-193.1).

<sup>121</sup> Regarding Eunomius' relationship to Neoplatonism, some hints have been given by J. DANÉLOU, 'Eunome l'Arien et l'exégèse néoplatonicienne du Cratyle', *REG* 69 (1956), 412-432; Further research has been carried on by P. M. GREGORIOS, 'Theurgic neo-Platonism and the Eunomius-Gregory Debate : An Examination of the Background', in *"Contra Eunomium I" en la producción literaria de Gregorio de Nisa* (Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra,

count Iamblicus and, on a lower note, Julian the Apostate). Driven to despair, Gregory denounces Eunomius as a person who 'advocates the error of Judaism and takes part in the impiety of the Greeks (*tēs Hellenikes atheias*)'<sup>122</sup>

Since the heresiarch does not wish to refute the Nicene dogma straightforwardly, pretending to establish his ideas on a logical platform of thought, Gregory brought out a semantic refutation. First, there is the question of synonymy drawn out between *agennētos* and *anarchōs*, already made by St Basil in his *Adversus Eunomium*<sup>123</sup>. Gregory comes out with a clear differentiation of the various meanings (*polysemos*) of the word 'origin' (*archē*), which stands behind the concept of *agennēsia* ('ungeneracy')<sup>124</sup>. Greek language uses different verbs in order to express the act of coming into existence: with regard to the animal nature, one thinks of the specific acts of, respectively, giving birth and begetting (*tiktō* – for female; *gennaō* – for male), then there is the specific act of creating (*poieō*), and of fashioning (*kataskueuazō*). Gregory does not follow Aristotle's taxonomy of causation (divided into four general types of *causa*), but makes clear that 'ungeneracy' is just one category under the more general idea of 'unoriginateness' (*tō anarchōn*). 'Ungenerate' is a manner of being<sup>125</sup>, and since it is a quality (determination), it cannot embrace the divine absolute. It conveys literally the idea of existence without a father, and in this respect, Adam could be called *agennētos*, as well as God the Father. If they can be designated with identical attributes, their meanings remain utterly different. *Agennētos* is also a non-biblical name, which by its own status shows itself to be an invention<sup>126</sup> or, in Boethius' later terms, an *impositio*.

Eunomius finds his way towards the divine Monad trying to find a concept absolute free of relation. He has difficulties in maintaining that, on the one hand, *agennētos* describes the essence of God, while, on the other hand, it conveys no negative meanings. If *agennētos* had been out of privation (prescribed by *alpha privativum*), then God also would have to be discussed as a passive subject. Why? Eunomius takes for granted the absolute,

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1988), 217-235; and P. PAPAGEORGIOU, 'Plotinos and Eunomios : A Parallel Theology of the Three Hypostases', *GOTR* 37 (1992), 215-231.

<sup>122</sup> NPNF V, 251b (GNO I. 231, 7-8).

<sup>123</sup> BASIL, *Adv. Eun.* I. 15 (PG 29, 545B ff).

<sup>124</sup> NPNF V, 78b (GNO I. 162, 7-8); Eunomius calls God the 'only font and source of all things [*ten ton panton te aitian kai archen*]' (A I, 22. 6). If, on the one hand, Eunomius is ready to render as synonyms concepts like 'origin' (*archē*) and 'cause' (*aitia*), he is inconsistent in claiming 'agennētos' as *the* name of God.

<sup>125</sup> NPNF V, 289a (GNO I. 339. 2-7).

<sup>126</sup> NPNF V, 305b (GNO I. 387. 3-4).

and immediate connection of language to reality<sup>127</sup>. Yet, he calls God the 'only fount and source of all things [*tēn tōn pantōn tē aitian kai archen*]'<sup>128</sup>. Accepting as synonyms words like 'origin' (*archē*) and 'cause' (*aitia*), he is inconsistent in claiming 'agennētos' as the name of God *par excellence*. Theologically, one should be ready to withdraw all the sensible connotations of the word *gennaō*, when it is said about God the Father. As Gregory very often repeats in his work, 'generation' tells of the mysterious relationship existing between the Father and the Son, which specifies simultaneously the hypostatic difference (*diaphōra* without *diastasis*) and the community of substance in God, who is One. Therefore, one can be confident that 'while the Father is unoriginate and ungenerate, the Son is ungenerate [in the way we have said], but not ungenerate.'<sup>129</sup>

It is clear that, from the beginning of the quarrel with Eunomius, the understanding of 'generation' was at stake. Eunomius regarded it as equivalent to 'creation' or 'bringing into existence'. It would be right to say that Eunomius understood 'ungeneracy' as the highest degree of existence ever conceivable, making of his God something less comparable to the late medieval *summum ens*. Eunomius' vocalism (or primitive nominalism) must have sounded attractive to at least one category of people, namely those belonging to upper-class society, being familiar with the Neoplatonic Theurgic jargon of that age (Porphyry tells us about Plotinus' success among members of the Alexandrian aristocracy of the third century). Yet, one can suspect that the appeal of abstract discourse remained limited to an elitist category of people, which explains why Eunomius failed to capture with his rebarbative intellectual speech the imagination of his congregation. In order to substantiate this assertion, one could bring forth not only the Cappadocians' frequent charges of atheism against Aëtius and Eunomius, but also some stances from his *Second Apology*. The first one echoes Exodus 3: 14 and John 1: 1, mixed with a subordinationist vision of God: 'He who is in the bosom of I AM (*ho en kolpois ōn tou ontos*), and Who is in the beginning and with God (*kai en archē ōn kai pros ton theon ōn*), does not possess existence simply and in the proper sense (*ouk ōn oude kyriōs ōn*), even if Basil, neglecting the distinction, uses the title of 'existent' (*tēn tou ontos prosēgorian*), contrary to the truth.'<sup>130</sup> This rather cryptic sentence tells us that the Son does not possess

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<sup>127</sup> A I. 12. 7-8: *ouk heteron men tēn ousian noountes, heteron de ti par'autēn to sēmainomenon*.

<sup>128</sup> A I. 22. 6.

<sup>129</sup> NPNF V, 78b (GNO I. 162. 22-25).

<sup>130</sup> NPNF V, 225a (GNO II. 251. 18-23).

existence in the proper sense of the word, which is only ascribable to the Ungenerate. To such a claim, Gregory protested harshly, saying that even for the pagan wisdom (e.g.: Aristotle), God was unimaginable under the category of quantity (more or less being). Refusing to apply any category of quantity or quality to God, Basil of Caesarea warned that the Trinity is not to be understood into a numeral sense: 'We do not count by addition, passing from the one to the many by increase; we do not say: one, two, three, or first, second and third. *'For I am God, the first, and I am the last'* [Is. 44, 6]. Now we have never, even to the present time, heard of a second God; but adoring God of God, confessing the individuality of the hypostases, we dwell in the monarchy without dividing the theology into fragments'<sup>131</sup>. Eunomius missed this point and, therefore, introduced an ontological differentiation among the divine hypostases, being compelled to speak of a 'second' and a 'third' god. Why one should stop at the third 'God' remained obscure.

The second fragment seem to confirm the onto-theological constitution of Eunomius' metaphysics, in other words: 'For he who possesses existence and who lives because of the Father (*ho dia ton patera on kai zon*), does not appropriate to himself the status of the I AM, for the essence which rules even Him draws (*elkousēs*) to itself the meaning of the existent (*tēn tou ontos ennoian*)'.<sup>132</sup> Pointing out that God is the essence, the very nature of which is to exist, Eunomius traces, again, a very similar logic of thought to that of Spinoza who imagined God as that essence 'whose nature can be conceived only as existing'<sup>133</sup>. Consequently, Eunomius was obliged to treat Christ as a demigod by adoption. This typically Arian assumption triggered among the Nicene theologians a very prompt reaction. If Christ was created in a

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<sup>131</sup> BASIL, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 45 (PG 32, 149B); Gregory of Nyssa enunciates in *Oratio Catechetica* (ch.III) the same idea: 'the same thing is capable of being numbered and yet rejects numeration' (NPNF V, 477b; PG 45, D2-3: *pōs to auto kai arithmēton esti, kai diapheugei tēn exarithmēsīn*).

<sup>132</sup> NPNF V, 227a (GNO II. 254. 27-255. 4).

