



CHAPTER

3 3 Gendered Body

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Abstract

Chapter 3 ('Gendered Body') argues that Gregory depicts gender as something ultimately unstable. This instability is the result not of a non-essentialist (postmodern) questioning of heteronormativity but of an anagogical, upward journey away from gender and sexuality altogether. In *Canticum canticorum* contrasts the temporary (post-lapsarian) 'tunics of hide' (which will not enter into the adiaSTEMIC paradisaL future) with the holy garb of Christ and contrasts the bodily senses with the spiritual senses. In *De hominis opificio*, Nyssen explains that embodiment and gender do not belong to the image of God, and if any procreation would have taken place in Paradise, it would have been an angelic, non-sexual kind of procreation. In *Vita s. Macrinae*, Gregory depicts his sister, Macrina, as someone who through virginity reaches the angelic life and so in Christ overcomes gender.

Keywords: gender, sexuality, virginity, heteronormativity, tunics of hide, spiritual senses, angelic life, in *canticum canticorum*, *de hominis opificio*, *vita s. macrinae* gender, sexuality, virginity, heteronormativity, tunics of hide, spiritual senses, angelic life, in *canticum canticorum*, *de hominis opificio*, *vita s. macrinae*

Subject: Early Christianity, Christian Theology, Theology

Embodiment, gender, and sexuality have become prominent themes among students of St. Gregory over the past few decades.¹ This contemporary interest is hardly surprising. Recent philosophical and cultural trends have placed questions of human personhood and identity at the centre of our attention.² And with the modern and postmodern rejection of "essentialism"—and of the soul—the body, along with sexual identity and gender, have become pressing concerns.³ As Sarah Coakley observes, however, the move from soul to body as the locus of our attention has not necessarily made things easier: "It is as if we are clear about an agreed cultural obsession, but far from assured about its referent."⁴ Indeed, the contemporary focus on the body goes hand in hand with an increasing inability to come to "grips" either with the body or with sexuality. The postmodern tendency to prize difference over identity has led to protracted and apparently insoluble anthropological and moral debates about the stability of gender and about sexual identity. In such a context, it seems both legitimate and important to probe the Christian tradition with questions about the place and role of body, gender, and sexuality. In the case of Nyssen, such interaction may be particularly profitable since both the question of the place of the body in the broader context of human identity and the question of the stability of gender and sexuality are explicit and significant concerns in his writings. The next two chapters, therefore, will deal with the question of what role Nyssen assigns to gender and sexuality within his overall understanding of the human person.

The relative prominence of embodiment and sexuality in current research on Gregory does, of course, raise the question of how we negotiate the gap that in many ways separates contemporary Christians from those in late antiquity. ↪ We need to be alert to the danger of imposing contemporary philosophical and theological values and concerns onto fourth-century thinkers such as St. Gregory of Nyssa. The next two chapters will argue that we can do justice to the concerns of Nyssen only if we bracket common contemporary assumptions about the inherent value of materiality in general—and of the human body and

gendered existence in particular—and if we keep in mind the central place that anagogy occupies in Nyssen’s theology. We have already seen in the previous two chapters that although Gregory regards time and space as opportunities, they are also limitations that we are meant to overcome. Desire for the life of God renders Gregory impatient with the creaturely life of “extension” (διάστημα); his hope is for the intelligible life of the heavenly Paradise. In similar fashion, the “obvious sense” of the biblical text is something that St. Gregory believes we must overcome through an “epektatic” ascent into the impassible life of God. Thus, while measured bodies (including the textual body of Scripture) are God’s gifts for the sake of salvation, they are in no way ultimate. Anagogical transposition drives St. Gregory’s approach to the diastemic realities of the created order and also to the interpretation of Scripture.

The next two chapters will make clear that the same interest in anagogical transposition inspires also Nyssen’s understanding of human embodiment, gender, marriage, sexuality, and virginity. I will argue that some contemporary readings of Gregory are so focused on Gregory’s acknowledgment of the beauty and goodness of the body and/or on his intriguing and repeated employment of gender reversal that they either misconstrue his approach or ignore important qualifications and clarifications that he makes. In this chapter, I will focus on the interpretation of John Behr with regard to the place of marriage and sexuality, and on the views of several feminist scholars (most notably Elizabeth Clark and Virginia Burrus) with regard to gender stability. The following chapter will discuss both Mark Hart’s understanding of the importance of virginity in Gregory’s thought and Rowan Williams’s appraisal of Gregory’s views on the emotion of grief. Each of these interpretations downplays St. Gregory’s anagogical approach by overemphasizing his appreciation of bodily creation and/or human passion. Although I am convinced that St. Gregory is a reader of Scripture before he is a Platonist, we cannot ignore the obvious impact of Platonic thought on his thinking. On the surface at least, it seems ironic that scholars with a (post-) modern disavowal of Platonist essentialism would turn to one of the most Platonic of the church fathers in support of a focus on this-worldly goods such as the body and marriage, and that they would mine the writings of Nyssen for allusions to this-worldly gender reversals and homoeroticism. To be sure, there are aspects of Gregory’s thought that seem to provide evidence for such interpretations. I will argue, however, that such evidence needs to be evaluated within the radically anagogical character of Gregory’s overall theology, which marks also his understanding of embodiment and sexuality.

p. 87 The first task at hand, therefore, is to illustrate the central role that anagogical transposition plays in Nyssen’s theology. I will do this by means of Gregory’s *In Canticum canticorum*, in which he problematizes both the current constitution of the human body (represented as “tunics of hide”) and human sense perception. To contemporary sensibilities, this might look as though Gregory, too, has difficulty ascertaining bodily identity and stability. I will argue, however, that Nyssen’s homilies on the Song of Songs are in fact asking us to engage in an anagogical transposition as the way to rid ourselves of our “tunics of hide” in order to put on the “holy garb” of Christ—a dress reversal rather different from the gender instability that some postmodern scholars advocate. Ontological instability in Gregory is actually an indication of human teleology rather than a mark of non-essentialist fragmentation. I will reinforce this argument by showing that as part of the change in clothing the bodily senses give way to spiritual senses. Nyssen’s disavowal of sensible existence implies that he believes gender and sexuality—as part and parcel of the “tunics of hide”—do not enter into the definition of what it means to be human.⁵ This chapter will make clear that he regards the “tunics of hide” (the post-lapsarian condition of the body) as penultimate and as problematic in significant ways. Gregory is deeply impressed with the need for an anagogical transposition that will allow us to leave behind all of the diastemic characteristics of the mortal body, including gender, sexuality, childbearing, maturation, nourishment, bodily functions, disease, bodily passions, and death.⁶ In short, all of these dimensions characterize the life that we have in common with the “brutish animals” and that we are to leave behind. It is the virginal life, particularly as we witness it in Macrina, which gives us an anticipatory glance into the virginal life of the resurrection. None of this is to say that Gregory disregards or perhaps even despises the life of the body. Marriage and sexuality, as well as food and drink and the human passions can serve in positive ways. But Nyssen is keenly aware not only that they can trip us up in our upward journey, but also that they can never be considered as ultimate, considering the virginal, even non-gendered, life that awaits us.

p. 88 One of the most striking elements of Gregory's views on gender and virginity is their Christological grounding, something that comes to the fore particularly ↵ in Nyssen's understanding of the "tunics of hide." The broad contours of Gregory's take on the "tunics of hide" are well known.⁷ In many of his writings, Gregory maintains that the "tunics of hide" (χιτῶνες δερμάτινοι) that God provided for Adam and Eve after the Fall (Gen 3:21) are not to be taken literally but refer to the human body in its fleshly and irrational condition (subject to the passions) and thus in its mortal character. This means that the tunics of hide refer to the fallen and mortal condition of human embodiment (rather than to the body as such), which in the resurrection will give way to a form of embodied existence that will be much more glorious precisely in that these very same bodies will be transformed so as to escape both the passions and the mortality of the body's current constitution. The resurrection life, for Gregory, will involve a shedding of the "tunics of hide" so that human beings will participate in a radically new way in the dispassionate and immortal life of God. This overall picture, which emerges from a number Gregory's writings, is consistent and uncontroversial.⁸

It is also commonly recognized that Nyssen employs the "tunics of hide" theme in his own distinct manner. Following St. Paul's mixed metaphor wherein he encourages believers to "take off" the "old man" so that they can "put on" the "new man" (Eph 4:22; Col 3:9), the Alexandrian tradition, following Philo and Origen, interpreted the "tunics of hide" as bodily existence per se, the result of the pre-temporal Fall of human souls into sin. In line with this, the "putting on" of the "new man" became the reversal of the effects of the Fall, an identification with Jesus Christ and a renewal of the image of God (cf. Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). The tradition on which Gregory draws thus tended to link the "tunics of hide" more closely with the human body as such.⁹ Gregory himself, however, never identifies the two, and in charting his own path in interpreting Genesis 3:21, he deliberately distances himself from the Origenist tradition, to which he is in many ways deeply indebted. Gregory never considers the human body, in itself, problematic. His high regard p. 89 both for the created order in general and for the human body in particular is well ↵ known. One of the main points that Nyssen makes in *De anima et resurrectione* is that the resurrection body will be the same as that which has dissolved in the grave. When, therefore, contemporary readings of Gregory highlight Gregory's esteem for the human body, they rightly draw on a significant element of Gregory's thought.

Gregory's high regard for the body does not, however, leave it unaffected. This becomes clear when we analyze *In Canticum canticorum*, a work not often looked at in connection with the "tunics of hide." These homilies are important not only because of the rather prominent presence of the "tunics of hide" but also because here Nyssen deals with this theme in a distinctly Christological fashion. And it is the Christology that makes clear that the human body itself undergoes ontological change as part of the journey to the heavenly realm. In the sermons on the Song of Songs, we repeatedly encounter the imagery of a change in clothing to describe the anagogical transposition to which we are called. Indeed, we could say that this transposition is predicated on a contrast between "tunics of hide" and the "holy garb" of the Lord Jesus Christ. The very opening words of the first homily illustrate the contrast:

You who in accordance with the counsel of Paul have "taken off" the old humanity with its deeds and lusts like a filthy garment (περιβόλαιον) (Col 3:9) and have clothed yourselves by purity of life in the lightsome raiment (ιμάτια) of the Lord, raiment such as he revealed in his transfiguration on the mountain (cf. Mark 9:2–3 and par.), or, rather, you who have "put on" our Lord Jesus Christ himself (Gal 3:27) together with his holy garb (στολής) and with him have been transfigured for impassibility and the life divine: hear the mysteries of the Song of Songs.¹⁰

The believer's identification with Christ in the "putting on" of the "new man" is evident not only in the passage already quoted, but also in Gregory's reflections in Homily 11 on the bride's words, "I have removed my tunic (χιτῶνά). How shall I put it on?" (Song 5:3). Not surprisingly, Gregory immediately spots here a reference to Paradise and sees here a reversal of the effects of the Fall: the bride "put off that 'tunic of hide' (τὸν δερμάτινον ἐκεῖνον χιτῶνα) that she had put on after the sin (cf. Gen 3:21)."¹¹ This "negative" stripping off of the tunic of hide has for its "positive" counterpart one's identification with Christ. Says Gregory:

So whoever has taken off the old humanity and rent the veil of the heart has opened an entrance for the Word. And when the Word has entered her, the soul ↵ makes him her garment (ἔνδυμα) in accordance with the instruction of the apostle; for he commands the person who has taken off the rags (ράκῳδη) of the old humanity "to put on the new" tunic (χιτῶνα) that "has been created after

the likeness of God in holiness and righteousness” (Eph 4:24); and he says that this garment (ἔνδυμα) is Jesus (cf. Rom 13:14).¹²

For Gregory, Jesus is the new tunic that the believer puts on when removing the old tunic of hide. Put differently, Gregory describes the anagogical transposition in such a way that our very bodily existence changes when in and through Christ we regain the immortality lost through the Fall.¹³

Human beings can share in Christ as the new garment because, according to Gregory, his human nature is ours. Thus, while Gregory at times refers to Christ as the “new tunic,” he specifically has in mind Christ’s human nature. This human nature functions as a garment that mediates his divinity to us. When the bride says to the Bridegroom, “Behold, you are fair, my beloved and beautiful, overshadowing (σύσκιος) our bed” (Song 1:16), the mentioning of the “bed” is, according to Gregory, a reference to the “blending” (ἀνάκρασις) or the “union” (ἔνωσις) of the divine and human natures.¹⁴ Gregory’s exposition is worth quoting at length:

Then she adds: *thickly shaded* (σύσκιος) *at our bed*. That is, “Human nature (ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη φύσις) knows you, or will know you, as the One who became shaded (σύσκιος) by the divine Economy. For you came,” she says, “as the beautiful *kinsman*, the glorious one, who became present at our couch thickly shaded (σύσκιος). For if you yourself had not shaded yourself (συνεσκίασας), concealing the pure ray of your Deity by the ‘form of a slave’ (Phil 2:7), who could have borne your appearing? For no one shall see ‘the face’ of the Lord ‘and live’ (Exod 33:20). Therefore you, the glorious one, came, but you came in such wise as we are able to receive you. You came with the radiance of Divinity shaded (συσκίασας) by the garment (τῆ περιβολῆ) of a body.” For how could a mortal and perishable nature be adapted to live together with the imperishable and inaccessible, unless the shadow (σκιά) of the body had mediated between the Light and us who live in darkness (cf. Isa 9:1)?

In a figurative turn of speech the Bride uses the word *bed* to mean the mingling (ἀνάκρασιν) of the human race with the Divine....¹⁵

p. 91 Gregory here describes the human nature of Christ as a bodily garment (περιβολή) that overshadows his divinity, so that the Incarnation not only permits the divine nature to be present in and with the human nature but also allows us to see the very Son of God. The removal of the tunic of hide (and the putting on of a new tunic) is thus for Gregory an ontological transposition that enables us to identify with Christ.

While this transposition is obviously a Christological matter, human virtue is also intimately connected with it. In fact, growth in virtue is what constitutes our anagogical transposition into Christ. Thus, Gregory reminds us in his first homily of Moses’ decree that “no one should dare the ascent of the spiritual mountain until the garments (ἱμάτια) of our hearts are washed clean and our souls are purified by the appropriate sprinklings of reasoned thoughts (cf. Exod 19:10, 14).”¹⁶ Nyssen makes the identification between a “new tunic” and new virtues even more explicit when in Homily 9 he reflects on Chapter 4:11 (“the fragrance of your garments (ἱματίων) is as the fragrance of frankincense”). The combined mentioning of garments and of frankincense proves irresistible to Gregory. “This statement,” he maintains, “indicates what the goal of the life of virtue is for human beings. For the limit that the virtuous life approaches is likeness to the Divine....”¹⁷ Gregory then goes on to speak about the weaving of a garment of virtues:

Now the virtuous manner of life is not uniform or marked by a single style, but just as in the making of a fabric (ὕφασμάτων) the weaver’s art creates the garment by using many threads, some of which are stretched vertically and others are carried horizontally, so too, in the case of the virtuous life, many things must twine together if a noble life is to be woven. Just so the divine apostle enumerates threads of this sort, threads by means of which pure works are woven together; he mentions love and joy and peace, patience and kindness (cf. Gal 5:22) and all the sorts of thing that adorn the person who is putting on the garment of heavenly incorruptibility in place of (μετενδύμενος) a corruptible and earthly life (1 Cor 15:53). This is why the Bridegroom acknowledges that the adornment of the Bride’s garment (ἔσθητι) is, as far as its fragrance goes, like frankincense.¹⁸

For Gregory, there is no difference whatsoever between putting on Christ as a garment, on the one hand, and weaving for oneself a garment of virtue, on the other hand.

The result is that Gregory can apply also his doctrine of continuous ascent (ἐπέκτασις) to clarify what takes place in this dress reversal (the removal of the tunics of hide and one’s putting on the garment of Christ).

We already saw that in Homily 11 Nyssen reflects on the bride's comment, "I have removed my tunic (χιτώνα). How shall I put it on?" (Song 5:3). He refers back to this statement when, in the next sermon, he notes the bride's comment that "the watchmen of the walls took my veil (θήριστρον) away from me" (Song 5:7). Gregory begins by noting an apparent incongruity: "How, then, does one who has been stripped of all covering (περιβλήματος) still wear the veil (θήριστρον) that the guards now remove from her?"¹⁹ Gregory explains this by referring to the soul's continuous (epektatic) ascent in virtue:

But is it not the case that these words show how much progress upward she has made from that previous state? She who had removed that old tunic (χιτώνα) and been freed of all covering (περιβολῆς) becomes so much purer than herself that by comparison with the purity that now becomes hers she does not seem to have taken off that clothing (περιβόλαιον) but again, even after that former stripping, finds something on her to be taken off.²⁰

The stripping of the garment and the removal of the veil become, in Gregory's reading, simply subsequent stages of the continuous growth in virtue, a growth that he regards identical to the continuous putting on of Christ. For Gregory, it appears, it is impossible to separate the saving exchange between Christ and the soul, on the one hand, and the continuous growth in virtue, on the other hand.²¹

There is little doubt that St. Gregory questions the stability of the body's identity. When he does so, however, he does not refer to the kind of gender fluidity commonly advocated in contemporary philosophical and theological discourse. Instead, he has in mind the increasing participation in Christ by means of virtue. Nyssen, therefore, insists on the penultimacy of gender because he is so deeply impressed with the fact that anagogical transposition implies ontological change, as our "tunics of hide" are increasingly being removed in order to make way for the "garment of Christ." In other words, Gregory's bodily "instability" is the result of a growth in virtue that recognizes that our ultimate goal is a spiritual or heavenly body.

Bodily and Spiritual Senses in *In Canticum canticorum*

The recent focus on the body would have struck Gregory as odd. After all, the dress reversal of which Gregory speaks is not one that either puts into question or attempts to delineate gender or sexual identity but one that transcends these realities. This is clear particularly from his homilies on the Song of Songs. Not once does he use the biblical text to comment positively on sexuality or on the bodily passions. Instead, he uses the descriptions of physical beauty and desire to draw the soul to the contemplation of the eternal beauty of God. At the very least, then, Gregory subordinates marriage and sexuality to the pursuit of something greater—which in our next section we will see he identifies as virginity. The transposition involved in this subordination of marriage and sexuality to virginity lies at the heart of Nyssen's anagogical approach, and it implies a fairly drastic subordination also of the physical to the spiritual senses.²² By analyzing Gregory's understanding of the bodily and spiritual senses, therefore, we can gain significant insight also into the relative importance that he attaches to gender and sexuality.

The idea that the bodily senses corresponded to (and were supposed to give way to) spiritual senses originated with Origen and the Alexandrian tradition.²³ The doctrine of the spiritual senses subsequently made its way into St. Augustine's theology and thus became a mainstay in Western spirituality.²⁴ Origen's commentary on the Song of Songs clearly impacted Gregory's homilies; in fact, the influence is such that Gregory mentions his commentary in his preface.²⁵ The doctrine of the spiritual senses is something that Gregory inherited from Origen's work and puts to pervasive use in his own commentary on the Song of Songs.²⁶ The numerous descriptions of sense perception throughout the Song of Songs provide Gregory with a good deal of opportunity to describe salvation as a process of anagogy or ascent. As we will see, Gregory regards the various bodily sensations that he finds described in the Song not as literal descriptions of physical pleasure but instead as references to spiritual perception. A spiritual transposition is required to interpret properly the biblical allusions to physical perception and to the pleasure that it yields.

Gregory first comments on the spiritual senses when he discusses Chapter 1:2, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your breasts are better than wine, and the smell of your perfumed ointments is better than all spices." Gregory interprets the Bridegroom's kisses as identical to the milk that flows from his breasts: by kissing the bride, the Lord touches the soul, while from his breasts—that is to say, from his heart—he nourishes the soul with divine teaching. The bride's desire for the Groom's mouth stands for the

virginal soul's thirsting for the fountain of truth, in accordance with John 7:37—“If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink.” The result of this teaching of the truth of Christ is that the soul comes to share in the virtues of God—the odors of the divine perfumes mentioned in the text.²⁷

Since the Song itself thus mentions the senses of touch, of taste, and of smell, Gregory uses the opportunity to discuss the doctrine of the spiritual senses:

We also learn, in an incidental way, another truth through the philosophical wisdom of this book, that there is in us a dual activity of perception, the one bodily, the other more divine—just as Proverbs somewhere says, “You will find a divine mode of perception.” For there is a certain analogy between the sense organs of the body and the operations of the soul. And it is this that we learn from the words before us. For both wine and milk are discerned by the sense of taste, but when they are intelligible things, the power of the soul that grasps them is an intellectual power. And a kiss comes about through the sense of touch, for in a kiss lips touch each other. There is also, though, a “touch” that belongs to the soul, one that makes contact with the Word and is actuated by an incorporeal and intelligible touching, just as someone said, “Our hands have touched concerning the Word of life” (1 John 1:1). In the same way, too, the scent of the divine ↪ perfumes is not a scent in the nostrils but pertains to a certain intelligible and immaterial faculty that inhales the sweet smell of Christ by sucking in the Spirit.

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Thus the sequel of the virgin's request in the prologue says: *Your breasts are better than wine, and the fragrance of your perfumed ointments is better than all spices.*²⁸

Gregory speaks in this passage of an analogy (ἀναλογία) between sense organs of the body and operations of the soul.²⁹ The latter enable us to take in the divine teaching (through taste and touch) and to participate in the virtues of God (through smell).

