

Progression and Succession

A good number of years ago a saintly old man who had a keen interest in St. Gregory of Nyssa handed me a book by Jean Cardinal Daniélou entitled **From Glory to Glory** which contained key excerpts from Gregory's works prefaced by a lengthy, detailed introduction. As my elderly friend explained, this ranked among the handful of books which has had a lasting impact on his life. Even while he was uttering these words I could intuit that this book would have the same effect on me despite my ignorance of that author. In sum, our conversation gave birth to one of those feelings you get which signals something momentous is about to happen, but you can't quite pin it down. Because such encounters don't occur frequently, they require special attention.

As for **From Glory to Glory**, I'm happy to say it's still in print, and it remains a fine introduction to the spirituality and work of Gregory of Nyssa. Back then I had virtually no knowledge of that fourth century author and wasn't particularly desirous to read about him. Therefore I took a crack at Daniélou's book chiefly to please my friend, for I knew that a few weeks later he'd be around to ask my opinion. The Introduction is quite long, over seventy pages, which initially turned me off. However, after having read a few pages, I knew that I had hit upon something special and was eager to delve into Gregory's own words. Instead of waiting approximately a month to meet my friend, I made every effort to contact him beforehand in order to express my excitement and gratitude. When the day arrived, I could tell by the expression on his face he knew that he had succeeded in converting me. Although over twenty-five years have passed since the death of my friend, he and those special encounters remain very much alive. Such feelings aren't based upon wishful thinking or longing to recover the past but are rooted in a reality you know instinctively is larger than the one in which we function. That turned out to be true for Gregory himself even though we're separated by some fifteen hundred years. Actually this awareness of the distant past being alive in the present has a lot to do with the notion of succession, not progression, to be dealt with later.

I'm pleased to say that such was my introduction to Gregory of Nyssa, a bishop of the fourth century who had written in Greek. As I look back, it was the personal touch of a dear friend who had been impacted by that author's insights. I wanted to follow in his footsteps simply

because he was so happy and content with life, nothing more. As for Gregory, getting acclimatized to him isn't easy which is fairly typical with many Fathers of the Church. It takes time to get used to their style and especially their use (some would say abuse) of allegory which can be quite far-fetched, Gregory being no exception. But once you understand that and can access their texts in the original language, everything changes, no question about it. These are the usual obstacles discussed by many who write about the Fathers, all helpful to the newcomer who wishes to explore more deeply. Personal witness as just described seems to be the best selling point. While all this is important, the person of Jesus Christ must be front and center. He was such for the Fathers and remains so today.

As for my elderly friend, the reason he brought up Daniélou's **From Glory to Glory** stemmed from a discussion we had about change or alteration. After having been a novice in an enclosed monastic order for just a few months, I was struck by the fact that I, a newcomer, was living the exact same life as people who were just as old as my grandparents, some even older. The mere thought of this was frightening. Monastic life starts early...three o'clock in the morning...and advances through the day in accord with the Divine Office with two parts of the day (morning and afternoon) devoted to work. Some of those afternoons are free. Contrary to what most people think about monastic life, sufficient time is granted for personal prayer, reading, study and reflection. *Otium* is the Latin word to describe it, leisure with a higher goal than simple relaxation.¹ Despite the appeals of monastic life, few people are willing to take up. That's perfectly acceptable because the first thirty-five to forty years are difficult. After that it's all gravy. You've gone through the mill of humiliations and have come out the other end intact.

So once a person leaves the "world" and enters the monastery he assumes a life style radically different from the one left behind. Problems are different here and hence their solutions. The biggest pertain to the passage of time because in the monastery you don't have as much access to the media and feel this when you get bored. Furthermore, because you're pretty much stuck in one place, activity outside the monastic environment is fairly restricted. So it comes as no surprise that almost at once you have to confront the passage of time, the sense of which is heightened because you have no place to go. The real kicker is that this regime will endure for the rest of your life. That means you have to make an urgent appeal to those more knowledgeable than you for support. These elders, as they are called, have adapted quite well to

¹The book to read is **Otia Monastica** (in French) by Jean Leclercq (Rome, 1963).

the sameness or apparent monotony of monastic life and indeed are flourishing. The question is, can I follow in their footsteps?

That's where my elderly friend's recommendation of **From Glory to Glory** saved the day. Daniélou's Introduction provides a great summary of how Gregory tackles the problem of change or alteration. Change is so basic to our experience that rarely do we reflect upon it until something out of the ordinary happens which compels us to question it. When we do, more often than not our response is negative. We consider change as a loss of stability or the loss of an idealized past which, in turn, evokes nostalgia. Here is an aspect of change that gives rise to a secondary consideration which is the most painful of them all, that everything is fleeting. This further consideration contains a nagging suspicion, if you will, that change is a façade under which lies some kind of permanent reality, one we'd love to get our hands on but never manage to do so. Even if we're led to think this is a grand deception on a cosmic scale, the sense of an underlying reality is difficult to shake off. The rub, of course, is that no one can give a satisfactory answer of why we retain this sentiment. Each person must decide on his own and depend upon witnesses with greater experience as in the case of my elderly friend. The truest test you can apply to a witness is whether he is happy or not. You can tell immediately without any type of analysis. If he is basically happy, you're on the right path which gets to the crux of the matter.

There is a phrase from Gregory of Nyssa which relates to his view on change or alteration,² *apodoxes eis doxan*, and translates as "from glory to glory." More literally it reads "from glory into glory," the preposition *eis* being indicative of a full presence-within compared to one which is without...in other words, a situation which involves constant moving inward (into). Implied, of course, is that such *eis*-ness follows (*apo*, from) a state in which you had been previously, the time span not being intimated but occurring fairly regularly and even accelerating as time goes on. This pattern is repeated indefinitely or because we're dealing with the divine or a-temporal sphere, exists eternally. More on that shortly. As for the phrase proper, it's lifted from 2Cor 3.18: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into

²Evolution may fall under this category as well...in sum, anything involving movement whether for good or for ill, scientific or otherwise. As for the word "glory," Gregory uses *doxa*. It might be better to have in mind the Hebrew *kavod* which connotes a sense of heaviness, of weightiness. While "part" of God, *doxa/kavod* isn't God himself. Thus *kavod* "falls down" from God or better, is like honey dripping from a honeycomb.

his likeness *from one degree of glory to another*; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” Fleshing out this verse before going further would be valuable, hence the following outline consisting of five parts:

#1: “With unveiled face.” That is to say, a *prosopon* (originally as mask through which an actor would speak, the mask representing a character being portrayed on stage) which lacks a veil or covering, *anakalupto*. The preposition *ana* is prefaced to the verbal root *kalupto* (to hide) and is suggestive of continuous upward motion. Thus the unveiling is a lifting up which is unceasing and can intimate that the veil itself has many layers to be peeled off like an onion.

#2: “Beholding the glory of the Lord.” *Katoptrizo* means to behold or more literally, to show in a mirror; it consists of the root *esoptron* or mirror prefaced with the preposition *kata* (in accord with). The object of this reflection has a definite mysterious quality about it. Ancient mirrors were made of highly polished metal as opposed to modern glass which faithfully reproduces the image. Hence anything reflected in an ancient mirror is burnished and blurred. This entices the viewer to look ever more closely at the ghost-like figure whose clarity also depends upon the quality of light. Thus the glory or *doxa* of the Lord is obscure, ever inviting one to gaze more closely and without ever seeing it in full. Something similar occurs when looking at one’s reflection in the water.