<sup>133</sup> Alongside the 'idea infiniti' (*Meditatio III*) and 'ens summe perfectum' (*Meditatio V*), DESCARTES speaks of God as 'causa sui' (*Responsiones I & IV*); SPINOZA, *Ethics* I, First Definition: 'By *causa sui* I mean that whose essence involves existence; or that whose nature can be conceived only as existing' (ET: S. Shirley, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992). To this long tradition culminating in Hegel, MARTIN HEIDEGGER gave the best 'scholium' in his famous essay called 'Die onto-theologische Verfassung der Metaphysik', *Identität und Differenz* (Pfullingen, 1957), 64 (ET: J. Stambaugh, New York: Harper and Row, 1969): '[Causa sui] is the right name for God in philosophy. Man can neither pray nor sacrifice to this god.' I am aware that in Eunomius' writing one cannot find the perfect match for *causa sui* (namely, *autogenes*), and yet, there is an important hint to this conceptual definition of God in A 7.1-3: *eis ... Theos mēte par'eautou mēte par'eautou genomenos*.

time before which he was not, the divine logic of Incarnation would collapse lamentably. Following St Athanasius<sup>134</sup>, Gregory of Nazianzus insisted that 'what is not assumed is unhealed, and only that which is united to God is saved.'<sup>135</sup> Once again, dogmatic theology cannot be separated from the practical adhesion to the proclamation of the Gospel and submission to the mystery of salvation. Eunomius' essentialist jargon left little room for such an understanding of salvation in Christ. It is significant that Eunomius' denial of Christ's divinity, whose participation in the goodness of the 'First Essence' (or 'Supreme Being', *tēs anokatō ousias*) he considered to be not natural, but gnostic<sup>136</sup>, resembles very much the modern shift the Western thought.<sup>137</sup> By implementing strongly ontologised concepts like 'Being' or 'Monad' in order to express the essence of God, many philosophers and theologians started to regard Christ as a model for moral perfection<sup>138</sup>. Perhaps, one should not forget that this essentialist tradition within the Western thought reached a ridiculous pinnacle in the person of Maximilian de Robespierre (1758-1793), who, within his anti-Christian framework of thought, regarded 'l'Être suprême' to be 'une idée sociale et républicaine'<sup>139</sup>. This surprising convergence between Eunomius

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<sup>134</sup> ATHANASIUS, *On the Incarnation* 52-4.

<sup>135</sup> GREGORY NAZIANZEN, *Letter* 101. 32.

<sup>136</sup> A I. 15. 16: 'he became the perfect minister [*teleiotos hypourgos*] of the whole creative activity and purpose of the Father'.

<sup>137</sup> J. PELIKAN, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (Yale, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 182-194.

<sup>138</sup> See, for general orientation, X. TILLIETTE, *Le Christ de la philosophie* (Paris : Cerf, 1990).

<sup>139</sup> At least for one reason, the European history of ideas could record on two parallel columns, in an anecdotal rubric, respectively, Eunomius' and Robespierre's attempts to acculturate their sectarian versions of 'onto-theological' metaphysics. The comparison might sound odd, due to the entirely different historical circumstances which shape the intellectual biography of both actors. Yet, the sources of the *religious rationalism* which, in modern times, exploded politically with the French Revolution could be traced back to the remote history of theological ideas. Maximilian de Robespierre (1758-1793) is recalled nowadays not only as the Jacobin ideologue of the *grand terreur* during the French Revolution, but also as the initiator of the most ludicrous form of celebration of the 'Supreme Being' (*L'Être suprême*) in modern times. After collapsing in the implementation of the revolutionary '*culte de la raison*', the France's National Convention introduced the Republican Calendar in November 1793, as a fierce tool of secularisation. On the 18, Month of Flowers (le Floréal), Year II (*i.e.*: 7 May 1794), Robespierre declared publicly that 'L'idée de l'Être suprême est un rappel continu à la justice, elle est donc sociale et républicaine'. He placed the cult of this last intellectual idol of the European humanism at the heart of the French 'democratic government', in the hope that «le peuple français reconnaît l'existence de l'Être suprême et de l'immortalité de l'âme". This national cult of the Supreme Being (which required an active participation in worshipping

and the rationalistic ideology of the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century becomes even more serious and arresting when compared in its epistemological application. The famous *Fragment II* included by Vaggione in Eunomius' *extant works*, provides a substantial argument in this respect. If one can trust Socrates Scholasticus' report, Eunomius maintained that 'God does not know anything more about his own essence than we do, nor is that essence better known to him, and less to us; rather, whatever we ourselves know about it is exactly what he knows, and, conversely, that which he knows is what you will find without change in us'<sup>140</sup>. With its conspicuous subjective touch, this sentence appears to be, again, very modern (*avant la lettre*). One just has to compare Aëtius and Eunomius' claims not only with Aristotle's image about God (defined as 'the thought which thinks upon itself'<sup>141</sup>), but also with Spinoza's or Hegel's philosophical statements, regarding the endowment of the intellect and its call for knowing God's essence<sup>142</sup>. One encounters

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the statue of Atheism, at the palace of *Tuileries*), as well as the Republican Calendar, 'was officially maintained for fourteen years, but it was virtually abandoned after six.' See N. DAVIES, *Europe. A History* (London: Pimlico, 1997<sup>2</sup>), 698.

<sup>140</sup> SOCRATES, *HE* IV. 7 (PG 67. 473B-C), ET in VAGGIONE (1987), 178; compare with THEODORET OF CYRUS' report: '[Eunomius] dared to assert such things as not one of the saints ever perceived, that he knows the essence of God perfectly (*alla kai auten akribos epistatai tou theou ten ousia*), and that he has the same knowledge about God, as God about himself (*hen autos echei peri eautou ho theos*)' – cf. THEOD., *Haer.* IV. 3 (PG 83. 421A), ET in VAGGIONE (1987), 169; see also EPIPHANIUS' account on Aëtius' doctrine (*Haer.* 76. 4. 2, GCS III. 344. 22-23): '[Aëtius] deluded himself to speak thus: "I know God" (*ton theon epistamai*), he says, "with perfect clarity, and I know and understand him to such an extent that I do not understand myself better than I know God (*me eidenai emauton mallon hos theon epistamai*).'

<sup>141</sup> *Metaphysics*, L, 7 (1072b19-26); for Aristotle, theology represents, in fact, the *philosophia prima*, or the 'science of the most eminent genus' (1026a21), which in the scholastic division of sciences will take the name of *metaphysica specialis*. When diagnosing as 'onto-theological' the Western metaphysics tradition, Heidegger thought that Aristotelian theology provided the foundationalist model of rationality, demanding for a relation of 'mutual conciliation' (*Austrag*) between the 'Being as Being' and the divine (*theion*) or God, thought as the 'first essence' or the 'supreme being'. One finds here a web of circular determination (God conceived as a Being grounding the common being, *to on*). See, M. HEIDEGGER, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (GA 26) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press); and also C. HANLEY, 'Heidegger on Aristotle's "Metaphysical" God', *Continental Philosophy Review* 32 (1999) 19-28; an important theological application of Heidegger's verdict has been pursued by J.-L. MARION, 'The Marches of Metaphysics' in *The Idol and the Distance*, ET (with introduction) by Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 1-26.

<sup>142</sup> SPINOZA, *Ethica* II, §47: 'Mens humana adaequatam habet cognitionem aeternae et infinitae essentiae Dei'; G. W. F. HEGEL, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* § 593.

here the typically modern deduction of ontology from epistemology, namely the objective structure of being is isomorphic with the subjective apparatus of knowledge (the latter reduced to common perception and discursive reasoning). In actual fact, many of Hegel's *Schwerpunkte* – God as absolute, self-conscious subject (*Gott als Selbstbewußtsein*)<sup>143</sup>, or the motto: 'what is rational is real and what is real is rational' – could be easily applied to Eunomius' eclectic metaphysics.

### Contradiction and Contrariety

There is no doubt that both Gregory and Eunomius used freely a philosophical concept like 'ousia', though by this word they referred to distinct realities. In the wake of the Nicene Trinitarian theology, Gregory tends to identify *ousia* (or *physis*) with the undivided Deity (*theotēs*), the common nature shared by the Father and the Son, while *hypostasis* designates the individuality of the divine persons<sup>144</sup>. In his turn, Eunomius speaks of three substances (*ousiai*): His definition of the 'Holy Trinity' brings forth the following image: 'the highest and principal essence (*tēs anokatō kai kyriotatēs ousias*), the essence which exists through it but before all others, and in the essence which is third in terms of origin, and the activity which produced it'<sup>145</sup>. However, terminological differences had in the past important antecedents, among which were the controversy between Dionysios of Rome and Dionysios of Alexandria at the end of the third century<sup>146</sup>, but which were not a sufficient condition for delimiting the borderline between orthodoxy and heresy. In the 360s, as Stuart G. Hall put it, 'the threat of persecution made

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<sup>143</sup> G. W. F. HEGEL, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, S. 747 in *Philosophie Schülerbibliothek* (CD-Rom, 1997), S. 18515 (cf. *Werke*, vol. 3, p. 504); see for details, SAMUEL M. POWEL, *The Trinity in German Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 104-141; and especially p. 116: 'The Trinity is according to Hegel neither a mystery, nor a secret in itself'; "these relations of origin [*ie*: begetting of the Son and proceeding of the Holy Spirit] are pictorial ways of expressing the logical dialectics of differentiation and reconciliation"; p. 121: 'Trinity therefore is the religious version of what philosophers know as the logical form of spirit'.