In Homily 6, St. Gregory again finds occasion to elaborate on his understanding of the five spiritual senses, since Chapter 3:7 mentions “sixty mighty men” standing around Solomon's bed: “Behold Solomon's bed: sixty mighty men surround it out of the mighty men of Israel.” Convinced that the number of soldiers mentioned here must have a spiritual meaning, Gregory notes that five multiplied by twelve gives the number sixty, and he concludes from this that each of the twelve tribes must have five armed warriors guarding the royal bed.³⁰ While this interpretation suggests the guarding presence of five warriors from each tribe, Gregory explains that, really, there is only one man from each tribe, yet armed with five spiritual senses:

Now is it not plain that these five warriors are the one human being, with each of its senses deploying the weapon proper to it for the consternation of its enemies? The eye's sword is to look across and through everything toward the Lord, and to contemplate what is right, and not to be defiled by any unseemly sight. Hearing's weapon, similarly, is hearkening to the divine teachings and refusal to take in vain talk. In this way it is also possible to arm taste and touch and smell with the word of self-control, protecting each of the senses in the appropriate manner. So come terror and amazement upon the dark enemies, whose plot against souls finds its opportunity in darkness and at night.³¹

Gregory's rendering of the spiritual senses is clearly moral in character: spiritual sight looks to the Lord instead of anything unclean; spiritual hearing listens to divine precepts rather than to vain words; and spiritual taste, touch, and smell protect our temperance. Furthermore, since the text seems to have the twelve tribes in its purview, Gregory explains that this bespeaks the entire church. The one bed refers to the unity of all who find rest and so are saved. After all, the Lord comments in his parable that “the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed” (Luke 11:7). The Lord's mentioning of children must, according to Gregory, refer to those who have reached the state of ↪ dispassion (τὸ ἀπαθὲς). Whether one has never experienced passion (children) or has driven away passion (warriors), either way, one has found true happiness. Thus, Gregory concludes his homily by commenting that in such persons “there is found the child, or warrior, or true Israelite who has come to blessedness: the Israelite who with a pure heart sees God; the warrior who stands guard in invulnerability and purity over the royal bed—that is, his own heart; the child taking rest upon the blessed bed, in Christ Jesus our Lord, To whom be glory to the ages of ages. Amen.”³²

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We should not miss the strong sense of duality on which Gregory's understanding of the senses is based. His theology of the spiritual senses displays the paradoxical character that he believes lies at the heart of the Song of Songs: God uses the material senses of the body to fortify the life of virtue and so to give us a share in his impassibility (*ἀπάθεια*). This means, that, in an important sense at least, Gregory contrasts the material and the spiritual and that he regards salvation as the perfection of the latter. In his sixth homily, Gregory divides all of reality into two categories: on the one hand, the intelligible and non-material has neither limit nor bound; on the other hand, the perceptible and material is limited and determined by quantity and quality. Gregory then subdivides the spiritual between the uncreated or First Cause, which is immutable, and the created, which changes for the better by being enhanced in perfection through participation in that which transcends it.³³ Likewise, in Homily 11, when commenting on the beloved putting his hand through the opening and the bride's belly crying out for him (Song 5:4), Gregory explains that the human soul has two natures: "One of them is incorporeal and intelligent and pure, while the other is corporeal and material and nonrational."³⁴ The bishop of Nyssa immediately follows up on this by mentioning the need for anagogical transposition: "When, therefore, cleansed as soon as possible of her inclination toward a gross and earthly life, the soul looks up with the help of virtue toward what is akin to her and closer to the divine...."³⁵ Thus, through the interpretation of Scripture and through participation in divine virtues, the soul experiences a transposition away from the sensible or material and toward the intelligible and spiritual.³⁶ Salvation, for Gregory, implies ascent from the sensible to the intelligible, from the material to the spiritual. We can only properly understand Gregory's theology of salvation if we do justice to this twofold character of human nature. For Gregory, salvation itself is the anagogical transposition from the one to the other.³⁷

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It should not surprise us at this point that when St. Gregory looks for a place in the text that might legitimately illuminate this salvific transposition, he lingers on images of sleep and death. Since both these states imply inactivity of the bodily senses, Gregory interprets descriptions of sleep and death in the Song as indicative of the transposition from bodily to spiritual perception. For instance, when Gregory reads in the Song, "I sleep, but my heart is awake" (Song 5:2), he explains, "This sleep, though, is a stranger and alien to the ordinary course of nature. For in the usual sort of sleep, the sleeper is not awake, nor does one who is waking sleep; rather, sleep and wakefulness both come to an end in each other—they alternate in withdrawal from each other and come to each person by turns."³⁸ Mentioning each of the five senses, Gregory insists that sleep is an image of death, since there "is no activity of seeing, or of hearing, or of smelling or tasting, or of touching in the season of sleep."³⁹ Gregory then explains how it is that one can be asleep and awake at the same time. He mentions the beautiful objects that we see in the created world and comments:

When vision of the truly good leads us to look beyond all such things, the bodily eye is inactive, for then the more perfect soul, which uses its understanding to look only on matters that are beyond seeing, is not drawn to any of the things to which that eye directs its attention. In the same way too the faculty of hearing becomes a dead thing and goes out of operation when the soul occupies itself with things beyond speech.

As to the more bestial of the senses, they are hardly worth mentioning. Long since, like some graveyard stench attached to the soul, they have been put away: the sense of smell, scenting out odors; and the sense of taste, bound to the belly's service; and the sense of touch as well, the blind and servile organ that nature, we may think, created only for the sake of the blind. When all these are as it were bound in sleep by disuse, then the working of the heart is pure, and its discourse is focused on what is above it, untroubled and unaccompanied by the noise that stems from the stirrings of sense perception.⁴⁰

Anagogical transposition implies a sharp disjunction. We now look beyond *all* perceptible things; the more perfect soul now looks *only* on matters that are beyond seeing; and the more bestial of the senses have "long since" (*πρόρρωθεν*) been put away.

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In like manner, since hair lacks sensation, Gregory links the Bridegroom's comment, "Your hair is like flocks of goats" (Song 6:5), with St. Paul's comment that a woman's glory is her hair (1 Cor 11:15). The woman's hair, in both texts, refers to the believers' pursuit of the beautiful and the good: for the wise,

[s]ight does not serve as their criterion of beauty, taste does not provide their assessment of goodness, their judgment of virtue does not depend on smell or touch or any other organ of

perception; on the contrary, all sense perception is done to death, and it is through the agency of the soul alone that they touch the good things and yearn for them as they are manifested in an intelligible form. In this manner they bring glory to the woman, the church, being neither puffed up by the honors accorded them nor shrunken down by pusillanimity in the face of pain.⁴¹

The transposition from physical to spiritual senses involves bodily renunciation. The denial is of such a radical character that Gregory latches on to hair as one of the few bodily elements that are without sensation in order to describe the required attitude toward the bodily senses.

Furthermore, since myrrh is a spice used for burying the dead, Gregory looks to the Song's references to myrrh as also indicative of the denial of the passions, and he contrasts it with frankincense, which is used to praise God. Thus, myrrh stands for mortification, while frankincense implies vivification. Gregory comments, for instance, that

the person who intends to dedicate himself to the worship of God will not be frankincense burned for God unless he has first become myrrh—that is, unless he mortifies his earthly members, having been buried together with the one who submitted to death on our behalf and having received in his own flesh, through mortification of its members, that myrrh which was used to prepare the Lord for burial. When these things have come to pass, every species of the fragrances that belong to virtue—once they have been ground fine in the bowl of life as in some mortar—produces that sweet cloud of dust, and he who inhales it becomes sweet-smelling because he has become full of the fragrant Spirit.⁴²

Anagogical transposition implies, for Gregory, a mortification of the bodily senses, so that one becomes dead to that which one perceives by means of these senses. Conversely, as we participate in the virtues of Christ, our lives begin to give off the odor of frankincense and other sweet-smelling perfumes.⁴³

p. 99 In this discussion, Gregory carefully balances the otherness of God with the fact that we genuinely image him. Commenting on Chapter 1:12 (“My spikenard gave off his scent”), Gregory distinguishes between the spikenard itself and its scent: “[T]he words of the text are teaching us this, namely, that that Reality, whatever it is in its essence, which transcends the entire structure and order of Being, is unapproachable, impalpable, and incomprehensible but that, for us, the sweetness that is blended within us by the purity of the virtues takes its place because by its own purity it images that which is by nature the Undeified....”⁴⁴ St. Gregory also uses the sense of sight to describe this same participation by way of imitation. The eye, he maintains, functions as a mirror. When the Bridegroom says that the bride’s eyes are doves, he refers, according to Gregory, to the fact that when a person looks at an object, its image is reflected in the eye. We do not gaze upon the divine glory itself. Nonetheless, explains Gregory, when the soul’s “purified eye has received the imprint of the dove, she is also capable of beholding the beauty of the Bridegroom.”⁴⁵ When in Chapter 5:12 the Bridegroom’s eyes are compared to doves—“doves by pools of waters, Washed in milk, sitting by pools of waters”—the Cappadocian preacher comments on the fact that, unlike water, milk does not reflect any image. This should stir in us the highest praise for the Bridegroom’s eyes, that is, for the church’s teachers: “[T]hey do not mistakenly image anything unreal and counterfeit and empty that is contrary to what truly is but look upon what is in the full and proper sense of that word. They do not take in the deceitful sights and fantasies of the present life. For this reason, the perfect soul judges that it is the bath in milk that most surely purifies the eyes.”⁴⁶ As a result, in the clear mirror of the church one indirectly sees the Sun of Righteousness itself (Mal 3:20 (4:2)).⁴⁷ While human beings’ virtuous lives genuinely mirror God, our spiritual senses do not grasp the essence of the divine glory itself.

A word of caution may be in order at this point: Gregory’s focus on the spiritual senses does not mean that he regards the bodily senses as unimportant. Contemporary Gregory of Nyssa research is right to highlight the commonality between animals and human beings in terms of embodiment. Without the sensuous images of the Song of Songs, we would have no way to express the transposition that characterizes the Christian life. The bodily senses are important to Gregory precisely because they allow for a transposition to spiritual perception, which is to say, to a life of participation in divine virtue. Nonetheless, his theology of the spiritual senses makes clear that he regards anagogical transposition as absolutely essential to the process of salvation. We do not do justice to the Cappadocian mystic by domesticating his theology. We must keep his focus on bodily renunciation as central. To regard the bodily senses themselves as ultimate would be, according to St. Gregory at least, to misconstrue the nature of the good and the beautiful. Bodily passions serve bodily pleasure. For Gregory, a focus on bodily passions involves a radical misconception of the nature

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of salvation: salvation means transposition of our passions from this-worldly to otherworldly realities. Such a transposition from bodily to spiritual senses demands a radical reorientation of human desires and passions.