#3: “Are being changed into his likeness.” The beholding or reflecting in a mirror (*katoptrizo*) results in a change, namely, *metamorpheo*. *Morphe* or form is the root which also pertains to a shape or a figure. The preposition *meta* prefaced to the verbal root of this noun means after or to change after which is suggestive of rapid, continuous motion with regard to form. The direction of the continuous change is with respect to the divine likeness or *eikon* meaning Jesus Christ.

#4: “From one degree of glory to another.” Note the interaction between two prepositions, *apo* and *eis* or from and into with respect to *doxa*, glory. The word “degree” is not in the Greek text so it applies directly to *doxa* or glory. As soon as the *apo* is attained, if you will, there succeeds an *eis* and so forth for eternity.

#5: “This comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” “This” is not in the Greek text which has instead *kathaper*, a variant of *kata*, in accord with. *Apo* is a preposition meaning from the Lord follow by “of the Spirit” or *pneuma*.

Thus we have the source of Gregory’s key insight, St. Paul. Surely Paul must have had in the

back of his mind his conversion experience on the road to Damascus from which sprang all his insights later put down in writing, his epistles. Although the two lived in different circumstances—Paul, when Christianity was just getting started and Gregory, when Christianity was pretty much established—a closer look of how Gregory interprets this verse is in line with Paul's intent. What matters here is that Gregory uses vivid examples of forward motion and transfers them to the spiritual realm whereas Paul was laying the groundwork on which others would build. In other words, Gregory had more time to reflect upon Paul's words in the larger context of scripture. Gregory's reflections upon *apo doxes eis doxan* are scattered throughout most of his works. However, some of the more important ones are found in his **Commentary on the Song of Songs**, four of which are presented here. First comes the text in and by itself (blue) after which each sentence (also in blue) is accompanied with a running commentary intended to give a closer look. It's especially important to pay attention to the subtle use of prepositions noted in the commentaries³:

Excerpt #1

We now see the bride being led by the Word up a rising staircase by the steps of virtue to the heights of perfection. First the Word sends her a ray of light through the windows of the prophets and the lattices of the Law. He exhorts her to draw near to the light and to become beautiful by being transformed into a dove's image in the light. The bride at this point partakes in the good as much as she can. Then he starts again to draw her to participate in a higher beauty as if she had never tasted it. Thus analogously her desire for advancement increases for all eternity with regard to what is visible. Because there is always an unlimited good beyond what the bride has attained, she always seems to be just beginning her ascent. And when she has come to him he says, "Come." For one who has been called to rise in this way can always rise further, and one who runs to the Lord will always have wide open spaces before him. And so we must constantly rise and never cease drawing closer. As often as the bridegroom says "Arise" and "Come," he gives the power to ascend to what is better. Thus you must understand what follows in the text. When the bridegroom exhorts the bride who is already beautiful to become beautiful, he clearly recalls the words of the Apostle who bids the same image to be transformed "from glory to glory" [2Cor 3.18]. By glory he means what we have grasped and found at any given moment. No matter how great and exalted that glory may be, we believe that it is less than that for which we still

³The letter "J" refers to the critical text begun under the direction of Werner Jaeger. While most sentences are examined, some are not by reason of not being pertinent to the task at hand, namely, how the text demonstrates movement.

hope. Although she is a dove by what she had achieved, the bride is bidden to become a dove once again by being transformed into something better. If this happens, the text will show us something better by this name (dove). J.159-60

Notes on Excerpt #1

We now see the bride being led by the Word up a rising staircase by the steps of virtue to the heights of perfection.

Cheiragogeō is the verb for “being led” or to put it more intimately, as being led by the hand (*cheir*). The *Logos* or Word as divine expression is the one who is leading. Since it is the nature of *Logos* to speak, he does it in this fashion, his word becoming, if you will, a *cheir* to take hold of the bride.

The preposition *para* is used with *Logos* which connotes a being-beside, in the presence of, and fits in neatly with this image of being led by the hand.

Cheiragogeō is used with the noun *anabasis* or literally ascent. The preposition *ana* is indicative of up-ness and also is prefaced to the noun *hodos* (way), rendering it as a way up or *anodos*.

Arete or virtue means the very best quality in someone or in something. Exploring this word alone would require an another article, at least. The preposition *epi* or upon is used with the adjective *hupsos* as heights (of perfection).

First the Word sends her a ray of light through the windows of the prophets and the lattices of the Law.

The noun *paraggelma* is the sending by the Word (*Logos*), expression of the Father, which originally meant a message sent by beacons. Note the preposition *para* or beside prefaced to the root, a sending-beside or sending-with as it pertains to light. That means the prophets and Law receive this sending and thus are transformed.

He exhorts her to draw near to the light and to become beautiful by being transformed into a dove's image in the light.

Proskaleō as drawing near consists of the verbal root *kaleō* (to call, to summon)

prefaced with the preposition *pros*, indicative of direction towards—which. In the case it hand it involves two things: 1) the adjective root being *eggus* and the noun *morphe* or form. As for the latter, it consists of an *eidōs* (image); the preposition *pros* is used with being in the light (continually towards the light), not being drawn to the light.

The bride at this point partakes in the good as much as she can.

Metecho means to partake of and consists of the root *echo* (to have) prefaced with the preposition *meta* or with, to have-with and pertains to the good which here is the adjective *kalos* or beauty which can pertain to form, circumstances or the moral order.

Choreo means to make way or to give way for another (‘as she can’). And so the feel of this sentence is that the bride has-with (*meta-echo*) that which is beautiful by making room for it.

Then he starts again to draw her to participate in a higher beauty as if she had never tasted it. Thus analogously her desire for advancement increases for all eternity with regard to what is visible. Because there is always an unlimited good beyond what the bride has attained, always she seems to be at the beginning of her ascent.

Huparche is a noun meaning the beginning and is used with the preposition *ex* or literally from the beginning. It consists of the root *arche* (beginning, leadership) prefaced with the preposition *hupo* or under, thereby rendering it literally as under the beginning. Thus *hupo* suggests the notion of a foundation on which all else rests, namely, *ephelko* or literally to drawn upon (*epi-*).

Such drawing upon concerns participation, *metousia* (a being-with: *meta-ousia*) in the direction of (*pros*) a beauty which lies beyond (*keimai* prefaced with the preposition *huper*).

Ametochos (having no taste) means literally having no share of a thing, alpha privative prefaced to *metecho* (*meta + echo*).

Prokope (progresses) means progress on a journey, a *pro* (being before) prefaced to *kopto*, to strike, to smite which gives this noun a certain vigor or even violence. Such self-assertive advancement is done according to (*kata*) a given proportion or analogy, *analogia*.

The bride has a desire or literally a desire (*thumos*: mind, heart, temper) upon (*epi-*) which increases with, *auxano* prefaced with *sun-* (with).

Huperbole means literally a casting beyond done in accord with (*kata*) a laying beyond (*keimai* prefaced with *huper-*) those things which are found as good (*agathos*).

