

SAINT GREGORY OF NYSSA

On the 10th of January, the holy Church commemorates our holy father among the saints, GREGORY of Nyssa.¹

Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa (372)² is to be praised for the holiness of his conduct of life, his theological knowledge, and his zealous promotion of the Orthodox Faith embodied in the Nicene clauses. He is believed to have been born at Caesarea, the capital of Cappadocia, ca. 335 or 336. The family of Saint Gregory was wealthy, distinguished, and conspicuously Orthodox. He was the younger brother of Saint Basil the Great (ca. 330-379). Our saint made no account of his honorable descent. He left blood lines, wealth, and splendor to the friends of this world. He believed that the Christian's lineage was his affinity with the divine.

During the persecution of Diocletian (284-305), Saint Gregory's grandparents departed with their family. Searching for safety in the mountains of Pontos, they underwent rigorous vicissitudes and deprivation. His maternal grandfather, whose name has not been left to us, lost all his worldly possessions, and even his life. A few years later, the family returned to Caesarea. The saint's father, Basil (who gave his name to his eldest son), was a recognized and notable rhetorician. He died at a relatively young age, after fathering a family of ten children, five boys and five girls. The children were reared by their paternal grandmother Makrina and their mother, the beautiful Emmelia. Both of these estimable ladies were celebrated for their strict traditional Orthodoxy. The ten children, in order of their birth, are as follows: Makrina, a son that died in infancy, Basil, Nafkratios, Gregory, four daughters whose names are known to us, and lastly, Peter. Makrina shared in the upbringing of her younger siblings. There was not one brother or sister who did not owe to the elder sister their settlement in the Faith and constancy of pious conduct. Later with her mother Emmelia, Makrina established a convent on the family estate in Pontos, at a place called Annesi, on the banks of the Iris River. As a result of her gentle but firm persuasion, Saint Basil renounced secular pursuits, and took up a life of more rigorous asceticism with his school friend Saint Gregory (the Theologian). Nafkratios entered his father's profession but reposed early. Saint Peter eventually became the Bishop of Sebasteia.

Saint Gregory, the third surviving son, was not of a strong constitution. He received his first instruction in grammar and rhetoric from his father. Gregory's father reposed when he was twelve years old. He continued to study at home. He acknowledged that his brother Basil, his senior by at least five or six years, later undertook his education. Saint Basil had been at Athens, and shared his learning from the Greeks with his younger brother. Saint Gregory, in his work *The Life of Moses*, commented: "Many bring to the Church of God their profane learning as a kind of gift. Such a man was the great Basil, who acquired the 'Egyptian wealth' in every respect during his youth, and dedicated his wealth to God for the adornment

¹ Saint Gregory the Theologian praises Saint Gregory of Nyssa, writing, "A faithful friend is not to be exchanged. It is noted in the Sixth Act of the Seventh (Ecumenical) Synod that he is named the divine Gregory of Nyssa. He is also called "Father of the Fathers," and the "Luminary of Nyssa" [Nicene Synod 11, Act VI; Nikephoros Kallistos, *Ecclesiastical History*, xi. 191. The saint's Treatises are to be found in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca* 4446. For English translations of Treatises, see Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Select Works, Letters, Dogmatic Treatises, Nicene, 2nd Ser.*,

Volume 5, translated by William Moore, M.A. and Henry Austin Wilson, M.A. of Oxford. See also Harvard Professor Verner Zenger's translations.

² Nyssa (37°05'N 28°10'E) is a city in northwest Cappadocia, south of the Halys, near the village of Harmandaii.

of the Church, the true tabernacle.³ Regarding his religious training, the credit lies with his mother and sister, for whom he had the tenderest regard. There is every reason to believe that Makrina the grandmother lived well into Gregory's early boyhood.

Unlike his brother Basil, Gregory did not have the broadening experience that travel often offers. He was diffident and retiring, and preferred to remain at home. He did not choose a profession as did his brothers, but continued living on his share of the paternal property. With a self-appointed discipline, he managed to educate himself quite well. Yet he defers to his brother Basil, and praises him in a letter, remarking, "I found no rich nourishment in the precepts of my teachers, inasmuch as I enjoyed my brother's society only for a short time, and got only just enough polish from his divine tongue to be able to discern the ignorance of those who are uninitiated in oratory."⁴ Some believe Gregory's writings characteristically share with those of Basil's a wide acquaintance with ordinary human life, and who is thoroughly conversant with human nature.

He is described as resembling his brother Saint Basil in appearance, that is, dark-haired, handsome, slender, and tall--with the difference that his hair was grayer. Gregory was also perceived by others as somewhat less graceful and clever than his older brother.

He did not enjoy the benefit of infant Baptism, and remained for many years unbaptized, according to the custom of the time. It is unclear whether he delayed it himself, or it was delayed for him. Later in life (376), he wrote *On the Baptism of Christ*, saying, "We baptize in the name of the Father (He is the primal Cause of all things) and of the Son (He is the Maker of the creation) and of the Holy Spirit (He is the Power perfecting all)."⁵ He describes Christ as "the Repairer of evil doing. He assumes manhood in its fullness, and saves man, and become the type and figure of us all, to sanctify the first fruits in every action."⁶ He informs us that "after the dignity of adoption the devil plots more vehemently against us, pinning away with envious glance. When he beholds the beauty of the newly born man, earnestly tending toward that heavenly city, from which he fell, he raises up against us fiery temptations, seeking earnestly to despoil us of our second adornment, as he did our former array."⁷

The Vision of the Forty Martyrs

Gregory was first moved to make a public avowal and receive holy Baptism due to an extraordinary vision in which he was made to take part. While his mother Emmelia was at her sacred retreat at Annesi, she implored her son to attend a service commemorating the holy Forty Martyrs. At his mother's behest he went, though reluctantly; for he had been studying in Caesarea, and felt incommoded that he should have to leave his studies at such an inconvenient time. The journey to the retreat proved tiring to him, and the length of time for the divine office was protracted. The vigil was already well into the night, and Gregory found himself physically unable to remain on his feet. He withdrew to the garden, where he was overtaken by sleep. He beheld a vision of the very forty martyrs. They reproved him for his lack of zeal, and started to strike him with rods. Only through the efforts of one of the warrior martyrs did he escape the thrashing.

Straightway, Gregory was roused from his slumber. Filled with remorse at his past laxity, he was resolved to change his ways. He begged God and the martyrs for mercy and forgiveness. Still struck with the ef-

³ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, Bk. 11, 1 116, p. 81.

⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, "Epistle X, To Libanius, " Nicene, 2"" Ser., V: 533.

⁵ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Baptism of Christ*, Nicene, 2" Ser., V:520.

⁶ *Ibid.*, *On the Baptism of Christ*, V:519.