<sup>144</sup> D. F. STRAMARA, 'Gregory of Nyssa's Terminology for Trinitarian Perichoresis', *VC* 52 (1998) 3, 257-263; see also C. STEAD, 'Why not Three Gods? The Logic of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Doctrine', in H. R. DROBNER & C. KLOCK (ed.), *Studien zu Gregor von Nyssa und der christlichen Spätantike* (Leiden: E J Brill, 1990), 149-163; ID., 'Ontology and Terminology in Gregory of Nyssa', in H. DOERRIE, M. ALTENBURGER, U. SCHRAMM (ed.), *Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie. Zweites Internationales Kolloquium über Gregor von Nyssa (Münster 18 23 September 1972)* (Leiden, 1976), 107-119.

<sup>145</sup> AA I (Vaggione, 102) (GNO . 71. 28-73. 15).

<sup>146</sup> For a short and clear account, see H. LIETZMANN, *A History of the Early Church* vol. III, 95-98.

some doctrinal arguments seem suddenly less important<sup>147</sup>. The Homoians accepted the use of the ontological language of Nicaea (which did not make of the status of the Holy Spirit an issue), while Athanasius 'era limitato a riconoscere, nel *Tomus ad Antiochenos*, che si poteva parlare in senso accettabile, sia di una, sia di tre ipostasi della divinità'<sup>148</sup>.

But Eunomius remained, symptomatically, the enemy of both the 'homoousians' and the 'homoiousians'. He articulated a theology of a hierarchic Triad of divine essences, considering the mode of origination as criterion for ontological dignity. Eunomius was right to see in the concept of *agennēsia* a trait missing among the Son's attributes, but he was wrong to read it as a proof of ontological degradation. Basil put it accordingly: 'The difference between the "generated" (*to gennēton*) and the "ungenerate" (*agennētō*) is not of more or less (*kata to mallon kai hetton*), as between of a more or lesser light, but the distance of one towards the other is so great, like that between two [attributes] incapable of coexistence (*asynhyparkton*)'<sup>149</sup>. Eunomius' mistake stemmed from the kind of logic he used: as Basil put it clearly in *Adversus Eunomium*, there is no necessary contrariety (*enantiōtetos*) between two terms standing in opposition (*antithesis*)<sup>150</sup>. Between *agennētos/gennētos* there is contradiction, but not contrariety, and this point was emphasised by St Gregory of Nyssa in *CE I*, while working on the concept of 'beginning' and of the 'end'. He states that 'beginning' is contradictory to 'ending', but just contrary to 'beginningless'. 'That which is without beginning, being contrary to that which is to be seen by a beginning, will be a very different thing from that which is endless, or the negation of end'<sup>151</sup>. In other words, the 'ungenerate' is contrary to the 'generated', but not contradictory. In order to understand what 'ungenerate' means, one has to say what 'generated' conveys. With respect to the Son, Gregory does not say that we know what the Father's act of begetting (*gennaō*) means, and what we are left with is just a negative understanding of it. More precisely, since only one actor (excluding thus any mythological scenario) performs it, on a divine level, the act of begetting the Son entails nothing of what we know from the sensible experience of the world. Consequently, Eunomius' mistake of logic becomes a theological

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<sup>147</sup> STUART G. HALL, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church* (London: SPCK, 1991), 148.

<sup>148</sup> M. SIMONETTI, *op. cit.*, 511.

<sup>149</sup> *Adv. Eun.* II. 28, 1-4 (PG 29, 636 c-d).

<sup>150</sup> *ibidem*.

<sup>151</sup> NPNF V, 99a (GNO I. 221. 11-14).

error, since he imagines the Son's generation as God's first act of creation<sup>152</sup>.

Though opposing, and yet not contradicting one another, *agennētos/gennētos* stand in a mutual relationship. In Eunomius' logic of argumentation, if one was to define God by his relationship to the 'third essence' (the Holy Spirit), then God should have been called the 'un-proceeded'. In principle, there is nothing wrong with this attribute, which is perfectly admissible. The problem is that Eunomius wanted to pinpoint 'the first essence' in relationship only to 'the second', while the third essence could have provided a negative concept, as well (*i.e.* 'the un-proceeded'). Being relative only to the Son's status, and not to the Holy Spirit, *agennētos* simply cannot be taken as an absolute name for God. Semantically, again, it is also strange that one can claim to have an *absolute* name, which retains a privative meaning. Gregory counted in the large (and, potentially, infinite) class of 'divine names' both negative and positive terms, but none was ranked at the level that Eunomius' targeted for *agennēsia*.

### **The Nicene Pastoral Concern**

One of the most compelling reasons which determined Gregory to mount up his attack upon Eunomius' teaching lies not only in his great appeal for thoroughness (*i.e.*, he refuted *all* the books of Eunomius: *Liber Apologeticus*, *Apologia Apologiae* and *Expositio Fidei*), but especially in his understanding of his pastoral duties. This source of inspiration is clearly conveyed by the strong homiletic tone of his writings. Breaking for a while from his methodical questioning of Eunomius' heresy, Gregory explodes before his congregation:

With what eyes will you now dare to gaze upon your guide? I speak to you, o flock of perishing souls! How can you still turn to listen to this man who has reared such a monument as this of his shamelessness argument? Are you not ashamed now, at least, if not before, to take the hand of a man like this to lead you to the truth? Do you not regard it as a sign of his

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<sup>152</sup> In Gregory's writings, the metaphysics of participation can be supportive of a cosmological doctrine of continual creation. 'By participation in the transcendent [the intelligible nature] continually remains stable in the good; in a certain sense, it is always being created while ever changing for the better in its growth in perfection' (*In Cant. Cantic.* GNO VI. 174, ET 127).

madness as to doctrine, that he thus shamelessly stands out against the truth contained in Scripture?<sup>153</sup>

The way Gregory speaks – presumably in front of an ex-Eunomian parish in Constantinople – gives us a clue not only about the *content* of his argument, but also about its *raison d'être*. The medium of Gregory's theology (the Church) is more than the message (the Gospel); it is also its firm justification. For the modern reader it is very important to reflect upon the enormous pastoral consequences involved in all theological disputations of the fourth century. It was a time when Christian believers regarded with much more concern the theological tenets of their leaders, than it happens nowadays. Gregory of Nyssa spoke with the authority of a bishop (elected in 372), yet without showing off his ecclesiastical dignity. Gregory wants to fortify the Church against the strong waves of heresy. At least for those who accepted the resolutions of the Council of Nicaea, the concept of 'heresy' and 'orthodoxy' was clearly defined. Gregory feared, and probably with good reason, that the Church was under threat of losing her cornerstone, which is Christ. In the prologue of *CE I*, Gregory imagines taking Eunomius' manifesto and dashing it 'on the rock, as if it was one of the children of Babylon: and the rock is Christ (*ē petra de ēn ho Christos*).<sup>154</sup> Willing to do so, Gregory feels, 'by the written and the natural law,<sup>155</sup> in communion not only with Basil the Great, but also with St Paul, whose prayers he invokes before setting off his theological arguments. Repeatedly, Gregory mentions that he does not speak for himself, but in the name of 'the Church of God' (*ekklēsia tou kyriou*), whose bishop he was at Nyssa for almost ten years (by the early 380s). Obviously, what drives Gregory is his profound conviction that Christian orthodoxy makes the basic claim to be the true faith<sup>156</sup>. Once again, it should be noticed that, for Gregory or Eunomius, religion was not a matter of 'private consummation'. Once again, for Gregory and for his ancestors, theology was a matter of death (to the 'old man') and life (in Christ), having thus an importance irreducible to what one would understand today by 'ideology'. Gregory lived in a time which hardly knew distinctions between 'religious' and 'secular'<sup>157</sup>, when theology was more than an

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<sup>153</sup> NPNF V, 312b-313a (GNO I. 406. 5-13).

<sup>154</sup> NPNF V, 36a (GNO I. 24. 14-16).

<sup>155</sup> NPNF V, 36a (GNO I. 25. 6-7).

<sup>156</sup> NPNF V, 37a (GNO I. 28. 11-13).