Hapto means to touch which is used regarding the bride's ascent or *anodos*.

And when she has come to him he says, "Come." For one who has been called to rise in this way can always rise further, and one who runs to the Lord will always have wide open spaces before him.

In both instances (come), the verb is *erchomai*. *Anistemi* means rise, the verbal root *histemi* (to stand) prefaced with the preposition *ana* (on, upon) thereby suggesting a stationary position with the upward action of *ana*. Compare it with *trecho* or a running *pros* or direction towards—which the Lord. A second instance of *pros* is used with the divine course (*dromos*). Such *pros*, as with most uses by Gregory, implies being always en route yet never reaching the goal.

Dapanao means to spend, to use up with regard to *eurouchoria*, literally a place which is broad (*euros*).

And so we must constantly rise and never cease drawing closer.

Egeiro means to rise in the sense of to rouse compared with *anistemi* in the last section. It is equivalent to *proseggizo* or drawing near (see *eggus* as in 'drawing near to the light' above), this verb prefaced with the preposition *pros*, direction towards—which. Action takes place on the *dromos* or literally *dia* (through) the (divine) course.

As often as the bridegroom says "Arise" and "Come," he gives the power to ascend to what is better.

First comes *anistemi* followed by *erchomai* and *anabasis*, arise->come->ascend.

The divine Bridegroom utters the first two commands after which he bestows *dunamis* (power in the sense of capacity and authority) for ascent, the noun *anabasis* with respect to (*pros*, direction towards—which) that which is better.

Thus you must understand what follows in the text. When the bridegroom exhorts the bride

who is already beautiful to become beautiful, he clearly recalls the words of the Apostle who bids the same image to be transformed "from glory to glory" [2Cor 3.18].

Noeo as understood is a function of the *noos* (*nous*) or mind which has a fuller sense than the intellect, that is, the means by which we take into something consideration and are mindful of it.

Keleuo means to exhort as well as to command with regard to the bride becoming beautiful, *kalos*. Because a command is involved, it suggests that she might be disinclined to assume the task of increasing her beauty.

Hupotithemi is the verb for "recalls" meaning literally a placing (*tithemi*) under (*hupo-*) which is a deeper sense than simply recalling, a placing-under with regard to one's memory.

Protasso means literally to place or to stand (*tasso*, to arrange, to put in order) before (*pro-*) here concerning the image or *eikon* (cf. Gen 1.26) which is to be transformed from glory into glory, i.e., the *apo->eis* dynamic noted already.

Metamorphoo means "transformed" and consists of the root *morphe* (form) prefaced with the preposition *meta* (after), to be formed-after or to situate the *apo->eis* after, if you will, onto an entirely new plane of existence.

By glory he means what we have grasped and found at any given moment. No matter how great and exalted that glory may be, we believe that it is less than that for which we still hope. Although she is a dove by what she had achieved, the bride is bidden to become a dove once again by being transformed into something better. If this happens, the text will show us something better by this name (dove).

Gregory defines glory or *doxa* (alternately it means opinion, estimation) which differs from the biblical sense of *kavod* (literally, heaviness) associated with divine revelation to Moses on Mt. Sinai. I.e., *doxa* equals something in the past, and the past for Gregory dwells in the memory where a recollection has been placed-under or *hupotithemi* as noted in the last sentence. That is to say, it is firmly established and will inform the person from now on.

That past has two parts: *lambano* and *heurisko*, to receive and to find where *aei* (always, eternally) refers to both but in the text is situated closer to the latter. Thus these two verbs as representative of the past are always (*aei*) operative in the present.

The adjectives “great” and “exalted” refer to divine *doxa* not in and by itself but to our perceptions of it through the action of *lambano* and *heurisko* just noted.

Hope (*elpizo*, the verb) is the link between the past of these two actions and the future which will consist in the same situation but not in the manner of replication over and over again. Gregory puts this in terms of a dove which is transformed *pros* or towards—which that which is better.

A noun is used for the verb, *metamorphosis*, obviously derived from *metamorphoo* of the last sentence, form-after. It is the function of the text (Song of Songs itself) to show us this, *hupodeixis* meaning an indication or intimation (*deichnumi* as to show prefaced with *hupo* or under, to show-under).

Excerpt #2

The Song now reads, "Who is this who comes up from the wilderness as pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the powders of the perfumer" [3.6]? If anyone should carefully pay attention to these words, he will find the truth of what we have already set forth. In theatrical displays those acting the designated plot are reckoned as other persons because they change their appearances by a variety of masks. The actor appearing now as a slave or a private citizen is seen a little later as a prince and a soldier; taking off the role of a commoner, he becomes a commander or is clothed with the garb of a king. Thus it is among persons advancing in virtue; being transformed from glory to glory [2Cor 3.18] out of a desire for loftier things, they do not always remain in the same character but according to the degree of perfection established in each person, a different character will shine in their lives: a different one succeeds the other because of their increase in the good. J.185-6

Notes on excerpt #2

If anyone should carefully pay attention to these words, he will find the truth of what we have already set forth.

Gregory begins this excerpt with a quote from the Song of Songs itself which contains the verb *anabaino*, to ascend (cf. *anabasis* in last excerpt) and to which he asks us to pay attention—and that consists of two words—the verb *epistemi* and the adverb *akribos*. The verb is the root *histemi* (to stand) prefaced with the preposition *epi* (upon), to stand-upon as though this understanding is obtained by a view from above looking down.

Such looking down with precision or accuracy (*akribos*) leads to the discovery (*heurisko*) of the *dogma* or teaching set forth, the verb being *prokatanoeo*. It consists of the root *noeo* (cf. last excerpt) prefaced with two prepositions, *pro* and *kata*, before and according to.

Thus it is among persons advancing in virtue; being transformed *from glory to glory* [2Cor 3.18] out of a desire for loftier things, they do not always remain in the same character but according to the degree of perfection established in each person, a different character will shine in their lives: a different one succeeds the other because of their increase in the good.

“Thus” makes a connection between the example just given of actors who assume the role of different characters, that is, their ability to change and the person advancing in virtue or *arete*.

As noted in the last excerpt, *prokope* means progress on a journey, *pro* (being before) prefaced to *kopto* (to strike, to smite) which gives this noun a certain vigor and even a touch of violence.

Virtue or *arete* is the very best and noblest in a person and implies that just as much it has been present as having been acquired. Here Gregory presumes this *prokope* is a transformation (*metamorphoo* of excerpt #1, a forming which is placed after) *apo*->*eis* relative to glory or *doxa*.

Desire or *epithumia* for loftier things is equivalent to this *metamorphoo*, a desire (*thumos*: mind, heart or temper) which is upon (*epi*-).

The remaining Gregory speaks of is not simply a being-within but a remaining (*meno* being the root) prefaced with the preposition *para* or beside, hence a remaining-beside. Such *para-meno* has nothing to do with one's character or *charakter* which means a stamp, an indelible image imprinted upon oneself with roots deep in the memory.

A different *charakter* will shine (*epilampo*: literally, to shine upon, *epi*-) in accord with the degree of perfection or *teleiotes* which connotes an end in the sense of a stated goal.