⁷ *Ibid.*, V:524.

fect the vision laid upon his tender conscience, he was inspired to accept the rank of Reader in the Church. This acceptance meant a public profession of the Faith.

Saint Gregory assumed the duties of that position for a short time, but could not dedicate himself exclusively to it. He then turned to the profession of a rhetorician or advocate. His retirement from his duties as a Reader led to a reprimand from his elder brother Basil and his good friend Gregory (the Theologian).

Saint Gregory the Theologian chided him in a letter, which moved the young man to remorse. He frankly told him, "Why shouldest thou not hear from me what all men are saying in whispers? They do not approve thine inglorious glory ... and thy gradual descent to the lower life, and thine ambition For what has happened to thee, O wisest of men? And for what do thou condemnest thyself, that thou hast cast away the sacred and delightful books which thou wast reading to the people ... and applied thyself to bitter ones, and preferred to be called a Professor of Rhetoric rather than of Christianity? ... Though it is full late, become sober again, and come to thyself once more, and make thine apology to the faithful, and to God, and to His s and Mysteries, from which thou hast taken thyself away What of the offense given to others by thy present employment? ... For a man lives not for himself alone but also for his neighbor I shall be grieved--to speak gently--if thou dost not see what is right, nor follow the advice of others....Forgive that my friendship for thee makes me grieve."⁸

Saint Theosevia

There is a strong possibility that Saint Gregory had taken to wife Theosevia, who later became a deaconess of the Church of Nyssa. In a letter upon her repose from Saint Gregory the Theologian to Saint Gregory of Nyssa, she is expressly called his sister. Yet in the same letter he calls Theosevia "consort" or "yokefellow (*syzygon*)," saying she is "the glory of the Church, the adornment of Christ, the helper of our generation, the hope of woman, the most beautiful and glorious among all the beauty of the brethren, truly sacred, the yokefellow of a priest, and of equal honor and worthy of the great Mysteries."⁹The Theologian also describes her as having tasted the joys of life, yet escaped its sorrows through the shortness of her life. He tells Gregory that "before she had to wear mourning for you, she was honored by thee with that fair funeral honor which is due to such as she."¹⁰

Saint Gregory of Nyssa composed a treatise *On Virginit*y, and writes: "I should have undertaken this labor with the greatest readiness, if I could have hope of sharing, according to the Scripture, in the fruits of the plow and threshing-floor As it is, this my knowledge of the beauty of virginity is in some sort vain and useless to me; ... happy are they who have still the power of choosing the better way, and have not debarred themselves from it by the engagements of the secular life, as we have, whom a gulf now divides from glorious virginity. No one can climb up to that who has once planted his foot upon the secular life. We are but spectators of others' blessings and witnesses to the happiness of another class."¹¹ Of course, Saint Gregory may also be speaking of a higher virginity, that of the soul. The essence of spiritual virginity was not embodied in sensual abstinence, but in the purity of one's whole life. These two passages, namely the Theologian's letter of condolence and Gregory's admission in his treatise, have given rise to the tradition that he and Theosevia were husband and wife.

Saint Gregory makes mention of the value of virginity, saying that it enables us "to look with a free and devoted gaze upon heavenly delights. The soul will turn itself from earth. It will not even partake of the recognized indulgences of the secular life. It will transfer all its powers of affection from material objects to the intellectual contemplation of immaterial beauty. Virginity of the body is devised to further such a

⁸ Saint Gregory (the Theologian), "Epistles 1, To Saint Gregory of Nyssa," Nicene, 2nd Ser., VII:459.

⁹ Saint Gregory (the Theologian), "Epistles 1, To Saint Gregory of Nyssa," Nicene, 2nd Ser., VII:459.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginit*y, Ch. 111, Nicene, 2nd Ser., V:345.

disposition of the soul. It aims at creating in it a complete forgetfulness of natural emotions; it would prevent the necessity of ever descending to the call of fleshly needs.¹²

Asceticism

Gregory's sister Makrina, after much prayer and persuasion, prevailed upon Gregory to leave his secular concerns and the law court, and devote himself entirely to asceticism. Gregory removed himself to his brother's retreat in Pontos, which was in the same neighborhood as the convent of his mother and sister. Gregory stayed in that monastic foundation for several years, hallowing his time with the study of sacred Scriptures and holy writings. He also studied the works of Origen, as did his brother and Saint Gregory the Theologian, who also was a sometime member of the monastic community.

In 365, elder brother Basil was called from his monastic retreat to act as coadjutor to Evsevios, Metropolitan of Caesarea in Cappadocia, that he might assist him in the Church battle against the heretical Arians. Five years later, after the repose of Evsevios, Basil was acclaimed by popular choice to the bishopric. His election was not without opposition. With the help of Saint Gregory the Theologian and the latter's father, Saint Gregory of Nazianzos, he succeeded to that see. Arians and other contenders against the Faith and unity in Cappadocia were at odds with the great Basil. The holy man decided the best way to uphold the Faith in his troubled diocese was to surround himself with bishops confessing true Orthodox Faith. In 372, he enjoined his reluctant brother Gregory to shepherd the flock at Nyssa, a small town in western Cappadocia. Saint Gregory had his own ideas about the true priesthood, and those who presume upon it. Later in life, in his work, the *Life of Moses*, he observes, "If you should now see someone purifying himself to some degree of the disease of pleasure, and with great zeal considering himself above others, as he thrusts himself into the priesthood, realize that this man whom you see is someone who is falling to earth by his lofty arrogance. For in what follows, the law teaches that the priesthood is something divine and not human."¹³

Evsevios, Bishop of Samosata, was amazed that Basil chose such a little-known bishopric for Gregory. Saint Basil answered Evsevios in a letter, stating: "I, too, was anxious that our brother Gregory should have the government of a church commensurate with his abilities; and that would have been the whole Church under the sun gathered into one place. But, as this is impossible, let him be a bishop, not deriving dignity from his see, but conferring dignity on his see by himself. For it is the part of a really great man not only to be sufficient for great things, but by his own influence to make small things great."¹⁴

It was with similar sentiments that Basil placed his close friend Gregory the Theologian in the tiny hamlet and marshes of Sasima. This Gregory also took exception to the nomination.

Family Troubles

With the election of Saint Basil to the bishopric, there was universal rejoicing in the Orthodox world that Caesarea was ruled by so splendid a prelate; and congratulations were even forthcoming from Saint Athanasios the Great of Alexandria. The Arian-minded Emperor Valens (364-378), however, was resolved to make trouble for the faithful in Basil's diocese. The bishops of the province who had been narrowly outvoted, and who refused to take part in Basil's consecration, forsook communion with the new archbishop. Even Saint Basil remarked that the Cappadocian character was hard to move.¹⁵ The suffragans' lack of feeling for Church unity disquieted the new archbishop. Now Basil and Gregory had an uncle, also named Gregory, who was a bishop that sided with the disaffected bishops. Saint Gregory

¹² Ibid., *On Virginity*, Ch. V, V:351.

