

“Some Synchronic Moment”: Gregory of Nyssa, *Théologie Mystique*, and French *Ressourcement*

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“In the cold light I only live for you
To love and adore you.
[It’s all that I have.]
Why do I keep falling?”

In memory of Michael Ossorgine, Dennis Vincent Higgins, and Franny Glass

Introduction

THE PRESENT IMPORTANCE of the thought of Gregory of Nyssa and the wisdom of a contemporary scholarly “turn” to his theology is so much taken for granted now that it can seem as though any thoughtful early-twentieth-century theologian looking to explore a patristic-sourced “mystical theology” obviously would have sought out Gregory. However, a pre–World War II patristics student seeking an existential theology not captive to rationalism more likely would have settled upon Gregory of Nazianzus—Gregory “the Theologian”—who wrote mystical poetry, or John Chrysostom, whose interests spanned all genres of writing.¹ The turn to Gregory of Nyssa in modern theological sensitivities is not a

¹ Note the large number of volumes devoted to Chrysostom in the original late-nineteenth-century Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers series (series 1)—attention not in keeping with post-war theological recourse to patristic theology.

development to be regarded as inevitable, nor should the motives for the turn be presumed to be obvious or inevitable. In its simplest form, my hypothesis for explaining this turn to Gregory of Nyssa is that through his writings on the human experience of God (i.e., on mystical ascent) Gregory personified the principal question of the day: “How do faith and philosophy co-exist?” His theology was easily contextualized within the new appreciation of Neoplatonism (as was also the case with, e.g., Peter Brown’s biography of Augustine); he was regarded as “orthodox” but problematically so; and he was a stepping-stone to Origen. It is difficult not to see Gregory’s marginal status as reflecting the experience of his more thoughtful mid-twentieth-century readers. Moreover, Gregory’s theology was written with a strong anthropological bent, and taken as a whole (as it was in Migne) it seemed potentially to offer an anthropology as comprehensive as Augustine’s; this allowed for Gregory’s theology to be easily merged with a modern theological logic that started from “*human nature*” rather than divine.² I believe the plastic capability of Gregory’s theological anthropology recommended his work to theologians newly bedazzled by subjectivity and new notions of “consciousness” (other than simply *Bewusstsein*). Gregory wrote several treatises on theological anthropology (unlike, e.g., the mystical poet, Gregory of Nazianzus), and anthropology is a genuine and consistent concern for Gregory. Last (but not least!) among hypothetical motives for a modern theological “turn” to Gregory may be that his works laid out an epistemology—or, at the least, he was explicitly concerned with epistemological questions of the day. This concern places Gregory among a small group of early Church Fathers—such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine—whose theology was framed with an awareness that revelation and epistemology were inevitably intertwined. Modern questions such as “is certain knowledge mediated, and if so, how?” or “what in humans properly knows God?” can be posed to Gregory direct-

² One way to make this point is to take note of the different significances the theology of Gregory of Nyssa has in Lossky’s 1944 *Essai sur la théologie mystique de l’Eglise d’Orient*, which appears in English as *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, trans. Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997 [original English translation 1957]). In the three chapters “Uncreated Energies,” “Created Being,” and “Image and Likeness,” Gregory has a significant role only in the last. “Uncreated Energies” is dominated by Gregory Palamas; “Created Being” is dominated by Maximus the confessor; and only in “Image and Likeness” does Gregory step to the fore and begin to “carry the weight” of Lossky’s argument. In that chapter, when speaking of image and likeness, participation, and the theology of Gregory of Nyssa, Lossky makes statements that Hans Urs von Balthasar would find untenable (and vice versa).

ly.³ Given the theological focus on the encounter with God as experience or encounter, Gregory can share our question of "in what state of mind does a person approach knowing God?"⁴ The line between an account of "mystical experience" and of "human openness to God (or not)" is blurred and each theologian works through a theological anthropology that is propaedeutic to a *théologie mystique*.

Among Catholic and Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century, Gregory of Nyssa was rehabilitated before Origen. The utility of Origen's theology was uncertain;⁵ even more uncertain was his status as a bona fide representative of early Christian theology. Aside from the traditional concerns regarding Gregory's problematical "Origenism" there was the modern linking of Gregory to Origen by Adolf von Harnack, who found Origen's brand of "Hellenization" in the theologies of the Cappadocians—especially Gregory of Nyssa.⁶ The defense and rehabilitation of Gregory accepted Harnack's fundamental criticism of Origen's theology as Hellenism—but revealed Gregory's theology to be rooted in a hermeneutic radically different from Origen's: Gregory's theology was fundamentally different from Origen's in its relationship to pagan philosophy; this difference is manifested clearly and significantly in each theologian's understanding of God's accessibility to human reason. Each author utilized familiar categories from pagan philosophy to describe how and to

³ I proposed, long ago (1992), that Gregory's epistemology owed to a Hippocratic model of "powers," and my thesis has been taken up recently as a conclusion among many analytic readers of Gregory: see John Milbank, "Force of Identity," in *Christian Origins*, ed. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones (London: Routledge, 1998), 94–116. Balthasar finds in Gregory a series of intrinsic dialectical antinomies which his theology resolves. Lossky recognizes in Gregory another early exponent of an "essence–energy" ontology and epistemology.

⁴ Several episodes in Moses's life figure heavily in answering this question—von Balthasar the "backside of God," for Daniélou and Lossky, the cloud of "darkness," and for all, Gregory's *Life of Moses*.

⁵ Note the link between Origen's rehabilitation in *ressourcement* theology and the perception of a "use" or need for what he can bring to theology (e.g., Henri de Lubac).

⁶ In his long treatment of Gregory of Nyssa, Leopold Malevez recapitulates the general thesis by Harnack of patristic Christianity succumbing to "Hellenization"—or, more accurately, to "school Platonism." Malevez also describes the charges against Gregory of Nyssa specifically. He rejects the "Platonization" thesis completely and defends Gregory against his detractors; see "L'Eglise dans le Christ: Etudes de théologie historique et théorique," *Recherches de science religieuse* 15 (1935): 257–91, 418–44. As will be clear, Balthasar acknowledges his debt to Malevez in the two Francophone versions of his 1942 *Presence et pensée* and presumes the terms of Malevez's argument.

what degree God is knowable, that is to say, how we understand God to be transcendent. Origen's core logic is Hellenistic, as is his use of Platonic philosophy. Gregory's theology owed not to a logic of reason or rationalism but to the experience of God; his theology was a *théologie mystique*, a phrase which meant, minimally, an existential theology of encounter with God by the Christian person. (The emphasis on "personal" leads to the strong development of topics in theological anthropology, e.g., humans as full images of God.) With Origen the transcendental language taken from Plato (especially) transformed Christian religion into a propositional science; with Gregory Plato's transcendental language was transformed by the experience of a living God. The trope that a given patristic theologian had "taken up and transformed" features of pagan philosophy became standard in mid-twentieth-century neopatristic and *ressourcement* hermeneutical strategies. Gregory had accomplished this "transformation"; Origen had not—his Christianity had, indeed, suffered a transmutation of gold into lead. Writing within two years of each other, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Jean Daniélou, and Vladimir Lossky each offer the same argument for Gregory, against Origen. The similar form and content of their independent but virtually simultaneous arguments is the subject of this article.⁷

Modern patristic scholarship on Gregory of Nyssa derives in large part from work done in France during the 1940s. Daniélou is most associated with the "rediscovery" of Gregory, while Balthasar may be said to have "popularized" Gregory as a bona fide theologian. Both of these authors

⁷ Daniélou's *Platonisme et théologie mystique: doctrine spirituelle de Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Aubier, 1944) has never been translated despite the importance of this work for *ressourcement* theology, as well as for Gregory scholarship; all translation from the work in the present article is my own. Lossky's *Théologie mystique* was the first to be translated into English, followed by—decades later—Balthasar's *Presence et pensée*, as *Presence and Thought*, trans. Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995) (I will mostly cite from the Sebanc translation, but I will sometimes cite or quote from the 1942 French edition and provide my own stated translation). The last two texts were translated in very different theological contexts, with different English-speaking audiences in mind; while they are quoted in translation, my comparisons between them are of the content of the original French texts. In my opinion—impossible to prove one way or the other—the late translation of *Presence et pensée* and the non-translation of *Platonisme et théologie mystique* are tokens of the marginal status they occupy in Anglophone *ressourcement* studies. (Opinions on the significance of Balthasar's Gregory book for his *oeuvre* may vary among scholars, but there is no disputing that *Platonisme et théologie mystique* was Daniélou's magnum opus.) On the peculiarities of the English translation of Lossky's *Théologie mystique*, see my "De Régnon Reconsidered," *Augustinian Studies* 26, no. 2 (1995): 51–79.

contributed descriptions of Gregory's thought which have set the parameters for the studies of Gregory which followed. Daniélou's work on Gregory, *Platonisme et théologie mystique: doctrine spirituelle de Grégoire de Nysse*, is written shortly after Balthasar's and with it in mind, as Daniélou makes clear.⁸ From a technical perspective, Balthasar's contribution to the study of Gregory of Nyssa was his treatment of *diastema*, the *l'espacement*, or interval, in Gregory's thought.⁹ Daniélou contributed the redefinition of Gregory as *mystic*.¹⁰ As I will show, both authors wrote with sensitivity to the charge that Gregory was a Hellenizer, and that he was more of a Platonist than he was a Christian. Both authors are concerned to defend Gregory from these charges, and to make his orthodoxy clear.

In this last endeavor they are joined by another scholar in France, Lossky.¹¹ Lossky is not usually associated with Daniélou and Balthasar as being

⁸ Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 6.

⁹ See Brooks Otis, "Cappadocian Thought as a Coherent System," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 12 (1958): 109n35: "It was, so far as I know, Balthasar who first realized the great significance of the Cappadocian use of the term *diastasis* or *diastema*." In his translation of *Presence et pensée*, Sebanc brings attention to the difficulty of translating von Balthasar's use of *diastema*; see *Presence and Thought*, 28n16. For a recent treatment of the concept see Scott Douglass, *Theology of the Gap: Cappadocian Language Theory and the Trinitarian Controversy* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005). None of the three Second World War theologians under consideration here expand Gregory's "language theory" into the content of "the Trinitarian Controversy" as Douglass does—an omission, I contend, that raises serious questions.

¹⁰ One can make this claim for Daniélou for a number of reasons, but the one I will offer here is that Daniélou wrote about Gregory with an active and substantial awareness of the scholarly literature on *mysterion* and the vocabulary of mystical theology; he made explicit the "conversations" he was building upon. He cited, for example, Joseph Maréchal's judgment that "participation" was the key concept in Gregory's theology; he actively engaged in the running debate over Ps. Dionysius; and Daniélou used his reading of Lossky's judgments on Dionysius to develop nuances of his own. For Lossky on Dionysius, see his "La Théologie Négative dans la Doctrine de Denys L'Arcopagite," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 28 (1939): 204–21. The date of the article makes it relevant, as does Daniélou's frequent engagement with the work in his book. Many of the themes and several of the personages—e.g., Gregory, Origen—that appear in Lossky's *Théologie mystique* make their debut in "La Théologie Négative" and the article thus provides the means for Daniélou to conduct a "conversation" with material in Lossky's contemporary book. See, for example, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 209–10.

¹¹ Daniélou and Lossky knew each other during the war years and were involved in substantial theological exchange during that time. The questions posed by Gregory and Eunomius had already been broached in scholarly "conversation" through an exchange on "how do we understand the Mystical Theology of Ps. Dionysius?" In *Platonisme et théologie mystique* Daniélou engages Lossky on the disputed question

a framer of the modern understanding of Gregory; his constant effort to relate other authors to his paradigmatic theologian, Gregory Palamas, results in less emphasis in Gregory himself as an important theologian. But Lossky shared with his French contemporaries the project of refuting the charge against Gregory of Hellenizer and of reestablishing Gregory as a paradigm of Greek patristic orthodoxy. As I shall show, he also shares with them a specific and significant evaluation of Eunomius; his greater concern, like theirs, is the problem of a “rational” or “scientific” theology which reduces theology and the experience of God to logical truth.¹²

The common concern with Eunomius was one of the first characteristics that drew me to see a common ground among the three scholars.¹³ When a contemporary scholar of Gregory of Nyssa reads these works by Balthasar, Daniélou, and Lossky, what is most startling is the complete evacuation of Trinitarian theology from Eunomius’s theology. Their ques-

of whether Ps. Dionysius’s mystical ontology can be called “Neoplatonic” without robbing it of its Christian content. In his 1939 article—cited above—Lossky says “no!” and that remains his answer, more elaborated, in *Théologie mystique*. Daniélou’s answer is “yes”: his argument draws heavily upon the judgments of Maréchal (in *Etudes sur la psychologie des mystiques*); to whatever else that is at stake for Lossky in his claim on “mystical theology” there should be added the perceived need to shake out Maréchal’s “erroneous” (but positive) appropriation of the Areopagite. In the time frame considered in this article Balthasar does not treat the case of Ps. Dionysius; much later in his multi-volume *Glory of the Lord*, he defends the “true Christianity” of the Aeropogite against charges made against him due to his “obvious dependence” on Neoplatonic forms of thought. Balthasar’s argument is noteworthy: “[Ps. Dionysius] turned the tables against” his critics by claiming that God’s wisdom was the source of whatever wisdom the philosophers possessed (*The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 2, trans. Andrew Louth et al. [London: T & T Clark, 1984; French original 1962], 208). This kind of argument is used to support Gregory and will later be applied to support Origen’s orthodoxy. Details on the relationship between Daniélou and Lossky (indeed, on most of Daniélou’s life at this time) can be found in Erick Moser, “‘Combat for Culture’: The Formation of Jean Daniélou’s Vision for the Church in Secular France, 1925–1950” (PhD diss., St. Louis University, 2015).