Such perfection is established in each person, *katorthoo*, *orthoo* (to keep straight) in accord-with (*kata*-) a given plan or here, *teleiotes*.

Epauxesis is the noun for increase or an *auxesis* which is upon (*epi*-) and hence more increase and intense. *Agathos* or good is in the plural.

Excerpt #3

The Word's voice is always one of power. As light shone at the creation by his command, and as the firmament was constituted at his bidding [Gen 1.2–24], the rest of creation appeared by his creative Word. In the same way, when the Word bids the soul that has advanced to approach him, it is immediately strengthened at his command and becomes what he wishes, that is, changed into something divine; and from the glory which the soul had, it is transformed into a loftier glory by an alteration through the good. The angelic choir around the bridegroom marvels at the bride and exclaims with admiration, "You have given us heart, our sister, our spouse" [4.9]. For a state free from passion illumines the bride as well as the angels; it gives her kinship and sisterhood with the spiritual powers. Therefore they say to her, "You have given us heart, our sister, our spouse." J.253–4

Notes on excerpt #3

The Word's voice is always one of power. As light shone at the creation by his command, and as the firmament was constituted at his bidding [Gen 1.2–24], the rest of creation appeared by his creative Word.

An association between *Logos* and *dunamis*, that which is uttered and expressed of the Father and capacity, the power to receive or to do something.

Such *dunamis* is demonstrated by two aspects of creation: light and firmament; i.e., the latter consisting of light as well. *Sunanaphaino* has the root *phaino* (to appear) prefaced with two prepositions, *sun* and *ana* (with and above). Thus the remainder of creation...that not directly concerned with light...appears with-above, a way of saying it is displayed at the same time.

In the same way, when the Word bids the soul that has advanced to approach him, it is immediately strengthened at his command and becomes what he wishes, that is, changed into something divine; and from the glory which the soul had, it is transformed into a loftier glory by an alteration through the good.

Ton auton tropon: these words (in the same way) alert us to pay attention to what was just presented because it will have application in the spiritual realm. I.e., *topos* is the key word meaning place, occasion or opportunity.

When it comes to the soul compared with creation, the *Logos* does the bidding, *egkeleuo* (implies cheering on) with regard to the *psuche* or soul.

Already the soul had approached the *Logos* compared with creation having come into existence as just cited. The *Logos* has the soul to come (*erchomai*) to (*pros*, direction towards—which).

Adiastatos or immediately consists of alpha privative with the preposition *dia* (through) prefaced to the root *histemi* (to stand). The root is *diastema* or interval, and here Gregory says no such interval exists, no “*dia*-ness,” if you will. *Diastema* is discussed briefly later on.

Compare the verb *dunamai* (strengthened) with *dunamis* used concerning the voice of the *Logos* relative to creation which is not the case at hand. It is relative to the divine “command” or *prostagma*, the same *prostagma* that brought light into existence. A parallel exists between having become strengthened by the divine bridegroom’s command and becoming what he wishes (*boulomai*).

Boulomai or this divine wishing consists of the soul being changed, *metapoieo* (the root *poieo*, to make, to fashion) prefaced with the preposition *meta* or after, to make-after. Compare with *metamorphoo* (to transform) above, to put the form after, if you will.

Note the somewhat ambiguous words, “something more divine” as opposed to something definite. The preposition *pros* is used, direction towards—which, implying as with other uses, that which is continuous though punctuated, as it were, with breaks.

Gregory refers to glory (*doxa*) already belonging to the soul, that is, when it was *apodoxes* (not yet *eis doxan*).

The soul is transformed (*metamorphoo*, not *metapoieo* as two lines above) yet *pros* with respect to glory. This comes about by an alteration or *alloiosis*, a change in the sense of making different through that which is good (*agathos*).

Excerpt #4

"If you have been raised up with Christ, set your mind on things above, not what is upon the earth." Paul continues: "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you will also appear with him in glory" [Col 3.1-4]. If we have died to our lower nature, life according to the flesh becomes hidden after we have transferred our

hope for life from earth to heaven. As Proverbs says, "The wise will hide perception" [Prov 10.14]. We await the true life, Christ, to be manifested in us so that we may appear in glory and be transformed into a divine state. Let us now listen to the Song's words as if we were dead according to the body and not attracted by words with a carnal meaning. For the person dead to both passion and desire transfers the outward meaning of the Song's words to that which is pure and undefiled. Being unmindful of lowly, earthly affairs, he sets his mind on things above where Christ, in whom there is no passion, is seated at the Father's right hand in glory [cf. Col 3.1]. Let us now pay attention to the divine words describing the bride's immaculate beauty. Let us listen as if we had no share in the nature of flesh and blood and have been transferred into the spiritual realm. J.262

Notes on Excerpt #4:

"If you have been raised up with Christ, set your mind on things above, not what is upon the earth."

Gregory quotes directly from St. Paul (Col 3.1-4)—the first of two—in order to demonstrate his insight into spiritual advancement with focus upon two verbs, *sunegairo* and *phroneo*. The first consists of a rising—with (*sun-*) which leads automatically, if you will, to comprehension of *ta ano* (things above) compared with *ta epi tes ges* (things upon earth).

Paul continues: "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you will also appear with him in glory."

Paul equates death with being hidden with Christ in God, *sun->en*. This stage does not imply manifestation but invisibility. First Christ (as one's own life or *zoe*, substance or existence) needs to appear (*phaino*: cf. *sunanaphaino* above) followed by one's own in glory or *doxa*. A temporal gap does not exist between the two uses of *phaino*; i.e., one doesn't exist without the other.

If we have died to our lower nature, life according to the flesh becomes hidden after we have transferred our hope for life from earth to heaven. As Proverbs says, "The wise will hide perception" [Prov 10.14].

Gregory refines his insight into death by saying it pertains to our lower nature, our

phusis which is *kato* or below. By implication (the quote above) this death is equivalent to being hidden with Christ in God, that dynamic of *sun*->*en* or with->in.

Life (*zoe*) as pertinent to our nature which is *kato* or below continues as hidden (*krupto*) in accord with or *dia* (through the flesh. This comes about under one condition, namely, that our hope (*elpis*) has been transferred from (*apo*) earth to (*eis*) heaven following the same *apo*->*eis* pattern of *apo doxes eis doxan*. This is dependent upon transferring hope, *metoikizo*, which means literally to dwell after (*meta*-) and more specifically to lead settlers to another abode.

The Greek (Septuagint) *sophos* is for the Hebrew of persons endowed with *chokmah*, literally skill or dexterity. The exact reason for hiding perception isn't given but implied because most people do not grasp what is transpiring. *Aisthesis* means perception chiefly through the senses.

Let us now listen to the Song's words as if we were dead according to the body and not attracted by words with a carnal meaning.

The small word *hos* (as if) is important because it sets up a situation which we can imagine now in a comprehensive way without actually being in it at the present.⁴ In the situation at hand, we are not dead but pretend to be such. Once so dead, our hearing of the Song's words is all the more intense.

Katasuro means to pull down, the root *suro* prefaced with the preposition *kata* which hear means something downward.

Dianoia or meaning consists of the root *nous* or mind prefaced with the preposition *dia* (through), literally as through the mind.