Sex in the Garden? *De hominis opificio*

p. 101 Thus far, the argument would seem to be fairly straightforward. Gregory's anagogical interpretation of the Song of Songs would appear to place him squarely in the Alexandrian tradition and might seem to render this-worldly concerns inherently problematic. Thus, the demands of the body, including sexuality, would hardly appear to be of the essence of what it means to be human. Indeed, one might be tempted to conclude from the discussion of this chapter so far that Gregory's anagogical transposition means that he is a radical Platonist, for whom embodiment, gender, and sexuality can only be regarded in negative terms. In what follows, it will become clear that in reality Nyssen's anthropology is more nuanced; Gregory is not a straightforward dualist. But the question is how much nuance, and of what sort, we need to get a true picture of Gregory's thought. Some have argued that we should not only nuance dualist interpretations of St. Gregory but that we ought to challenge them at a rather fundamental level. The well-known patristic scholar John Behr has presented a reading of *De hominis opificio* that puts into serious question traditional interpretations of Gregory's anthropology.⁴⁸ According to Behr, Nyssen's treatise on the creation of the human person traces gendered existence and bodily sexual activity all the way back to the Garden, so that they are fundamental to what it means to be human. Behr maintains that this ↪ positive appraisal of marriage and sexuality is consistent with Nyssen's holistic anthropology, which sees the rational soul as completing and encompassing the nutritive and sensitive souls, and which regards the human body and the desiring faculty as belonging to the psychosomatic unity of the person, who as a whole is created in God's image. Thus, on Behr's reading of Gregory, the Fall was not the beginning of human sexuality; instead the Fall meant that the mind no longer governed the irrational animal emotions as it should, so that the latter now turned into passions (ἐπιθυμίας), now no longer subject to human reason.

The fact that the "tunics of hide" do not show up in *De hominis opificio* is important to Behr's reading. One of the key difficulties that Behr sees in the traditional interpretation is that it takes the notion of the "tunics of hide" from Gregory's other writings and reads it into *De hominis opificio*.⁴⁹ Behr believes that such a "synthetic" reading does not hold up in the face of a careful and sustained analysis of Gregory's treatise in its entirety. I am not convinced, however, that Behr's analysis, however meticulous and nuanced, stands up to scrutiny. In particular, it seems to me that *De hominis opificio* should not be read in isolation from Nyssen's other works. After all, Gregory wrote his treatise at most a few years before writing *De anima et resurrectione* and *Vita s. Macrinae*, both of which shed significant light on Gregory's understanding of embodiment and gender in relation to the Fall and the eschaton. The obvious and numerous similarities between *De hominis opificio* and Nyssen's anthropology as we know it from his other writings would seem to lend significant prima facie support for a more "synthetic" reading. Furthermore, while it is possible to detect some development in Gregory's theology, his overall theological approach tends to be relatively homogeneous throughout his writings.⁵⁰ In other words, even though Gregory fails to use the term "tunics of hide" in *De hominis opificio*, this is hardly reason enough to exclude from consideration the theological package to which this expression belongs.

p. 102 Before turning to the question of gender and sexuality in *De hominis opificio*, however, I want to draw attention to the fact that for St. Gregory, ↪ human embodiment is by no means uniformly negative. In fact, Nyssen makes quite abundantly evident in this treatise the high regard he has for the human body and indicates that even the tunics of hide, despite their connection with the animal passions, serve an important role in the divine economy. St. Gregory's positive attitude toward the human body comes to the fore in several ways. The beginning of the treatise indicates that God has made the human body in such a way that it enables the human person to rule in the paradisaical palace in which he has been placed. Both the "superior advantages of the soul" and the "very form of the body" are "adapted for royalty."⁵¹ This royalty is evident, for example, in the upright form of the human person, which provides him with dignity.⁵² Hands not only enable human beings to write,⁵³ but they also assist in eating, so that the human face did not have to be "arranged like those of the quadrupeds, to suit the purpose of his feeding."⁵⁴ The superiority of animals over humans in a number of areas serves the purpose that we might use the animal world in precisely those areas, in order to assert our sovereignty over them. For example, horses help increase our speed, sheep wool gives us clothing, dogs' teeth function as our swords, crocodiles' hides become our armor, etc.⁵⁵

Now the music of the human instrument is a sort of compound of flute and lyre, sounding together in combination as in a concerted piece of music. For the breath, as it is forced up from the air-receiving vessels through the windpipe, when the speaker's impulse to utterance attunes the harmony to sound, and as it strikes against the internal protuberances which divide this flute-like passage in a circular arrangement, imitates in a way the sound uttered through a flute, being driven round and round by the membranous projections. But the palate receives the sound from below in its own concavity, and dividing the sound by the two passages that extend to the nostrils, and by the cartilages about the perforated bone, as it were by some scaly protuberance, makes its resonance louder; while the cheek, the tongue, the mechanism of the pharynx, by which the chin is relaxed when drawn in, and tightened when extended to a point—all these in many different ways answer to the motion of the plectrum upon the strings, varying very quickly, as occasion requires, the arrangement of the tones; and the opening and closing of the lips has the same effect as players produce when they check the breath of the flute with their fingers according to the measure of the tune.⁵⁶

p. 103 This detailed physical description of the human voice as the mind's instrument is a remarkable illustration of Nyssen's keen interest in the functioning of the human body.⁵⁷ It evokes in him obvious wonder and awe.

There is a sense, moreover, in which Gregory may be said to view the human person as a "psychosomatic whole."⁵⁸ The three aspects of the soul—nutritive, sensitive, and intellectual—are not three distinct souls or even separable aspects of the human person.⁵⁹ The mind is in every part of the human person, so that the "union of the mental with the bodily presents a connection unspeakable and inconceivable."⁶⁰ Thus, the mind does not control the body from the outside, as it were.⁶¹ And Gregory makes short shrift of a Platonic transmigration of the soul, explicitly repudiating the Origenist "absurdity" of a pre-existence of souls.⁶² For Gregory, body and soul develop together. Most significantly, Gregory is emphatic about his belief that the resurrection is a bodily resurrection, and he adduces several arguments that are meant to make this doctrine intellectually plausible despite the fact that at the point of death soul and body are separated and the bodily elements dissolve into the various elements of the created order.⁶³ For Nyssen, bodily life is integral to human existence.

This positive view of embodiment does, however, need significant qualification. Mind and body stand in an unambiguously hierarchical relationship for Nyssen. Only the mind itself is created in the image of the most beautiful and "remains in beauty and goodness so long as it partakes (μετέχει) as far as is possible in the likeness to the archetype."⁶⁴ As such, the mind functions as a mirror (κάτοπτρον) that receives the figure of beauty itself. The body, Gregory explains, receives beauty only indirectly, from the mind, so that physical beauty functions as a "mirror of the mirror."⁶⁵ In line with this, Gregory is anxious to maintain that pain and pleasure not be allowed to dictate the mind, for this would bring the mind "into bondage to the impulses of their nature" and would make it "pay servile homage to the pleasure of sense."⁶⁶

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Thus, although the body indirectly displays divine beauty, it emphatically is not part of the image of God.⁶⁷ This is precisely why St. Gregory rejects here the notion of man as a "miniature cosmos": "Those who bestow on human nature such praise as this by a high-sounding name, forget that they are dignifying man with the attributes of the gnat and the mouse."⁶⁸ For Gregory, the image of God consists of participation in goodness,⁶⁹ and particularly in freedom from necessity, though he also connects it with virtue, immortality, righteousness, rationality, and love.⁷⁰ For Gregory, all of these have to do with the soul. Gregory appears to leave no doubt: "In what then does the greatness of man consist, according to the doctrine of the Church? Not in his likeness to the created world, but in his being in the image of the nature of the Creator."⁷¹ For Gregory, only the soul, the rational aspect of the human person, is created in God's image.

This distinction between body and soul, with only the latter being made in the image or likeness of God, is important to Gregory, and it is an issue that he connects directly to the distinction that he makes between the first and the second creation. As is well known, Gregory argues for a "dual" creation on the basis of Genesis 1:27, which mentions first that God made "man" in his image (Gen 1:27a), while it then continues by saying that he created them "male and female" (Gen 1:27b). Gregory associates the first part of the verse with God's creation of a universal humanity made in the image of God, while he links the second part of the verse with the creation of male and female, "a thing which is alien from our conception of God."⁷² The universal "man" is something that Gregory links to the image of God, as well as to the rational and

intelligible soul; the distinction between “male and female,” however, he connects to the “irrational life of brutes” (τῆς ἀλόγου καὶ κτηνώδους ζωῆς).⁷³ In some way, Gregory maintains, the former “precedes” (προτερεῦειν) the latter.⁷⁴ Likely, ↪ Gregory means with the first creation God’s foreknowledge of the fullness (πλήρωμα) of all human beings at the end of time; this means that he regards the two “creations” as two different angles from which to view the creation (and completion) of humanity.⁷⁵ Unlike the first creation, however, the second creation takes into account the Fall that God anticipates. Nyssen is quite clear that embodied and gendered existence—two aspects inextricably intertwined here—have to do with the second creation, which is not made in the image of God and which instead shows itself (at least to us today) in “misery” (ἐλεεινὸν) and in “wretchedness” (ταλαιπωρία).⁷⁶ Although Gregory does not speak here of tunics of hide (for reasons that I will explore below), the discourse itself cannot but remind us of them: Gregory would be quite ready to apply the terms “misery” and “wretchedness” to the tunics of hide. At the very least, the second creation is less significant than the first: gender differentiation is not part of God’s initial (nor, as we will see, of his final) intent.

An obvious question arises at this point: why did God bother with embodied, gendered existence at all, seeing he created only the universal, rational element in his likeness? In order to answer this question properly, Gregory distinguishes between angelic and sexual procreation. Although there is no marriage among angels, their armies nonetheless exist “in countless myriads.”⁷⁷ Apparently, the angels have multiplied in some ineffable fashion. Gregory is convinced that, if there had been human procreation prior to the Fall, it would have taken the form of this same, ineffable, angelic kind. Since the paradisaic life was an angelic kind of life, procreation in the Garden would have taken the same form as that of the angels:

[I]f there had not come upon us as the result of sin a change for the worse, and removal from equality with the angels, neither should we have needed marriage that we might multiply; but whatever the mode of increase in the angelic nature is (unspeakable and inconceivable by human conjectures, except that it assuredly exists), it would have operated also in the case of men, who were “made a little lower than the angels” [Ps 8:6] to increase mankind to the measure determined by its Maker.⁷⁸

According to Gregory, then, the pre-lapsarian mode of procreation would have been modeled on that of the angels. Since, however, God knew that human beings would fall, he included sexual differentiation in paradisaic embodiment, so that, once exiled from their angelic Paradise, human beings would still be able to procreate—although now in a sexual rather than angelic manner—and would thus be able to complete the ordained number of human beings:

[S]ince He saw beforehand by His all-seeing power the failure of their will to keep a direct course to what is good, and its consequent declension from the angelic life, in order that the multitude of the human souls might not be cut short by its fall from that mode by which the angels were increased and multiplied,—for this reason, I say, He formed for our nature that contrivance for increase which befits those who had fallen into sin, implanting in mankind instead of the angelic majesty of nature, that animal and irrational mode by which they now succeed one another.⁷⁹

Gregory distinguishes between pre-lapsarian angelic-like multiplication and post-lapsarian sexual procreation, and he believes that the reason why God nonetheless introduced gender differentiation already in Paradise is so that human beings would be appropriately equipped to procreate once they would fall into sin.⁸⁰ All of this is predicated on Gregory’s assumption that Jesus’ words regarding the angelic absence of marriage in the eschaton (Luke 20:35–6) apply to the initial paradisaic state, as well—seeing that the resurrection will be a restoration (ἀποκατάστασιν) of the paradisaic state.⁸¹

It is certainly true that Gregory locates gendered existence in the paradisaic state. But Behr goes wrong, it seems to me, in linking this presence of gender in the Garden with marriage and sexual procreation, thereby implying that for Nyssen, gender and sexuality are integral aspects of the human person.⁸² It seems hard to argue this on the basis of Gregory’s treatise. The element of foreknowledge—God’s anticipation that Adam and Eve would sin—is the only reason Gregory gives for the presence of gender differentiation in Paradise. Furthermore, as Warren Smith has made clear, Gregory argues that after the Fall, the “animal and irrational mode” of procreation came “instead of” (ἀντὶ) the earlier “angelic majesty of nature.”⁸³ If embodied animal procreation ↪ replaced multiplication according to the angelic mode, it is hard to see how the latter would have been physical and sexual. Gregory clearly appears to intimate that God never intended sexual activity to take place in the Garden.