<sup>157</sup> Modern categories like 'religious' and 'secular' do not overlap with the binomial function of 'sacred' and 'profane' within archaic societies. The spatial and temporal distribution of the 'sacred' and the 'profane' is typical of life within all religious societies (cf. M. ELIADE, *Sacred and Profane*, New York: Harper&Row, 1962), including the Christian ones. On the contrary, 'secular' is

exercise of 'imagination', sacramental life never reconciled with a symbolical conventionalism, Divine Liturgy more than a public spectacle, 'orthodoxy' less than an ideological construct. A battle for truth implied recourse to all literary resources, which, had to overwhelm Eunomius' hidden usage of syllogism in theology. Like Basil, Gregory needed to refute Eunomius' within his own settings of thought, but on the scriptural level and with recourse to the authority of the tradition. Gregory wanted to defend a general truth: not only consistent in its own terms, but also persuasive, beautiful, and credible. Having set this purpose, Gregory could make use of rhetoric and dialectic in the framework provided by the Scriptures. Gregory's plan was not only to refute point-by-point Eunomius' ideas, but to prove what Christian theology genuinely means. In short, Gregory assured

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entirely a modern concept, opposing 'religion' (cf. J. MILBANK, *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason*, London: Blackwell, 1990, especially first part of the book). Twisted by the subversive logic of secularisation, legions of postmodern theologians took illusory refuge in the pandemic sacralization of the immanent and corrupted forms of life, starting, very significantly, with the *exaltation* of all possible (save the procreative) forms of sexuality. Cf A. THATCHER, *Liberating Sex: A Christian Sexual Theology* (London: SPCK, 1993), 56; G. LOUGHLIN, 'Erotics: God's sex' in J. MILBANK, C. PICKSTOCK, G. WARD (ed.), *Radical Orthodoxy* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 143-162; G. WARD, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000), 81, 96; *et alii*. The basic and false premise of the above-mentioned authors – who sometimes make impertinent use of Gregory of Nyssa's theology, and of other Church Fathers – is that, looking for God's presence, they feel entitled to declare every sector of our daily life 'sacred'. Some go so far that they consider sexuality to reflect – *horribile dictu* – the mystery of God's intrinsic life or of the angelic fellowship. These are statements emerged from defected analogies, which to St Gregory would have sound blasphemous. 'Sacred' (like 'orthodoxy') is not all about *making*: it requires also the acceptance of another (though temporary) side of existence, namely that of the 'profane' realm (the *topos* where the human being is separated from God). Idolatrous pantheism is the last destination of a theology that puts in her centre the non-ascetic concept of 'gift' and 'participation' (cf *Radical Orthodoxy*, op. cit., *passim*). 'Transfiguration' (*metamorphosis*) is the watchword of orthodoxy. Within a completely secularised world, which has forgotten the eschatological orientation towards the sacred, Christians need to learn the ascetic (crucified) grammar of existence into a liturgical framework, which for the Cappadocian Fathers (continued by Denys the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor) meant more than festive ritualism. Orthodox Christians have a fundamentally *anachoretic* mode of existence, the *anachoret* being the one who separates himself (or herself) for the things 'from above'. Any concept of gift that excludes the partaking in the Passion and the Resurrection of Christ is virtually infected with self-indulgence and self-gratification. All those who still believe in the modern myth of moral and technological emancipation against *les anciens* refuse, in fact, to accept the more compelling evidence, that Adam's fall is our ultimate transcendental conditioning. Only a theology of monastic inspiration can overcome the false dilemmas of modern secularisation, which needs to be refuted by recourse to contradiction *and* contrariety. Kierkegaard's despair could be our last hope.

himself with the authority of the Church tradition (confirmed by the prestige of Basil's holiness), wrapping his argument in the body of the Scriptures.

On the side of the orthodox, the pastoral implications were quite serious. Gregory mentions more than once that the Eunomians threatened the unity of the Church at the level of practice of the Christian virtues, affecting the orthodox understanding of prayer, Scripture and holy sacraments. One knows that, soon after Eunomius' consecration as bishop at Cyzicus, there were reports about his decision to change the baptismal formula<sup>158</sup>, shifting from the triple immersion into water (fitting the expression 'in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit') to just one immersion (symbolising Christ's death). Christ's commandment recorded by Matthew (28: 19) – 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' – speaks clearly of *one* name (*eis to onoma*) of the triune God in which the believers should be baptised. Since baptism was the act of initiation into the mysteries of the Christian life, the corruption of the formula of consecration (which means more than a conventional sign or a symbol) proved to be a very culpable arbitrariness on Eunomius' part. One knows that many credal documents in use before and after Nicaea I were the expression of the liturgical consciousness of the Christian Church, rather than an introduction to some specific issues of dogmatic theology.<sup>159</sup> Catechetical instruction and baptismal initiation, and not an extravagant interest in the theological speculation, set the framework for the composition of the credal confessions. When Eunomius' party rejected the content of the Nicene Creed, they were obliged, consequently, to alter the baptismal formula. Because of that, the second council of Constantinople was particularly severe with all the Eunomians willing to be received again in the Orthodox Church. If the Arians were expected only to anathematise their former creed before being 'sealed and anointed with holy chrism', the Eunomians (together with the Montanists and the Sabellians) were received 'like the Greeks' (i.e., the gentiles). The seventh Canon of this Council states the following: 'On the first day we make Christians of them; on the second, catechumens; on the third we exorcise them by breathing three times into their faces and their ears; and thus we catechise

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<sup>158</sup> In his last book of *Apologia Apologiae*, Eunomius explicitly says: 'we affirm that the mystery of godliness is not established by the sacredness of the Names, or the distinctiveness of customs, but by the accuracy of doctrine' (NPNF V, 239a; GNO II. 284. 20-5). As Vaggione rightly points out, 'sacredness of Names' alludes to the baptismal formula.

<sup>159</sup> F. YOUNG, *The Making of the Creeds* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 1-15.

them and make them spend time in the church and listen to the Scriptures; and then we baptise them.<sup>160</sup>

### Meaning of Rhetoric

The structure of Gregory's major work against Eunomius is similar to some other of his polemical writings, and still the most distinctive one<sup>161</sup>. Gregory first quotes faithfully Eunomius' own words, and then counterattacks in full force, topping up his reasoning with unsurpassed literary effects, going from mild ironies to insidious rhetorical questions, then to conscious derision, very often culminating in fierce sarcasm<sup>162</sup>. Here, one should pay heed not only to the historical context of the emergence for Gregory's writings, but moreover, to his crafty and polyvalent usage of language<sup>163</sup>. On the one hand, Gregory is committed to spin up the gaudy arguments of his adversary, bringing into play his dearest method of *reductio ad absurdum*. With respect to Eunomius, he can easily maintain that 'strength of vituperation is infirmity in reasoning'<sup>164</sup>. Yet, Gregory bets on the *power* of words to make the truth triumphant. He is ready to elaborate an almost juridical phraseology, just to fulfil his strategy of persuading the Christian congregation. It is remarkable how, for example, each of St Gregory's homilies on the Song of the Songs, includes at the beginning and at the end a liturgical exhortation to virtues for his readers, and a short prayer to God. Like his 'master', Basil of Caesarea, the bishop of

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<sup>160</sup> Cf. NORMAN P. TANNER SJ (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (Sheed & Ward: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 35 (ET).

<sup>161</sup> E. C. E. OWEN, 'St Gregory of Nyssa: Grammar, Vocabulary, Style', *JTS* 26 (1925), 64-71.

<sup>162</sup> Gregory tells us that Eunomius' father was 'an excellent man, except that he had such a son', NPNF V, 40a (GNO I. 39. 4-5).

<sup>163</sup> For the historical clarification of the concept of rhetoric within the Hellenistic world, see D. L. CLARK, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education* (New York: Columbia University, 1957); H. I. MARROU, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, translated by George Lamb (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1964), *passim*; G. KENNEDY, *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (London, 1980); B. VICKERS, *A Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); FRANCES M. YOUNG, 'The Rhetorical Schools and Their Influence on Patristic Exegesis' in R. WILLIAMS (ed.), *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 182-199; G. KENNEDY, *The New History of Classical Rhetoric* (Princeton: 1994). On the relationship between rhetoric and dialectics (two possible models for theology), see R. MCKEON, 'Greek Dialectics: Dialectic and Dialogue, Dialectic and Rhetoric', in C. PERELMAN (ed.), *Dialectics* (The Hague, 1975), 1-25; P. HADOT, 'Philosophie, dialectique, rhétorique dans l'antiquité', *Studia Philosophica* 39 (1980), 139-166;

<sup>164</sup> NPNF V, 313a (GNO I. 406. 21-23).