For the person dead to both passion and desire transfers the outward meaning of the Song's words to that which is pure and undefiled.

This sentence carries further the "as if" of the previous one by speaking of being dead.

This projected death, if you will, concerns passion and desire or *pathema* and *epithumia*. The former means anything that befalls oneself, a suffering or calamity and hence is a

⁴Cf. *Some Reflections on Hans Vaihinger* under "Essays" on this home page. Vaihinger goes into some detail with regard to an as-if situation, something overlooked yet quite interesting.

passive emotion or feeling. The latter (already mentioned) is a desire-upon, a *thumos* which is *epi*.

Metoikeyo is the verb for changes and consists of the root *oikos* (house) prefaced with the preposition *meta* (after), thereby rendering a dwelling after or a settling in another place. That which is involved here is the outward meaning or emphasis which consists of the verbal root *phaino* (to appear).

The preposition *epi* (upon) is used with regard to this change, *katharos* and *akeratos* or pure and undefiled in the sense of not being contaminated.

Being unmindful of lowly, earthly affairs, he sets his mind on things above where Christ, in whom there is no passion, is seated at the Father's right hand in glory [cf. Col 3.1].

Lethe is a noun meaning forgetfulness, usually in a negative sense but here not so. It pertains to that which is lowly and earthly or *tapeinos* and *chamaizelos*, the latter literally as being zealous for that which is on the ground. Both adjective pertain to *noema* or what is perceived.

Phroneo means to set one's mind upon, to be so minded upon *ta ano*, those things above.

Christ lacks passion or *pathos* which suggests suffering and is seated at the Father's right hand, literally en *dexia* or in the right hand.

Let us now pay attention to the divine words describing the bride's immaculate beauty. Let us listen as if we had no share in the nature of flesh and blood and have been transferred into the spiritual realm.

Akoueo is the verb for pay attention, to hear. *Rhema* is word or the subject of speech and is used for "things" (above) in the last sentence.

Hupographo means literally to write under (*hupo-*) and here rendered as paying attention.

Kallos means beauty which is *amiantos* or without defilement.

Note the second use of *hos* or "as if" which sets up a situation not realized but sufficiently present to oneself so as to act upon it.

Exo means outside with regard to the nature of flesh and blood and contrasts with the

spiritual realm of that which is *pneumatikos* used with the preposition *eis*, into.

Metastoiceiooo means to change the elementary nature of something. It consists of the root *stoicheion* or order of the letters of the alphabet, the primary elements, prefaced with the preposition *meta* or after. I.e., to put these elementary things after their present reality into something wholly different.

Thus ends the notation on the four excerpts from the **Song Commentary** by Gregory of Nyssa.

Even a quick glance at the notations associated with each sentence reveals the importance of prepositions with their unending twists and turns, a feature of the Greek language Gregory of Nyssa employs to the max. Instead of complicating matters, this allows for insight into things divine that otherwise wouldn't be possible, that is, through the slow-motion practice of *lectio divina*. Prepositions do a wonderful jot of presenting *apo doxes eis doxan* as a continual movement, an image Gregory puts out there for us to incorporate into our spiritual lives. Although they are essentially for perceiving his insights, we retain some difficulty in overcoming an inherently sharp dualism, a dualism that's quite strong and difficult to resolve. From our culture we've inherited the image of divine reality as unmoving which lives "up there" whereas our sphere of influence is "down here," always in a state of flux. And as we all know, "down here" is a rather messy place. Trying to dovetail the two turns out to be an close to impossible task.

When reading such exalted texts a question as the following is bound to arise: yes, we might be able to stumble along and frame our movement in terms of moving from (*apo*) one degree of glory into (*eis*) another. But what happens after death when, according to scripture and all spiritual masters, movement no longer applies? We'll be dead much longer than now when we're alive, so questions about that infinitely long period of time are bound to pop up in our minds, even preoccupy us. The common supposition about life after death...should it exist (and that, of course, is another question)...is that it's outside space and time and therefore outside movement. Thus so-called eternal life is iceberg-like, a state in which we're frozen for all eternity. And eternity is impossible to comprehend just like being frozen or immobilized. Usually we go about the task by thinking of an exceptionally long time, like the time it takes for light to reach the limits of the known universe. In addition to this we can add familiar words as "eternal rest" which suggest a cryogenic state more suited for long distance space travel. Some of these static

concepts derive ultimately from the forms of Plato, a favorite boogie man for a lot of modern people. However, that is a gross misunderstanding largely traceable to subsequent commentators with insufficient breadth of comprehension. To examine that issue here would be going too far off the path, but it's good to be aware of anyway.

Gregory had the boon...the luxury...of being planted in two worlds, that of Hellenistic culture as influenced by Plato and the world of the Bible. Some Hellenistic Christian authors did disparage the Bible and Jewish tradition, but Gregory and most of his fellow churchmen did not consider it crude and unrefined; rather, the Bible was a world of divine revelation with splendors all unto itself. The ability to switch between the two seamlessly is a great gift, difficult to appreciate from our modern way of thinking, and is a sign of his strength of spiritual character. And so when reading these excerpts we can't help but be excited and bewildered because such ideas are hard to find elsewhere. They aren't at variance with Christianity but lay it its very core though like many a Church Father, the bishop of Nyssa was subject to allegations of heresy.

If we return to the **Song Commentary** excerpts and others like them, two general objections arise. First, Gregory's constant harping on progression can be wearisome and even confusing despite its boldness. Gregory is relentless; there's no other way of putting it. Essentially it boils down to the fact that we're reading the same material nuanced in different ways, so dense with all those prepositions. In a short time we might feel adrift with the text no longer making real sense. Then again we may say yes, Gregory is onto something special, but my life doesn't begin to match his standards even though I may be doing my best to live in accord with Gospel norms.

The second objection is that someone like Gregory had plenty of time on his hands, was naturally inclined to the contemplative life despite being a bishop and involved with theological controversies of the day. The culture of Gregory's time was quite unlike we experience today, for Christianity had begun to permeate every layer of society and was destined to remain so in Europe for many centuries. While that turned out to be true, Gregory's native Cappadocia or the larger modern state of Turkey turned out to be almost one hundred percent Islamic. This can give the impression that all Gregory had accomplished is lost and has peripheral historical value only. Still, getting beneath the surface of his thought on forward movement (*apo doxes eis doxan*) rings with us moderns because it reveals another dynamic using the familiar vocabulary of motion and progression. That dynamic will be spelled out shortly not in terms of progression but of succession. Failure to make this distinction has us run the risk of mistaking Gregory as a

forerunner of sorts, one who long ago had keen insight into our notion of progress. Modern culture is focused totally upon progression which has many implications on how we behave. The same applies to religious texts in general. Initially they may excite us, but that's difficult to sustain. We get inspired for a while yet feel all along that a subconscious need hasn't been addressed properly. Until that need is taken care of, we won't be satisfied. Hence these remarks, amateurish as they may be, on the need to make a transition from perceiving spiritual reality in terms of progression to one of succession. That will be described shortly as moving in a partial, gradual fashion to one that is sudden and instantaneous.