¹³ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, T 283, pp. 126, 127.

¹⁴ Saint Basil, "Epistle XCVIII, To Eusebius, Bishop of Samosata," *Nicene*, 2nd Ser., VIII:182

¹⁵ Ibid. "Epistle XLVIII, To Eusebius, Bishop of Samosata," *Nicene*, 2nd Ser., VIII:153

tried to reconcile his brother and uncle, but was unsuccessful. Thus, in his guilelessness, he thought to reunite them by using less than scrupulous means.

Our well-meaning Gregory made a clumsy attempt at a forgery in the name of his uncle. The counterfeit was found out when the uncle repudiated the letter. Saint Basil wrote his brother Gregory in a letter: "How am I to dispute with thee in writing? How can I lay hold of thee satisfactorily, with all thy simplicity? ... Thou didst forge one letter, and brought it to me as though it came from our right reverend uncle, the bishop, trying to deceive me; I have no idea why. I received it as a letter written by the bishop, and delivered by thee. Why should I not? I was delighted; I showed it to many of my friends; I thanked God. The forgery was found out, on the bishop's repudiating it in person. I was thoroughly ashamed, covered as I was with the disgrace of cunning trickery and lies; I prayed that the earth might open for me. Then they gave me a second letter, as sent by the bishop himself by the hands of thy servant Even this second had not really been sent by the bishop Now Adamantios has come bringing me a third. How ought I to receive a letter carried by thee or thine? I might have prayed to have a heart of stone But what am I to think, now that, after my first and second experience, I can admit nothing without positive proof? Thus I write attacking thy simplicity, which I see plainly to be neither what generally becomes a Christian man, nor appropriate to the present emergency. I write that, at least for the future, thou mayest take care of thyself and spare me. I must speak to thee with all freedom, and I tell thee that thou art an unworthy minister of things so great. However, whoever be the writer of the letter, I have answered as is fit If the right reverend bishops are really willing to meet me, let them make known to me a place and time, and let them invite me by their own men. I do not refuse to meet my own uncle, but I shall not do so unless the invitation reaches me in due and proper form."¹⁶

Initially Gregory's letters only widened the breach between uncle and nephew. But Saint Basil took up his pen and wrote a polite, warm, and conciliatory letter to his uncle. In a second letter to his uncle, he mentions his brother Gregory, saying, "I received my brother on his coming to visit me with the same feelings, and have lost none of my affection. God forbid that I should ever so feel as to forget the ties of nature and be at war with those who are near and dear to me. I have found his presence a comfort in my bodily sickness and the other troubles of my soul; and I have been especially delighted at the letter, which he has brought me from your excellency. For a long time I have been hoping that it would come, for only this reason, that I need not add to my life any doleful episode of quarrel between kith and kin, , to sure to give pleasure to foes and sorrow to friends, and to be displeasing to God, who laid down perfect love as the distinctive characteristic of His disciples If thy reverence really does not disdain to come down to my lowliness and to have speech with me, whether thou shouldst wish the interview to take place in the presence of others or in private, I shall make no objection."¹⁷ At length a reconciliation was brought about.

Bishopric of Nyssa

Saint Gregory was still to experience his older brother's reproof and advice, as he was yet unseasoned in the ways of ecclesiastical politics. In his enthusiasm for the unity of the Faith and love toward his brother, Gregory was moved by zeal to help uphold Archbishop Basil's honor and esteem. He keenly felt that it was important to assist his brother's objectives for the strengthening of the Church and true Orthodoxy. Thus Gregory thought his idea would be well received by his brother, if he were to encourage the convening of synods. Yet Saint Basil perceived that such assemblies, under the then present unsettled situation in the Church, would not enhance the prospects for unity. He understood that what his inexperienced brother hoped to achieve should openly place him as an pawn before unscrupulous men who were not inclined to serve the Church, but instead their own wishes. Therefore, he deterred his brother from calling such synods.

¹⁶ Saint Basil, "Epistle LVIII, To Gregory, my brother," Nicene, VIII: 159.

¹⁷ Ibid., "Epistle LX, To Gregory, his uncle," Nicene, VIII: 161.

On another occasion, Saint Gregory wished to accompany a commission to Rome. The purpose of their mission was to invite Pope Damasus (366-384) and the western bishops to help mediate the turmoil in the Antiochian see, as a consequence of a disputed election to the see. Basil himself had already experienced the effects of the unsatisfactory intervention of Rome, which, he believed, lacked the sensitivity and capacity for sharing in the interests of those in the east. Moreover, he in no way wanted to assist Rome in her assertions of supremacy, nor give her the opportunity of making inroads into the Eastern Church, and thus curtail the latter's autonomy. Therefore he denied such application to himself and his brother.

Saint Gregory was celebrated for his gentle spirit. He was better suited to a life of monasticism and study. His diocese was troubled with controversy and hostility from the Arian and Sabellian heretics. Antagonisms did not end with his pen, or with his writings on the Trinity and incarnation. Problems in his diocese were intensified also on account of the imperial patronage for the heretic the throne was occupied by Valens (364-378), whose twisted mind was bent on the uprooting of Nicene Orthodoxy. To this end, Valens appointed his evil minion Demosthenes, a former clerk of the imperial kitchen, as viceroy of the civil diocese of Pontos. Thereby, Saint Gregory was to taste his unsavory arts, and suffered many persecutions as Bishop of Nyssa. Demosthenes already had made a quarrel with the great Basil, and persecuted Saint Gregory in many irksome ways.

Exile

Now certain Arian bishops trumped up an accusation against Gregory, charging him with uncanonical irregularity in his ordination. He was summoned by them to appear and make his defense at a synod meeting in Ankyra. The emperor's officer and chief cook, Demosthenes, added the false charge of embezzlement of Church monies. Some time in A.D. 375, in order to ensure his appearance, the Arians dispatched soldiers to fetch him. Having a delicate constitution, and burdened with much disquiet of mind, Gregory found the hardships of the journey nearly insupportable. The conduct of those escorting him was abominable. In fact, he contracted a fever which prevented his attendance.

Saint Basil hastened to his brother's side by convening a synod meeting of true Orthodox bishops in Cappadocia. They composed a polite letter, which they all signed, apologizing for Gregory's unavoidable absence from the synod meeting in Ankyra, on account of an attack of pleurisy. They succeeded in disproving the falsehood of the charge of embezzlement. Concurrently, Saint Basil also communicated by letter to one named Astorgos who had considerable influence at court, asking if he might intercede and spare his brother Gregory the embarrassment of being brought before a secular court. The communication did not secure the desired end. Demosthenes managed to have another synod meeting convened at Nyssa, where Gregory was summoned to answer the same charges. This time, Saint Gregory refused to attend. The false council, deeming him intractable, charged him with unwillingness to submit to authority, and deposed him in his absence. Emperor Valens also interfered, and in 376 he decreed banishment for Gregory. The saint repaired to Seleukeia.