This conclusion is also the more likely because of the fact that St. Gregory sees marriage, along with sexual union, as inextricably bound up with the passions. After discussing God's creation of human beings as male and female in anticipation of the Fall in Chapter 17, Nyssen immediately goes on to discuss the connection between marriage and all the other passions:

For I think that from this beginning all our passions (παθή) issue as from a spring, and pour their flood over man's life; and an evidence of my words is the kinship of passions (ἡ τῶν παθημάτων συγγένεια) which appears alike in ourselves and in the brutes (ἄλογοις); for it is not allowable to ascribe the first beginnings of our constitutional liability to passion (ἐμπαθοῦς) to that human nature which was fashioned in the Divine likeness; but as brute (ἄλογον) life first entered into the world, and man, for the reason already mentioned, took something of their nature (I mean the mode of generation), he accordingly took at the same time a share of the other attributes contemplated in that nature; for the likeness of man to God is not found in anger, nor is pleasure a mark of the superior nature; cowardice also, and boldness, and the desire of gain, and the dislike of loss, and all the like, are far removed from that stamp which indicates Divinity.⁸⁴

Gregory insists that the qualities of the irrational "brutes" became "passions" (πάθη) when they were transferred to human life.⁸⁵ And, in case there was any lingering doubt about their origin, he adds about these passions: "All these and the like affections entered man's composition by reason of the animal mode of generation (κτηνώδους γενέσεως)."⁸⁶ It is, accordingly, our likeness to the animal world rather than our likeness to God that inclines reason to become the servant of the passions.⁸⁷ Nyssen, therefore, sees gendered embodiment as directly linked to love of pleasure: "Thus our love of pleasure took its beginning from our being made like to the irrational creation (τὸ ἄλογον), and was increased by the transgressions of men, becoming the parent of so many varieties of sins arising from pleasure as we cannot find among the irrational animals (ἄλογοις)."⁸⁸ For Gregory, there is a logical connection that moves from gendered existence (in the likeness of the irrational animals), via sexual union, to the other passions. Gregory nowhere contemplates sexual activity—in some "dispassionate" manner—as possible in Paradise. Instead, he consistently links marriage and sexuality with the passions, which took their starting-point in the paradisaal provision of gendered existence.

This leaves us with the question: why does St. Gregory not use the term "tunics of hide" when he refers to this initial human association with the irrational animal body, through which originated both sexuality and the passions? The reason, no doubt, is that in the biblical narrative God gives human beings the tunics of hide *after* the Fall (Gen 3:21). Gregory cannot possibly introduce them into Paradise itself. Therefore, although the tunics of hide inevitably come to mind when Gregory describes the human animal life as being in "misery" (ἐλεεινὸν) and in "wretchedness" (ταλαιπωρία),⁸⁹ and although he goes on immediately to describe the creation of human beings as male and female, he nonetheless needs to tread cautiously: he does not want to say that sexual activity, the passions, and mortality (which he elsewhere describes as constituting the tunics of hide) were already there in Paradise. The human love of pleasure may have taken its occasion—its "beginning" (ἀρχήν)—from being made like the irrational brutes, but this does not mean that this "brutish" embodiment is necessarily wrapped up with the passions. The free choice of human beings stands between their gendered existence, on the one hand, and their use of the passions and their mortality, on the other hand.

Gregory wants to speak of the transition of the Fall in two distinct and complementary ways. In most of his writings he emphasizes the discontinuity that the Fall introduced, since he is interested in the question how we rid ourselves of our strictly post-lapsarian mortal condition. The result is that he speaks of the tunics of hide given by God after the Fall as physically "heavy" garments that are liable to the passions and to death. This is the way we have seen Gregory speak of the tunics of hide in his commentary on the Song of Songs. These tunics obviously had no place in Paradise: there human bodies had been "light" like the angels, while the passions and death had no control over them. In *De hominis opificio*, however, he is engaged in a different project. Since he is expounding the creation narrative, he is forced to deal with questions about the origin of the twofold human likeness (like God and like brutes), and he recognizes that he needs to trace this twofold character back all the way to Paradise itself. This leaves him with an obvious point of tension: if the paradisaal body was "brutish" and gendered in character, how could it, at the same time, be angelic in constitution? Gregory partially solves this tension by separating gender from sexuality, passion, and death. While human beings in Paradise were like the animals (as seen in the presence of gender), they were at the same time angelic and without sin (considering the absence of sexuality, passion, and death). Of course, this still leaves us with a problem, because even the mere fact that gender has a place in Paradise is difficult

to square with Gregory's overall theology. Nyssen never quite explains how a gendered body was able to reside in Paradise, a place that he elsewhere describes as heavenly and intelligible in character.⁹⁰ Nor does he explain how his gendered paradisaical life fits with his insistence elsewhere that the truly virtuous life is an angelic overcoming of gender.

Neither Male nor Female: Macrina's Angelic Overcoming of Gender

If Gregory introduces brutish gendered bodies into Paradise, what does that do for his understanding of sexuality and gender? This has become a much debated issue over the past few decades, and Gregory provides ample fuel for this discussion as some of his discourse seems to display remarkable gender fluidity. This is the case particularly (though not only) with regard to Macrina. During a stopover in Antioch on his way to Jerusalem after attending the Council of Constantinople (381), Gregory had told the monk Olympius about his experiences at the deathbed of his sister Macrina, two years earlier (18–19 July 379).⁹¹ As he recalls his conversation with Olympius in *Vita s. Macrinae*, Gregory comments: "The subject of the tale was a woman—if indeed she was a 'woman', for I know not whether it is fitting to designate her of that nature who so surpassed nature...."⁹² At the outset of his biographical account, Gregory makes clear that he hardly considers his sister a woman. Interestingly, in his account of her passing away, it is Gregory who is constantly weeping, while the dying Macrina is characterized by "manliness" (ἀνδρεία).⁹³ Furthermore, both here and in *De anima et resurrectione*, Macrina takes on the role of the teacher (ἡ διδάσκαλος).⁹⁴ These initial indications are at least reason for closer reflection on Gregory's understanding of gender and sexuality, particularly with regard to Macrina.

Elizabeth Clark has argued that Macrina's role in *Vita s. Macrinae* is problematic. Although she is presented as a teacher, Clark argues that we ought not to take this positive valuation at face value. She draws attention p. 110 to a parallel between Macrina and the priestess Diotima, who teaches Socrates about Eros in Plato's *Symposium*.⁹⁵ According to Clark, Macrina merely serves as a "trope" for Gregory himself, just as Diotima stands in for Socrates, so that Macrina's presence in the dialogue does not mean that her presence as a woman is truly valued.⁹⁶ Clark maintains that Gregory's attempt at appropriating Macrina for his own purposes is not entirely successful, however, since Macrina leaves "traces" in his work, through which she herself continues to linger on in Nyssen's dialogue.⁹⁷ In similar fashion, Virginia Burrus, borrowing from David Halperin,⁹⁸ maintains that in the *Symposium*, Diotima reflects Plato's masculine erotics, which re-inscribes classical pederastic love by appropriating—and thereby erasing—the "feminine" figure of Diotima.⁹⁹ Much the same, Burrus argues, happens to Macrina at the hand of Gregory. Her dual depiction as virgin and mother in *Vita s. Macrinae* serves to entrench the "universalizing discourse in the male culture of late ancient orthodox Christianity" and as such is a reflection of a "masculine erotics."¹⁰⁰ Weeping virgins and a crying Gregory keep intruding into the text, however, rendering both Macrina's and Gregory's gender identity highly ambivalent: "If Macrina is Diotima, then Gregory is Socrates; if Gregory is the weeping virgin, then Macrina must be Socrates after all. The 'woman' is everywhere and nowhere, and the transgressive element of excess produced by 'her' exclusion from discourse is for Gregory the necessary source of his own transcendence."¹⁰¹ While Burrus believes that Gregory appropriates Macrina as a feminized "object," she concludes that by means of "disciplined projection" the historian can nonetheless read Macrina as a woman, regardless of Gregory's own intentions.¹⁰²

Gregory's account of the dialogue with his dying sister in *De anima et resurrectione* is indeed highly stylized p. 111 and deliberately takes the form of a Platonic dialogue.¹⁰³ I am also convinced that gender roles—and their relativity—are important to Gregory, especially in *De anima et resurrectione* and in *Vita s. Macrinae*. But accounts such as those of Clark and Burrus are so focused on contemporary concerns about gender that they end up misreading Nyssen's real concerns.¹⁰⁴ His "destabilizing" of gender is the result not of an attempt to appropriate Macrina and thus to assert masculine control. The discourse that Clark and Burrus interpret as instances of gender reversal is, in fact, part of a larger body of reflection on anagogical entry into an angelic (and thus genderless) or virginal life. This anagogical discourse is, in turn, closely wrapped up in Gregory's overall Trinitarian and Christological thought. This means that the misinterpretations of Clark and Burrus are deeply ironic. Gregory's theology of gender is focused not on difference (gender fluidity, gender reversal, and the like) but on unity (the confluence of male and female in a genderless state).¹⁰⁵ Whereas Gregory destabilizes gender by means of anagogical transposition into a genderless angelic state, Clark and Burrus remain focused on immanent questions of gender reversal. The concerns of Clark and Burrus are horizontal and this-worldly, whereas Gregory's are vertical and other-worldly.