¹² In 1940s scholarship the argument for understanding Eunomius’s theology to be one in which philosophy had replaced revelation can be found in the writings of: C. Isaye, “Vom Platonismus zur theorie de Mystik zur Erkenntnisleher Gregors von Nyssa,” *Scholastik* 11 (1936): 163–95; and E. Vandenbussche, “La part de la dialectique dans la théologie d’Eunome le technologue,” *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 40 (1944–1945): 47–72. Vandenbussche’s article is contemporary to Daniélou’s and Lossky’s monographs.

¹³ Malevez’s extensive defense and “rehabilitation” of Gregory against the charges of “Platonizing” and “Hellenizing” in “L’Eglise dans le Christ . . .” makes no use of Eunomius.

tion is always "how did Eunomius speak about God?" rather than "what did Eunomius say about the Trinity?" The controversy over Eunomius's "rationalist" theology was never argued simply for the sake of "getting theological method right." Eunomius argued, in his own way, over what the New Testament reveals about God, the Trinity.¹⁴ If Eunomius's understanding of knowing God seems fundamentally unrelated to his doctrine of the Trinity that is not because Eunomius articulated it in such a way, but because Balthasar, Daniélou and Lossky engage him—insofar as they engage the historical Eunomius at all—principally through the medium of book 2 of Gregory of Nyssa's *Against Eunomius*, the one book in the three-volume work of that name by Gregory which is dedicated to the question of speech about God. From the perspective of contemporary scholarship the judgments of Eunomius's theology expressed in these three French writings do not map out the content of Eunomius's writings, but represents a specific interpretation—which they share with one another.¹⁵ It is as though for whatever problem they are facing neither "God as One" nor "God as Trinity" provides the solution to their commonly perceived problem. It is a sign of their times that the most important speech about God is to speak of simply "Being" or "Beyond Being" (two synonyms).¹⁶

¹⁴ For Eunomius, the name "Unbegotten" was taken as the ultimate Name—following in the lineage of "Almighty," "Lord," and "He Who Is"; this Name was revealed (Eunomius thought) by Christ himself when he called God "Father." This is not the place to give an account of Eunomius's anti-Nicene theology—its motivation and content against the Trinitarian theology promulgated in the name of the Creed of Nicaea, 325. Eunomius's theology was dense, prolific, and hearty: it survived well into the sixth century despite constant imperial suppression. Although the only text by Eunomius that survives (the *Apologia*) includes philosophical appeals, the work, when translated into English in the seventeenth century, was regarded by some Anglicans (e.g., William Whiston, George Rust, as Isaac Newton) as a remnant of the pre-Constantinian, "primitive" church.

¹⁵ See my "Background and Use of Eunomius' Causal Hierarchy," in *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts*, ed. Michel Barnes and Daniel Williams (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 217–36, my "Eunomius of Cyzicus and Gregory of Nyssa: Two Traditions of Transcendent Causality," *Vigiliae Christianae* 52 (1998): 59–87, and my 2001 *The Power of God: Dunamis in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology* (repr. 2016).

¹⁶ Elsewhere I have criticized the popular idea that Western Trinitarian theology "begins" with the unity while Eastern Trinitarian theology "begins" with the relations. I want to now suggest that the "unity Trinitarian theology" critiqued for decades is in fact the product of the specifically modern *problematique* that "'Being' equals Being" is necessarily singular: one, a unity. The modern "unity of being" resembles the old Scholastic "unity of being" for all the reasons Baring provides in *Converts to the Real*—"resembles" not "equals": a false continuity has

When we read Balthasar's *Presence et pensée*, Daniélou's *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, and Lossky's *Théologie mystique de l'Eglise d'Orient*, we should recognize that these are three books written in French and published in France within two years of each other.¹⁷ When the books are considered together, synchronically, as theological articulations contemporary in place, common shapes and contents of the books emerge: it is these common shapes and contents that I explore in this article.¹⁸ The most important common features in their arguments for Gregory's orthodoxy are easy to list:¹⁹ first, almost simultaneously these three authors published books with

been imposed between medieval and early twentieth century arguments on God's single "Being." See my "De Régnon Reconsidered," for the role of the French Augustinians Henri Paissac and André Malet.

¹⁷ We must bring to the fore the spiritual concerns common in pre-World War II modern France and be especially mindful of the irenic mixture of premodern and modern thought that characterized intellectual engagement in the early twentieth century, for example, the Aristotelian vocabulary of Franz Brentano, the rabbinic hermeneutic of Sigmund Freud, the neo-Thomism of Pierre Rousselot, and the Scholasticism of Martin Heidegger.

¹⁸ It is important that the reader understand the intentional limits of my work here. I am concerned with one book by each author, these all published in France within a two-year "window." I do not endeavor to locate each book's content within a trajectory of development by the author. My "canon" is limited. (This is a methodology which should be familiar to most contemporary theologians.) I allow myself one deviation from my strict method: when other works by each author are written within two years of the texts at hand, then these works are consulted. Thus I include Balthasar's article from published the year before *Presence et pensée* in my methodological "canon": "Patristik, Scholastik und wir," *Théologie der Zeit* 3 (1939): 65–104, as translated by Edward T. Oakes, "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves," *Communio* 24 (1997), 347–96 (citations will be from the English). (The word *wir* in the original title will figure occasionally as a hermeneutical point of leverage in my reading.)

¹⁹ Phenomenologically each of these books is in its own way a product of *dislocation*. *Presence et pensée* reworks material from Balthasar's earlier study in German, and it is the only major work by him written in French; it was published in occupied France while he was safe in Switzerland where he lived through to the end of the war; the book announces his conclusion that the Greek theology of Gregory of Nyssa has little to offer a modern theologian other than as a kind of a role model of *affect*. (Most of Balthasar's life during the decade of the 1930s qualifies as geographical *dislocation* in one way or another. He was a Swiss Gulliver.) *Platonisme et théologie mystique* was written in defeated and occupied France ("Greater Germany") after Daniélou had served in the French Armée de L'air and was held briefly as a prisoner of war. *Théologie mystique* was written in Lossky's adopted homeland, while in permanent exile from his native Russia, and living in a country conquered by the same army now invading Russia. The fact that the majority of *ressourcement* works were published after 1950 obscures the fact of

the common purpose of rediscovering and promoting a *théologie mystique* of premodern Christianity;²⁰ second, each book recovers this *théologie mystique* by exploring the theology of Gregory of Nyssa; third, each book is written as a *défense* of Gregory's theology against the charge that it is Platonism masquerading as Christianity;²¹ fourth, each work argues for Gregory by contrasting his theology against that of Eunomius of Cyzicus; fifth, in each book the characterization and criticism of Eunomius's theology follows the same form, namely that the conflict between Gregory and Eunomius was a conflict between two types of Christianity, mystical versus rationalist; sixth, each author treats Origen as the archetype of Western rationalist theology, in order to (seventh) argue their case by "reducing" Eunomius's theology to the source of "scientific" theology, Origen.²² Finally,

ressourcement's origin in a defeated culture, within which the authors lived at the edge of a potentially new—and very hostile—kind of history, such as de Lubac's often neglected book *Drame de l'humanisme athée* (published in 1944, the same year as Daniélou's and Lossky's books). See also Kevin L. Hughes, "Ressourcement and Resistance," in *Reading Scripture as a Political Act*, ed. Matthew Tapie and Daniel Wade McClain (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015), 219–34.

²⁰ If one regards these authors as a closed circle of discourse in which these scholars interacted with each other and with the patristic texts at hand (i.e., Gregory of Nyssa, Ps. Dionysius, Origen), then the origin of the term *théologie mystique* seems straightforward: the term arises directly from the primary sources. On the other hand, if one regards these three authors within a wider diachronic arc of Francophone Christians engaged in a broad conversation of renewal, the origins and significance of the term become a complex, intertextual question. For example, in his 1910 *Notre Junesse*, Charles Peguy used *mystique* in the sense of "radical" or fundamental. To appreciate the wide circumference of Catholic intellectuals, see Paul Cohen's 1988 *Piety and Politics: Catholic Revival and the Generation of 1905–1914 in France*, Stephen Schloesser's 2005 *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris 1919–1933*, and the already indispensable Baring, *Converts to the Real*.

²¹ Harold Cherniss argued in *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa* (1930) that Plato was the source of Gregory's fundamental terms and concepts, and that his Christianity covered a deeper Platonism. Cherniss's book was known to Balthasar, Daniélou, and Lossky.

²² There is no inclination in *Presence et pensée* to "rehabilitate" Origen: indeed, the guiding topos in the book is that Gregory succeeds where Origen (and Eunomius) failed, and the same judgment is held by Daniélou and Lossky. From the perspective of the Catholic *ressourcement* theology developing in France, these works by Balthasar and Daniélou will be the last in which what I call the "Harnackian" judgment of Origen is accepted. The project of the "rehabilitation" and appropriation of Origen will mark the movement: *voilà* de Lubac's 1950 *Histoire et esprit: l'intelligence de l'écriture d'après Origène* and Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la "Connaissance Mystique"* (Bruges: Desclee De Brouwer, 1959). De Lubac writes a long Preface

for each of these modern theologians the conflict between Gregory's theology and Origen's is tested as a theological resource for the contemporary struggle against modern forms of rationalist theology.²³

For me to organize a synchronic reading of the three works, *Présence et pensée*, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, and *Théologie mystique de l'Eglise d'Orient*, according to their treatment of Eunomius of Cyzicus might seem to be to organize my study around a minor, incidental figure or topic. What is remarkable—what needs to be remarked by scholars—is that in all of these works so “minor” a personage as Eunomius carries the entire weight of each author's claim that Gregory refutes Origen and his theo-logic (whatever one takes Origen's theology to have been). If there is no Eunomius's theology to stand for or equal Origen's theology, then any argument that Gregory rejected the latter's theology would be tedious and anything but “dramatic”—if indeed it could be made successfully! For any student of late-fourth-century Greek theology Eunomius is an enormously important figure—but not for the reasons that motivate Balthasar's, Daniélou's, and Lossky's interest in him. The two sets of motives barely intersect each other, but the arguments are close to identical.

The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa

For the purposes of my argument here, the most important critic of Gregory was Harnack—who reduced Gregory's theology to that of Harnack's

for Crouzel's book. The works of each of these two scholars should be read with recourse to the other—de Lubac's “Origen” set beside Crouzel's “Origen.”)

- ²³ Who or what Balthasar, Daniélou, and Lossky wrote against in each of their writings is more clear in post-Vatican II scholarship than it is in their own texts. The possible “candidates” for theologies of oppressive and desiccating rationalism in pre-WWII France are numerous: Scholasticism, certainly, but Kantianism, Rénanism, empiricism, and futurism are all likely candidates for causes of the spiritual suffocation so many Francophone intellectuals experienced since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The credibility of any contemporary hypothesis claiming one of these in particular to be the villain turns upon three prior scholarly judgments: a knowledge of the many “antinomies of crisis” being articulated in French literature prior to World War II; the degree to which it is useful to consider these articulations as truly distinct from one another; and a firm judgment on the relative permeability (or a firm boundary) of French theology to the contemporary French culture. For myself, I cannot imagine French Catholic theology as a bubble floating above the tumult of the age. (I think that my interpretation is well illustrated by the fates of Rousselot and Peguy.) For excellent insight into the crisis of rationalism in pre-World War I French culture, and the varieties of responses, see Robert C. Grogin, *The Bergsonian Controversy in France 1900–1914* (Calgary: University of Calgary, 1988), and Schloesser's *Jazz Age Catholicism*.

arch villain, Origen.²⁴ Harnack does no worse to Gregory than he does to the other Cappadocians, especially Basil, but it is bad enough. Harnack believed that the true Nicene orthodoxy of Athanasius was transmuted by the Cappadocians into a "new orthodoxy," as typified by Constantinople I, and the (spurious) creed of that council. True Nicene orthodoxy was centered on *homoousios*, and the equality of Father and Son—what Harnack called "substantial unity." However, a neo-orthodoxy, Harnack argued, was championed by Basil of Ancyra and the Cappadocians, and gave implicit conceptual priority to *homoiousios*, although it explicitly acknowledged *homoousios* (but omitted it from the creed of the Council, 381), and gave logical and natural priority to the Father (over the Son), even as it insisted that the "three" were "one."²⁵ Harnack says:

The entire Origenistic speculation regarding the Trinity, with which Athanasius would have nothing to do, that is, of which he knew nothing, was rehabilitated. Science concluded an alliance with the Nicene Creed; that was a condition of the triumph of orthodoxy. If at the beginning of the controversy the scientific thinkers—including those among the heathen—had sympathized with Arianism, men were now to be found as the defenders of the Nicene Creed to whom even a Libanius yielded the palm. These men took their stand on the general theory of the universe which was accepted by the science of the time; they were Platonists, and they once more naively appealed to Plato in support even of their doctrine of the Trinity.²⁶

Harnack bases his characterization of Cappadocian theology on the common methodology he finds between Origen and the Cappadocians. According to Harnack, Origen was a man of *science* rather than *faith*, *rationalism* versus *experience*—the same oppositions at stake in Balthasar,

²⁴ Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 7 vols., repr. (New York: Dover, 1960).

²⁵ Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 4:98–100. See my "The Fourth Century as Trinitarian Canon," in *Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, ed. L. Ayres and G. Jones, Studies in Christian Origins 1 (New York: Routledge, 1997), 47–67. Harnack's argument that the Cappadocian understanding of Nicaea and *homoousios* is intrinsically subordinationist is given a new kind of articulation by Balthasar. As we shall see, Balthasar's disagreement with Harnack is about the significance of philosophical language in patristic doctrine, not over its presence, and not even over its effect on Christian doctrine. For example, Balthasar judged Cappadocian theology to include a subordinationist "step-wise" logic in its "Nicene" Trinitarian theology. See Balthasar, "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves," 375 ff.

²⁶ Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 4:87–88.

Daniélou, and Lossky. This same “scientific [i.e., rationalist] Christianity” is found in the neo-orthodoxy of the Cappadocians.