Gregory's intense focus on moving forward in the spiritual life turns out substantially different from our expectations. Recognizing this isn't easy because, as just noted, it seems in line with our modern way of thinking which makes it easy for us to jump to premature conclusions. We may attempt living in accord with what he lays out yet find it alien because perception of movement as advancement, of getting from A to B to C in stages, remains strong and is difficult to overcome, let alone find a substitute. So while reading Gregory we discover that ideas about progression or movement got fixed...entrenched...within us long ago and govern us at a level beneath our awareness. The movement familiar as the air we breathe is relentlessly linear and informs our awareness of time's passage of time and the advancement of history. Furthermore, all our perceptions of movement affect our ideas about good and evil; there's no alternative to think otherwise. We spend our time favoring the good and keeping at bay as much as possible that which is evil, quite exhausting and surely involving lots of movement...not so much physical but psychic and spiritual. Nothing else seems available to replace this overarching reality, nor does it appear desirable to do so.

The technology which has crept into virtually every aspect of our lives partakes of this movement as well. Here's another instance of our conditioning and so expect Gregory of Nyssa to support our way of thinking. That's why reading him for the first time can be an intoxicating experience; he appears to back up our most fundamental intuitions into life. One such intuition says that progress is good and lack of it is bad. What's even worse is the prospect of regressing, like dissolving into nothingness. We could continue for a considerable period of time milking Gregory's insights for what they are worth and rightly so. To support our endeavors a whole world of scholarship on Gregory is available, fine and admirable, yet done almost entirely not from the point of view of *lectio divina*. That means if you wish to learn from him on a deeper level, you have sit down and read him as slowly and carefully as you can, a task that sadly most of

us aren't up to. Fighting off these subtle influences is not unlike fighting off a viral infection. The desire, however, remains and needs to be inserted into our lives no matter how slow the process.

Such are the obstacles, and now for the benefits. Should we adopt the slow-motion practice of *lectio divina* and apply it to the excerpts from above, something new begins to emerge. The more we give ourselves over to progression as conceived by Gregory, the more subtle we find his presentation. Initially the intense focus and rapid sequence of images in the **Song Commentary** texts had captured our imagination. Throw in the myriad use of prepositions as well which complicates the text hopelessly yet ever so wonderfully. By slowing down our reading of a given text and pausing, if you will, between each example of *apo* (from) *eis* (into) relative to divine glory, the constant emphasis upon forward-ness turns out to be other than our expectations. Our preconceptions loosen their grip and point in a direction other than we had anticipated. To put it better, we are discovering that the essential *apo-eis* is being distilled which means we're uncovering deeper levels or refining what lies behind the reality of this pair of prepositions. At the same time we discover that we're "not moving" anywhere but are standing still...and are doing it more so, if we can put it that way. It's better to speak like this than using a word like "abstraction" which connotes a withdrawing from familiar reality. Abstraction means a drawing-away whereas we want to be drawn deeper into that which is divine.

The unexpected obstacles that hits us have another benefit despite their relentless assault which can be quite discouraging. While grappling with a shift in perception away from movement and progression, distractions hit us more and more whether from our thoughts and emotions or from the outside. As one friend put it, we don't entertain distractions, they entertain us. The constant barrage to which we're subject makes us feel that we're losing it, that things are getting out of control. Yet we must persevere and realize that such distractions are filling a void that has opened up suddenly where nothing suitable has been found to fill it. Part of that void consists in a deep questioning of our reliance upon the concept of movement and not being sure how to articulate to ourselves thoughts about succession. In our unreflective preference for seeing reality in terms of movement, we allowed thoughts and distractions to conform to that general pattern. The usual prescriptions about this perennial bothersome reality as found in spiritual books fit in nicely as well with our preconceptions.

A shift in our attention from progression to succession seems to intensify these thoughts,

stymying us because few if any guidelines exist. The garden variety distractions to which we've grown accustomed now assail us without warning but with a strength hitherto un-experienced. At first we're surprised, even embarrassed, but this dissipates the more closely we consider them. When a habitual manner of perceiving reality is interrupted, our thought patterns which have conformed to it are thrown into disarray. Our world view has been challenged, and we attempt to repair the damage. Instead of applying solutions that had worked in the past...looking for analogies based upon movement and progression...we're compelled to develop new ones. The amount of energy released at this point is substantial and can prevent us from advancing further, making us spin around with one distraction after another. Ultimately all derive from movement and progress evident by the vocabulary we use. We're confused by the bits and pieces of reality being tossed at us continuously which never seem to come together in a coherent fashion. And they never will should we continue down this road. Perhaps the best way to subdue this unexpected inner turmoil by examining its source which heralds the arrival of a new reality that is coming into our view.

The more we hand ourselves over to what appears to be progression as presented by Gregory of Nyssa, the more our own notions of it fade away. Because we're reading him now in the spirit of *lectio divina*, without realizing it we're slowing ourselves down and are becoming other than what we had expected when we first became acquainted with Gregory. So contrary to the forward-oriented images which he throws at us, they put in in the exact opposite condition, namely, they make us frozen stiff. The shift is so radical that to conceive of it is virtually impossible. However, once we surrender to it, by no means does it correspond to the static, frozen image of eternity we've entertained. The reason is that the stiffness now paralyzing us and mimicking death turns out to be a process of distillation. And so our dependence upon the idea of progress and motion as a sign of life and the idea of being stationary as a sign of death are altered radically. Just as important, the images we use to describe each are reversed on their own accord without our intervention.

Our shift in perception from being frozen for all eternity to being distilled is a sign that some larger force is at work which smacks of transcendence as it attempts to inform our lives. We're at the root of all difficulties experienced by people in their attempts to decipher the spiritual life which until now had perceived largely in terms of movement, albeit subtle. Movement presented by Gregory through his template *apo doxes eis doxan* becomes a way of seeing directly into our own nature, and that nature turns out to be quite different than we had imagined. We

obtain these perceptions instantly, one following the other a little bit later and so forth. “Little bit later” can be a nano-second or longer; despite even the tinniest interval, there’s no difference. Nevertheless, these perceptions remain disjointed which contribute to our awareness of the flow of time. Memory of the last perception—and the one before it and so forth—hook up and give continuity to our existence. Yet these hook-ups remain individual units like individual frames on a movie reel and are not seamless and are the essential components to our awareness of the passage of time. So what Gregory seems to be after according to his *apo-eis* template is that the numerous glances we make into our nature, preferably done short and sweet, shift from being disjointed to something more smoothed out. This smoothing out is to be done discreetly and at intervals in accord with our temperament, not forced. It is gradual in accord with the slow-motion reading of *lectio divina*, so the two work together. However, “gradual” shouldn’t be taken as a kind of movement. It applies more to a new manner of perception readying us for the sudden break, a it were, from darkness into light. Thus the task at hand is a breaking down our perception of interval, the essence of time’s passage. And it is these intervals which are the chief culprits of our distress and unhappiness.⁵

Modern readers may experience difficulty in the analogies used by Gregory to flesh out his *apo-eis* template and see in this sufficient reason to go no further. Nevertheless, they are important both for him and other Church Fathers which makes it worthwhile exploring his use of them. The tendency to make analogies subscribes more to progression as we’ve been presenting it, of attempting to move from an image to the reality it represents, which means they must be viewed with some caution. It rests on the basic presumption that a form is being modeled which invariably involves movement or progression to express it. Gregory is aware of this fact yet doesn’t quite have the vocabulary of speaking about that reality to which his analogies point. This is putting it a bit awkwardly, of course, for the ultimate object of his search is God. And that search is marked by some ambivalence between form and lack of form. Quite a remarkable

⁵Allow in passing another very important aspect of Gregory's thought, namely, *diastema*. Here is not the place to explore it at length because this concept requires independent study. *Diastema* literally means a standing (*hístemi*) through (*dia-*) and has the connotation of a standing apart, extended existence or an interval. When applied to theology, *diastema* cannot be understood as a spatial gap between Creator and his creation; more properly speaking, it is a gap existing on the side of creation which has a beginning (*arche*) and end (*telos*). More information on *diastema* is found on the Gregory of Nyssa home page which is linked with the present one.