For Gregory, virginal life is angelic existence. In *De virginitate*, his early encomium on virginity, Nyssen insists that it is possible to move beyond “sympathy with one’s own body,” so as not to be subject to the “evils of the flesh.”¹⁰⁶ Gregory describes this as a transposition from a life concerned with the body to one that is devoted to the soul and so to an imitation of the heavenly angels: “[T]his means living for the soul alone and imitating, as far as possible, the regimen of the incorporeal powers (τὴν τῶν ἀσωμάτων δυνάμεων πολιτείαν), among whom there is neither marriage nor giving in marriage. Their work and zeal and success consist in the contemplation of the Father of incorruptibility and in beautifying their own form through imitation of the ὡ ἀρχετυπάλ beauty.”¹⁰⁷ Gregory uses Jesus’ words about the angelic life and the absence of marriage in the resurrection (Luke 20:35–6)—a passage we already encountered in *De hominis opificio*—as an encouragement to pursue the life of a virgin already today and thus to concern oneself with the life of the soul rather than that of the body. Sitting at Macrina’s deathbed, it seemed to Gregory that this virgin par excellence had already left behind her a material form of existence. He explains that her unflinching attitude toward death made him think “she might have escaped the common nature.”¹⁰⁸ Her continued philosophizing right up to her last breath filled Gregory with awe toward his sister: “All this seemed to me to be no longer of the human order. It was as if by some dispensation an angel had assumed a human form, with whom, not having any kinship or affinity with the life of the flesh, it was not at all unreasonable that the mind should remain in an unperturbed state, since the flesh did not drag it down to its own passions.”¹⁰⁹ The *Vita s. Macrinae* is thus a mystagogical biography that depicts for us Macrina’s progress as a virgin mystic toward the angelic life.¹¹⁰

We have already seen that Gregory regards eschatological life as a restoration of the paradisaical or heavenly angelic life. It now becomes clear that Gregory identifies the ascetic life of a virgin as the life that begins most closely to resemble the life of the angels. Virginal life characterizes the paradisaical life of the beginning as well as the paradisaical life of the end.¹¹¹ Huybrechts captures Gregory’s concerns well when he insists that through the “life of virginity,” “ascetics revealed in a prophetic manner that the true condition of man is protological, in terms of the image of Adam, and eschatological, in terms of the image of the angels. The sign through which ascetics display this twofold challenge of the human condition is precisely the renunciation of marriage.”¹¹² The characterization of virginity as angelic in character is tremendously important because it puts into proper focus Gregory’s understanding of human embodiment.

p. 113 One of the key biblical texts that St. Gregory quotes in *De hominis opificio* is Galatians 3:28. After mentioning God’s creation of male and female, Gregory comments: “I presume that every one knows that this is a departure from the Prototype: for ‘in Christ Jesus,’ as the apostle says, ‘there is neither male nor female.’”¹¹³ Gregory interprets this verse in a quite literal fashion: the initial creation of the divine fullness (πλήρωμα) was genderless. However, Gregory’s interpretation is more than a literalist curiosity. His mentioning of Galatians 3:28 means the insertion of a Christological element into the creation narrative. The first (and foremost!) creation of the human person is modeled on Christ himself. Furthermore, since this genderless existence also makes up humanity in the eschaton, Christ constitutes not only the protological but also the eschatological reality of the human person. For Gregory, we come to understand the human person most fully in Christ.

This Christological overcoming of gender implies for Gregory that “spiritual marriage” with Christ is for both men and women. In *De virginitate*, Nyssen refers to Proverbs, where the young man is encouraged to follow wisdom:

If anyone is going to obey Solomon and take true wisdom as the companion and sharer of his life, concerning which he says: ‘Love her, and she will safeguard you’ [Prov 4:6] and: ‘Honor her, in order that she may embrace you’ [Prov 4:8] he will worthily prepare himself for this longing, keeping festival in a pure garment, rejoicing with those in this marriage, in order not to be rejected because of being clothed as a married person.¹¹⁴

The Proverbs passages encourage the young male figure to love and embrace wisdom as the female figure. Gregory, however, does not want us to take the gender language literally. It needs to be transposed Christologically, and so he immediately continues with a reference to Galatians 3:28:

It is clear that the eagerness for this kind of marriage is common to men and women alike, for since, as the apostle says, ‘There is neither male nor female,’ and Christ is all things for all human beings, the true lover of wisdom has as his goal the divine One who is true wisdom, and the soul, clinging to its incorruptible Bridegroom, has a love of true wisdom which is God.¹¹⁵

Gregory uses the Christological reference in Galatians 3:28 as a means of avoiding a gendered reading of Proverbs.¹¹⁶ What is more, he then goes on to explain that the soul (as a female figure) clings to the incorruptible Bridegroom (as a male figure). Although he does not mention it explicitly, he probably has in mind the Song of Songs at this point.¹¹⁷ Gregory appears to play off Proverbs and the Song of Songs against one another, in order to underscore his point—both Christological and anagogical at the same time—that gender is irrelevant in Christ.¹¹⁸ Fullness in Christ—which is for Gregory the first creation—means that gender differentiation and gender roles are not highlighted but instead are excluded. The eschatological life in Christ is angelic, and therefore genderless, in character.¹¹⁹

The genderless character of the true virgin is, furthermore, a mirroring of the Trinitarian life of God. In a careful analysis of *De virginitate*, Verna Harrison explains that for Gregory there are four kinds of generation: “the Father’s begetting of the Son in the Trinity; Mary’s conception and bearing of Christ as human; ordinary human generation; and the spiritual generation of virtues o[f] Christ and of oneself.”¹²⁰ As she discusses each of these modes of generation in turn, Harrison makes clear that although St. Gregory uses the same language for each of these modes of begetting, he has a keen eye for the differences between them. Considering his general insistence on the difference between the adiaesthetic life of God and the diasthetic character of this-worldly existence, that is exactly what we would expect. Human purity and incorruptibility is not identical to divine purity and incorruptibility but is merely a participation in it. While Mary’s virginity is closest to God’s own—considering the absence of passion in Christ’s generation and birth—nonetheless, even the virgin birth was subject to time and space.¹²¹ Ordinary human generation, the result of passion, is obviously far down the hierarchical ladder. The purpose of *De virginitate*, we could say, is to assist the reader in moving away from the passion involved in ordinary generation toward a participation in divine virtue—which Gregory describes as spiritual generation.

This brief summary of Gregory’s broader understanding of “generation” shows that he sees bodily virginity as a way to overcome human passion and thus to begin the practice of virginal and genderless existence. By taking on the life of bodily virginity—and thus engaging in practices of spiritual generation of virtues—women and men take on the “feminine” role of spiritual childbearing, which is our virtuous participation in divine virginity.¹²² To live the life of virtue thus means at one and the same time to enter upon a mode of life beyond physical gender and to become spiritually fecund. It is also clear that this spiritual childbearing—giving birth to virtues—is patterned on the virgin birth and, ultimately, reflects the begetting of the Son in eternity as its great archetype.¹²³ Gender itself, we could say, gets anagogically transposed as virtuous persons leave behind their male and female characteristics through practices of spiritual childbearing. Or, as Harrison puts it: “Gregory says that in the resurrection, the human generative faculty, presently embodying the distinction between male and female, will be transformed into a capacity for spiritual motherhood.”¹²⁴ In the future paradisaical life, the virtues of the risen saints will transform their gendered bodies so as to conform them to the intellectual life of the angels.

Gregory must have felt the tension that he caused by introducing gender into the pre-lapsarian angelic Paradise. After all, while he willingly acknowledges human animal-likeness in the Garden, he does not draw gender and sexuality into the future eschaton. Apparently, the resurrection is not simply going to be a restoration (ἀποκατάστασις) of the paradisaical state.¹²⁵ The “twofold” human creation of *De hominis opificio* allows Gregory to insist that it is the first of these two—the rational, intelligible element, made in the image of God—that will inhabit the future kingdom of Heaven: the gendered existence of the second creation will not make it into the eschaton. This means that Gregory downplays gender in two ways, both by insisting that it is not part of God’s first creation and by excluding it from the eschaton. For Nyssen, gender is a divine accommodation to the fallen human condition, which anagogical transposition transcends by way of spiritual childbearing. Therefore, Gregory is convinced, the eschaton will witness the overcoming of both gender and passions. The resulting genderless angel-like existence will at the same time be the most fecund participation in Christ.

Notes

- 1 For an excellent overview, see Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 161–227. [10.1093/0198270224.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/0198270224.001.0001)
- 2 See, for example, Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic–Perseus, 2003); Dominique Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, trans. Eileen Brennan (London: Routledge, 2005).
- 3 See, for instance, Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
- 4 Sarah Coakley, “The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation, and God,” *MTh* 16 (2000), 62.

5 As will become clear in this chapter, Gregory believes that while there was gender differentiation in Paradise, this was strictly in anticipation of the Fall and will not continue in the eschaton.

6 Cf. Gregory's listing in *An et res* (PG 46.148C–149A; Silvas 240).

7 See Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 25–31, 55–60; id., “Les Tuniques de peau chez Grégoire de Nysse,” in Gerhard Müller and Winfried Zeller (eds.), *Glaube, Geist, Geschichte: Festschrift für Ernst Benz zum 60. Geburtstag am 17. November 1967* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 355–67; id., *L'Être et le temps*, 154–64; Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco, “Tunics of Hide,” in *BDGN*.

8 Some of the most well-known passages that are often analyzed and that give us this view are *Virg* 12.302.24–13.303.22 (Woods Callahan 46–7); *Mort* 53.9–54.1; *An et res* (PG 46.148C–149A; Silvas 239–40); *Vit Moys* 39.22–40.4 (Malherbe and Ferguson 59–60); 103.7–12 (Malherbe and Ferguson 106–7); 122.10–13 (Malherbe and Ferguson 120); *Or cat* 29.22–30.20 (Srawley 46).

9 Cf. Peter W. Martens, “Origen's Interpretations of the ‘Garments of Skins’ (Gen 3:21),” in Susanna Scholz and Carolina Vander Stichele (eds.), *Esoteric Readings of Genesis 1–3*, SBL—Semeia Studies (Leiden: Brill, 2012), forthcoming. In connection with Origen, too, we need to keep in mind that he repeatedly fends off Valentinian views of the body itself as problematic and that he regards the body as problematic mainly in the sense that it often tempts us to sin. At the same time, this means that the body serves for him as a sort of training ground for salvation.

10 *Cant* 1.14.13–15.2.

11 *Cant* 11.327.14–15. Elsewhere, Gregory sees a reference to the Fall in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10), in which Jesus “relates the downward journey of the human being, the thieves' ambush, the stripping off of the incorruptible garment (ἀφθάρτου ἐνδύματος), the wounds of sin, death's occupation of the half of human nature (the soul remains immortal)” (*Cant* 14.427.13–17).

12 *Cant* 11.328.5–11.

13 Cf. J. Warren Smith's helpful comment: “Nyssen grounds his understanding of the transformation of our earthly bodies into spiritual or angelic bodies upon his ontology of quality. Rather than basing his anthropology on a hylemorphic theory of substance (i.e., prime matter given identity by the imposition of form), Nyssen sees human beings as a collection of intelligible properties or qualities (ποιότητες)” (“The Body of Paradise and the Body of the Resurrection: Gender and the Angelic Life in Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio*,” *HTR* 92 (2006), 221).

14 For a helpful discussion of the Christological understanding behind Gregory's phraseology, see Brian E. Daley, “Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation: Gregory of Nyssa's Anti-Apollinarian Christology,” *MTh* 18 (2002), 497–506.

15 *Cant* 4.107.9–108.12.

16 *Cant* 1.25.12–15.

17 *Cant* 9.271.10–12.

18 *Cant* 9.271.16–272.6.

19 *Cant* 12.360.2–3.

20 *Cant* 12.360.4–10.