I rehearse Harnack’s opinion in detail because he stands as the most forceful example of the characterization(s) of Gregory that Balthasar, Daniélou and Lossky were attempting to overcome. The quotation immediately above makes clear that Harnack saw Gregory and the Cappadocians as Hellenizing dogmatists. It is precisely this judgment that French scholarship in the forties is attempting to overturn for their own theological reasons, as I will show through a brief and select treatment of details in each book. However, we must be clear that Harnack’s negative judgment of Origen as arch Hellenizer was taken over by the three authors during the time treated in this essay. The kind of problem that Harnack identified was not rejected by these three authors; rather, they each found Harnack’s exclusion of philosophy—“Platonism”—to be a failed and inadequate appreciation of the Incarnation—of the complete “taking up” of the human.²⁷ In their three books, Balthasar, Daniélou and Lossky displayed very similar understandings of true Christianity, of the real danger of scientific or rationalist Christianity, and of the identities of rationalist Christianity in the past and in the present.²⁸ It had been clear for some time that modernism’s embrace of rationalism or “science” left faith in the arms of a cold and loveless romance.²⁹ Harnack’s criticisms of Origen

²⁷ Balthasar criticizes Harnack and other Protestant historians of dogma for concluding that the influence of philosophy in a doctrine calls into question its Christian authenticity, (see “The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves,” 368–69.).

²⁸ For example, Balthasar says of Origen: “We can no longer deny that in his case and despite his unbending will to be and to remain in authentic Christian, not only were certain words but also basic forms of the Hellenism allowed to penetrate into the inner realm of Christianity, and to a great extent they were established themselves their henceforth because of the unique influence of this giant of the spirit (a fact which has not yet been sufficiently research and evaluated). It is not so much a question of certain individual doctrines that worked their way inside . . . as it was much more a question of the inner space of the spirit, a whole tissue of assumptions from time memorial that are not easy to get ahold of, an atmosphere the formal methodology” (“The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves,” 372). In *Presence and Thought*, see 19, 20, 68, 71, and 85.

²⁹ On one side of “rationalism” were the neo-Kantians and the empiricists, on the other side were the manualists: two sterile options. Schloesser’s, *Jazz Age Catholicism* is especially relevant here, as are the first two chapters of Derek Hastings’s 2011 *Catholicism and the Roots of Nazism: Religious Identity and National Socialism*. A tragically neglected work on the French response to the “cold romance” is the thoughtful and detailed research in Grogin’s *Bergsonian Controversy*. For primary sources, see, e.g., any of the writings by Henri Poincaré, Peguy’s 1910 *Notre Jeunesse* (published in English as *Temporal and Eternal*), or any issue of the

become tropes common to my three authors: "Origenistic speculation," the triumph of rationalism over faith, and the specter of Platonism (i.e., of pagan philosophy) appear as notional clusters in these works by Balthasar, Daniélou, and Lossky.³⁰

Hans Urs von Balthasar

If one reads Balthasar's 1942 book on Gregory, *Présence et pensée: essai sur la philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse*, within its original context, and without the benefit of knowing, in retrospect, the arc of Balthasar's theology within which it stands as a point, the genre of the work is not obvious.³¹ However, for many of Balthasar's contemporary readers "hind-

journal *Esprit* from this time.

³⁰ I regard the use of these tropes as a *choice* on the part of the three theologians: they all make the same scholarly and theological judgment that Origen's "theology" was indeed "rationalist." There are other—positive—judgments of Origen alive in European theology, but either out of ignorance or by informed decision, none of these writers took up the alternate understanding of Origen. I am thinking of Walther Voelker's 1931 *Das Vollkommenheit des Origenes* and Aloisius Lieske's 1938 *Die Theologie der Logos mystic bei Origenes* (1938)—both works prior to those of von Balthasar, Daniélou, and Lossky. In Krivocheine's judgment in 1958 these two scholars mark the first modern recognition of Origen's theology as "mystical" ("The Holy Trinity in Greek Patristic and Mystical Theology I," *Sobornost*, ser. 3, no. 21 [Summer 1957]: 462–68, and "The Holy Trinity in Greek Patristic and Mystical Theology II," *Sobornost*, ser. 3, no. 22 [Winter 1957–1958]: 529–36). While technically Krivocheine's judgment may be correct, there was nothing exclusively "modern" or recent about the "recovery" of Origen. His doctrines were defended by Giovanni Pico in 1572 and by Fr. Etienne Binet, S. J., in 1629. In 1668 P.D. Huet (Huetius), O.S.B., published his two volume *Origeniana*. Late-seventeenth-century English and German Pietism recognized the positive "mystical" character of Origen's theology. In scholarship, see especially Edgar Wind, "The Revival of Origen," in *Studies in Art and Literature for Belle Da Costa Greene*, ed. Dorothy Miner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), 412–24, and D. P. Walker, "Origene en France au Debut du XVI Siecle," in *Courants religieuses et humanisme a la fin du XV et au debut du XVI Siecle* (Strasbourg, FR: Bibliothèque des Centres d'Études supérieures spécialisées, 1959), 101–19. Wind covers the "revival of Origen" from 1486 until Erasmus in 1536. Lossky did not speak for all Orthodox theologians: Krivocheine characterizes Origen's mystical theology as possessing the "tender piety and fervent love for the humiliated 'historical' Jesus and for the Cross of the Lord constitute one of the most striking and attractive features in the spirituality of Origen" ("Holy Trinity I," 464).

³¹ The following works (presented here chronologically) figure in my synchronic reading of Balthasar: Malevez, "L'Eglise dans le Christ"; Balthasar, "Patristik, Scholastik und wir"; Balthasar, "Présence et pensée: La philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse," *Bulletin d'Ancien Testament* 29 (1939): 513–49; and the principal text, *Présence et pensée*. It is worth noting in particular that the articles

sight is all.”³² Judged as a 1940s Francophone reading of Gregory, *Presence et pensée* is written with great sensitivity toward the question of Gregory’s standing vis-à-vis Greek philosophy.³³ Balthasar’s introduction is a careful discussion of (then) contemporary claims of Gregory’s philosophical standing. Balthasar’s own judgment is clear: Gregory was no Platonizing or stoicizing Christian; still less was Gregory prevented from such activity

“Patristik, Scholastik und wir,” and “Presence et pensée” both were published in 1939. The French article of the same title as the 1942 book became part of the book (where it likely began conceptually), appearing as “Troisième Partie—Philosophie de l’Amour” and then “Nature humaine et Incarnation,” beginning on 101 in the 1942 French edition; Sebanc works from the 1998 French edition. Hereafter, “Presence et pensée” will refer to the 1939 article, while *Presence and Thought* will still refer to the Sebanc translation of the book and, as stated in note 8, and *Presence et pensée* will be used for any citation or translation directly from the French volume on my part. Malevez’s “L’Eglise dans le Christ” figures because Balthasar cites from him heavily in “Presence et pensée.” “Patristik, Scholastik und wir,” although written in German, is significant because it fits within the synchronous *sitz* treating the same subjects as the principal text, *Presence et pensée*.

³² I want to be clear that here I am not “as a patrologist” judging Balthasar’s historical reading of Gregory of Nyssa; that has already been done: see Brian E. Daley, “Balthasar’s reading of the Church Fathers,” *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 187–206. The topic in *Presence et pensée* that I bring to light here is one that Balthasar has in common with two other contemporary scholars who are acknowledged as “patrologists”—Daniélou and Lossky. Thus, I am revealing an instance in which Balthasar reads Gregory in the same way as two Francophone contemporaries read Gregory within the same hypothetical *sitz*: I read *Presence et pensée* for the synchronicity it displays with two contemporary French monographs on the same subject. It is the recurrence of a trope that makes *Presence et pensée* interesting to me.

³³ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 16. As I remarked earlier, Balthasar draws attention to the strong influence Malevez’s 1935 article had upon his writings on Gregory; however, he (strangely) never gives the title of the article—i.e., “L’Eglise dans le Christ: Etudes de théologie historique et théorique.” Reading Malevez’s article we see the following: Balthasar is conceptually dependent upon Malevez for the paradigmatic significance attached to Gregory, but not materially—Balthasar uses a different constellation of passages from Gregory’s writings to elaborate his theology; Malevez discusses the Harnackian thesis that patristic theology had been Platonized, and he rejects Harnack’s conclusions; Malevez recapitulates the received criticism of Gregory as a strong example of Platonized Christianity, and defends Gregory against those charges; a line of influence running from Karl Adams to Balthasar is made possible through Malevez’s mediation (if such a mediation were needed); and, finally, Malevez provides an interpretation of Gregory’s Christology that Balthasar finds very appealing. (explicit acknowledgement of Malevez’s authority and influence is made in the 1939 French article and preserved in its incorporation into the 1942 French volume).

by having a second-class mind. On the contrary, Gregory's theology was brilliant and suffused with a mystical spirit:

In the case of Gregory the mystical bent that animates all his writings produces an authentic metaphysics as well, a metaphysics marked by an irreproachable logic and an adequate expression of his interior drama.³⁴

For Balthasar, Gregory's philosophical language, or (better) his philosophical imagery, flowed from his mysticism; Gregory's brilliance and significance lies in his articulating a systematic ground for religious experience.³⁵ The "ground" for that experience which Balthasar identified in Gregory was his paradigm-changing emphasis on the difference between uncreated and created nature: *adiastemic* life and *diastemic* life. Gregory's greatest theological virtue is that he recognized and articulated this "distance" between God and creation, Being and not-Being: this is Gregory's doctrine of a "gap" or "interval" (*diastema*) between uncreated and created. The fact of the gap reveals the ineffable God who dwells "beyond all seeing and grasping, the knowledge of God's eternal other-ness and thus of his overpowering and ever-greater darkness even in the midst of his light."³⁶ *Presence et pensée* can be read as Balthasar's discovery in Gregory's thought of a mystical theology of positive dislocation. Each step "toward" God dissolves into a sign of God's distance: we are not "where" we think we are, vis-à-vis God. "Presence" is postponed indefinitely, infinitely.³⁷ "There is a

³⁴ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 16.

³⁵ This "systematic ground" of Gregory's has its limitations, but its principal achievement lies in the fact that it holds back—and pushes against—Origen's earlier corrupting "ground." The theological illness that Origen introduced into Christian faith is treated by the physician, Gregory—until that illness can later be cured, the body of faith purified by the medicine of medieval theology. See Balthasar, "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves," 389 ff.

³⁶ The foundational statement at the beginning of the 1942 French *Presence et pensée* of God's "otherness"—his "pure being" to our "un-being"—is already articulated, in another conceptual idiom, in the 1939 German article: there Balthasar speaks of "an authentic Christian shyness" which "works against the immediate tendency to divinize man and creation" ("The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves," 377).

³⁷ It is as though for Balthasar the content of human life under the sign of *diastema* is roughly equivalent to the life otherwise called *Geworfenheit*. See, in particular, "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves," 355: "To the extent the creature comes nearer to God and becomes more 'similar' to him, the dissimilarity must always appear as the more basic, as the 'first truth.' . . . All true approaches to God, however they might be brought about . . . stand by definition in this strange

sadness in the creature, who knows that it will never see God as he is for himself.”³⁸ Gregory’s greatest theological *failure* was his inability to keep this insight into “God beyond ‘God’” before his mind constantly.³⁹ This failure was due to the inescapable Platonic “participation logic” embedded in all patristic theology.⁴⁰

Four other points are of interest in Balthasar’s study: the first is that he continues the characterization of Origen as a Christian thinker whose philosophy injured his Christianity. Balthasar is emphatic that Gregory’s theology succeeds (in its relationship to philosophy) where that of his predecessor had failed.⁴¹

Secondly, while Balthasar finds Gregory’s key insight into the difference between the *adiastemic* and *diastemic* primarily in his *Contra Euno-*

paradoxical relationship, that they can be constructed only on the foundation of an ever more towering distance.” The “cleft” between our nature and God’s is so great that love across the disjunction seems impossible, and can lead us to *despair* (see *Presence and Thought*, 128). Von Balthasar thus differs from most modern Gregorian scholars, including his two synchronic peers, who view Gregory’s doctrine of “eternal progress” exclusively as a positive doctrine in the sense that we never “exhaust” God. Balthasar regards this simple conclusion regarding Gregory’s doctrine of God’s infinity as a failure to think through God’s otherness existentially as well as ontologically: the simple buoyant reception of this doctrine of Gregory represents the premature conclusion of an incomplete dialectic. On Gregory and *Geworfenheit*, see Douglass, *Theology of the Gap*, 25.

³⁸ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 104.

³⁹ See Balthasar, “The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves,” 377–78. When von Balthasar discusses the problematic presence of the Stoic epistemology of “grasping” he goes on to remark that “Gregory was in no way minded to set the Stoic conception of ‘grasping’ (*καταληψις*), another idea of intelligence, in opposition to the Platonic idea of ‘gazing’ toward the object, for example. To the contrary, Gregory stresses precisely this character of possession in the intelligence” (“The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves,” 92).

⁴⁰ On the danger of the relationship between God and the world being expressed as “participation” see “The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves,” 373 (“Created being is understood as a de-potentializing of the divine being”).