Gregory expresses the temporal limitations of our present existence as follows: “All our notions are bound by time (*te diastematike paratasei*); they attempt to transcend their proper limits but cannot. Intervals of time constitute all our thoughts as well as the thought content. Yet we have learned to seek and to cherish that which transcends all creation” (**Commentary on Ecclesiastes**, J.412).

undertaking when you stop to think of it. Gregory is dealing with the appearance of God in history as Jesus Christ and how to integrate that with the more general transcendent nature of God inherited from Judaism as well as Plato. Still, his reflections which rest upon use of analogies form an adjunct reality, an anti-chamber of sorts, enabling us to get at the heart of the matter.

Thus far we've been talking about Gregory of Nyssa's treatment of movement, also put in terms of progression, of going from one degree of glory to another and so forth for all eternity. You have to read all the passages with this in mind and do so carefully in order to see that beneath the emphasis upon movement, something else is at work. That something else we may designate as succession, a term not in Gregory's vocabulary but intimated as being there. We can approach this by observing that the *apo-eis* template, of moving from-into relative to divine glory, represents an active stance by our minds and hearts which does not partake in movement. Because this *apo-eis* is open to us all the time, it's a matter of tuning in to it, if you will, and seeing where it will take us. Surely this sounds attractive but is difficult to wrap our heads around. We are so accustomed to the passage of time and the perception of intervals that we come to a dead end when attempting to articulate all this.

Succession means the sudden appearance of a reality which hadn't been visible before. It kind of plops down in front of us whole and entire without expectation. Thus we can equate it with reality or that which lacks parts and is undivided compared to our perceptions which almost always are partial. Since this is so obvious, the next obvious observation is that our mode of perception requires a certain filling out, a bittersweet experience. Bitter in that we have trouble acclimatizing ourselves to it and sweet in that it appeals directly to something deep within us. Sticking with texts presented by Gregory of Nyssa and our innate proclivity to think in terms of movement or progression, we come to realize that the problem is our partiality, of being unable intuit reality as whole. Since reality is one and undivided, so should be our perception of it...a one-on-one conformity. It appears, then, that any perception in terms of form (*morphe*) turns out to be limited even if that form is as large as the universe. Perhaps...and this is somewhat tentative and a personal insight...Gregory is saying that his *apo-eis* schema is based upon varying degrees of awareness. The problem is that like other ancient Christian authors, they lacked such a term. Someone like Gregory does his best to speak in terms of awareness but simply can't due to his culture and vocabulary. Yet he uses words and images that circle around this insight which is both his strength and weakness. The strength has been pointed out, of course, while the weakness consists in the sometimes over-blown use of analogies, of always trying to describe the

incomparable in terms completely foreign to it.

So the notion of awareness allows for a plopping down of reality in rather sudden fashion before our eyes as opposed to the gradual emergence of a form which would be our usual way of viewing it. This precludes our efforts at perceiving reality in bits and pieces, here and there, instead of something more fluid-like. In fact, the sudden appearance of reality and our difficulty of grasping it leaves us with little means to describe how we perceive reality whole and entire. We've been accustomed only to those bits and pieces. Here we run up against the paucity of language and thought current in the West regarding things spiritual. Never has the West been at home with contemplative matters despite an exception here or there. However, this lack makes for fruitful exploration as in this modest article which seeks to spell out the notion of succession. And succession is defined technically as the act of following in order or according to a sequence; the verb to succeed means to follow or to come after another.⁶ In our spiritual tradition we have this reality right out there for all to see, directly from the Bible. It's available though generally not reflected upon due to our paucity of language and thought. The most basic element proper to the notion of succession is the image of light with six examples from the Gospel of John followed by a special verse, if you will, from Acts of the Apostles:

#1: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it [1.5].

#2: The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world [1.9].

#3: And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light [3.19].

#4: I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life [8.12].

#5: But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him [11.10].

#6: While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light [12.36].

#7: But he (Stephen), full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God [7.55].

Note the two realities of light and darkness, simple, whole and entire. One is present in the other

⁶Please see an accompanying article inserted under "Reflections," *Taxis and Akolouthia as Used by Gregory of Nyssa*. These two terms, spelled out to some degree, have the potential of better presenting the preference for the notion succession over others terms related to movement or progression. In many ways that article and the present one work hand in hand. Also Jean Daniélou has a number of articles on *akolouthia*, all in French, though unfortunately I don't have the references at hand.

despite their radical differences. How light, for example, got into darkness isn't spelled out; it just happens and does so immediately by way of displacement. To speak of light being present in darkness falls outside movement or progression, so that type of vocabulary doesn't apply. As we all know, the sun does not shine in part but in full force. There's no "process" by which the light enters darkness which means instantaneous purification, of burning up the darkness all at once...in sum, zapping it. While we can attribute this to the sun (it's right overhead for anyone to behold), we can't subject the presence of light in darkness to as a gradual entry, let alone analysis.⁷ But since we Westerners are partial to methods and progression, light's presence as a kind of purification makes sense. It's a way of keeping the light out there while we figure ways of allowing a little bit in here or some over there. In sum, we're reading into this a whole slew of spiritual exercises and disciplines where none are called for. These are complications and need to be seen for what they're worth, as imposed from without, for our natural impulse is to impose complexity where none is called for. In light of the form-awareness distinction made above, we prefer sticking with terms of form than awareness which are more comfortable and familiar. Such is the simple yet disconcerting nature of those passages from John's Gospel which require more reflection than at first glance. Thus the ways we deal with them are artificial, bordering upon concoctions and are more reflective of our propensity for complication. Yet when this is brought into question, we're at a loss to explain ourselves. That's okay, however. It's a sign of the stirring of new life, of the light present whole and entire within the darkness.