Nyssa is unscrupulous about using all possible literary effects, including *le superflu* (once called by Voltaire '*une chose très nécessaire*'). Indeed, repetition is for Gregory not only the proof of self-consistency, but also a weighty tool of persuasion. As in music and in prayer, the reiteration of words, every time slightly differently tuned, plays down emphatic effects of seduction. The circular movements in thought trace, ideally, the perfect and most enigmatic geometrical figure of the Greeks, which was the circle. Consciously or not, Gregory – who obviously trained himself in the art of oratory – used this procedure of repetition in all his writings against Eunomius. Instilled with refreshing humour, he could approach topics of immense importance for the Church of Cappadocia, which by St Basil's death lost one of her most solid 'pillars of truth'.

Gregory accepted with no reluctance the literary canon of the Second Sophistic School<sup>165</sup> from Athens and, even as an old man, he could enjoy the correspondence with representatives of the pagan rhetorical schools from Asia Minor<sup>166</sup>. By doing so, St Gregory wanted to make himself 'all things to all *men*' (I Corinthians 9: 22), being 'debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise' (Romans 1: 14), so that he might 'by all means save some'. In just one shot, he can prove innumerable virtues: psychological acumen and beguiling rhetoric are cleverly assorted as to oppose any resistance. Besides inheriting from his brother the very deep pathos of a true pastor, Gregory displayed the sparkling dexterity of a lawyer and the accuracy of a philosopher. Therefore, his language takes explosive shapes and, when necessary, gives up any formal rule of consistency. Before finding out *what* Gregory says about the objective status of words in Scripture, the reader cannot help

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<sup>165</sup> The standard monograph on this subject remains L. MÉRIDIÉ, *L'influence de la seconde sophistique sur l'oeuvre de Grégoire de Nysse* (Rennes: Hachette, 1906); The importance of rhetoric in the theology of the Nicene theologians has been carefully analysed. See also T. E. AMERINGER, *The Stylistic Influence of the Second Sophistic on the Panegyric Sermons of St John the Chrysostom: A Study in Greek Rhetoric* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1921); J. M. CAMPBELL, *The Influence of the Second Sophistic on the Style of the Sermons of St Basil the Great* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1922); J. BERNARDI, *La prédication des Pères cappadociens: Le prédicateur et son auditoire* (Montpellier: PUF, 1968); R. RUETHER, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Rhetor and Philosopher* (Oxford: 1969); C. STEAD, 'Rhetorical Method in Athanasius', *VC* 30 (1976), 121-137.

<sup>166</sup> See letters to Libanius (*Ep.* 13; 14), and presumably to some of his disciples (*Ep.* 15), to a Sophist (*Ep.* 9, 27), to be consulted in the excellent critical edition *SC* (N° 363), with the translation and introduction of P. MARAVAL. cf GREGOIRE DE NYSEE, *Lettres* (Paris: Cerf, 1990); see also H. I. MARROU, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'Antiquité* (Paris, 1965<sup>2</sup>), 303-306; ALDEN M. MOSSHAMMER, 'Gregory of Nyssa and Christian Hellenism', *SP* 32 (1997), 170-195.

noticing *how* he profits from the pragmatic functions of language.

Pondering upon the endemic harshness of Gregory's literary style, one could wonder what is the real motif of such an apparently wanton, polemical determination? To this question, many answers are ready. Among Gregory's personal reasons, one has to count, first, his passionate commitment to the memory of Basil the Great, whose personality deeply marked his biography. Basil was for both Gregory (of Nyssa and of Nazianzus) the very incarnation of the idea of holiness, 'an orator among orators, even before the chair of the rhetoricians; a philosopher among philosophers, even before the doctrines of the philosophers; highest of all, a priest among Christians, even before the priesthood'<sup>167</sup>. Few could have challenged Basil's credentials, and probably least of all Eunomius<sup>168</sup>. The latter hardly distinguished himself among monastic circles as a pastor, and the reputation of his master, Aëtius, was even worse. Attacks *ad personam* were not excluded from Gregory's literary armoury, since he regarded theology as a 'science' that had to be incarnated and needed a living testimony. The theologian had to distinguish himself first as a holy man, and only secondly as a rhetorician or dialectical thinker. For Gregory, Basil personified all the virtues of the Church tradition<sup>169</sup>. Though he died prematurely (at the age of 49), Basil enjoyed an enormous reputation as teacher, pastor, ascetic, and bishop of the Church of Cappadocia. The fact that Eunomius attacked Basil shortly after his repose in God, Gregory's response was outrageous. In a letter received from Gregory of Nyssa, Peter of Sebasta could read this locution:

When our saintly Basil fell asleep, and I received *the legacy* of Eunomius's controversy, when my heart was hot within me with bereavement, and, besides this

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<sup>167</sup> Gregory Nazianzus, *Or.* 43. 13 (PG 36: 512); On Basil's authority, see P. J. FEDWICK, *The Church and the Charisma of Leadership in Basil of Caesarea* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978); P. J. FEDWICK (ed.), *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic* 2 vols (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1981).

<sup>168</sup> Gregory charges Eunomius of 'not knowing himself, and how great the distance is between the soaring Basil (*tou hypsipetous Basileiou*) and a grovelling reptile (*kai tou chersaiou theriou*). NPNF V, 314a (GNO I. 409. 3-4).

<sup>169</sup> Obviously, for Gregory, the 'holy tradition' handed down by the saints is not limited to the person of St Basil. The personality of St Gregory Thaumaturgus (the author of the famous panegyric dedicated to Origen) had a pivotal role in the formation of St Gregory of Nyssa's ascetic philosophy and dogmatic theology. For more details, see S. MITCHELL, 'The Life and Lives of Gregory Thaumaturgus', in JAN WILLEM DRIJVERS & JOHN W. WATT (ed.), *Portraits of Spiritual Authority. Religious Power in Early Christianity, Byzantium & the Christian Orient* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 99-138.

deep sorrow for the common loss of the church, Eunomius had not confined himself to the various topics which might pass as a defence of his views, but had spent the chief part of his energy in laboriously written abuse of our father in God – I was exasperated with this, and there were passages where the flame of my heart-felt indignation burst out against this writer<sup>170</sup>.

This was the beginning of Eunomius' end. He succeeded to put on fire Gregory, who added moral distrust to his former intellectual disdain against Basil's enemy<sup>171</sup>. Secondly, Gregory sensed his obligation to carry on the mandate of Nicaea, dogmatic resolution of which he regarded as the most conclusive one for all previous contentions over Christ's divinity. As he put it, 'the main point of Christian religion (*eusebias*) is to believe that the Only-begotten God, Who is the truth and the true light, and the power of God and the life, is truly all that He is said to be, both in other respects and especially in this, that He is God and the truth, that is to say, God in truth, ever being what He is called, Who never at any time was not, nor ever will cease to be, Whose being, such as it is essentially, is beyond the reach of the curiosity that would try to comprehend it.'<sup>172</sup> The 'truceless and implacable warfare (*ton aspondon touton kai akērukton polemon*)'<sup>173</sup> against Eunomius defended the ideas that all the most important Nicene theologians hold with respect to Scripture and its right hermeneutics of Christ, who since the apostles was acknowledged as 'Lord and God' (John 20: 24).

Gregory's appeal to rhetoric should *not* be understood as a proof for his inability to think systematically, as some scholars tended to argue<sup>174</sup>. At stake was rather Gregory's conviction that there is no just one starting point in the process of theological

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<sup>170</sup> NPNF V, 33b (printed as *Ep.* 29 in SC 363. 311-315, ed. P. Maraval).

<sup>171</sup> It is noteworthy that, if Gregory calls Eunomius 'the Antichrist' (NPNF V, 239; GNO II. 288. 17), Eunomius compares Basil to Gnostic authors like Valentinus, Cerinthus, Basilides and denies him the name of 'Christian' (GNO II, 284. 12-19; NPNF V, 238a).

<sup>172</sup> NPNF V, 251b (GNO I. 230.18-26).

<sup>173</sup> NPNF V, 250b (GNO I. 228. 7-8).