⁴¹ As noted, the 1939 “*Presence et pensée*” article became the first chapter of part 3 of the 1942 book. The article follows Malevez’s line of thought, which criticized the “Hellenization” thesis and the characterization of Gregory as “Platonist,” although without invoking Eunomius or treating Origen as a synecdoche. The same is true in von Balthasar’s “article”: the article lacks the hermeneutical key provided by Balthasar in the preface and introduction of his book—a key which privileges Eunomius and Origen as the vehicles of Hellenization. Insofar as these identifications do not occur in the article—which only recapitulates Malevez’s kind of critique of Hellenization—but do occur in *Presence et pensée* as a whole, the critique via Eunomius and Origen is clearly Balthasar’s own development.

mium, Balthasar never makes references to texts by Eunomius himself.⁴² Balthasar returns to Eunomius only in chapter 7, "Desire and Knowledge": after he has discussed Gregory's new teaching on God's incomprehensibility. There the issue is the kinds of knowledge of God. Balthasar's argument takes a brief pedagogical turn: Balthasar refers to Zeno the Stoic's three types of knowledge—pure sensation (*phantasia*); judgment (*sunkatathe-sis*); and comprehension (*katalēpsis*).⁴³ Balthasar dwells on comprehension (or *saisie*; *katalēpsis*), as being central to the difference between Basil's and Gregory's theology, on the one hand, and Eunomius's, on the other. Neither Basil nor Gregory sought to *grasp* God's being or existence, but Eunomius did.⁴⁴ (The verb for this "grasping" form of knowledge is *katalēpsis*.) For the Stoics and Eunomius:

Intelligence is, therefore, a possession, and, for the Stoic, the degrees of thought are identical to the degrees of force and energy used in grasping the object. Eunomius had, in an analogous fashion, wished to grip God with his hand, even as he hemmed in his essence through the concept of agennesis. Just as . . . the Stoics possesses truth in sensation itself, so did Eunomius think to have a grip on the divine Truth through the idea of innascibility.⁴⁵

For Gregory and Basil, the Christian experience of God is, like Moses's, always of the "backside" of God—which is the only view we have of Christ as we *follow* (behind) him. Some modern theologians pass over the otherness of God and

⁴² See *Presence and Thought*, 19, for the first expression of Balthasar's negative judgment of Eunomius, where the latter's mysticism is grouped, to its detriment, with Origen's. Gregory's work is structured as a commentary on Eunomius's writing(s).

⁴³ *Katalēpsis*—which Balthasar translates as "grasping"—is the kind of knowledge of God that Eunomius seeks and claims to "hold": Eunomius "grasps" the essence of God; see *Presence and Thought*, 91–93.

⁴⁴ Basil and Gregory understand that God cannot be "comprehended" (i.e., *circumscribed* in the act of our knowing God). Balthasar's judgment that an extreme positivism characterizes Eunomius's theology is the "opposite" of the judgment of contemporary scholarship which recognizes Eunomius as working within a technical (or school) theological apophaticism. See Raoul Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2, *The Way of Negation, Cristian and Greek* (Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1986), 128–91, for the philosophical content of Eunomius's apophatic theology.

⁴⁵ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 91–92. While Gregory is commended over against Eunomius for escaping a theology centered on "grasping" God, Balthasar nonetheless criticizes Gregory for allowing a mitigated Stoic notion of epistemological "grasping" to be fused with the Platonic epistemological model of *sight*.

think to *grasp* his existence (as Henri Bergson does, according to Balthasar).⁴⁶

These features of Balthasar's treatment of Eunomius allow us to recognize another related characteristic: in Balthasar's study, Eunomius's "historical" role as the fourth-century Hellenizing subordinationist thematizes his role as avatar of Origen. Balthasar links the two together in the text quoted above, and thereafter uses Origen instead of Eunomius as Gregory's foil. Balthasar is working within the problematic I earlier attributed to Harnack. Here we find in Balthasar an account of "the Eunomian controversy" that will appear again in the works of the second and the third author I treat here: the definition of Gregory's theology as mystical requires a similar definition of Eunomius's theology, and yet there is no attempt to link the two doctrinal loci of *théologie mystique* and the Trinity. Balthasar's lack of concern with Eunomius himself is especially intriguing after one reads his conclusions about the *adiastemic* life in Gregory's theology. For Gregory there is no gap or interval (the *diastema*) in God, either between his essence and existence, or his intention and action, or his will and his power.⁴⁷ The question of such a "gap" arises out of the historical context, for positive claim for such a "gap" is at the very heart of Eunomius's Trinitarian theology; his explanation of the origin of the Son (and thus the nature of the Son's relationship with God) is built upon the separation between essence and will (or energy) in God—a "gap" between the two, as it were. Gregory develops his argument (in the *Contra Eunomium*) against such a separation or interval in God as his rebuttal to Eunomius's causal hierarchy of the *Apologia Apologiae*. Balthasar makes no mention of any of this.

Many "second-generation" Gregory scholars introduced Balthasar's discovery of *diastema* in Gregory's theology into histories of Trinitarian dogma.⁴⁸ These scholars were indebted to Balthasar for an insight that is

⁴⁶ The critical reference to Bergson is at *Presence and Thought*, 107: "The last sound yielded up by this metaphysics of becoming is a Bergson sound. The intelligence is made for grasping." (Bergson is then adversely compared to Fichte.) On 156, Balthasar says that in Gregory's mysticism, "[the] eternal desire of the creature is thus freed from all the distress it might have found in the (Bergsonian) opposition between 'Knowledge' and 'Life.'" Whatever else may be Balthasar's intentions, and despite his occasional impressionistic vocabulary, I suspect that his sympathy is with the neo-Kantians. (I know that Balthasar sometimes writes against Kant, but that fact only pushes our judgment back one step: does he write against the Kantians from an analogous position to Augustine writing against the Pelagians, or to Augustine writing against the Manichees?)

⁴⁷ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 28 ff.

⁴⁸ When I say, "second-generation Gregory scholars" I am thinking primarily of David L. Balás's 1966 *Metousia Theou: Man's Participation in God's Perfection According*

now treated as one of Gregory's greatest contribution to the development of Trinitarian doctrine. Balthasar himself understood the true content of Gregory's *adiastemic*–*diastemic* distinction to be more than its simply securing of the non-metaphysical "God"; more to the point, with the concept Gregory articulates a metahistorical God. Balthasar says:

The God "above God" (which is to say, the God who is above the God of the philosophers), the God "beyond hope" cannot be the object of a system, like Eunomius attempted in his arid, theological rationalism.⁴⁹

Balthasar sees Gregory as accomplishing the demetaphysicalization (if I may be allowed such a word) of one's knowledge of, and thus relationship with, God. In Balthasar's original French there is an echo of Blaise Pascal which gives some depth (i.e., "le Dieu des philosophes au delà le Dieu de l'espérance") to Balthasar locating Gregory's philosophical language within the larger context of Gregory's theology of a personal God in a personal relationship. In short: Harnack was wrong; Gregory is no "scientist" or rationalist, no Greek philosopher in Christian garb (as Harold Cherniss put it in 1930). However, in Balthasar's judgment there lay a different, but deeper, problem with "Platonizing" in Gregory's thought.⁵⁰

After noting these preliminary features of Balthasar's references to Eunomius we can begin to recognize the larger role that "the theology of Eunomius" plays in Balthasar's reading of Gregory. *Presence et pensée* begins by identifying Gregory's understanding of God: *ho tē autou physei*

to St. Gregory of Nyssa and Ekkehard Mühlenberg's 1966 *Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa: Gregors Kritik am Gottesbegriff der klassischen Metaphysik*. In 1966 B. Barmann submitted a dissertation to Stanford that was later revoked by the university because it was a plagiarized redaction of Mühlenberg's book. Recently there has developed an unfortunate fashion among British scholars for treating Barmann's dissertation as an independent and authentic piece of scholarship.

⁴⁹ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 172 (see also 23).

⁵⁰ Balthasar's opinion is that even the conceptualizing of the Incarnation as a "taking up" in a logic of descent and ascent—which he calls a logic of "participation"—is a tragic flaw in patristic theology that needed to be "purified"; see "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves," 374 ff, esp. 378: "[We] must point out here that the Platonic schema is what predominated [in patristic Trinitarian theology]. This law has always hidden within itself [in its basic concept of 'participation']." Whatever common ground Balthasar held with Daniélou and Lossky on Eunomius, Origen, and "excessive" rationalism, the latter two stand in sharp distinction to the former on the question of "participation." I will return to this issue.

to *einai echei*.⁵¹ Balthasar finds that Gregory's notion of God begins with God as being: Being [*einai*]. The term "being" can only be used of God. If God is the single pure being then the most fundamental (and pious) understanding of humanity—and indeed all creation—is that it is not-being, for it is not-God. God exists beyond all properties that we can conceive of God: God is above "God." There is an epistemological wall that we reach and cannot surpass because God is precisely "beyond Being [*einai*]."⁵² Eunomius breached that epistemological and ontological wall by thinking that he could know the essence—the "how," the "what" and the "in what way"—of God's existence by reducing that essence/existence to the concept, to the very word, "unbegotten."⁵³

Balthasar's key "inheritance" from Harnack is the judgment that (neo)Platonism became intrinsic to Christianity not just by providing vocabulary or doctrines but by becoming the logic of and in Christianity. Christian theologians thought Neoplatonically⁵⁴ about God, God's relationship to the world, how God would "come to" creation, and how creation (specifically humanity) would *rise up and return* to God.⁵⁵ All

⁵¹ I will refer to this understanding of God by Gregory (and/or von Balthasar) with the single term *einai*.

⁵² Balthasar's description of God beyond being and beyond knowledge seems to be a theological statement of the Kantian understanding that there is (or may be) some being beyond all that our mind constructs for us in our perceptions, but that being is beyond the action of our reasoning faculties, and thus is totally "beyond." Human reason's grasp of "reality" has a limit—which is the limits of reason in itself. Balthasar's conception of "God beyond 'God'" is not, strictly speaking, an apophatic theology as Lossky would recognize it; rather this conception seems related to Barth's notion of the God wholly "outside." As is well known, Balthasar recognized the congruency of this part of his theology with Barth's. (However, wherever one suspects "Barth" as background to a comment by Balthasar, one has to imagine the possibility of either Kierkegaard or Heidegger as well!)

⁵³ The reader is cautioned not to take Balthasar's irenic reminiscence of the theologies of Gregory and Eunomius as an account of the arguments articulated by Gregory and Eunomius, or as a summary of the constellation of conceptual forces at work in Greek Trinitarian theology from 325 to 383.

⁵⁴ "But the inner logic of the Platonic scheme was so compelling that one could draw defensive walls, as it were, only with great effort; and then the defensive measures would often enough be forgotten the next moment—because of the hypnotic power of its inner architectonic" (Balthasar, "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves," 374).

⁵⁵ "The incarnation is consequently thought of as the most extreme point of the 'egression' of God from himself; the self-emptying (*kenosis*) appears as God's self-alienation in the service of fetching the world back home to the Godhead. . . . In this schema the incarnation must appear as something provisional and transitional. The resurrection of the flesh, formally confessed and maintained, appears

these doctrines Balthasar regards as constituting a doctrine of "participation," and this judgment serves as the basis for Balthasar's radical criticism of the theologian he otherwise admires. Within a logic of participation, Gregory develops an exciting and existential account of a never-ending ascent of love by humans into and through God's endless fountain of love for us.⁵⁶ In Balthasar's judgment this means that Gregory's anthropology, soteriology, and Trinitarian theologies are developed according to a "Neoplatonic logic" of *descent and ascent*.⁵⁷ This logic constitutes Gregory's most illustrious and most tragic *failure* because Gregory knew the two fundamental forces in any theology of God—and he failed to hold them together, each intact: the logic of participation won out. Gregory's youthful excitement for a longing that is fulfilled-but-always-unfulfilled (e.g., "Romeo and Juliet") charms and stirs us, but Gregory (and all the other Church Fathers) necessarily fail us as contemporary resources for theology: "The thought of the Greek Fathers, taken in its materiality, often offers but little support to the task of the theologian today, why there might even be a danger in wishing to rejuvenate it without a total critique. . . . Youthful fire is not meant to warm up those who are old."⁵⁸

Balthasar expressed this judgment in his earlier engagement with Greg-

like a disturbance of the systematic lines and usually was subtilized in one form or another" ("The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves," 375).

⁵⁶ A distinctively Balthasarian description of this ascent-and-immersion into God would be that God is the fountain of Love within which we move and breathe—"breathing" the very "water" within which we move: "In becoming supple and flowing, the soul is assimilated to the Eternal Ocean" (Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 127; see also 153).

⁵⁷ Von Balthasar's critique of Gregory's logic of descent and ascent is substantial; see "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves," 373–75.

⁵⁸ See Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 13. By contrast, Balthasar's failure at this point is his neglect at recognizing "being" within the original Trinitarian context that Gregory gives it. The a-historical, straw-man role given Eunomius in Balthasar's reading becomes conspicuous here. Gregory's articulation of the Creator–creation (Being–contingency) schema is to provide the logical support for locating the Son on the "side" of Being even though he was caused ("begotten"). In the Trinitarian controversies of the early fourth century, the distinction between God and creation had been that of God and caused: whatever was caused was created. Gregory provided the conceptual basis for understanding the Son as "caused" (obviously, if "son") but not created. In *Contra Eunomium* 3.8 Gregory lays out the notions of "cause" across the division of uncreated/being and created/non-being. Recognizing such late-fourth-century Trinitarian developments falls outside Balthasar's logic at this point; the logic of "that which is beyond reason may be spoken of as a single unity" is one reason to suspect a Kantian conceptual-ity at work in Balthasar's speculations.

ory (i.e., “Patristik, Scholastik und wir,” 1939), when he says:

That [the Church’s *youth*] is why this period is so marked by the immediacy to experience, why the impressions of the world enter so directly: For it is always the mark of every young era and is the reason why it can react much more openly and instinctively to new challenges than is the case of an aging mind that is hampered by all sorts of hardened concepts and practices.⁵⁹

We moderns (*wir*) know that Gregory’s two insights—God’s otherness, God’s immanence—must be held before us with equal strength and simultaneously, but “dialectically.”⁶⁰ The failure to recognize and hold the two insights together and to move through them is what constrains the thoughts of all the Greek Fathers to the limited support they can offer to the task of the theologian today: “We remember [those thoughts] as a man remembers the profound intuitions of his adolescence.”⁶¹ I will again discuss Balthasar’s hermeneutical metaphor for reading and locating the experience (and authority) the young Church in the “Synchronic View” section below.⁶²

⁵⁹ “The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves,” 371. See also 379: “This was the church’s first time out, so to speak, and there is something about the efforts of these early thinkers that reminds one of the attempts of any adolescent, which is precisely what gives it its charm.” At no point does Balthasar attribute any sort of authority to the patristic—or “adolescent”—Church writings; even the authority of the creeds is contained within our interpretations and our dispositions of them liturgically.