21 Shifting away from the dress metaphor, Gregory also adopts the Platonic imagery of “wings” that we have lost in the Fall and that we regain through God's grace. The Song comments: “Turn your eyes away from that which is opposed to me, for they give me wings” (Song 6:5). Gregory connects Scripture's attribution of wings to God (Ps 16 (17):8; 90 (91):4; Deut 32:11; Matt 23:37) with our being made in his image and likeness, and he then proceeds to explain that the Fall “robbed us of such wings as these” (*Cant* 15.488.11–12). When, however, God looked on his bride in love, he furnished her with new wings, so that the bride takes up the wings of a dove (*Cant* 15.448.5–450.3). Cf. *Virg* 11.294.8–10 (Woods Callahan 40). Cf. Jean Daniélou, “The Dove and the Darkness in Ancient Byzantine Mysticism,” in Joseph Campbell (ed.), *Man and Transformation: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, trans. Olga Froebe-Kapteyn, Bollingen Series, 30/5 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 276–9; Gregorios, *Cosmic Man*, 180–4; Marguerite Harl, “Références philosophiques et références bibliques du langage de Grégoire de Nysse dans ses Orationes in Canticum canticorum,” in Herbert Eisenberger (ed.), *Hermeneumata: Festschrift für Hadwig Hörner zum sechzigsten Geburtstag*, Bibliothek der klassischen Altertumswissenschaften, NS 2/7 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1990), 120–1.

22 Cf. Gregory's comment in *Virg* 11.291.15–17 (Woods Callahan 38): “On account of this weakness (ἀσθενείας) of knowing things through the senses, it is necessary for us to direct our mind to the unseen.”

23 See Origen, *Origen, Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*, ed. Hans Urs von Balthasar, trans. Robert J. Daly (1984; repr. Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 218–57.

24 Cf. Carol Harrison, “Senses, Spiritual,” in Alan D. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 767–8.

25 *Cant* Prologue.13.3–9: “If, however, we are eager, even after Origen has addressed himself lovingly and laboriously to the study of this book, to commit our own work to writing, let no one who has before his eyes the saying of the divine apostle to the effect that ‘each one will receive his own reward in proportion to his labor’ (1 Cor 3:8) lay a charge against us. As far as I am concerned, this work was not put together for the sake of display.” For discussions dealing both with Origen's and Gregory's commentaries on the Song of Songs, see Mark W. Elliott, *The Song of Songs and Christology in the Early Church*, Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity, 7 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 15–18, 24–9; Andrew Louth, “Eros and Mysticism: Early Christian Interpretation of the Song of Songs,” in Joel Ryce-Menuhin (ed.), *Jung and the Monotheisms: Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (London: Routledge, 1994), 241–54; Norris, “The Soul Takes Flight.”

26 Cf. Frances Young's comment: “Perhaps the most striking thing about Gregory's exegesis of the Song is his emphasis on spiritual senses. He believes, not unlike Origen, that there is a correspondence between the motions and movements of the soul and the sense organs of the body, and it is soon apparent that this undergirds his positive embracing of the discourse of sexuality to describe the soul's advance towards God and response to the divine allure. The whole point is

that our earthly response to beauty gives us a taste of what it would mean to transcend surface appearance and discern the Lord as the object of beauty par excellence” (“Sexuality and Devotion: Mystical Readings of the Song of Songs,” *TheolSex* 14 (2001), 96).

27 *Cant* 1.33.2–38.2.

28 *Cant* 1.34.1–35.1.

29 Richard T. Lawson highlights the fact that Gregory’s homilies regard all speech of God as analogous in character (“‘A Guide for the More Fleshly-Minded’: Gregory of Nyssa on Erotic and Spiritual Desire” (M.S.T. thesis, School of Theology of the University of the South, 2009), 31–46).

30 *Cant* 6.194.20–195.13.

31 *Cant* 6.195.18–196.11.

32 *Cant* 7.199.1–7.

33 *Cant* 6.173.7–174.20.

34 *Cant* 11.333.14–15.

35 *Cant* 11.333.15–334.2. Cf. *Cant* 12.345.11–17: “For in us there is a dual nature. The one is fine and intelligent and light, while the other is coarse and material and heavy. Hence it is inevitable that in each of these there be a dynamic that is proper to itself and irreconcilable with the other. For that in us which is intelligent and light has its native course upwards, but the heavy and material is ever borne, and ever flows, downwards.”

36 Thus, Gregory comments in connection with interpretation that we “should not stick with the letter but, by a more deliberate and laborious way of understanding, transpose (μεταλαβείν) what is said to the level of spiritual comprehension, after distancing the mind from the literal sense” (*Cant* 6.190.15–18).

37 Cf. the comment of Franz Dünzl: “Erlösung bedeutet in den *CantHom* vor allem ‘Erziehung’, ‘Aufstieg’ und den ‘Heilsweg der Liebe’...” (*Braut und Bräutigam: Die Auslegung des Canticum durch Gregor von Nyssa*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese, 32 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993), 396).

38 *Cant* 10.311.11–16.

39 *Cant* 10.311.21–312.1.

40 *Cant* 10.313.1–16.

41 *Cant* 15.451.19–452.4.

42 *Cant* 6.189.4–15. Cf. *Cant* 7.242.14–243.21; 8.249.7–250.7; 12.342.9–347.6; 14.404.1–406.7.

43 For an excellent exposition of the way in which perfume and its fragrance function in Gregory’s homilies on the Song, see Harrison, *Grace and Human Freedom*, 99–107.

44 *Cant* 3.89.15–21. Cf. *Cant* 1.37.3–9: “For whatever name we may think up, she says, to make the scent of the Godhead known, the meaning of the things we say does not refer to the perfume itself. Rather does our theological vocabulary refer to a slight remnant of the vapor of the divine fragrance. In the case of vessels from which perfumed ointment is emptied out, the ointment itself that has been emptied out is not known for what it is in its own nature.”

45 *Cant* 4.106.5–7.

46 *Cant* 13.396.17–397.3. Cf. *Cant* 7.216.17–219.20. Gregory uses the language of a reflecting mirror not only for the eye but also for human nature as a whole. Thus, human nature either reflects Beauty or it reflects the image of the Serpent (*Cant* 4.103.15–104.16; 5.150.9–151.2; 15.440.1–441.4).

47 *Cant* 8.257.1–5.

48 Behr, “The Rational Animal.” Several scholars have incorporated Behr’s basic argument in their own interpretations of Gregory: Laird, “Under Solomon’s Tutelage”; Jeremy William Bergstrom, “Embodiment in Gregory of Nyssa: His Anthropology and Ideal Ascetic Struggle” (Th.M. thesis, St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, 2008). For a careful refutation of Behr’s position, see Smith, “Body of Paradise.”

49 Behr, “Rational Animal,” 223.

50 One of the developments in Gregory’s writings is of interest at this point. It is true that Gregory’s later works *De vita Moysis* and *In Canticum canticorum* both develop the notion of ἐπέκτασις rather significantly and that they highlight the abiding role of desire (ἐπιθυμία) in the hereafter. We should note, however, that *De anima et resurrectione*, written at most a couple years after *De hominis opificio* and bearing many similarities to it, still rejects the presence of desire in the eschaton and instead refers to enjoyment (ἀπόλαυσις) as characterizing our final state (*An et res* (PG 46.89B–C; Silvas 208–9)). Cf. Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 197–216; id., “Body of Paradise,” 224. It would thus seem unlikely that in *De hominis opificio* Gregory would endorse a much more positive view of human desire than in *De anima et resurrectione*. Furthermore, while *De hominis opificio* may not mention the tunics of hide, *De anima et resurrectione* does (*An et res* (PG 46.148C–149A; Silvas 239–40)). Considering the close chronological and thematic proximity of the two writings, one would be hard pressed to see a major theological divergence in terms of the tunics of hide.

51 *Op hom* IV.1 (PG 44.136B). The theme of human sovereignty and dominion over the rest of creation is an important theme especially in the initial five chapters of *De hominis opificio*.

52 *Op hom* VIII.1 (PG 44.144A–B).

53 *Op hom* VIII.2 (PG 44.144C).

54 *Op hom* VIII.8 (PG 44.148D). Cf. *Op hom* X.1 (PG 44.152B).

55 *Op hom* VII.1–3 (PG 44.140D–144A).

56 *Op hom* IX.3 (PG 44.150C–152A). Cf. *Op hom* XII.8 (PG 44.162A–B).

57 Gregory also presents fascinating explanations of what he believes happens physiologically in connection with crying and laughter (*Op hom* XII.4–5 (PG 44.157D–160C)), as well as in connection with sleeping, yawning, and dreaming (*Op hom* XIII (PG 44.166A–175C)). Almost the entire last chapter of the treatise consists of a lengthy description of the human body and its constitution and functioning (*Op hom* XXX (PG 44.240C–256C)).

58 Behr, "Rational Animal," 230.

59 *Op hom* XIII.6 (PG 44.168C–D); XIV.1–3 (PG 44.173D–176B).

60 *Op hom* XV.3 (PG 44.177B).

61 This point is emphasized by Susan Wessel, "The Reception of Greek Science in Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio*," *VC* 63 (2009), 24–46. Cf. Morwenna Ludlow, "Science and Theology in Gregory of Nyssa's *De Anima et resurrectione*: Astronomy and Automata," *JTS*, NS 60 (2009), 467–89. [10.1093/jts/flp067](https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/flp067)⁵¹

62 *Op hom* XXVIII.4 (PG 44.232B).

63 Gregory presents several arguments, but central to his case is his opinion that the soul leaves on the bodily elements an impression like that of a seal, which the soul recognizes at the time of the resurrection (*Op hom* XXVII.5 (PG 44.228A–B)). Cf. *An et res* (PG 46.73B–80A; Silvas 200–3).

64 *Op hom* XII.9 (PG 44.161C).

65 *Op hom* XII.9 (PG 44.161C).

66 *Op hom* XIV.1 (PG 44.176A).

67 Pace Behr, "Rational Image," 230.

68 *Op hom* XVI.1 (PG 44.180A).

69 *Op hom* XVI.10 (PG 44.184B).

70 *Op hom* IV.1 (PG 44.136D); V.1–2 (PG 44.138.A–C); XVI.11 (PG 44.184B). For discussion of Gregory's views on the image of God, see Johann Bapt. Schoemann, "Gregors von Nyssa theologische Anthropologie als Bildtheologie," *Schol* 18 (1943), 31–53, 175–200; J. T. Muckle, "The Doctrine of St. Gregory of Nyssa on Man as the Image of God," *MS* 7 (1945), 55–84; Roger Leys, *L'Image de Dieu chez Grégoire de Nysse: Esquisse d'une doctrine* (Brussels: L'Édition universelle; Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1951); Hubert Merki, 'ΟΜΟΙΩΣΙΣ ΘΕΟΥ: Von der platonischen Angleichung an Gott zur Gottähnlichkeit bei Gregor von Nyssa, *Paradosis: Beiträge zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur und Theologie*, 7 (Freiburg: Paulus, 1952); S. de Boer, *De anthropologie van Gregorius van Nyssa* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1968), 148–86; Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), 120–35, 280–95; Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 21–33; Giulio Maspero, "Image," in *BDGN*.

71 *Op hom* XVI.2 (PG 44.180A).

72 *Op hom* XVI.8 (PG 44.181B).