It's easy to see how this insight of succession as presented flies in the face of our traditional understanding. For example, we have darkness into which light advances little by little, an undeniable fact. Yet light doesn't overtake darkness gradually but all at once. There's no gradation between where light meets a shadow which is composed of darkness, the two being distinct in razor-sharp fashion. One may attempt to qualify this by introducing twilight where light (or darkness) comes on gradually as at the beginning and the end of a day. This image fits in nicely with progression and movement and hence supports the need for exercises in making the transition. After all, we see it happen twice at day. True as that may be, light is light and darkness is darkness. One doesn't "progress" so far while its opposite fades away little by little. Rather, one succeeds the other at once or better, light succeeds darkness not unlike going down a road when suddenly you hit a barrier. Yet instead of being an obstacle as high as the heavens and as dense as brass (to put it biblically), the vertical reality we run into represents the point where

⁷The analogue, of course, is the speed of light traveling from the sun. We can forego that scientific image for now provided we're aware of its factualness.

succession commences and progression leaves off. Indeed, the point of contact is sudden and unexpected. Instead of experiencing a calamity, a person is transformed into this new reality though it may see otherwise for a brief moment. Even to comprehend the precise point of contact is next to impossible. Incorrectly we can take it to mean that having crossed the line, we must start behaving in a super-moral, super-Christian way with no wiggle room for our inherent faults and defects.

So if there is no wiggle room when we're hit with a full, undiluted exposure to reality, the question arises whether this might put too much unrelenting pressure on us, more than anyone can bear. We could rephrase this as asking whether too much truth is too much to bear.⁸ When we were content perceiving things in terms of movement this problem didn't arise. Endemic to movement is an incremental growth in our perception of reality as opposed to getting it in full dose, of beholding reality whole and entire. Either we get it all at once or in piecemeal, nothing in between. To see reality in piecemeal is both absurd and impossible when you come down to it, like the famous example of a fish trying to see the water in which he lives. Perhaps this is arguing about terminology and nothing more, but reality and God are pretty much one and the same. Everyone is driven towards it whether he realizes or not, even when denying it. So if we have progression or movement form the basis of how we perceive reality, that is, in piecemeal fashion, we're more susceptible to heresy. I mean heresy in the literal sense as a picking here and a choosing over there. Should we opt for the image of succession...reality in itself and just as it is...no longer do we any options to pick and choose because we've been hit with everything all at once.

The option between two modes of perception can be reconciled by considering the seventh scriptural verse above or the one after the six citations from John's Gospel, the Acts of the Apostles. Stephen is at the point of death when he has a vision of divine glory. Note that he is "full of the Holy Spirit" meaning that he is not conscious of himself yet fully able to function. He is full just as the darkness is full of light. This Spirit compels him to gaze into heaven where he beholds two objects, if you will, the divine glory (*doxa*, as with Gregory of Nyssa) and Jesus at

⁸You could put this in another more direct way. It isn't a matter of going from regular living to being transformed into someone who's super-holy and stands out because of that. Rather, the change effects humble way of living even to the point of flaunting one's faults and defects. You get the insight that the realm of succession is as close to reality or the divine you can get in this life; by keeping a close lid on it, you're having a profound effect on the world. In the words of Ps 19, "There is no speech nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world."

his Father's right hand. *Atenizo* is the verb here ('gazed') which derives from the root *teino*, to stretch to the utmost and is prefaced with alpha privative. The alpha privative negates the gazing making it into one of no gazing, a cryptic but unavoidable way of putting it we'll let stand as is. And so *atenizo* seems better adapted for describing the way we perceive reality through the model of succession. It contains both immediacy and an active stance toward reality, not being passive to it. Once we've adopted this we look back and realize that any fears that had governed us are unfounded. Those fears were described as having no wiggle room (i.e., of being frozen) and not knowing how to comport ourselves when hit with reality all at once. So here is where hope, a virtue often overlooked and under-appreciated, comes in. Gregory mentions it several times in the **Song Commentary** excerpts, and we can breeze by them without taking serious note. Hope is operative while we're making the transit from the realm of progression into succession as a sign that we're not satisfied and are seeking a homeland of which we've had a taste. That homeland, of course, is one where we're ensconced already, once and for all, the homeland proper to succession. Hope thus consists of a memory of succession, a vision that is inserted into our lives through the faculty of our memory.⁹ Paradoxically that insertion has taken place prior to any experience which has imprinted itself upon our memories or so we think.

Hope is not an argument for any type of pre-existence but a sign that we can attain our natural dwelling place which we've been discussing in terms of succession, not progression. Hope is an instrument, if you will, enabling us to transform partial insights into full blown perceptions of reality, enabling us to learn from our experiences that neither are we destined nor subject to any forms of movement or progression. It understands the paradoxical question, how can you go to a place in which you're already present? Hope is active and authorizes any and all thoughts and emotions without pursuing them further than this authorization which is whole and sufficient to itself. It says yes...never no...to everything that emerges from within which, strange to say, is the enemy of progression.

You'd think this active stance would be described best in terms of progress/motion, but no. Because hope has existed upstream within us from all manifestation and often thought of in terms of energy, it is immune to our deliberations, fears and desires. The direct, undeniable proof for the existence of hope is the suddenness with which it emerges, not gradual as if it were moving or progressing from one place to somewhere else. Anyone can experience it, and the

⁹Emphasis on our recollective faculty is very important for the ancients as found throughout the works of Plato, more expansive than ours. One special word for it is *anamnesis*, a calling to mind or recollection which informs our whole lives.

method is simple. All you have to do is authorize any and all thoughts and emotions (shorthand for mental garbage) that enter our minds. We find it a bit scary because it's unfamiliar. Furthermore, never have we been trained to take that approach.

Hope so presented differs from the popular Catholic way of looking at what happens when we die. Most Catholics go to Purgatory when they die, a state of cleansing, usually by fire, which prepares us for heaven. This preparation is gradual (i.e., 'it moves') which reflects the general way Catholics (and certainly non-Catholics) view the spiritual life. And so hope, often symbolized by an anchor, is thrown out there to moor us within reality. That reality had been within us since our birth, if you will, and requires an attention which is sudden and successive to our world of progression, nothing more. This world isn't obliterated but seen for what it is worth, a presence of the light within the darkness. Thus Scripture has been right all along to speak like this. All we have to do is refer to the quotes above from John's Gospel...not only that but to see similar examples throughout Scripture.

In conclusion, allow some brief thoughts on the sentiment of gratitude which comes closest in our experience to succession as it has been spelled out in this article. When we're thankful the experience is total and focused more upon the giver than the gift (in fact, the two are indistinguishable). There's nothing halfway or incomplete about gratitude even though it may vary in intensity due to one's condition, etc. Gratitude lacks memory of everything else once this sentiment overcomes you. It blots out everything from the past yet at the same time informs it which is why gratitude is the closest real life thing there is to *anamnesis* as recollection (cf. footnote #9).

Let's say that we don't have a spirit of thankfulness, not that we're necessarily glum and wrapped up in ourselves, just going along like everyone else. Then we hit upon someone who gives us something out of the clear blue which we haven't expected, something that changes our lives, more than a gift in the conventional sense. We find ourselves in a completely different situation that affects our lives all around, inside and out. The "change" (pardon the slip into a movement-oriented word) occurs instantly, and we forget our state of mind prior to this intervention. Recollection of the good a person bestows thus inserts itself in ourselves, and it is very difficult to dislodge. In other words, the sentiment of gratitude *succeeds* all else within us not by stages but totally. We don't move piecemeal into it which otherwise would make us want more, for gratitude is whole and enduring. No extraordinary transformation in our external lives but one

that is strictly internal, hidden from prying eyes. Our lives go on just as they had before indistinguishable from those of everyone else.

+ The End +