⁶⁰ Balthasar never explains why a “dialectical” logic is less Greek in its origins than an emanationist logic, or a stepwise logic: he simply asserts that it is. Balthasar further posits that the antinomies—or the terms of the dialect—are post-“Greek.”

⁶¹ Sebanc’s translation of Balthasar is on *Presence and Thought*, 13. The French is: “La pensée des Peres Grecs, prise en sa materialite, n’offre souvent que peu de secours a la tache actuelle du theologien” (*Presence et pensée*, xiii). The entirety of *Presence et pensée* can be seen as existing in a “dislocation.”

⁶² The antinomies of Balthasar’s “dialectic” are succinctly elaborated in this passage from Erich Przywara: “Balthasar therefore, logically, says no to the Origen of pneumatic ascent (and to the dissolution of the earthly form of the image into pure spirit), but he says yes to the Origen of the Dionysian vitality of an earthly ‘life in fire’” (“The Scope of Analogy as a Fundamental Catholic Form,” in *Analogue Entis*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014], 348–99, at 352). In *Presence and Thought* Balthasar says *No* to “pneumatic ascent” in Origen—but also in Gregory of Nyssa. The key word in this quotation is “logically.” That “logic” is the logic of Balthasar’s (and Przywara’s) dialectic; the existential *tonos* which drives the dialectical motion is left unspecified, but it can

Jean Daniélou

Daniélou's work on Gregory—*Platonisme et théologie mystique: doctrine spirituelle de Grégoire de Nysse*—comes soon after Balthasar's. The title of the work indicates that Daniélou's own study is clearly pointed toward uncovering any philosophical foundation to Gregory's mystical theology, and to establishing that Gregory has a *Christian* mystical theology, whatever influences run through thus his mystical theology.⁶³ What is immediately apparent is that Daniélou's work shares two characteristics with Balthasar's. First, on the grand scale, Daniélou's book contains a consistent sensitivity toward the question of Gregory's "Hellenizing"; and, secondly, detailed arguments are organized around Eunomius the "Hellenizer," but only insofar as he is the "sign" of something (someone) greater in a crisis of mystical, and not Trinitarian, doctrine: again the real problem is Origen.⁶⁴ The question of how patristic (or premodern) theology is "meaningful" to, or a resource for, modern theology is addressed and resolved positively by Daniélou in terms of the fundamental hermeneutic in premodern symbolic or allegorical reading.

The question of Gregory's non-Christian Greek sources appears quickly in Daniélou's work:

We are struck, as soon as we begin to read Gregory, by the considerable number of expressions, and even developments, he has borrowed from Platonic, Philonic and Plotinian terminology.⁶⁵

be labeled as a kind of anti-Enlightenment "modernity."

⁶³ Daniélou's treatment in *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 189 ff, of the term *μυστήριον* (*mystērion*) helps provide content and specificity to what is meant by *théologie mystique*.

⁶⁴ Both Balthasar and Daniélou cite two articles by Gabriel Horn: "L'amour divin: note sur le mot 'eros' dans Grégoire de Nysse," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 6 (1925): 378–89; "Le 'miror', la 'nuee': deux manieres de voir Dieu d'après S. Grégoire de Nysse," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 8 (1927): 113–31. Balthasar's reading of Gregory owes a significant debt to Malevez, "L'Eglise dans le Christ." Malevez's article focuses on Gregory's Christological anthropology; Horn focuses on the non-Platonic character of Gregory's mysticism. Daniélou's is more influenced by Horn than by Malez. Much to my surprise, neither scholar acknowledges the existence of Amboise Gardeil's 1927 *La structure de l'ame et l'expérience mystique*, a contemporary of Horn's. Gardeil, a neo-Scholastic, was influential in curriculum reforms at the Saulchoir under Marie-Dominique Chenu and Yves Congar.

⁶⁵ Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 9. Although "Stoicism" does not appear in this list that philosophy will figure later in the book.

Daniélou then offers two examples of Gregory's use of Greek philosophy: his use of the concept of *apatheia*, which appears in Stoic writings; and his use of *katharsis*, which is Platonic. Daniélou shows that Gregory's use of these two terms differs from the philosophical uses, and he concludes that, although Gregory uses Greek philosophy, his own theology is a pure Christian thought which expresses itself in the language of the times.⁶⁶ In this conclusion Daniélou agrees with, as he says, E. V. Ivanka, René Arnou, and André-Jean Festugière.⁶⁷

Daniélou regularly compares Gregory's doctrine on a given specific point to a cognate doctrine in Platonic, Philonic, Stoic, or Neoplatonic philosophy. He does not hesitate to point out similarities between Gregory's position and pagan philosophical sources, but Daniélou does this with a strong confidence that Gregory's assimilation of Greek philosophy is not corrupting or dissipating Christianity. This is not to say, however, that Daniélou is free from worry about the charge of Gregory Hellenizing. A good example of Daniélou's attitude is found in his discussion of Gregory's psychology, in particular, Gregory's use of *pathos/pathé*.⁶⁸ Daniélou remarks on the Platonic use of the concept, and then continues:

Gregory freely uses philosophical language to express his own ideas. This passage [on *pathos*] shows the principle, which we have never failed to find in our study of the Fathers, of their independence from all specific philosophical systems and their ultimate appeal to Scripture. All the concepts taken from Platonism and Stoicism are modified by the religious perspective within which they placed.⁶⁹

Daniélou believes that he has demonstrated in this specific case (and the others treated in the book) the independence and ultimate regard for Scripture that he has attributed to Gregory. Daniélou offers a convincing case-by-case treatment of Gregory's relationship with philosophical parallels, for he feels the burden of the Hellenizing charge against Gregory quite acutely. His strategy for a rebuttal lies in situating the heart of Gregory's thought in mysticism rather than dogmatics: Gregory is to be properly

⁶⁶ Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 200–204.

⁶⁷ Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 65–66. As with Balthasar, we find in Daniélou's reading of Gregory a special interest in the latter's use of Stoic psychology. This interest does not appear in the writings that I am considering here by Lossky.

⁶⁸ Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 66 ff.

⁶⁹ Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, p. 71.

regarded as a mystical theologian. Daniélou says: "We can say, in summary, that Gregory allegorized everything, even philosophy."⁷⁰ This articulation of the dynamic of Gregory's reception of Platonic philosophy—his hermeneutic—can be regarded as exemplary of this stage of *ressourcement* theological hermeneutic (or, perhaps, *ressourcement's* theological *consciousness* [French *sens*]). Daniélou carries the claim of Gregory's "allegorical reading" further than either Balthasar or Lossky: even philosophy has been allegorized.

Daniélou's characterization of Eunomius appears as forthrightly as his characterization of the problem of Hellenization.

*Eunomianism came about as a consequence of the extreme intellectualism of Origen. Just as Arianism pushed Origen's theory of the logos to its extreme, so Eunomianism pushed the doctrine of the accessibility of God's essence to our intelligence and identified "unbegotten" with the Father. This claim endangered all théologie mystique. Gregory's writings firmly established that the divine ousia is inaccessible to speculate knowledge, and that the knowledge that we have of God is the fruit of His presence given to us through grace, and it is this which is the proper domain of the mystical life.*⁷¹

This thoughtful passage by Daniélou gives us a strong summary of his understanding of Gregory's mystical theology; the latter's theology is contextualized as a reaction to the intellectualism of Origen, which finds its most radical expression more than a hundred years later in the theology of Eunomius. Daniélou distinguishes between "dogmatic" and "mystical-gnosiological" traditions of theology, and then defines the controversy between Eunomius and Gregory as relating entirely to the mystical. In this debate Gregory's contribution is to save mysticism (admittedly, understood in its larger sense) by arguing that the divine essence is inaccessibility to the intellect. As in the case of Balthasar's study, there is little acknowledgment of Eunomius's key role in late-fourth-century Trinitarian controversies: the threat Eunomius poses is due to his postulating that the essence of God—unbegottenness—can be known through reason. Among all three modern authors the (re)definition of Gregory's theology as "mystical" requires a similar (re)definition of Eunomius's theology solely in terms of gnoseology.

However, reading Daniélou we recognize an important difference

⁷⁰ Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 9: "On peut dire, en somme, que Grégoire a tout allégorisé, même la philosophie."

⁷¹ Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 74 (emphasis added).

between him and Balthasar on questions of Gregory's theological anthropology. According to Balthasar *fallen human nature was experienced by Gregory as an alienation from body*; for Balthasar it is properly experienced as an alienation from God—a reality that Gregory fails to appreciate properly. This judgment by Gregory is developed by Balthasar into a general critique of Gregory: modern philosophy is clear that human consciousness includes a consciousness of/within our body; it includes an awareness of ourselves as material.⁷² Gregory fails this modern criterion because he locates consciousness in the mind only, a mind that is alienated from and by its body or materiality. By contrast, Daniélou's principal thesis is that for Gregory human consciousness includes an existential sense of God; this scripturally derived "image consciousness" cannot be rejected as erroneous, or as simply "Platonic." Daniélou's counterclaim for our consciousness vis-à-vis God may not satisfy Balthasar, but as a judgment the claim is not outside reason—it is not even outside *modern* reason, given the attempts of some early-twentieth-century philosophies was to disclose the trace or the trajectory of God *in us* (*wir*). Even if Balthasar rejected these efforts by contemporary philosophers he could not reject them as "not-modern," or regard them as born simply of the confidence of a "young" Church.⁷³ Formal and teleological senses of our Godliness may not be properly "dialectical" (in a Barthian sense) but they are, nonetheless, unequivocally a property of some modern theology *qua* modern.⁷⁴

⁷² According to Balthasar, Gregory's appreciation of "alienation from God" fails because (1) it is displaced onto body, and (2) it fails to be a dialectical understanding. References to the displacement on to the body are ubiquitous. See, e.g., "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves," 375: "In consequence of the movement of the ascending, step-by-step return of the world potencies into God, this movement proceeds unambiguously away from the material to the spiritual. Spiritualization, presented in a thousand different colorations, is the basic tendency of the patristic era." Regarding the failure of a dialectical understanding, Balthasar returns to the concept of "spirit" which "is able to be an excellent expression of the supernatural relation between the God of grace and the engraced creature . . . but it is not able sufficiently to clarify the relationship of the two natures that lies as the basis of every act of grace" (379).

⁷³ Thus the famous appeal of Teilhard de Chardin to de Lubac, and the perennial appeal of Irenaeus to modern theological sensibilities (ranging from, e.g., Rowan Greer to John Hicks).

⁷⁴ Daniélou's argument is built principally upon detailed considerations of Gregory's two early anthropology works—*On the Soul and Resurrection* and *On the Making of Mankind*—and two later figurative works, *On the Life of Moses* and *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. (Balthasar also highlights Gregory's two figurative or "mystical" writings.) In Daniélou's judgment, Gregory experienced fallen human nature through or in the passions—which do indeed occur instrumentally in the

My motivation for recounting the details of Daniélou's focus on Gregory's moral psychology is not simply that of providing an illustration of his argument, just as my motivation for recounting the details of Balthasar's focus on Gregory's (Stoic) epistemology was not simply for the sake of illustrating his argument. Daniélou rehearses Gregory's moral psychology while Balthasar rehearses Gregory's epistemology or gnoseology. Balthasar finds the root "failure" of any attempt to know God to be what the Stoics called *katalēpsis* (καταληψις)—a *grasping* at knowledge. Daniélou finds the root "failure" of any attempt to know God to be what the Platonists described as the effects of passions on the mind (or soul). Both these authors bring to the fore the question they find posed in Gregory's mystical theology: "In what state of mind does a person approach the possibility of knowing God:."

Vladimir Lossky

Lossky's book *Essai sur la théologie mystique de l'Eglise d'Orient* was published in 1944, the same year as Daniélou's *Platonisme et théologie mystique*.⁷⁵ The lectures which eventually became the book *Vision de*

body—but they are not corporeal events occurring in matter: they occur in our will, or, more precisely, in our soul, an event which is, strictly speaking, outside the material realm. It is possible for Gregory to conceive of a fully human, i.e., embodied, soul free from passion in this life: see Gregory's portrait of his sister in his *Life of Macrina*. It may be that Gregory's understanding of sin is conceived too much by way of "a change in our condition," but it is not the case that he simply reduces sin to living in a material world. See my "Snowden's Secret: Gregory of Nyssa on Passion and Death," in *A Man of the Church: Honoring the Theology, Life, and Witness of Ralph Del Colle*, ed. Michel René Barnes (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 107–22.

⁷⁵ The majority of Anglophone scholars who have read Lossky's books have read only the 1955 English translation, and in consequence sometimes think of his *Théologie mystique* as a product of the 1950s. (Recently one notable English theologian argued that the book's theology was a product of the "Cold War mentality prevalent in the Fifties," thereby identifying the English 1955 translation as Lossky's work itself!) In the United Kingdom the mid-1950s was a time of dynamic interest in *mysterion* and the theology of religious experience generally: the decade began coincidentally with Marcel's "Mystery of Being" Gifford Lectures with its penultimate lecture entitled "Presence as a Mystery." Continuing to reflect this interest we find a French academic symposium translated in 1956 as *Mystery and Mysticism*, and one should follow the publishing history of Maréchal's *The Psychology of the Mystics* to see French-language scholarship in this area beginning to make an impact in British studies. The single most important event for Lossky was probably Florovsky's paper to the Congress of Orthodox Theologians, Athens, 1936, on "Patristics and Modern Theology." Lossky belongs to the "neopatristic

Dieu were originally given in Paris in 1945–1956; thus Lossky's books are contemporary to Daniélou's and to Balthasar's. Both of Lossky's books are well-known as the modern foundation of the twentieth-century Neopal-amite movement in the second half of the twentieth century: in its parts and as a whole *Essai sur la théologie mystique* argues for the legitimacy and authority of Gregory Palamas's theology.⁷⁶ To that end, Lossky begins the scholarly project of identifying Eastern Orthodox theology with Palamas's doctrines, and of projecting that identification back in the history of doctrine.⁷⁷

Lossky's immediate precedent for recovering Palamas is Basil Krivocheine, who in 1938 published an article which rediscovered Palamas for the East after he had been, as Krivocheine makes clear, forgotten or abandoned.⁷⁸ However "Palamite" Krivocheine may have been in the

school" in Russian Orthodox theology. Paul Valliere aptly characterizes the neopatristic school as an Orthodox theology that "focuses on the concept of theosis (deification) and subordinates the whole gamut of anthropological values to it. In the Russian school the humanity of God is connected first of all with kenosis, the self-emptying of God in the Incarnation"; see *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov—Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 14. I would add that the majority of "neopatristic theologians" thought in terms of the "essence–energy" theology associated with Gregory Palamas. In short, the proper context for reading Lossky is the "white Russian" exile community in Paris of the 1930s and 1940s, particularly l'Institut Saint-Serge.