During his exile, Saint Gregory was in ill humor--almost a kind of melancholy--at the ostensible victory of the heretics. Though he was in exile, the malice and persecution of the heretics followed him there. He suffered from a lack of physical comforts and necessities and was incommoded often by having to change his lodging place. During his time away, however, moving about from place to place, he consoled the Orthodox wherever he met them. He also maintained his warm friendship with Saint Gregory, who was himself an excellent and faithful correspondent. The latter attempted to raise the spirits of the dejected and isolated hierarch, and he wrote: "Do not let your troubles distress you inordinately. For the less we grieve over things, the less grievous they become The heretics shall be overcome both by the truth and by the times, and all the more so the more we commit the whole matter to God."¹⁸ As the Theologian wrote this note, some time in 378, Valens was killed, and the new emperor in the west, Gratian (367-383), was prepared to restore exiled bishops to their lawful sees. He encouraged Gregory of

¹⁸ Saint Gregory the Theologian, "Epistle LXXII," Nicene, VII:460

Nyssa, consoling him with these words: "Although I am at home, my love is expatriated with thee, for affection makes us have all things in common. Trusting in the mercy of God, and in thy prayers, I have great hopes that all will turn out according to thy mind, and that the hurricane will be turned into a gentile breeze, and that God will give you this reward for your Orthodoxy... May God grant you health and good spirits in all circumstances--thou who art the common prop of the whole Church."¹⁹ Shortly thereafter, Gratian, a disciple and friend of Saint Ambrose (374-397), decided Bishop Gregory of Nyssa ought to be rightfully restored to his episcopal throne. To the utter gladness of the Orthodox faithful of his diocese, the sentence of banishment was revoked.

He returned in triumph to his people. In a letter which is believed to have been written on his return from exile, he describes that much longed-for day of his return. "Suddenly the clouds gathered thick, and there was a change from a clear sky to deep gloom. A chilly breeze blew through the clouds, bringing a drizzle. It ushered in a damp feeling. Rain such as had never yet been known threatened us. On the left there were continuous claps of thunder, and keen flashes of lightning alternated with the thunder. On each side we were shrouded in clouds. Already a heavy cloud hung over our heads, caught by a strong wind and big with rain. Yet, we, like the Israelites of old in their miraculous passage of the Red Sea, surrounded on all sides by rain, arrived dry at Vestena. When we had already found shelter there, and our mules were rested, then the signal for the downpour was given by God to the air. When we had spent some three or four hours there, and had rested enough, again God stayed the downpour, and our conveyance moved along more briskly than before, as the wheel easily slid though the mud just moist and on the surface.

"Now the road from the point to our little town is all along the riverside, going downstream with the water, and there is a continuous string of villages along the banks, all nearby the road, and with short distances between them. Therefrom, an unbroken line of the inhabitants came out to meet us. Some escorted us, mingling their abundant tears with joy. Now there was a little drizzle, but it was not unpleasant. There was enough just to moisten the air. Then, a little way before we reached home, the cloud that overhung us was condensed into a more violent shower. Our entrance was then very quiet, and no one was aware of our coming beforehand. As we entered inside our portico, as the sound of our carriage wheels along the dry hard ground was heard, the people turned up! I know not whence or how. They flocked around us so closely that it was not easy to step down from our conveyance, for there was not a foot of clear space. With difficulty then we persuaded them to permit us to descend, and to let our mules pass. We were crushed on every side by folks crowding all around us, so much so that their excessive kindness nearly made us faint.

"When we were inside the portico, we caught sight of a stream of fire flowing into the church. There was a choir of virgins carrying their wax torches in their hands. They were marching in file along the entrance of the church, kindling the whole into the splendor of a blaze. When I was within the church, I rejoiced and wept with my people. I experienced both emotions from witnessing both in the multitude."²⁰

The Repose of Saint Gregory's Siblings

Saint Gregory's joy was soon mingled with mourning when his elder brother, whom he loved and owed very much, reposed at about fifty years of age in 379, worn down by his inimitable labors and harsh asceticism. Saint Gregory the Theologian wrote to Saint Gregory of Nyssa a letter of condolence, saying, "I think though thou hast many friends and will receive many words of condolence, yet thou wilt not derive comfort so much from any as from thyself and thy memory of him; for you two were a pattern to all of philosophy, a kind of spiritual standard, both of discipline in prosperity, and of endurance in adversity; for philosophy bears prosperity with moderation and adversity with dignity. This is what I have to say to your excellency. But for myself who write thus, what time or what words shall comfort me, except thy com-

¹⁹ Ibid., "Epistle LXXIV," Nicene, loc. cit.

²⁰ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, "Letter III, To Ablabius," Nicene, V:529, 530.

pany and conversation, which our blessed one hath left me in place of all, that seeing his character in thee, as in a bright and shining mirror, I may think myself to possess him also!"²¹

In the same year, during the month of July, after an eightyyear absence, Gregory went to visit his sister Makrina at her convent. He had been hindered from seeing her, due to his troubles with the Arians. After walking a considerable distance on the road, he was about a day's journey from his sister. He beheld a vision which forebode unhappiness in the future. He remembers the event and says, "I was holding in my hands the relics of martyrs. Such a brilliant light emanated therefrom, that my eyes were dazzled by the brilliance." He says he beheld the dream three times that night. As he approached the convent, he learned that his sister had been taken ill. After he entered the convent with his sister's nuns, he went into the church and made the customary prayer and blessing. He then went to visit his sister, who was lying not on a bed or cushion, but on the floor. She was in an exceedingly feeble state, but managed to raise herself to greet her brother, and spoke with cheerful words. Gregory's heart was heavy, contemplating the pending grief. They spent a good deal of time together, reminiscing and speaking of godly matters. Saint Makrina supplied her brother with arguments for the resurrection of the dead. She remonstrated with him for his disconsolate attitude toward her departure. She bade him not to sorrow as those without hope.

Saint Gregory says, "I then began to tell of my own toils by which I was tried. First, there was the persecution against Orthodoxy by the Arian or Emperor Valens. At length, I then said, 'Later, due to the confusion and turmoil in the churches of Christ, which summoned us to struggles and pains..., Then the great lady stopped me, and said, 'Wilt thou not cease from appearing ungrateful for the good which God has granted thee? Wilt thou never correct thine ingratitude? Wilt thou not set aright thy judgment? Dost thou not compare the good of thy parents with thine own? Yea, many esteemed our father for his learning, and among rhetors he was considered first, yet his fame did not spread beyond our homeland. Yet thou hast become renowned in cities and among peoples and nations. The churches of Christ send thee and invite thee to aid and set them aright. Dost thou not give attention to this grace? Dost thou not know the cause of these blessings? Thank God Who, by the prayers of our parents, hast raised thee up to this lofty height; because thou, by thyself, dost not have any strength.'"²² Saint Gregory was not offended at his sister's reproof, but only wished the day were longer, so that they might continue conversing.