<sup>174</sup> C. STEAD, 'Ontology and Terminology in Gregory of Nyssa', in H. DOERRIE, M. ALTENBURGER, U. SCHRAMM (ed.), *Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie. Zweites Internationales Kolloquium über Gregor von Nyssa, Münster 18-23 September 1972* (Leiden: Brill, 1976) 107-119; ΓΙΑΝΝΗΣ ΔΗΜΗΤΡΑΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, *ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΠΙΣΤΗ. Η ΛΟΓΙΚΗ ΑΠΟΔΕΙΞΙΜΟΤΗΤΑ ΤΟΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΟΝ ΔΟΓΜΑΤΟΝ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΟΝ ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟ ΝΥΣΣΗΣ Η 'FIDE DEPRECANS INTELLECTUM'* ('Αθηνα: Παρουσία, 1996), The English Summary, 167-180. I thank Dr Ioan Ică Jr for offering me the opportunity to consult Y. Demetrakopoulos' book.

thinking<sup>175</sup>, which is ultimately resumed to the prayerful and doxological contemplation of Christ. Outside the Church and her authoritative tradition, the Scriptures cannot become what they actually are (the Word of God and not a collection of pious texts). In Gregory's case, rhetoric did not mean the usage of flashy style with a very shallow purpose to impress an audience. One has to remember that, by highlighting Basil's charismatic gifts, Gregory pointed to Christ's own enticing power to convert and to resurrect all those who gaze and encounter him through faith. This was done by 'words of life' and not by human wisdom (I Corinthians 2: 5). Gregory's rhetoric opposes the fluid conversation about the totality of God's revelation to the constipated theology of Eunomius, who encapsulated this majestic totality into one single word, 'borrowed from the Greeks' (i.e., 'homousios'). For Gregory, theological knowledge is built on the Christian virtues of faith, hope and love. Discursive reason is only the secondary effect of our primary call to resemble God in holiness and love. The fruits of faith and the outcome of reasoning do not overlap, though they are not necessarily at odds. Trusting rhetoric more than dialectics, Gregory acts first as a vigilant minister of his Church, and only secondly as an 'academic' theologian. One believes with the heart, which cannot be touched by compelling syllogisms of discursive reason. The faith is not certitude and is not the fruit of analytical deduction, as Eunomius' methodology suggests. If rhetoric grounds anything, then it is this faith, which makes hope and love intelligent and effective. Since it is woven into the most complex web of life-circumstances, faith can start and collapse from every point. Gregory was aware that this 'hermeneutical circle' is the basic specification of our daily perceptions, skills, acts, or reflective attitudes. Trying to avoid the seduction of dialectical precision, Gregory becomes the champion of the Christian rhetoric of truth. He is the advocate of the narrative

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<sup>175</sup> Like Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa thought that the first principles of knowledge are not subject to rational, and uncontroversial demonstration. See *C. Eun.* I. 217-219: 'All such arguing must start from plain and well-known truths, to compel belief through itself in truths that are still doubtful; and none of these latter can be grasped without the guidance of what is obvious leading us towards the unknown. If, on the other hand, that which is adopted to start with for the belief it will be a long time before the unknown will receive any illumination from it.' apud Y. Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture. The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism*, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1993, 192. We disagree, however, with Pelikan's conclusion, *op. cit.*, 195: 'For all the four of the Cappadocians, Nicene orthodoxy presented itself as a system that was simultaneously "congruous" with the presuppositions of natural theology and "consistent" with those of revealed theology – indeed, as the only system that was in a position to make that twofold claim.'

theology that addresses questions both for 'specialists' and the 'simple minded'. In fact, this is the natural genius of the poetry, closely followed by rhetoric. As the parables of the Gospel always emphasise, the most important things are known by heart, which needs incessant repentance (*metanoia*). For Gregory, theology starts from anywhere and solicits every single act constituting our being. Theology includes worship, contemplation of the Scriptures, selfless gestures of philanthropy, and reasoning about the structure of the universe. If only one of these pieces is taken away, the cohesion of theological knowledge would fall apart. Gregory's theology unfolds the striking multitude of the literary genres of the Scriptural books, including the cosmic narrative, prophetic lamentations, paraenetical discourses, words of wisdom, mystagogical catechesis, and pastoral letters.

### **Search not for Doctrine, but for Truth**

The above-sketched overview shows the quite discouraging complexity of the theological controversies of the fourth century in which Gregory of Nyssa took part. Even the little information provided shows that, *pace* A. von Harnack, it is no more possible to regard the Nicene Creed as an expression of Hellenistic (metaphysical) culture triumphing over the Jewish scriptural (fideist) heritage. This thesis can be easily contradicted if one thinks how deeply Hellenised was the philosophical culture of Aëtius and Eunomius, and how, on the side of the Nicaea, the non-philosophical, poetic theology of Ephrem the Syrian could defend the orthodox Creed. Yet, as I have tried to prove, there is a sharp difference between the ways of theologising pursued by Eunomius and Gregory, respectively. Gregory's option for Scripture and rhetoric, rather than for mere dialectics, speaks of his serious pastoral sense of doing theology. Being wrapped in rhetorical garments, Gregory's biblical theology was addressing personal issues (nowadays one would say even 'existentialist'), of large concern for the Christian folk. Like Athanasius in Alexandria and Basil in Caesarea, Gregory fulfilled as a bishop of his (however small) district (Nyssa) the expectations of many people who were answering the call for deification through Christ. On the contrary, Eunomius can be situated on the long historical line of what M. Heidegger described as 'die onto-theologische Metaphysik'. There are two reasons for reading Eunomius in this grid: first, his foundationalist approach in theology<sup>176</sup>, which marries dialectics in order to establish an extremely 'ontologised'

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<sup>176</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *GNO* II. 84. 97: "So long as the first principles remain unproved, it is idle to dwell on those that are secondary." See also *GNO* I 90. 217-219; I. 251. 83.

idea about God. Secondly, I counted his rationalistic thrust, which allows him to make very radical epistemological claims, refreshed only in the early modern age, as with Spinoza and Hegel.

Having said that, the difference between 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' clearly cannot be stripped off, unless we deprive theology of any existential content, which has itself its own claim for truth. It would be insufficient to say, as R. Williams does<sup>177</sup>, that 'orthodoxy' was made possible only by the Emperor Constantine's decision to put the ecclesiastical disputes on his political agenda. One can hardly imagine any circumstance in which Church representatives could avoid dealing with the subjective idiosyncrasies of one or another Caesar, Christian or not. One of the consequences of the Incarnation is that separation from the political realm is not possible for a Christian Church which professes the 'orthodoxy' and 'catholicity'. Even less convincing is the argument of F. Young who claims that 'orthodoxy entails violence.'<sup>178</sup> To say that is a way of deploring the idea of truth, which is *by definition* correlated with the notion of error. It is also incorrect, since the history of Christianity provides examples of tolerant and orthodox emperors (like Jovian), as well as non-orthodox (Julian the Apostate). Within the social sphere, the Christian idea of 'orthodoxy' no more entails violence anymore than the political idea of 'monarchy' in the contemporary world.

Before even thinking of establishing a doctrine of God, Gregory and Eunomius were in search for truth.<sup>179</sup> They thought that theological ideas could be either right or wrong. But the postmodernist allergy against concepts as 'truth' and 'error' make us very often unable to understand appropriately the passionate struggle of the ancients to defend their position: though hard enemies, Gregory of Nyssa and Eunomius of Cyzicus shared the same vision about the compulsive need to know the truth. It is hard to understand the patronising attitude of some contemporary scholars who believe that this search for truth entails violence, as if the Church was not born through Christ's crucifixion. It is even less comprehensible how one can envisage the achievement of orthodoxy as the irrational or, at best, the hazardous result of an indefinite number of causalities. Since F. Nietzsche wrote his (false) genealogy of morals, far too many

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<sup>177</sup> R. WILLIAMS, *Arius*, 91: 'The Constantinian synthesis was in the long run destructive of both the "Catholic" and the "Academic" senses of the Church in most of the Christian world.'

<sup>178</sup> F. YOUNG, *The Making of the Creeds* (London: SCM, 2002), 15: 'the "idea" of orthodoxy cannot but breed intolerance'.

<sup>179</sup> This common feature of the Late Antiquity debates is, perhaps, the heritage of Platonism. Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* I, PG 32, 69a, echoing Plato, *Phaidros* 262c.

theologians refuse to acknowledge the existence of *facts*, and not only of *interpretations*. The conviction that we know more than the actors in the events of the fourth century, makes possible the presentation of the 'development of Christian doctrine' in terms of intellectual emancipation. It is quite perplexing to see the confidence of so many contemporary scholars who depict the fourth century controversies as a mere fruit of mutual misunderstanding.