⁷⁶ See: André de Halleux, "Palamisme et Scolastique," *Revue théologique de Louvain* 4 (1973): 409–42; Georges Barrois, "Palamism Revisited," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (1975): 211–31. Barrois treats, among other important matters, the articles in *Istina* 19, no. 3 (1974). Little has been written, and less has been published, examining Lossky's theology as a whole, and the most substantial treatment in English remains Rowan Williams's 1973 dissertation, "The theology of Vladimir Nikolaievich Lossky: an exposition and critique."

⁷⁷ For a description of the way in which Lossky and his interpretation of Palamas have come to dominate Orthodox theology in the West see Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Divine Energies or Divine Personhood: Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas on Conceiving the Transcendent and Immanent God," *Modern Theology* 19, no. 3 (2003): 357–85.

⁷⁸ Basil Krivocheine, "The Ascetic and Theological Teaching of Gregory Palamas," *Eastern Churches Quarterly* 3 (1938): 26–33, 71–84, 138–56, 193–215. Krivocheine (Vasilij Krivosein) was a monk of St. Panteleimon, Mount Athos; he studied in Prague and in Paris, and in 1936 published his edition of Gregory Palamas. Later Krivocheine was elevated to the Russian Orthodox see of Brussels, Belgium, where he continued to have an active scholarly presence through his writings and conference attendance. Nicolas Lossky speaks of the Archbishop ("Incidences en Occident," 555) as one of the most eminent patrologists of the twentieth century—and indeed he was.

1930s, his assessment of Palamas differs in one important respect from later Palamas enthusiasts such as Lossky, John Meyendorff, Georges Habra, and Christos Yannaras: Krivocheine did not hesitate to describe Palamas's theology as being influenced by Greek philosophy. A major feature of the others' interpretation is that Palamas's theology is not to be understood as being Greek in any sense; in particular, it is not Neoplatonic in origin or influence. Indeed, Palamas is judged to have defeated the Hellenization of Byzantine theology.⁷⁹ Thus, the problematic of Hellenization is a distinctive feature of Neopalamism;⁸⁰ in this problematic Lossky (etc.) draws the interpretative proportion that as the Cappadocian were to Eunomius, so Palamas was to Barlaam of Seminara (et al.).⁸¹ I have shown elsewhere how this proportion both leads to, and is supported by, a complete misreading of the origins of the essence–energy distinction in the Eunomian controversy.⁸² I shall return to Lossky's reading of Eunomius.

As with Balthasar and Daniélou (and Harnack), for Lossky the primary figure of Hellenization is Origen:

The heterodox doctrines with which Origen was charged had their root in a certain insensitivity towards the unknowability of God on the part of this great Christian thinker. An attitude which was not fundamentally apophatic made the Alexandrine teacher a religious

⁷⁹ Lossky may be the source of the distinguishing feature of what I call "Neopalamite" scholarship, which is characterized by the truism that Palamas' theology was free from any philosophical influence, but it is John Meyendorff who returns again and again to this point in his *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*. When Lossky's *Vision de Dieu* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1962) was published in English as *Vision of God*, trans. Asheleigh Moorhouse (London: Faith Press, 1963), Meyendorff wrote the preface. While in Paris in the late 1920s Dmitri Staniloae studied the works of Palamas, and in 1938 published *Viata Si Invitatura Sfântului Grigorie Palama, Seria Teologică*. Lossky seems unaware of this work, and in any case it is Lossky who has served as the spokesman for the Neopalamites.

⁸⁰ By making this statement it should be clear that I am not collapsing the "problem of Scholasticism" into the "problem of Hellenization"—theologians who might be harshly critical of Scholasticism would be open to the literature of "Hellenization": for example, Daniélou. Furthermore, Lossky's attacks on "rationalism" cannot be reduced simply to attacks on Scholasticism: "rationalism" can include the philosophy of Bulgakov (for certain!), the influence of Kant or Hegel, or the long tentacle of Jakob Boehme. (For the last, see David V. Zdenek "The Influence of Jacob Boehme on Russian Religious Thought," *Slavic Review* 21 [1962]: 43–64.)

⁸¹ Lossky, *Vision of God*, 62–63, 128. This proportional interpretative "key" takes on a life of its own after Lossky.

⁸² See my *Power of God*, "Eunomius of Cyzicus and Gregory of Nyssa," and "Background and Use of Eunomius' Causal Hierarchy."

philosopher rather than a mystical theologian, in the sense proper to the eastern tradition. . . . With Origen, Hellenism attempts to creep into the Church.⁸³

Here Origen's errors are described primarily as mystical-gnosiological ones: these errors mark Origen as a religious philosopher, if not a "rationalist." Lossky is very close to Harnack in seeing Origen as the arch Hellenizer. Lossky's similarity to the two French Catholic authors lies in his judgment that Gregory's mystical theology contains whatever is good in Origen, while being free of his predecessor's errors. For Lossky, as for Daniélou and Balthasar, Origen's errors—indeed, his deep single error—is the introduction into Christianity of a pagan philosophical (i.e., "Hellenist") understanding of the limits of human knowledge of God. In the debate at hand, Origen's errors are characterized as primarily mystical-gnosiological in nature.⁸⁴

In *Vision de Dieu* Lossky again describes Origen as the source of Eunomius's theology; however, in the later book he says more to locate Eunomius within the Origenist-Arian trajectory of fourth-century Trinitarian controversies, though the distinctive issue still remains "le gnoseologie chretienne en general":

Origen's intellectualism will find itself in friendly territory among the Arian's, where subordinationism degenerates into a radical dissimilarity between the Father and the Son, identifies the divine nature with the Father and ejects the Son into the realm of created being. The extreme faction in Arianism, the Anomoeans, professed

⁸³ Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 32. It is important to be clear that what is of interest to me is not Lossky's statement that Arius's or Eunomius's Trinitarian theology owes to the "subordinationism" of Origen; what is of interest is that Lossky understands this "sourcing" to be a matter of gnoséologie. Lossky, like Balthasar and Daniélou, reduces a controversy involving a complex set of Trinitarian doctrines to a comparison of the corrupting presence of Hellenistic philosophy in Eunomius with freedom from any philosophical taint in Gregory for the sake of articulating a theology of the knowledge of God. None of the three issues—Trinity, "Hellenization" or gnoséologie—are trivial; it is the constellating of these three (or rather, two, since Trinity is passed over) issues in the thought of these three theologians that needs recognition. The bracketing off of a doctrine of Trinity from a doctrine of "gnoséologie" is conspicuous when the historical exemplar for true gnoséologie is Gregory's engagement with Eunomius, a controversy that argued—on both sides—gnoséologie via Trinitarian theology (or vice versa).

⁸⁴ As I have shown above, Harnack already had emphasized this gnoséological character of Hellenization.

a clearly defined intellectualism in the question of the knowledge of God. This is why the disputes against Eunomius (365 and 385) have had a great importance for Christian gnosiology in general and consequently also for the doctrines of the vision of God.⁸⁵

In Lossky's account, Eunomius inherited both Origen's "intellectualism" and his subordinationist tendencies, which he developed into a kind of mystical gnosiology that was radically un-Christian. For Lossky the heart of Eunomius's heresy is his excessive kataphatic theology and attendant theory of divine language—which Lossky calls a "gnosiological optimism."⁸⁶ Eunomius's strong Trinitarian subordinationism is mentioned in passing, but it is not addressed. For example, in the ten pages of consideration of the Cappadocians and Eunomius in *Vision de Dieu*, Lossky mentions the Trinitarian consequences of the Eunomian heresy in only three sentences, and the first of these is cast in terms of the affinity between excessive rationalism and subordinationism. The pivotal term of Eunomius's theology—*aggenetos*—is discussed only as a doctrine on the knowledge of God.⁸⁷ While one might object in Lossky's defense that the subject matter of *Vision de Dieu* precludes any general discussion of Eunomius's theology, Lossky's earlier treatment of the Eunomian controversy in *La théologie mystique*, where any interpretation should be unconstrained, only confirms the opinion gathered from *Vision de Dieu*. In *La théologie mystique* Lossky discusses the Eunomian controversy in his chapter on

⁸⁵ Lossky, *Vision of God*, 62. The material in *Vision* dates from 1945–1946, but was not published as a book until 1961. It is not clear what changes Lossky might have made in the time between. Compare Daniélou's earlier summary of the rationalist context of Gregory's mystical theology with Lossky's statement here that Origen's intellectualism will find itself in friendly territory among the Arians, where subordinationism identifies the divine nature with the Father and ejects the Son into the realm of created being, where the extreme faction, the Eunomoians, professed a clearly defined intellectualism in the question of the knowledge of God.

⁸⁶ Lossky, *Vision of God*, 63.

⁸⁷ Lossky, *Vision of God*, 63. Lossky has reasons for focusing on this term in Eunomius's theology that Balthasar and Daniélou lack, for he understands Eunomius's theory of language providing a positive description or name of God's very essence. Lossky is more invested in identifying *théologie mystique* with a radical apophaticism than is either of the other authors. For the judgment that *agennetos* was through and through a philosophical term Lossky could rest on the opinion of Jules Lebreton, *Histoire du dogme de la Trinité* (1928): "This study concludes that the term *agennhtos* is indeed what Athanasius judged it to be, a term of philosophical origin" (*Histoire du dogme de la Trinité* [Paris: Beauchesne, 1928], 3:647; translation mine).

“Divine Darkness,” and not in his chapter on “God in Trinity.” In the former chapter Lossky refers to the essence–energy distinction and says:

It is the apophatic basis of all true theology which the great Cappadocians were defending in their controversy with Eunomius.⁸⁸

There is no mention of any Trinitarian content to the “Eunomian controversy”: for Lossky the fundamental drama of the controversy is not the unity of divinity between Father and Son but the integrity of a truly Christian apophatic theology.⁸⁹ Thus, while the Cappadocians understand Eunomius to be an “Arian,” his real significance for them—and for Lossky—is that he argues for a fully Hellenized understanding of how God is known; indeed, he argues that God can be “fully” (essentially) known. The theology of God that Origen made possible is made real by Eunomius.⁹⁰

Lossky argues that Gregory of Nyssa refutes Hellenized theology by overturning a theology that is radically kataphatic. By contrast, Gregory articulates an epistemology built upon the inherent unknowability of God’s nature; he shifts the realm of human experience of God from the rational to the affect; and he replaces a Platonic doctrine of human participation in God with a theophanic doctrine of human participation in God.⁹¹ Balthasar and Daniélou agree with Lossky that Gregory’s theology contains these three fundamentals. Equally important is the agreement among Balthasar, Daniélou, and Lossky is that Eunomius was historically what he is for us now, thematically: a Christian for whom God exists within the limits of reason alone.⁹²

⁸⁸ Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 33.

⁸⁹ Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 21–22.

⁹⁰ Given Lossky’s judgment that theology is a unified whole, such that one error in a theology poisons it in its entirety, Lossky likely understood there to be no clear line between Eunomius’s “gnoseological optimism” and Eunomius’s anti-Nicene Trinitarian theology. (He says as much.) However, to lay out the cascading error(s) in Eunomius’s theology would take Lossky away from the simple identification he has made between Eunomius (= Origen) and a Christianity that has abandoned its mystical, apophatic roots. The reduction of Eunomius can sympathetically be called rhetorical; what is key is that Lossky, like Balthasar and Daniélou, chooses this rhetorical identification to build *théologie mystique* upon. Without Eunomius, Gregory lacks a suitable protagonist against whom his rejection of the “Origen option” (as Lossky sees it) can be *dramatized*.

⁹¹ Balthasar and Lossky would have different judgments, however, on the significance of the theophanic divine participation in humanity—if only because they disagree on the proper “Christian” understanding of participation.

⁹² It is also the case that Lossky and Balthasar recognized “divine energies” (ἐνέργεια)

Lossky's slightly later writing, *Vision de Dieu*,⁹³ is a more nuanced work than *La théologie mystique*; Lossky has consulted a greater variety of secondary sources, and—one might speculate—he writes free of the polemical burdens against Sergei Bulgakov and "Sophiology" that engaged him during the early part of the decade.⁹⁴ In *Vision de Dieu*, he explicitly follows the conclusions of Festugiere and Daniélou. Lossky agrees with Festugiere that "the Hellenistic world enters the Church with Clement and Origen, bringing with it elements alien to the Christian tradition."⁹⁵ Lossky explicitly acknowledges Daniélou's contribution to Gregory studies by citing his judgment that Gregory's mysticism "marks a complete reversal of the Platonic perspective" and that, according to Gregory, in the mystical event there is "the inhabitation of the soul by the Word."⁹⁶ Daniélou's and—now—Lossky's judgment that Gregory's mysticism "marks a complete reversal of the Platonic perspective" depends upon the same insight that Balthasar had already made central to Gregory's theology: that for Gregory (and not earlier in Christianity) there is a definite line between the Uncreated and the created, and thus the mystical vision would be of God and not of the (created) forms.⁹⁷ However, the mystical

to be a fundamental concept in Gregory's theology. Balthasar emphasizes their importance repeatedly in *Presence et pensée*. However, the two theologians have radically different understandings of what the divine "energy" is and its significance. For Lossky the *energeia* have a positive epistemological role: they are the object of any kataphatic theology, and through them positive statements can be made about God (though not about the essence of God). For Balthasar the *energeia* have a transient, self-deconstructing function: in the experience of God's *energeia* the present dissolves into the absent, the "there" into the "not there." Lossky draws a firm limit on the content of an *energeia*, but he affirms that qua energy it has the positive content of God's revelation; for Balthasar the energies destabilize the experience they would otherwise seem to cause.