The following day, the 19th of July, Saint Makrina reposed peacefully. Saint Gregory became unnerved from the sorrow at beholding her precious relics and the mourning of the virgins. Saint Gregory felt his sister would have preferred orderliness and discipline among the sisterhood, so he instructed the nuns to calm themselves and take up psalmody. After her body was arranged, Saint Gregory was bequeathed his sister's ring, which contained a relic of the true Cross. He then conducted an all-night vigil, dividing the congregation by placing the women together with the virgins and nuns, and the men with the ranks of the monks. "I then made two groups," he says, "into two choirs that they might chant harmoniously and in an orderly fashion. " Amid the press of the crowd, after daybreak, the bishop of that place came with an entire complement. Gregory was urged to be a pallbearer until they reached the grave. When they arrived at the Church of the Holy Martyrs at Annesi, where Gregory's parents and his brother Nafk-ratios had been laid to rest, Saint Makrina was also interred with her mother. As a result of his visit and his sister's deathbed discourse with him, Gregory composed his famous work, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*.

The Champion of the Orthodox Faith

With the repose of the glorious Basil, Saint Gregory was called to fill the vacancy. He rose in preeminence and exerted a powerful influence as the chief defender of the Nicene Creed, but was still harassed by the heretics. Neighboring Galatians were attempting to foster their own brand of heresy in Saint

²¹ Saint Gregory the Theologian, "Epistle LXXVI," Nicene, VII:461.

²² See Vita Makrina, P. G. 46:981B

Gregory's diocese. On the other hand, the people of Ibera in Pontus wished by popular feeling to have him as their own bishop. However, their desire never came to fruition.

Saint Gregory, as his brother Basil's worthy pupil, completed his brother's description of the six days of creation, the *Hexaemeron*, and wrote *On the Making of Man*. In the latter, he explains the reason why man appeared last, after the creation. "It was not to be looked for that the ruler should appear before the subjects of his rule. When his dominion was prepared, the next step was that the king should be manifested."²³ He says that man is "a twofold organization: blending the divine with the earthly, and properly disposed to each enjoyment, enjoying God by means of his more divine nature, and the good things of earth by the sense that is akin to them."²⁴ He writes that the body denotes the nutritive part, the soul denotes the sensitive, and the spirit the intellectual. Speaking of the three divisions of dispositions, he calls one "carnal," which is busied with the belly and the pleasures connected with it; another "natural," which holds a middle position with regard to virtue and vice, rising above the one, but without pure participation in the other; and another "spiritual," which perceives the perfection of godly life."²⁵

Saint Gregory notes that the kinship of passions which appear alike in ourselves and in the brutes, such as anger or cowardice and like affections, entered man's composition by reason of the animal mode of generation. "Since God saw beforehand by His all-seeing power the failure of their will to keep a direct course to what is good, and its constant declension from the angelic life,...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. David, pitying the misery of man who, being in honor, understands not, says he is compared to the beasts that have no understanding and is made like unto them [cf. Ps. 48:12]. For truly he was made like the beasts who received in his nature the present mode of transient generation, on account of his inclination to material things."²⁶

He affirms the doctrine that the cause of the existence of the soul and body is one and the same. "We are to suppose that the beginning of his existence is one, common to both parts neither the soul before the body, nor the contrary, that man may not be at strife against himself, by being divided by the difference in point of time";²⁷ and that "the energies of the soul also grow with the subject in a manner similar to the formation and perfection body."²⁸

Saint Gregory was now a celebrated teacher in the Orthodox world. He was one of the prelates at the Synod of Antioch in 379, which was convened in order that the schisms in that see might be made to cease. At that synod meeting, it was decided that Saint Gregory was to visit the Churches of Arabia and Babylon; for they had fallen into an embarrassingly low and reprehensible state. They were plagued with two radical and polarized sects: the Antidikomarianites who refused to venerate the Theotokos, and the Kollyridians who worshipped the Theotokos as a goddess. The acclaim of Gregory had reached the ears of Emperor Theodosios (392-395), and he provided carriages for the holy hierarch to visit these sects. The saint went and found them in a condition worthy of a torrent of tears. The saint, by the grace of God made every effort to complete his mission successfully. Although he was elected to bring regularity and the true Faith, he admitted that it was beyond his competence to usher in sweeping reforms.

²³ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, § 11, ~ 1, Nicene, 2" Ser., V: 390

²⁴ *Ibid.*, *On the Making of Man*, § 11, 12, loc. cit

²⁵ *Ibid.*, § VIII, 16, Nicene, V:394.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, § XVII, 15, Nicene, V:406, 407.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, § XXIX, 1, Nicene, V:420, 421.

²⁸ *Ibid.* § XXIX, 6, Nicene, V:421.

In 380, he wrote *On the Holy Trinity*, and of the divinity of the Holy Spirit saying, "It is said, 'The angels continually beheld the face of My Father Who is in the heavens [cf. Mt. 18: 10],' and it is not possible to behold the hypostasis (person) of the Father otherwise than by fixing the sight upon it through His image; and the image of the person of the Father is the Only-begotten, and to Him again no man can draw near whose mind has not been illumined by the Holy Spirit. What else is shown from this but that the Holy Spirit is not separated from any operation which is wrought by the Father and the Son?"²⁹

The Holy Land

Saint Gregory also visited Jerusalem and the holy places. From his observations, the inns and hostelrys of the cities of the east presented examples of license and of indifference to vice. At Jerusalem, he met three devout and respectable ladies: Efstathia, Ambrosia, and Vasilissa. He was disappointed with what he had seen in the holy land, and writes them: "I was saddened in my journey back to my native land, estimating now the truth of the Lord's words, that 'the whole world lieth in the evil one [I Jn. 5:19],' so that no single part of the inhabited earth is without its share of degeneracy. For if the spot itself that has received the footprints of the very Life is not clear of the wicked thorns, what are we to think of other places where communion with the Blessing has been inculcated by hearing and preaching alone?"³⁰ Once a Cappadocian abbot asked his advice about making a pilgrimage with his monks to Jerusalem. Saint Gregory remarked, "Change of place brings us no nearer to God, but where thou art, God can come to thee, if only the inn of thy soul is ready."