73 *Op hom* XVI.9 (PG 44.181C).

74 *Op hom* XVI.9 (PG 44.181C).

75 This is the viewpoint expressed in Corsini, "L'Harmonie du monde"; David L. Balás, "Plenitudo Humanitatis: The Unity of Human Nature in the Theology of Gregory of Nyssa," in Donald F. Winslow (ed.), *Disciplina nostra: Essays in Memory of Robert F. Evans* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979), 115–31, 205–8; D. Bentley Hart, "The 'Whole Humanity': Gregory of Nyssa's Critique of Slavery in Light of His Eschatology," *SJT* 54 (2001), 51–69 [10.1017/S0036930600051188](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930600051188)⁵². For recent discussion on the question whether or not Gregory understands "universals" as "collections of individuals," see Johannes Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, 46 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 61–122; Richard Cross, "Gregory of Nyssa on Universals," *VC* 56 (2002), 372–410; Johannes Zachhuber, "Once Again: Gregory of Nyssa on Universals," *JTS* NS 56 (2005), 75–98 [10.1093/jts/fli003](https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/fli003)⁵³.

76 *Op hom* XVI.6–7 (PG 44.181A).

77 *Op hom* XVII.2 (PG 44.189A).

78 *Op hom* XVII.2 (PG 44.189A–B).

79 *Op hom* XVII.4 (PG 44.189C–D). Cf. *Op hom* XVI.14 (PG 44.186A).

80 In *De anima et resurrectione*, Gregory goes beyond this by insisting that, if not the passions (παθή), then at least desire (ἐπιθυμία)—which is connected to our gendered animal nature—can become an instrument of virtue and so guide us on our anagogical journey (*An et res* (PG 64B–68A; Silvas 196–7)). Cf. Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 75–103.

81 *Op hom* XVII.2 (PG 44.188C).

82 Behr interprets the angel-like multiplication that Gregory mentions as being sexual in character but not as being prone to base passions, which would have been inappropriate to human beings' original "angelic" dignity ("Rational Animal," 240).

83 Smith, "Body of Paradise," 214. See *Op hom* XVII.4 (PG 44.190D).

84 *Op hom* XVIII.1 (PG 44.192A–B).

85 *Op hom* XVIII.2 (PG 44.192B).

86 *Op hom* XVIII.2 (PG 44.192C). Verna E. F. Harrison, in an otherwise excellent article, does not seem to put it quite right when she maintains that God added not only gender but also the passions in paradise ("Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology," *JTS*, NS 14 (1990), 468). For Gregory, God did indeed add gender in Paradise, but passions were the post-lapsarian result of human beings taking their starting-point in their commonality with the animals. Admittedly, Gregory may not be quite consistent on this point, since in one passage, the passions appear to be pre-lapsarian in character (*An et res* 61A (Silvas 194)).

87 *Op hom* XVIII.3 (PG 44.192D).

88 *Op hom* XVIII.4 (PG 44.193A).

89 *Op hom* XVI.6–7 (PG 44.181A).

90 Cf. Chap. 1, sect.: Heavenly Paradise: Diastemic Space and Time?.

91 For the chronology of these events, see Anna M. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger, Philosopher of God*, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts*, 22 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 49–51, 101–2.

92 *Macr* 371.6–9 (Silvas 110).

93 *Macr* 381.11 (Silvas 120). The term ἀνδρεία, which is used twice in this section, has as denotation "manliness" as well as

- “courage.” Cf. Harrison, “Male and Female,” 445.
- 94 Cf. Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 208.
- 95 Clark, “Holy Women, Holy Words”; ead., “The Lady Vanishes.” This parallel between Macrina and Diotema is also maintained in Catharine P. Roth, “Introduction,” in Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, trans. and introd. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 11; Burrus, “*Begotten, Not Made*,” 116–22; id., “Is Macrina a Woman?”; Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 156. Some caution seems required regarding this alleged literary dependence. *De anima et resurrectione* is obviously modeled on the *Phaedo*, both in form and contents, and (despite Burrus’s meager evidence) I have not come across obvious parallels between *De anima et resurrectione* and the *Symposium* beyond the fact that a highly revered woman is presented as the teacher of the main figure (either Socrates or Gregory).
- 96 Clark, “Holy Women, Holy Words,” 425–6.
- 97 Clark, “Holy Women, Holy Words,” 430. The positions of Clark and Burrus, which I outline here, are helpfully summarized also in Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 211–13. [10.1093/0198270224.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/0198270224.001.0001)
- 98 David M. Halperin, “Why is Diotima a Woman?,” in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 113–51.
- 99 Burrus, “Is Macrina a Woman?” 256.
- 100 Burrus, “Is Macrina a Woman?” 258.
- 101 Burrus, “Is Macrina a Woman?” 261.
- 102 Burrus, “Is Macrina a Woman?” 262.
- 103 At the same time, I am much less convinced than Clark is of Macrina’s lack of philosophical and theological knowledge (“Holy Women,” 423–4). Such a position requires not only that we read *De anima et resurrectione* as shaped significantly by Platonic rhetorical style (which it is), but it also requires us to seriously question many of the historical references provided by Basil and Gregory about their sister’s organizational and philosophical abilities. Cf. Silvas’s rebuttal of Clark’s more skeptical position in *Macrina the Younger*, 163–7.
- 104 Vasilika M. Limberis rightly cautions: “The philosophical and theological tenets that informed the Cappadocians’ concepts of gender and defined their theoretical universe differ radically from those that inform the modern academy” (*Architects of Piety: The Cappadocian Fathers and the Cult of the Martyrs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 160). [10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199730889.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199730889.001.0001)
- 105 Verna E. F. Harrison rightly comments: “In western cultures today there is great concern about the diverse properties shared by some groups of people but not others, the kinds of things summed up in the phrase ‘gender, race, and class.’ In Gal 3:28, the apostle Paul notes that precisely these kinds of diversities are absent in a Christian’s new baptismal identity. The Fathers also are wary of these kinds of diversity on the grounds that they could threaten the unity of the body of Christ” (“Gregory of Nyssa on Human Unity and Diversity,” *SP* 41 (2006), 336).
- 106 *Virg* 4.276.13–15 (Woods Callahan 27).
- 107 *Virg* 4.276.15–21 (Woods Callahan 27). Cf. *An et res* (PG 46.144C; Silvas 237).
- 108 *Macr* 395.21 (Silvas 132). Thus, Gregory’s comment “if indeed she was a ‘woman’” (*Macr* 371.7 (Silvas 110)) is not intended to depict her as masculine but to describe her as angelic and thus as beyond gender.
- 109 *Macr* 396.1–6 (Silvas 132). Cf. similar characterizations of Macrina’s life as “angelic” in character in *Macr* 382.2–383.8 (Silvas 121–2); 387.9–16 (Silvas 126).
- 110 Here I follow Silvas’s designation of mystagogy as the interpretive key of *Vita s. Macrinae* (*Macrina the Younger*, 104–8).
- 111 Peter Brown rightly highlights the fact that Gregory was distressed by the chronological experience of time introduced by the entry of death in the wake of the Fall (*The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, 2nd edn. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 296–7). He also comments: “The virgin state, therefore, brought with it a touch of the ‘pure’ time of Adam” (*ibid.*, 299).
- 112 P. Huybrechts, “Le ‘Traité de la virginité’ de Grégoire de Nysse: Idéal de vie monastique ou idéal de vie chrétienne?” *NRT* 115 (1993), 238.
- 113 *Op hom* XVI.7 (PG 44.181A).
- 114 *Virg* 20.327.20–328.2 (Woods Callahan 64).
- 115 *Vig* 20.328.2–9 (Woods Callahan 64).
- 116 Limberis notes that while he attempts to trump gender in applying Galatians 3 to the metaphors of gender and marriage in Proverbs 4, Gregory’s language actually slips back into the trope of gender (*Architects of Piety*, 169). While Limberis’s observation is accurate, Gregory’s intent is nonetheless clear: his continued use of gendered language serves to point to a transcendence of gender altogether.
- 117 Gregory also links Proverbs 4:6–8 with the Song of Songs in the first homily of *In Canticum canticorum* (*Cant* 1.21.4–10). For further discussion, see Verna E. F. Harrison, “A Gender Reversal in Gregory of Nyssa’s *First Homily on the Song of Songs*,” *SP* 27 (1993), 34–5.
- 118 Gregory is emphatic also on the fact that God is beyond gender, and here, too, he at least alludes to Galatians 3:28 (*Cant* 7.212.14–213.6). Cf. Harrison, “Gender, Generation, and Virginité,” *JTS*, NS 47 (1997), 39–41.
- 119 Sarah Coakley argues, on the basis of the continuously shifting gender roles, that for Gregory gender continues to have a role in the ascent: “[I]t is not that either ‘body’ or gender are disposed of in this progressive transformation to a neo-angelic status. Rather, as advances are made in the stages of virtue and contemplation, *eros* finds its truer meaning in God, and gender switches and reversals attend the stages of ascent” (“The Eschatological Body,” 69). Valerie Karras follows Coakley in this approach (“Sex/Gender in Gregory of Nyssa’s Eschatology: Irrelevant or Non-Existent?,” *SP* 41 (2006), 367). This interpretation does not do justice, however, either to the centrality of Gal 3:28 or to Gregory’s strong focus on

virginity. The gender switches in Gregory are metaphorical allusions, the “obvious sense” of which must be transcended by way of anagogical transposition.

- 120 Harrison, “Gender, Generation, and Virginity,” 39. [10.1093/jts/47.1.38](https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/47.1.38)^{sq}
- 121 Harrison, “Gender, Generation, and Virginity,” 45. [10.1093/jts/47.1.38](https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/47.1.38)^{sq}
- 122 Gregory’s insistence that childbearing becomes also a male activity is further evidence that Clark is misguided in insisting that by describing women such as Macrina in masculine terms Gregory appropriates her for his own patriarchal ends. Clark ignores here the fact that the “gender reversal” goes both ways; men also take on female characteristics—though, of course, only by way of anagogical transposition, since we are talking about *spiritual* childbearing.
- 123 For this spiritual childbearing of virtues (and Gregory’s fascinating exegesis of Ps 112 (113):9; Isa 26:17–18; 1 Tim 2:15; and Matt 12:50), see *Virg* 13.305.11–22 (Woods Callahan 48); 14.308.9–19 (Woods Callahan 50); 19.323.23–324.17 (Woods Callahan 61–2); *Mort* 63.15–27. Cf. Harrison, “Male and Female,” 469–70; [10.1093/jts/41.2.441](https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/41.2.441)^{sq} ead., “Gender, Generation, and Virginity,” 56–8.
- 124 Harrison, “Gender, Generation, and Virginity,” 62. [10.1093/jts/47.1.38](https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/47.1.38)^{sq} Cf. Gregory’s discussion in *Mort* 63 and *An et res* (PG 46.138B–160C; Silvas 235–46). Both passages make quite clear that on Gregory’s understanding, the notion of a gendered eschatological existence fails to take into account the drastic anagogical transposition that the resurrection effects.
- 125 Cf. *Op hom* XVII.2 (PG 44.188C).