⁹³ As Meyendorff relates in his preface to the translation, *Vision de Dieu* was based upon a series of lectures given at the Sorbonne in 1945–1946 (Lossky, *Vision of God*, 6).

⁹⁴ Bulgakov died in Paris in 1944. He had not been active since cancer surgery in 1937 (see Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, 388–89). Lossky's *Vision de Dieu* (again, published in 1962 but based in lectures originally from ca. 1946) is helpful not only for the light it may shed on his thoughts in his earlier *Mystical Theology*, but for what it can reveal to us about the content of Daniélou's 1944 book that was perceived to be new insights.

⁹⁵ Lossky, *Vision of God*, 56–57. In *Théologie mystique* Clement was the strongest example of a proper, un-Neoplatonic, Christian apophaticism.

⁹⁶ Lossky, *Vision of God*, 72–74.

⁹⁷ In the well-known episode from his own life that Augustine recounts in *Confessions* 7 it is not clear whether the vision he "fell" from is a vision of the noetic realm or of God.

“interior ascent” that Lossky proceeds to describe reads remarkably close to the patristic “Platonic ascent” model that Balthasar critiqued so deeply in “*Patristik, Scholastik und wir*” (especially) and *Presence et Pensée*.⁹⁸ This observation necessarily requires details.

In Lossky’s account of Gregory’s mystical theology, the journey of the soul to the presence of God begins with an “interior descent” into itself from which it arrives, purified, at the interior, connatural remnant of its original state. Lossky seems to suggest that, prior to Gregory, the soul’s arrival at its “native land” and the sight of God would constitute the climax of the experience among Platonic and Christian mysticism (i.e., the soul’s entry into the presence of God in heaven). Gregory adds something more: at the summit God is no longer perceived as light but as darkness—meaning, that God cannot be comprehended: “It [the soul] recognizes the One it is seeking as the only One he does not comprehend”; “the darkness through which Moses penetrated to the summit of Sinai represents a form of communion with God.”⁹⁹ The mystical experience remains that of union, but it is no longer couched in terms of sight: “St. Gregory of Nyssa

⁹⁸ In an article written less than five years after *Théologie mystique*, “Redemption and Deification” (*Sobornost*, ser. 3, no. 2 [Autumn 1947], 47–55; republished in *In the Image and Likeness of God* [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1974], 97–110, with minor changes), Lossky argues for most of the doctrinal points that Balthasar had earlier rejected as characteristic of an overly-Platonized neopatristic theology. Lossky begins his article by quoting the famous passage in Irenaeus, “God made Himself man, that man might become God,” and reports that the principle appears in the theologies of Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. Lossky then moves quickly into an account of salvation which begins with the *descent* of Christ, a *descent* which is ordered towards making possible the *ascent* of humanity. The human ascent is made possible through the *kenotic descent* of the Word. Lossky cites in passing 2 Peter 1:4, that we, by grace, should become “a partaker of the divine nature.” These Scripture texts are cited by Balthasar in his critique of the theosis theology that Balthasar rejects, one which is at the heart of Lossky’s theology.

⁹⁹ Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 33–35. Balthasar pauses over the “darkness” (*ténèbres*) Moses encounters, quotes Gregory and sums up his theology: “This night is faith, in which all knowledge is reached” (*Presence and Thought*, 103). His exegesis of this scene is limited, and at this time Balthasar may not have known of Philo’s exegesis of the Exodus passage in *De gigantibus*—which is Daniélou’s opinion of Lossky’s exegesis of Moses and the dark cloud (see Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 209). In any case, see Martin Laird’s excellent exposition in *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 174–204. (Balthasar would not be comfortable with Laird’s “grasp[ing]” language, since that action—as an epistemology—is what he accuses the Stoics and Eunomius of trying to do.) See my comment on Balthasar’s “dialectical” faith vis-à-vis Lossky’s “apophaticism.”

pays less attention to sight, 'the most intellectual sense,' as Fr. Daniélou remarks."¹⁰⁰

From the perspective of Balthasar's "dialectical" theology the distinction between kataphatic and apophatic theologies is irrelevant. Whatever claims for apophatic theology Lossky may make about "not knowing God" (in his essence) the existential fact of that ignorance *produces no anxiety*: it is rather an ignorance born of confident faith. Even in the case of mystical "darkness" God's presence (e.g., his love) is felt.¹⁰¹ Knowing this, Lossky's strong distinction between kataphatic and apophatic theologies, as well as his attempt to distinguish Greek apophaticism from Christian apophaticism (e.g., Origen versus Gregory), collapses because for all these cases "Otherness" is due to the human incapacity to know that something: every kind of human incapacity rests upon creatureliness—whether the epistemological incapacity is explained under the rubric of the "Greek model" or "Christian model" of apophaticism(s). For Balthasar (et al.) God's radical "Otherness" is due to our non-being (our creatureliness) versus his True Being.¹⁰²

A Moment amongst Three Theologians

I have offered a reading of authors who can be described not only as para-

¹⁰⁰ Lossky, *Vision of God*, 73. Balthasar's critique of "sight"—with Gregory's doctrine of Darkness surpassing those hermeneutical errors—may be found at *Presence and Thought*, 123–28, where he concludes: "We find, in fact, at the end of this philosophy of image something that resembles a kind of resignation [*sic*] and that could only be a mitigated form of 'despair' and 'sadness.'" However, it would be a mistake to understand Lossky's, Daniélou's, and Balthasar's criticism of the paradigm which identifies sight or vision as the "highest sense most like reason" as no more than a criticism from within a specific trajectory in apophatic theology. A critique of the constellated concepts of sight, vision, rationalism, possession and "grasping" runs strongly through nineteenth- and twentieth-century French culture, as Martin Jay "revealed" in his 1993 *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. The valorization of the "Dark Presence" by these three *théologie mystique* theologians locates them within the non-visual, non-rationalistic hermeneutical trajectory Jay describes.

¹⁰¹ Balthasar recognizes Gregory's claim for the "Living Darkness" (see *Presence and Thought*, 103).

¹⁰² See *Presence and Thought*, 27 ff. However, we should consider the possibility that during the mid-twentieth century the apophatic theology of *darkness* may have been an O/orthodox response to the Kierkegaardian-Barthian theology of the "distant" God. It largely fails in that function, but not entirely: see Balthasar's later, substantial response to the theology of St. John of the Cross, who, like Gregory, speaks of encountering God in a "Dark Presence"; see vol. 3 of *Glory of the Lord*. (Daniélou refers to St. John of the Cross in *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, 209.)

digmatic of an era of scholarship on Gregory of Nyssa but as having had substantial influence on the way post-war Western theology developed. My reading has attempted to identify the common *problématique* that Balthasar, Daniélou and Lossky worked within—the most important being their common advocacy of a *mystical theology*—with arguments based upon their common understanding of Gregory of Nyssa's critical response to the anti-Nicene bishop Eunomius of Cyzicus. Where my account differs from most other accounts is that I take seriously the fact that all three authors advance the positive content of Gregory's *théologie mystique* by locating his theology within a polemical context. Gregory does not just offer a kind of theology; he advances it by rejecting another kind of theology. Wherever a positive account of *théologie mystique* might be weak among any of the three theologians, the content of that theology is strengthened through a characterization of the theology it opposes. There is a sense among the three that the kind of theology Gregory rejects—in Eunomius and in Origen—is perennial, while the kind of Gregory's own theology needs advocacy (at least within the small window of time in which all three books are written).¹⁰³

As Gregory of Nyssa is distanced from and overcomes the ratiocentric faith of Eunomius, he rejects the greater evil which the latter only represented, the "Hellenized" Christianity of Origen. This is an idiosyncratic reading of Eunomius's theology—if it may be said to be a *reading* of Eunomius at all. The interpretation of—the reduction of—the Eunomian controversy to a proxy conflict with Origen over the "Hellenization" of the Christian faith functions as a common axiom among the three Francophone theologians. Gregory's victory over Eunomius has two parts: first, Gregory overturns not "just" Eunomius but the theology of Origen, whose avatar Eunomius plays; and, second, Gregory gives us an exemplary case of how a Christian properly interprets and utilizes pagan or secular philosophy. Gregory's free faith is an experience of God—experience which supplies an entire theology of God encountered—a

¹⁰³ As I have shown, each scholar used the historical figure of Eunomius as a synecdoche to reveal a perceived greater whole—namely, Origen's theology—though "Origen" himself was only a more saturated sign of the true whole. Origen's thought and influence was the occasion of a trespass failure within the community of Christian faith: a viral entry into the Church body of a "faith" that was no more than a kind of logic, a set of propositions without a voice or presence—reason without presence. The scale and density of Origen's thought allows for an investigation about which Eunomius is only the tag. For the three, Gregory of Nyssa's refutation of Eunomius defeats any lingering modern suspicions of Gregory's own theology being "Hellenized" (as Harnack and others before and after charged).

théologie mystique. While Balthasar, Daniélou, and Lossky may differ over the details of what constitutes this *théologie mystique*, they agree on its antinome: they know it when they see it, and they recognize the emptiness of the logic that supports it (the emptiness which *constitutes* it). All three agree that when philosophy and Christianity encounter one another there is only one possible outcome: one of the two "transforms" the other. Either Christianity transforms and appropriates a true remnant of pagan or secular philosophy, or philosophy transforms and dissects Christian faith.¹⁰⁴ In Gregory's theology pagan philosophy is transformed; for the attentive reader Gregory's Platonic or Stoic language in fact deconstructs the world(s) of Platonism or Stoicism.¹⁰⁵ It is difficult to say with certainty whether Gregory's mysticism functions as "proof" that he had transformed his philosophical heritage, or whether the successful accomplishment of transforming received pagan philosophy lends authority and credence to his mysticism. It would be possible to find a scholarly perspective which held those two questions separate, but the separation of the two is not at issue, or even to be desired, by these three authors. Only where these two are bound together is there a *théologie mystique*.

Balthasar's experiment with constructing an ideal premodern Christian philosophy as the basis of the modern engagement with faith and the culture fails on its initial terms. The theology of the *epoch* of the patristic Church proved inadequate as a constructive resource for doing theology "now," and, despite whatever sympathetic traces remain in his later writings, Balthasar rejected a *patristic* or *neopatristic* foundational ideal.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ The only way to prevent one of these outcomes is for Christianity to avoid all encounter with philosophy—which allows it to "over-leap" philosophy altogether. In his *Life of St Anthony*, Athanasius presents the monk in exactly this way: he never studied philosophy but was able to confound the "wisdom" of the philosophers. Gregory of Nyssa, by contrast, does not present his sister Macrina (also a monk) in this way: she has encountered philosophy, has sifted out the God-given true remnant, and by appropriating it has given philosophy (a "restored philosophy") its proper function of giving glory to God the source of Truth. See Gregory's writings *Life of Macrina* and *On the Soul and Resurrection*.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, the *form* of Henri Crouzel's rehabilitation of Origen: he acknowledges that the terms Origen uses (in this case, to differentiate kinds of knowledge) are taken from Plato, but he vigorously distinguishes Origen's knowledge as a scriptural knowledge—one that is, above all, *the knowledge of Christ*. There is a positive relationship between the Platonic theory of knowledge and Origen's, but—and this is Crouzel's key point—"This is an imitation of Platonism, but by the same stroke, its antithesis" (*Origene*, 7; translation mine). Not all rehabilitations of Origen are equal.

¹⁰⁶ In the present article "patristic" names reading patristic texts as Daniélou did (i.e.,

We should like rather to penetrate right to those *vital wellsprings of their spirit*, right to that *fundamental and hidden intuition* that directs *every expression of their thought* and that reveals to us one of the *great possibilities of attitude and approach* that theology has adopted in a concrete and unique situation. We shall explain . . . why the thought of the Greek Fathers, taken its materiality, offers but little support . . . why there might even be a danger in wishing to rejuvenate it without a total critique. . . . We remember it, as a man remembers the profound intuitions he had as an adolescent.”¹⁰⁷

Balthasar found the patristic Church lacking in two fundamental ways (not counting the problem of Platonization already discussed). The first, as we read, arises out of Balthasar’s own characterization of the early Church as “young”—an adolescent.¹⁰⁸ The distinguishing feature of the patristic authors is that they come at the *beginning* of Christianity and thus the era constitutes the youth in the “ages” (or aeons) of the Church.¹⁰⁹ The

historically) and “neopatristic” names reading patristic texts as Lossky did.

¹⁰⁷ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 13. (Seban’s translation is true to the French original.) Again see Balthasar, “The Church Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves,” 371, 379. The italicized vocabulary of these sentences shows Balthasar to be immersed in the quasi-phenomenology and personalist philosophy of pre-World War II modern France; fortunately, the identification of Balthasar’s “source” is beyond the methodological intention of this article. Balthasar uses expressions which were spread broadly in the French intellectual air by the time he began his Jesuit formation: interest in, e.g., intuition, vitality, and concreteness was a commonplace in French intellectual life at that time. (See Grogan, *Bergsonian Controversy*, 21–36.) Bergson, Maurice Blondel, Wilhem Dilthey, Edmund Husserl, Emmanuel Mounier, José Ortega y Gasset, Péguy, and others constellate notions like vitalism, élan vital, intuition, and memory in their fight against the influence of neo-Kantianism. The emphasis on vitality and intuition could owe to German romanticism. Moreover, as Baring, *Converts to the Real*, 211–40, and Jonathan King, “Theology Under Another Form: Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Formation and Writings as a Germanist” (PhD diss., St. Louis University, 2016), 143, 188–90, make clear, Balthasar had by this time developed a keen interest in Heidegger’s philosophy. The question of influences is made more difficult by Balthasar’s explicit textual reliance on Max Scheler and Przywara, both of whom fail to appear in his bibliography. (Analogous absences apply to all the candidate “sources” I proffered above.) In short, the question of Balthasar’s sources is a complex and controverted subject, often answered prematurely.