While Saint Gregory was abroad, the Arians entered by stealth into his dioceses. Upon his return, the holy man had to exercise a good deal of formidable effort to repair whatever the Arians ruined. He also took part in the election of bishops for the sees of Eborā (Ibora in Armenia Minor) and Sebasteia. The faithful of those dioceses applied to him when their Orthodox bishops had fallen asleep in the Lord. They were apprehensive, fearing that their bishops' successors might be heretics.

The Second Ecumenical Synod

In 381, a second Ecumenical synodal meeting was convened in Constantinople. It was primarily to be held against Makedonios (Macedonius), who declared that the Holy Spirit was a thing constructed or created by the Son. Also, it was convened against Apollinarios, and the Evnomians, Evdoxians, Sabelians, Markellians, and Photinians. Among the one hundred and fifty bishops summoned by Emperor Theodosios, Saint Gregory was also invited with other bishops--Nectarios of Constantinople, Timothy of Alexandria, Meletios of Antioch, Kyril of Jerusalem, and Gregory the Theologian. There was no bishop from the west attending, nor did Pope Damasus come in person or send a legate. The Western Church later agreed and acceded to the things decreed at the synod meeting. Saint Gregory carried the sheets that he had thus far collected as an installment of his treatise against the Evnomian heresy. Evnomios had written a pamphlet as a reply to Saint Basil's refutations. Hence, Saint Gregory composed a defense on behalf of his blessed brother Basil, on the issues of the Holy Trinity and the incarnation. He first had a hearing of what he had written with Saint Gregory the Theologian and Blessed Jerome, and others. His treatise comprised twelve books. He opens by saying, "We have been unjustly provoked to make this answer, being stung by Evnomios' accusation of our brother."³¹ He describes Evnomios and his master in heresy as "two men thirsting for notoriety and publicity. They mar the living building of the Church, with the slow canker of their teaching."³² Evnomios charged the great Basil with not defending his Faith at the time of the trials. His charge of cowardice is baseless, for Saint Basil displayed the highest courage before the emperor and his lord-lieutenants. Evnomios' dogmatic theology of the Trinity, according

²⁹ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Trinity*, Nicene, 2nd Ser., V:329

³⁰ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, "Epistle XVII, To Eustathia, Ambrosia, and Basilissa," Nicene, V:542.

³¹ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, Bk. 1, § 2, Nicene, 2nd Ser., V:36.

³² *Ibid.*, *Against Eunomius*, Bk. 1, § 6, Nicene, V: 41.

to Saint Gregory, declares "there is the supreme and absolute Being, and another Being existing by reason of the First--but after It, though before all others; and there is a third Being, not ranking with either of These, but inferior to the One, as to Its cause, to the Other, as to the energy which produced It."³³ Thus Evnomios believed that the Son is alien in nature, unlike in being to the Father and quite devoid of His essential character. They deny His grand, sublime, ineffable generation from the Father, and would prove that He owes His existence to a creation.

Saint Gregory attacks Evnomios' depraved doctrines and blasphemy on the nonexistence of the Lord before creation, and responds: "This is the sum of our Faith, that the Son is from all eternity, being glorified by the Father."³⁴ He is antecedent to times, the words "before" and "after" having no place as applied to Him.³⁵ Speaking of human nature, he writes: "Christ took to Himself humanity in completeness, and mingled His life-giving power with our mortal and perishable nature, and changed, by the combination with Himself, our deadness to living grace and power."³⁶ And, "The divine nature is always one and the same, and with the same mode of existence, while the flesh in itself is that which reason and sense apprehend concerning it, but mixed with the divine no longer remains in its own limitations and properties, but is taken up to that which is overwhelming and transcendent."³⁷ For "The divinity 'empties' Itself that It may come within the capacity of the human nature, and the nature is renewed by becoming divine through its commixture with the divine."³⁸ He tells us that "the Son, as God, is certainly impassible and incapable of corruption; and whatever suffering is asserted concerning Him in the Gospel, He assuredly wrought by means of His human nature which admitted such suffering."³⁹ Christ "was born among us for the cure of the disease of sin. The aim of the dispensation of the incarnation was not that the Son should be subject to suffering, but that He should be manifested as a Lover of man."⁴⁰ The Holy Spirit, in delivering to us divine mysteries, conveys instruction on those matters which transcend language. In speaking of the Only-begotten, the Son of God, and His close relationship of nature with the Father, Saint Gregory comments, "Because human poverty is incapable of the truths that are too high for speech or thought, the Spirit uses our language and calls Him by the name of Son. Hereby in the word Son is declared concerning the Only-begotten the close and true character of His manifestation from the Father."⁴¹ Now the Son is conceived to be of the Father and also with Him. "There is no intermediate interval existing between the Father and that Son Who is of Him."⁴² The difference of "begotten" and "unbegotten" is apart from the essence, and does not affect It.⁴³ As spokesman for the Nicæan party he concluded, saying that "our salvation would not have been wrought, had not the good will of the Father

³³ Ibid., Bk. 1, § 13, Nicene, V: 50.

³⁴ Ibid., Bk. 11, § 11, Nicene, V: 120.

³⁵ Ibid., Bk. IX, § 2, Nicene, V: 214.

³⁶ Ibid., Bk. V, § 4, Nicene, V: 179.

³⁷ Ibid., Bk. V, § 5, Nicene, V: 180.

³⁸ Ibid., Bk. V, § 5, Nicene, V: 181.

³⁹ Ibid., Bk. VI, § 1, Nicene, V: 183.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Bk. VI, § 3, Nicene, V: 186.

⁴¹ Ibid., Bk. VIII, § 4, Nicene, V:205.

⁴² Ibid., loc. cit.

⁴³ Ibid., Bk. X, § 3, Nicene, V:223.

proceeded to actual operation for us through His own power. And we have learned from Scripture that the Son is the power of the Father [cf. I Cor. 1:24].⁴⁴

Saint Gregory delivered the inaugural address at the synod. The first president of the Second Ecumenical Synod was Meletios of Antioch. He reposed at Constantinople, and Saint Gregory gave the funeral oration to his beloved friend, saying, "For him, indeed, better it was by his departure hence to be with Christ, but it was a grievous thing for us to be severed from his fatherly guidance Where is that sweet serenity of his eyes? Where that bright smile upon his lips?"⁴⁵

Before the closing of the synod, by a decree of the emperor, issued at Herakleia, Saint Gregory was nominated as one of the bishops who were to be esteemed as chief authorities on the Orthodox Faith. Helladios, Archbishop of Caesarea, was to be his colleague in his province. The primacy of Rome and Alexandria was being replaced by Constantinople, with this Canon (III): "Let the Bishop of Constantinople have the priorities of honor after the Bishop of Rome, because of its being New Rome."