R. P. Vaggione, for example, is sympathetic to Eunomius just because he was the loser<sup>180</sup>, and this very fact prevents him from questioning the objective value of his theology. Vaggione found the sustained activities of the heretics to be a *felix culpa*, since they stimulated the creativity of the orthodox theologians. But to say this means to force an answer to the question of theodicy, which goes far beyond the competence of the modern Patristic scholarship. To spell out the Arian controversies as a fruit of reciprocal misapprehension is to suggest that historical distance and theological neutrality allows us to understand *better* the true rationales of their disputes. Yet, distance is not only the condition of visibility, but also a test for myopia. Vaggione also tried to explain the success of the Nicene Creed by emphasising two elements. First, was the relative flexibility of language practised by Athanasius and his followers (contrary to Eunomius' obsession with *akribeia*), and second, the capacity of the Nicene theologians to capture the imagination of simple people. Sociologically, both points are valid, but they still need a deeper analysis of the conditions of possibility for the Nicene success. Let us weigh up what stands behind Vaggione's insightful remarks.

The first clue referring to the idiomatic flexibility is best seen in the transformation of the concepts of *ousia* and *hypostasis* from Athanasius' writing into the Cappadocian theology. The instatement of *homoousios* at Nicaea as the watchword of orthodoxy lacked the appropriate hermeneutic package, which could deter any suspicion of modalism in Athanasius' Trinitarian theology. In other words, *the context of emergence for homoousios was not identical with the context of its final justification*. The long and necessary period between 325-350 AD unfolded and articulated the potential typologies of the non-orthodox Trinitarian theology. In the 350s, the moderate Arians (Homoians) showed interest in the theology of Nicaea and the Emperor blustered Aëtius and Eunomius, who were even more innovative in their language and conceptions. In between

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<sup>180</sup> On this recent tendency among Patristic scholars, see P. HENRY, 'Why is Contemporary Scholarship so Enamoured of Ancient Heretics?', *SP* 17 (1982), 123-26.

361-378, 'the Nicenes seized the initiative by distinguishing between *ousia* and *hypostasis*,<sup>181</sup> while the Anomeans adopted a more defensive position. When Theodosius the Great (who, unlike Constantine, was baptised by an orthodox bishop, Ascholius) took power, the church of Eunomius could be regarded only as a sectarian movement, which had to be disciplined in the interests of peace within the Empire. Vaggione's second point could make even clearer the already emphasised efficacy of rhetoric (masterly handled by the Cappadocian Fathers) against dialectics (stubbornly wasted in the writings of Aëtius and Eunomius). Still, the methodologies of persuasion used by the fourth century competitors cannot be separated from the substance of their argument and, moreover, from the question of authority. Whence did the Nicene theologians gain the immensely influential power of their discourse? To say 'from the Scriptures' would be simply too easy, though it is obvious that Basil and Gregory were better versed the Scriptures, and were therefore better placed to talk about their letter and Spirit. In principle, but not always in exegetical practice, Eunomius and the Nicene theologians shared the same belief in the unity of the Scriptures (the Old and the New Testament) so that, in this respect, 'their problem was neither canonical, nor textual.'<sup>182</sup> It is very likely that, at Antioch, Aëtius initiated Eunomius into the study of the Scriptures, though he never showed the same comprehensive knowledge of it as the Cappadocian Fathers. Eunomius genuinely willed to buttress his theological and philosophical statements with biblical references. However, his interpretation of some key passages regarding the divine Logos in relationship to God was substantially different from that of the Nicene theologians. Lack of congruence in biblical hermeneutics reflected (if did not derive from) huge disagreements on other theological or philosophical issues.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> VAGGIONE, *Eunomius of Cyzicus*, 377.

<sup>182</sup> *ibidem.*, 79.

<sup>183</sup> Apart from the formal acceptance of the unity of Scripture, I believe that, if there was a single topic on which the Nicene and the Arian parties came together in perfect agreement, it was probably the realm of sexual morality (which, ironically enough, nowadays is so ardently disputed by 'orthodox' – some even 'radical' – theologians). It is remarkable that the common rhetorical *topos* of deprecation, which associated sexual immorality with doctrinal heresy (but not always *viceversa*), does not occur either in Gregory's, or in Eunomius' writings. For more dramatic charges of this sort in the early Church, see K. A. FOX, 'The Nicolaitans, Nicolaus and the early Church', *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 23 (1994) 4, 485-496; A. FERREIRO, 'Priscillian and Nicolaitism', *VC* 52 (1998) 2, 382-393; C. TREVETT, 'Spiritual Authority and the "Heretical" Woman: Firmilian's Word to the Church in Carthage', in JAN WILLEM DRIJVERS & JOHN W. WATT (ed.), *Portraits of Spiritual Authority. Religious Power*

Yet, I think it would be wrong to believe that, if Aëtius and Eunomius had a more elastic language, and if they used more abundantly scriptural images, the Nicene theologians would have failed. Beyond this narrative embodiment of theology, there was at stake something to do with real life. I would employ here Max Weber's terms to describe the 'charismatic' authority that Athanasius and Basil in particular enjoyed within the vast majority of lay and monastic circles<sup>184</sup>. In the person of these leaders, who were both monks and bishops, the potential 'anarchism' of any exclusive 'charismatic' determination of the Church authority was balanced by the doctrinal 'routine', which had to remain always a visible sign of orthodoxy. The solidarity between monasticism and the Nicene theologians lies in something deeper than these sociological categories can express. The reasons for the success of orthodoxy are simply theological. When Athanasius and the Cappadocians defended the orthodox doctrine of incarnation, they appealed to the concept of deification (*theosis*), which was already the supreme goal of the monastic life. The hermits of the desert could recognise the 'orthodox' doctrine about Christ by detecting this crucial concept of deification, which was at work in their daily life. Only transfiguration (*metamorphosis*) in Christ made meaningful the orthodox soteriology of Nicaea, and not the mere talk about participation in God. Vaggione tries to situate Eunomius in the context of the urban forms of monasticism, but one thing remains sure: neither Eunomius, nor Aëtius, had such a genuine interest in the contemplative life as St Basil or anybody in his natural and spiritual family.<sup>185</sup> Perhaps Vaggione could have drawn more conclusions from such a comparison: not only the hermeneutics of Scripture and their outlook on philosophy divided the neo-Arians and the Cappadocian Fathers, but also their understanding of prayer, asceticism and mystical theology, which all enjoyed huge respect in the countryside<sup>186</sup>, where the simple Christians lived and worshipped God. If Gregory of Nyssa

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*in Early Christianity, Byzantium & the Christian Orient* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 45-62.

<sup>184</sup> On this topic, see H. von CAMPENHAUSEN, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (London, 1969); P. ROUSSEAU, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian* (Oxford, 1978).

<sup>185</sup> On Basil's monastic agenda, see W. K. LOWTHER CLARKE, *St Basil the Great: A Study in Monasticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913); P. HUMBERTCLAUDE, *La doctrine ascétique de saint Basile de Césarée* (Paris: Beauschesne, 1932); P. ROUSSEAU, *Basil of Caesarea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 190-232;

<sup>186</sup> W. H. C. FREMD, 'The Winning of the Countryside', *JEH* 18 (1967), 1-14.

professed a 'gnoseological pessimism'<sup>187</sup>, it was because he understood the doctrine of God's infinity as a call for continual spiritual progression (*epektasis*). Nothing about 'union with God through prayer' can be found in any of Eunomius' writings, which resemble rather strikingly the arrogance of the epistemological *claims* of some modern metaphysicians, like Spinoza or Hegel.

Vaggione is certainly right in saying that Eunomius' fall (along with the oblivion of Aëtius) in the late 370s was the result of his incapacity to address issues of potential popularity. 'Aëtius and Eunomius were looking to shock, and they succeeded.'<sup>188</sup> Not even in front of the Emperor Constantius (who had no sympathy for the Nicene theologians) did Eunomius gain credibility, due to his essentialist jargon (regarded by the conciliators as the seed of discord)<sup>189</sup>. Contrarily, Gregory of Nyssa proved to have an immense knowledge of the Scriptures, which probably represented the nucleus of the religious imagination of the Christian people by the end of the fourth century. Comparatively, Aëtius' or Eunomius' dry and very speculative prose, in which Christ was hardly mentioned, and which resembled Aristotle's style<sup>190</sup>, could hardly convince or capture any religious imagination. Yet, one still needs to emphasise that the reasons for their failure were not accidental, rooted in their wrong strategies of persuasion, but substantial, having to do with the gist of their theology. Apart from his artificial manipulation of the Scriptures, there were two other major points in which Eunomius broke with the former tradition. First, it was his very denial of Christ's essential divinity (confessed by the apostolic Church), and second, his contempt towards the long-lasting apophatic tradition within Christian theology.<sup>191</sup> Since Clement of Alexandria's time, apophatism was an undisputed conviction

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<sup>187</sup> V. LOSSKY, *The Vision of God* translated into English by A. Moorhouse (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Press, 1983), 77; Also M. R. BARNES, 'The Fourth Century as Trinitarian Canon' in L. AYRES AND G. JONES, *Christian Origins. Theology, Rhetoric and Community* (London: Routledge, 1998), 47-67.

<sup>188</sup> VAGGIONE, *Eunomius of Cyzicus*, 256.

<sup>189</sup> On Eunomius' vocabulary, see F. MANN, 'Das Vokabular des Eunomius im Kontext Gregors', in L. F. MATEO-SECO and J. L. BASTERO (ed.), *El 'Contra Eunomium I' en la produccion literaria de Grigorio de Nisa* (Pamplona, 1988), 173-202.

<sup>190</sup> NPNF V, 313b (GNO I. 407. 25-26): 'He brandishes over us this Aristotelian weapon (*tēn Aristotelikēn ēmin aichmēn episeionti*)'. In fact, Eunomius only follows Aëtius. 'Having laid a train of syllogisms from what he remembered of Aristotle, he [Eunomius] became notorious for even going beyond Arius, the father of heresy (*ton pateratēs haireseōs*)', in NPNF V, 39b (GNO I. 37. 20-23).

<sup>191</sup> A. LOUTH, 'Apophatic Theology: Before and After The Areopagite', *Bogosloveni Vestnik* 56 (1996) 3, 297-310.

shared by virtually all the Christian theologians.<sup>192</sup> No one before Aëtius and Eunomius imagined a way of knowledge of God parallel to worship and prayer. Moreover, the doctrine of Trinity was not a simple matter of 'imagination', be it for 'experts', or 'pastors'. As I have suggested above, Vaggione could have gained more by taking into consideration another crucial element in the social fabric of Late Antiquity, namely, the commanding function of the 'holy man'<sup>193</sup>. The role played by the monastics in the events of the fourth century – and surprisingly neglected by even by scholars of the stature of Hanson or Simonetti – makes us understand, at least in part, why *Nicaea* was predestined for victory (*nikē*). *Nicaea* received not only the support of the Egyptian desert Fathers, but also the assistance of the Syrian convents led by Ephrem of Edessa, as well as some important monasteries of Asia Minor.<sup>194</sup> The Cappadocian Fathers were representatives of a kind of 'experiential theology'<sup>195</sup> (J. Romanides), to which Eunomius – as defender of dialectics – did not want to have access. In the Latin-speaking world, Hilary of Poitiers resumed this orthodox exigency in his arresting appeal: 'we must believe, must apprehend, must worship; and such acts of devotion must stand *in lieu* of definition (*credendus est; intelligendus est; et his officiis eloquendus*).'<sup>196</sup>

## Conclusions

*Summa summarum*, it is very likely that the facts of the second half of the fourth century were much simpler: the battle between Neo-Arianism and Nicene Orthodoxy was conducted by two categories of people, holding two different understandings

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<sup>192</sup> JUSTIN THE MARTYR, *Apologia* I. 61 (PG 6, 421b); ATHENAGORAS, *Ad Autolykos* I. 3 (PG 6, 1028c); CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Stromates* V. 11. 71. 5 (SC 275, 144 sq); ORIGEN, *Peri archon* I. 1. 5 (PG 11, 124 b-c); ATHANASIUS, *Contra gentes* 36 (PG 25, 69).

<sup>193</sup> See especially, P. BROWN, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *JRS* 61 (1971), 80-101; see also P. BROWN, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, 1971-1997', *J ECS* 6 (1998) 3, 353-376.

<sup>194</sup> The monastic spirituality of Egypt was present in many forms in Cappadocia. It is important to know that in the late '350s, Basil set up a monastic community near Caesarea, after he visited the Pachomian communities from Tabennesi in the Upper Egypt. On monasticism in Cappadocia, see J. GRIBOMONT, 'Le monachisme au sein d'église en Syrie et en Cappadoce', *Studia Monastica* 7 (1965) 7-24; R. LYN, *Cave Monasteries of Byzantine Cappadocia* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); C. STEWART, 'Monasticism', in PHILIP F. ESLER (ed.), *The Early Christian World* vol I (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 357-358.

<sup>195</sup> J. S. ROMANIDIS, 'Critical Examination of the Application of Theology', *Procès Verbaux du deuxième Congrès de Théologie orthodoxe à Athènes* (19-29 Août, 1976), ed. S. C. AGOURIDES (Athens, 1978), 413-441.

<sup>196</sup> HILARY, *De Trinitate* II. 7 (PL 10. 57a; NPNF IX, 54b).

about *how* the revelation of God in Christ can be effective. Pace Vaggione, the radical Arians and the orthodox Nicene disagreed both on theological propositions and on the forms of life that could make these propositions *real*. The Nicene theologians, while espousing the 'maximalist' spirituality of the Desert Fathers, found deification to be the last consequence of the Incarnation. For them salvation meant deification in the perspective of eternal progress in God's eternal love. Contrarily, the radical Arians considered any discourse about God's incarnation as conflicting, so that their spirituality could find salvation effective on the moral level of agreement between the human will and God's commandments. Those living the monastic life probably knew first that Christ is more than a model of 'moral perfection'. Gregory of Nyssa's insistent description of life in God being infinite is the perfect proof for the 'maximalist' understanding of salvation. In short, the motives of the success of Nicene orthodoxy are first theological and only secondarily political or sociological<sup>197</sup>. And since the reasons for this achievement are theological and not secular, it would be simply wrong to envisage the fourth century as an epoch in which the Church bishops found themselves in search of the *doctrine* of Christian God. (Very probably, this is the pious consequence of the inner conviction of so many Protestant scholars that Jesus Christ was, above all, a *teacher* professing his doctrine in widely-accepted parables.) It would be even worse to consider the achievement of 'orthodoxy' as an experiment of 'trial and error'<sup>198</sup>.

Like Christ's apostles and their immediate heirs, martyred within the first three centuries, the Christian theologians of the fourth century were not in search of a doctrine, but in *search of truth*. To spread the Gospel to the Gentiles meant for St Paul to present the image of Christ in different cultural idioms, which despite their peculiarity were meant to preserve the universality of a unique proclamation. This explains why the elements of Christian doctrine of God stemmed from the earliest times of the Church and could acquire new connotations even one thousand years after Nicaea. The search for truth is perennial and, therefore, the Christian doctrine receives new valences in every age of the Church. The profound dogmatic elaborations of the fourth century, on the side of the orthodox theologians, did not

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<sup>197</sup> This point was astutely argued by J. BEHR, *The Way to Nicea*, vol. I, foreword by Andrew Louth, (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Press, 2001). In fact, I am very much indebted to J. Behr's approach to the history of early Christian theology, with its emphasis on the perennial issue abridged in Christ's question to his disciples: „who do you think I am?“

<sup>198</sup> R. P. C. HANSON, 'The Achievement of Orthodoxy' in R. WILLIAMS (ed.), *The Making of Orthodoxy*, 153.

bring the apostolic faith somewhere further, on a deeper level of understanding. Given their relative flexibility regarding the language, the champions of orthodoxy in the fourth century only provided new means of conceptualising of what is essentially encapsulated into the proclamation of Christ's lordship and divinity. As the later Church Councils showed, the claim for orthodoxy of the champions of Nicaea and Constantinople was not a call for theological stagnation, but an immediate consequence of their search for truth (which they never believed it could be relative) and look for theological self-consistency (drawing the ultimate conclusions from the proclamation of Christ's lordship and divinity). 'Development of doctrine', within and beyond the fourth century, represents not the evolution from a primitive stage (of the primitive Church) towards more recent and more intelligent levels of understanding, but the spontaneous process of unfolding of what it is already given in the apostolic and unsurpassable confession of Christ as 'God and Lord'. The history of the early Christian doctrine could be perhaps better understood as a process of unfolding the same proposition ('Christ is Lord and God', which is the core of the apostolic proclamation) in different categories of thinking.

## CONSPECTVS SIGLORUM:

A	Apologia (Eunomii)
AA	Apologia Apologiae (Eunomii)
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
CH	<i>Church History</i>
ECR	<i>Eastern Churches Review</i>
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte
GNO	Gregorii Nysseni Opera
GOTR	<i>Greek Orthodox Theological Review</i>
HE	Historia ecclesiastica
JECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
MT	<i>Modern Theology</i>
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
REA	<i>Revue d'études augustiniennes</i>
RHR	<i>Revue d'histoire des religions</i>
RSR	<i>Recherches de Sciences Religieuses</i>
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SP	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
ZKG	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i>

### Note:

Published first in 2002 by *Archævs. Studies in History of Religions* (Bucharest), VI (2002) 1-2, 69-120. In 2004, the electronic copy of this essay has been subjected to some minor changes.