At this Ecumenical synod, Saint Gregory also upheld his friend Saint Gregory the Theologian's rights, as archpastor of Constantinople. Also, through the God-inspired endeavors of Saint Gregory of Nyssa, the Symbol of the Faith (Creed) was enlarged by the addition of the article concerning the Holy Spirit, and four other clauses were also added to the Creed. The additional clause "of Whose kingdom there shall be no end" was supplied, due to the heresy of Apollinarios the millenarian. Article 8, in reference to the Holy Spirit, was also provided: "...the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son is equally worshipped and glorified, Who spoke by the prophets. " In his treatise *On The Holy Spirit*, written against the followers of Makedonios, he affirms that "we confess that the Holy Spirit is of the same rank as the Father and the Son , that, while not to be confounded with the Father in being never originated, nor with the Son in being the Only-begotten."⁴⁶

Helladios

Much to Gregory's regret, profound ill will began to fester in the heart and mind of Archbishop Helladios of Caesarea against Gregory. Saint Gregory was distressed about the unfriendly feeling displayed by Helladios. He took up his pen, ca. 393, and wrote to Flavian, Archbishop of Antioch (384-403). Saint Gregory informed Flavian that it was others that informed him that Helladios was disgruntled with him. At first he did not believe it, but the report was corroborated on many sides. Saint Gregory then describes a pitiful incident.

He was serving in Sebasteia at the memorial for his brother Peter and the holy martyrs. When he finished his visit, as he was journeying, one of Helladios' relations took the trouble to meet Gregory, declaring that Helladios was ill. The holy man wrote: "I left my carriage at the spot where this news arrested me. I went on horseback for the rest of the journey, which took us over a road that was like a precipice and well-nigh impassable with its rocky ascents. The journey was painful--now on foot, now mounted We finally arrived at Andumocina; for that was the name of the place where Helladios, with two other bishops, was holding his conference Slowly, and on foot, my company and I passed over the intervening ground, and we arrived at the chapel, just as Helladios retired to his residence. A messenger was dispatched to inform him of our arrival. Shortly thereafter, Helladios' deacon met us; and we requested him to inform Helladios at once, so that we might spend as much time as possible with him, and so have an opportunity of leaving nothing in the misunderstanding between us unhealed. " Saint Gregory then said that he remained sitting, in the open air, waiting for an invitation to enter indoors. Saint Gregory says he then became "a gazing stock to all the visitors at the conference. " A long time passed. Drowsiness set

⁴⁴ Ibid., Bk. XII, § 3, Nicene, V:245.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Funeral Oration on Meletius, Nicene, 2nd Ser., V:514.

⁴⁶ Ibid., On the Holy Spirit, Nicene, V:315.

in upon Gregory, and languor was intensified by the excessive heat of the day. "People kept staring at me, pointing me out to others." He was made to wait until noon."⁴⁷

"Heartily did I repent of this visit, and that I had brought upon myself this piece of discourtesy. " At last they were admitted to the altar. Saint Gregory entered with his deacon, who had to support his exhausted frame. "I addressed him, " says Gregory, "and stood for a moment, expecting from him an invitation to be seated. " Nothing of the kind was forthcoming from Helladios, so Gregory turned toward one of the distant seats, and rested himself upon it. "I was still expecting Helladios to utter something that was friendly; or at least give a nod of recognition. But my hopes were doomed to complete disappointment." A long interval ensued. Saint Gregory says, "So struck was I with this reception, in which he did not deign to accord me the merest utterance even of those chance salutations by which you discharge the courtesies of a chance meeting 'Welcome,' for instance, or 'Where dost thou come from?' or 'To what am I indebted for this pleasure?' or 'On what important business art thou here?'" Gregory then reflected upon the treasuries of social courtesies we have inherited from our fathers. "Why, indeed, should I speak at all of that affectionate disposition of our fathers toward each other?" Saint Gregory then clearly witnessed Helladios' conceit and overweening pride. He said to Flavian, "I had no means whereby to advise myself to keep quiet; for my heart within me was swelling with indignation at the absurdity of the whole proceeding, and was rejecting all the reasons for enduring it."⁴⁸

Then the saint broke the silence, and uttered, "Is it, then, that some of the things required for your personal comfort are being hindered by our presence, and is it time that we withdrew?" Helladios declared that he had no bodily needs. Saint Gregory then spoke some words calculated to heal his ill-feeling. Helladios then declared that the anger he felt toward Gregory was owing to many injuries done him. Saint Gregory replied, "Lies possess an immense power to deceive; but in the divine judgment there will be no place for the misunderstandings thus arising. In my relations toward yourself, my conscience is bold enough to prompt me to hope that I may obtain forgiveness for all my other sins, but that, if I have acted in any way to harm you, this may remain forever unforgiven. " Helladios was indignant at his words. It was then after six o'clock. It was evident that Helladios considered it a sin and a pollution to have Saint Gregory and those with him at his board, even after all that fatigue which they underwent on the journey, and the excessive heat out of doors while they baked in the sun at Helladios' gates. The holy man was sent off, in a state of great fatigue, across the same distance and difficult and dangerous route. Saint Gregory scarcely reached his traveling party at sunset, after suffering a storm which drenched him to the skin. He declared to Flavian: "Something, therefore, I think, must be done on our part, in order that Helladios may improve upon himself, and may be taught that he is human, and has no authority to insult and to disgrace those who possess the same beliefs and the same rank as himself. " What trial, what proofs, what canons, what legitimate episcopal decision did Helladios bring forward to justify his abominable behavior? None."⁴⁹

Saint Gregory set forth that they both were of the priestly dignity, and there was no advantage in education, or birth, or lineage, or theology. "These things," he says to Flavian, "will be found either equal, or at all events not inferior in me. " Saint Gregory then suggested that the cause of Helladios' resentment might be the revenues, that is, the funds of his diocese. He said to Flavian, "I would rather not be obliged to speak of this in his case. Suffice it to say that our own was so much at the beginning, and is so much now." He then ended his communication, saying, "I deem it right that this malady of puffed-up pride is not left without a cure.... The manner of effecting the cure, we leave to God."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid., "Letter XVIII, To Flavian," Nicene, V:545. ⁴⁸ Ibid., V:546.

⁴⁸ Ibid., V:546

⁴⁹ Ibid., V:547

⁵⁰ Ibid., V:548

Archbishop Helladios had a difficult character. His resentment was implacable. He had also made trouble for Saint Gregory the Theologian when he contested the validity of the election of Evlasios to the Bishopric of Nazianzos, on account of party zeal. It has not been left to us what precisely were the grounds of Helladios' ill will toward Saint Gregory of Nyssa. The holy Gregory was saddened by this incident which ushered in such an indelicacy of feeling on the part of Helladios; especially when Gregory brought to mind the affectionate disposition of the fathers of old toward one another; for they wished no advantage over one another, but thought to exceed each other only in humility.

In Constantinople

Saint Gregory was present at the synod meeting in 383, where he gave a discourse on the divinity of both the Son and the Holy Spirit. Now Saint Gregory's estimable abilities as an orator received the general approbation of the imperial court. In 383, he delivered the funeral oration on behalf of Empress Flaccilla (Plakilla). Two years later, he was selected to deliver the funeral oration in honor of the infant Princess Pulcheria. In his homily *On Infants' Early Deaths*⁵¹ he urges that God's omnipotence is to be recognized in every direction. God's dispensations have no element of chance or confusion.

Very little is known of the saint's latter years. He felt that those who attempted to lead the flock astray were men who deceived themselves, being swayed by one mental impulse or another. He said they openly idolized their own imaginations. Therefore, in 384, he wrote an *Answer to Evnomios' Second Book*, saying: "God is not an expression, neither has He His essence in voice or utterance. But God is of Himself what also He is believed to be, but He is named, by those who call upon Him, not what He is essentially (for the nature of Him Who alone is, is unspeakable), but He receives His appellations from what are believed to be His operations in regard to our life."⁵² Saint Gregory also answered Evnomios regarding Christ, saying, "We maintain that our Lord, the image of the invisible God, is immediately and inseparably one with the Father in every movement of His will. He needs not, therefore, to know the Father's will by word, being Himself the Logos of the Father, in the highest acceptance of the term."⁵³ Regarding the Holy Spirit, he says, "Neither does the Holy Spirit require instruction by speech; for being God, as saith the apostle, He searcheth all things, even the deep things of God [1 Cor. 2:10]."⁵⁴

His highly acclaimed treatise on *The Life of Moses* and the *Homilies on the Song of Songs* are assigned somewhere between 385 and 392. In 385, he wrote *The Great Catechism*, wherein he states that man was created not in view of any necessity, but from superabounding love, that there might exist a being who should participate in the divine perfections. Moreover, God did not, on account of His foreknowledge of the evil that would result from man's creation, leave man uncreated; for it was better to bring back sinners to grace by the way of repentance and physical suffering than not to create man at all. "For needful it was that neither His light should be unseen, nor His glory without witness, nor His goodness unenjoyed, nor that any other quality observed in the divine nature should in any case lie idle, with none to share it or enjoy it."⁵⁵ In 394, a synod was called by the prefect of the east, Rufinus, under the presidency of Nectarios, which is the last record we have of the saint, where the claims of the see of Bostra in Arabia had to be settled. In the roll of the last synod, his name was placed between those of the Metropolitans of Caesarea and Iconium.

The Saint's Repose

⁵¹ See Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On Infants' Early Deaths*, Nicene, 2^d Ser., V:372-381.

⁵² Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Answer to Eunomius' Second Book*, Nicene, 2^d Ser., V:265.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, *Answer to Eunomius' Second Book*, Nicene, V: 272. 14 *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, Ch. V, Nicene, 2^d Ser., V:478.

It is believed that he reposed in peace at about sixty or sixty-five years of age, ca. 394 or 395, leaving us with the glorious memory of his life, work, and writings which won him a high reputation. He contributed materially to the Church when he wrote important dogmatic works on the Trinity, the incarnation, the redemption, and the mysteries of holy Baptism and the Eucharist. Within the wealth of his intellectual life, it must be acknowledged that there were some inconsistencies in his writings, especially regarding the origin and destiny of the soul and the restoration of things. In any case, this was not a significant part of his writings. He was a foremost adherent and defender of the Nicene Faith. He was a man of profound thoughts. His defense of the mystery of the Trinity and the incarnation, and the distinction between essence and hypostasis, was of lasting service to the Church. He was known as an advocate of apophaticism, and said, "This is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility, as by a kind of darkness. Wherefore, John the sublime, who penetrated into the luminous darkness, says, 'No one hath seen God at any time [Jn. 1: 18],' thus asserting that knowledge of the divine essence is unattainable, not only by men, but also by every intelligent creature."⁵⁶ And "What does it mean that Moses entered the darkness, and then saw God in it? ... As the mind progresses and, through an ever greater and more perfect diligence, comes to apprehend reality, as it approaches more nearly to contemplation, it sees more clearly what of the divine nature is un contemplated."⁵⁷

He struggled on behalf of Orthodoxy against the heretics who attempted to penetrate his flock. He assigned the will as the source of evil, and considered the gift of free will as the most precious of blessings. To this end, he wrote in *The Life of Moses* about the Egyptian Pharaoh's heart and free will, remarking, "God gives up to dishonorable passions the one who gives himself up to them. It lies within each person's power to make this choice. God gives up to passion him whom He does not protect, because He is not acknowledged by him. But his failure to acknowledge God becomes the reason why he is being pulled down into the passionate and dishonorable life. The Egyptian tyrant is hardened by God not because the divine will places the resistance in the soul of Pharaoh, but because the free will, through its inclination to evil, does not receive the word which softens resistance."⁵⁸ Thus, "each man makes his own plagues."⁵⁹

Although Saint Gregory endured many disappointments and vexations, he was consoled by this fact, and he declared it in a letter, that "I am rich in friendships."⁶⁰ In his writing, *The Life of Moses*, he leaves us with two thoughts: "The vision of God is never to be satisfied in the desire to see Him. But one must always, by looking at what he can see, rekindle his desire to see more."⁶¹ And this is true perfection: "Not to avoid a wicked life, because like slaves we servilely fear punishment, nor to do good because we hope for rewards, as if cashing in on the virtuous life by some businesslike and contractual arrangement. On the contrary, disregarding all those things for which we hope and which have been reserved by promise, we regard falling from God's friendship as the only thing dreadful, and we consider becoming God's friend as the only thing worthy of honor and desire. This, as I have said, is the perfection of life."⁶²

⁵⁶ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 163, p. 95.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 162, pp. 94, 95.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 74-76, pp. 71, 72.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 86, p. 74.

⁶⁰ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, "Letter V, A Testimonial," *Nicene*, 2^d Ser., V:530.

⁶¹ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 239, p. 116.

⁶² *Ibid.*, *The Life of Moses*, 320, p. 137.

As a theologian, he defended Orthodoxy with brilliant refutations against the heretics. Thus, we see that the prophecy of Saint Basil the Great was surely fulfilled in him, that Saint Gregory would be the one to bring honor to Nyssa, and not the city to the man.

After the catastrophe which took place in Asia Minor during the 1920s, the precious relics of his sacred skull were removed. Together with the relics of the Great-martyr Theodore and the holy New-hieromartyr George of Neapolis, Saint Gregory's relics were translated to the Church of Saint Efstathios in Perissos, Attike, located in the outskirts of Athens.

From *The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church: January*, pp 259-281, Holy postles Cnvent, Buena Vista, CO