¹⁰⁸ Again, there are cognate passages on the patristic era as the “teenage era” of the Church in the 1939 “The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves” (e.g., 371) that confirm and elaborate upon the thoughts Balthasar expresses in 1942.

¹⁰⁹ It is a characteristic of Balthasar’s thought that he takes the idea of historical “epoch” or “aeon” seriously as a hermeneutical frame, unlike Daniélou, and Lossky;

distinguishing characteristic of the young Church is that its experiences are immediate, strong, and unburdened by complexities.¹¹⁰ Balthasar says that modern Christians regard the early Church as an adult remembers being seventeen.¹¹¹ From the Church's adolescence we can observe a Christianity which is vital, wholehearted, and open to new experiences.¹¹² These affective traits give us encouragement and a drama which we moderns try to experience in our own way now in the full maturity of the Church.¹¹³

see "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves," 352, and *Presence and Thought*, 89. When thinking about Balthasar's judgment that the Church Fathers in fact occupy the place of adolescents in the life of the Church two items should be brought to mind—both having to do with the influence of Scheler on Balthasar's thought. First, Scheler is important specifically for his positive judgment on the strong and enthusiastic popular movements of the 1920s and the 1930s among Catholic youth in Germany and France. Secondly, Scheler was very much of the opinion that the human species, *qua* species, developed or aged. Thus it was only to be expected that a cultural phenomenon of the ancient—"young"—world (namely, Christianity) should reflect the general youthfulness of the species as a whole at the time. On the youth movements of the time see, Zeev Sternhell's 1995 *Neither Right Nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*. On the influence of Catholic movements such as the "Quickborn" on Scheler, see Baring, *Converts to the Real*, 131–36.

¹¹⁰ Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 11, compares the theological history of the Church to a "treasure house" of memories "at the disposal of the theologian in the way that the storehouse of his lived experiences is available to the individual." Here Balthasar uses a metaphor (storehouse) to explain another metaphor (treasure house). I shall return later to the inherent weakness of this metaphor (or analogy?) as a hermeneutical perspective for reading tradition. However, more than we, Balthasar had a notion of the profoundly undetermined effects of memory: Freud was Balthasar's older contemporary. Balthasar speaks of the "taking up" of this or that memory in an astonishingly naive way—astonishing not only "after Freud" or "after Merleau-Ponty" but *after Augustine*. (A scholar in another field might offer that hearing such a metaphor proposed in this way should remind us, the intelligent reader, of the late entry into the genre of the "introspective novel" of German literature.)

¹¹¹ "Of course it [youthful enthusiasm] will always carry a veneer of depth, piety and superiority over the lowlands of a 'purely formal philosophizing'" (Balthasar, "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves," 379).

¹¹² Balthasar does not specify from what developmental model he learns that social organizations develop by a logic analogous to individual persons. He does not reveal what German romantic dramas display the true nature of youth as he tells it. Perhaps *Sorrows of Young Werther*, *A Death in Venice*, *Tin Drum*, or *Siddhartha*? The story of Romeo and Juliet might come to the mind of students of English literature. (Or "West Side Story"?)

¹¹³ "The difference [between 'ourselves' and the Fathers] lies only in this: That the Fathers did not yet understand 'subjectivity' as a function of the total representa-

The second fundamental way that patristic theology (more precisely, all premodern theology) fails the modern theologian as a constructive resource is more incisive on Balthasar's part but articulated less explicitly in his book.¹¹⁴ As I pointed out earlier, Balthasar accepts the understanding that Platonism entered Christianity not simply in terms of Platonic doctrines but as a logic which controlled and constructed the kind of thinking within which Christians recognized, defined, and defended articles of faith—and indeed the “essence” of Christianity. The dominant Platonic doctrine of the immanence of “being” in the created world was the product of the logic of participation; this doctrine and this logic came to rest in Christian minds.¹¹⁵ By this conceptual dynamic Platonism prevented patristic theologians from understanding correctly how creation relates to “being” as opposed to how God relates to “being.”

At the very beginning of *Presence et pensée* Balthasar lays out the principle that God is he who possesses “being” as his nature: “Dieu est celui qui possède comme Nature l’Être.” He quotes Gregory in Greek to this effect: *τῇ αὐτοῦ φύσει τοῦ ἔναι ἔχει*.¹¹⁶ The first principle of creation—of humanity in particular—is that of not-being: “La première marque essentielle de la creature est donc négative.” As Balthasar expresses it in “Patristik, Scholastik und wir”: “This not-being-God of the creature must be maintained as the most fundamental fact of all, ranking first and foremost above all others.”¹¹⁷ Here Balthasar rejects any onto-theological understanding of

tion [of self]” (Balthasar, “The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves, 392). The previous critique of a “Platonizing” remains in place—see, e.g., “The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves,” 391. See also 394, for example, for Balthasar’s contrast between the patristic understanding of “dying to the world” and “our” own understanding.

¹¹⁴ The full logic of this “incisive but not fully articulated” critique deserves a substantial elaboration by me, especially since in both works here under consideration Balthasar only utilizes what I judge to be “parts” of this critique without explicitly bringing them together as a “whole.” My elaboration of that logic will occur in a future (and shorter) article devoted to the subject.

¹¹⁵ In his translation of “The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves,” 372, Oakes uses the English phrase “Danger Zone” to communicate von Balthasar’s sense of the threat Platonism played to Christian theology (but never to the “core of Christian faith”!).

¹¹⁶ *Presence et pensée*, 1 (*Presence and Thought*, 27). The Greek is from Gregory’s *Life of Moses*. An indispensable work of scholarship showing the anti-Eunomian context of Gregory’s *Life of Moses* is found in Ronald Heine’s 1975 *Perfection in the Virtuous Life*.

¹¹⁷ Balthasar, “The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves,” 354 (more broadly on this, see 353–56 and 372–73).

God and "man"—a step he judges all patristic authors, including Gregory, to have failed to have taken: most importantly, a step he believes the patristic authors were unable to take, to even imagine, because of their intrinsic Platonism. All premodern Christian theology stands behind a wall produced by the Platonic logic of participation, a wall it cannot outflank or overcome, and a wall which renders premodern theology fundamentally "other" than modern theology (modern *existentielle*). The discontinuity is radical. Gregory is not the problematic Origen, but he is still as far away as a seventeen-year-old is from the least of contemporary adult "folk."¹¹⁸ Thus Balthasar concludes that Gregory's theology fails as a resource for modern theologians even when properly understood—indeed, it is the proper understanding of Gregory that confirms his limited utility in the modern situation that theology faces "now." The entirety of *Presence et pensée* can perhaps be seen as existing in a "dislocation" within Balthasar's theology overall.¹¹⁹ Only with Daniélou would Platonism explicitly remain relevant to a constructive theology—albeit a "transformed Plato"—and one sees with him the scholarly "Platonist trajectory" that would soon rehabilitate Origen. "For Origen, as for most of the Church Fathers, it is obvious that it

¹¹⁸ "Everywhere [in the Gospels] the stress is put on . . . the 'simple people' who know how to accept the harshness of existence along with the occasional joys that come their way, not making much fuss about either, experiencing and taking in a great deal, sacrificing themselves and wearing themselves out with work without taking overdue notice of it or thinking it is 'anything special,' keeping back in the lower ranks as simply a matter of course, and finally departing from this world without leaving any visible traces in world history, never really understanding why they, of all people, should be 'the first'" (Balthasar, "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves," 358). Given the timing of the article (1939) and its language (German), Balthasar's likening of the peon to the *Volk* is disturbing. (The fact that this "folk" vignette is preceded by a discussion of "community"—*Gemeinschaft*—does nothing to ease one's judgment.)

¹¹⁹ Arguments for a fundamental, pre-1940 French influence on Balthasar strengthen his credentials as a *ressourcement* theologian; arguments for a fundamental, pre-1940 "Germanist" influence weaken his identity as a "Ressourcement" theologian. In my judgment von Balthasar's disappointment expressed here in *Presence et pensée*—"l'homme se souvient des profondes intuitions de l'adolescent"—removes him as a candidate for "Ressourcement theologian" despite whatever happy things his Romantic attachment to the Greeks leads him to include in other writings. A related argument with the same conclusion could be developed by contrasting von Balthasar's emphasis in *Presence et pensée*, Chapter One, on the radical dissimilarity between God ("Being") and creation, including humans, with the strong emphasis on participation, image, and "sur-natural" one finds in Daniélou and Lossky, as well as well-recognized "Ressourcement" theologians like de Lubac.

is Plato who provides the framework for theological discourse”¹²⁰ However, it needs to be recognized and stressed that one tragic effect of the strong rehabilitation of Origen by Henri de Lubac and others was to produce a major divide between Catholic *ressourcement* and Orthodox Neopalamite scholarships—the latter of which has still not accepted Origen into any orthodox discourse.

There are a variety of ways to read and “appropriate” patristic theology—not only one, and, more importantly, not only two. “Two” tends to lock the reader into a binary or oppositional hermeneutics, where “this reading” is opposed to “that reading”—which is what we see in Balthasar’s “either/or” dialectical model. There was a binary hermeneutic also at work in Lossky’s neopatristic reading which came into existence over against the “renewalist” party (or “Russian School”) of Bulgakov. Just as the twentieth-century “turn to” Gregory misleadingly now seems natural and inevitable, so too the exclusive turn to patristic sources by twentieth-century Russian Orthodoxy—the neopatristic movement—misleadingly now seems as natural and inevitable: a virtual cliché. The judgment that Russian Orthodox theology should be based exclusively on patristic sources is the consequence of a conflict over ecclesiastical identity that dominated the Russian church in the post-Revolution period. Lossky took an active role in establishing “neopatristic” theology as the dominant Russian Orthodox theology—indeed, apparently the only “orthodox” Orthodox theology. His reading of Gregory and of all the Fathers is a foundational act for the canon and context of the majority of Russian theology now—and a polemical act against any orthodoxy that engaged modern philosophy.¹²¹ One can deduce from Balthasar’s critique of patristic theology—especially the charge of its cohabitation with Platonism—that Lossky’s “neopatristic” theology would have little appeal to him. It seems more likely instead

¹²⁰ Jean-Fabrice Delbecq, O.C.D., “La transposition christologique de Henri de Lubac,” *Teresianum* 61 (2010): 267–94, at 274 (translation mine). There is one more point to be derived from my reading: with these authors the question of “what about Plato?” is taken to be a defining Christian question. There is a Christian engagement with Plato (and Platonisms) that does not reduce simply to “Plato—how much is useful and safe?” The working sensibility among all these authors is much closer to “how is Plato as revelation?” To talk about “Plato transformed” is one way of expressing this dynamic relationship within Christianity—especially when one realizes that Christian exegesis is itself “the literal transformed”: the literal is not excluded before it is exegeted/spiritualized.

¹²¹ For two very different (binary?) perspectives on the neopatristic movement, see Valliere’s *Modern Russian Theology* and Paul Gavrilyuk’s 2015 *George Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*.

that Balthasar would be at home amongst those whom Lossky counted as foes, and those Russians who would themselves have little to no sympathy for neopatristic Christian theology. One thinks particularly of Bulgakov, Aleksandr Bukharev, and Vladimir Soloviev as logical Russian Orthodox (or at least Russian) resources for Balthasar's theology as he conceived it.¹²² This much is clear from a close reading of his 1939–1942 writings.¹²³ With Lossky the boundaries of ideal Christianity were constructed as much "over against" as they were intrinsic. For Lossky (unlike, e.g., with Krivocheine) the ideal Christian philosophy seems unified across a diachronic front. Eventually Lossky identified an "ideal Christianity" which he could engage within the only philosophy and culture that came to matter—the Russian and Slavic culture(s).

Conclusion

This article has examined the appearance of a theological trope in Franco-phone texts written by three scholars at approximately the same time: Hans Urs von Balthasar (1942), Jean Daniélou (1944), and Vladimir Lossky (1944). The trope is that Gregory of Nyssa's polemic against Eunomius of Cyzicus represents Gregory's rejection of Origen's hermeneutic for Christian philosophy. Each author constructs an antinomy between Gregory and "Eunomius" (who equates to "Origen"); each author understands Gregory's opponent "Eunomius/Origen" to be the personification of rationalism, evacuating Christian theology of its distinct religious content; each author implicitly brackets off the Trinitarian component of the controversy between Gregory and Eunomius, leaving only the "mystical"; each author takes Gregory's relationship to philosophy to represent an exemplary Christian doctrinal and hermeneutical engagement with philosophy. Details in each scholar's understanding of Gregory's significance emerge through the focused examination of three expressions of a common value assigned *at that time* to Gregory of Nyssa's theology.

My perspective has been that there is a common *sitz* that brings these three theologians—and their theologies—together, even if briefly. Reading each author separately from the others would not reveal their common

¹²² Here we pause to acknowledge that Balthasar's reading of Gregory of Nyssa was—especially in "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves"—no less polemical in intent than Lossky's. Balthasar writes against those who would appropriate and apply patristic theology "too simply" and "undialectically," lifting the Fathers out of their Platonic context and placing them, purified, in a post-Platonic horizon.

¹²³ This hypothesis is confirmed in Jennifer Newsome Martin's 2016 *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Critical Appropriation of Russian Religious Thought* and King, "Theology Under a Different Form," 145 and 178.

moment and response. In only a few years, through these three books, these authors take a standing culture-wide phenomenon—the spiritual malaise of rationalism—and internalize it: they articulate the modern French rationalist crisis in specifically Christian terms.¹²⁴ Their map is a Christian map, elaborated with Christian landmarks and Christian paths taken: Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Eunomius. Each of these authors shows that the old Harnackian *problématique* of “the Hellenization of Christianity” is inadequate for capturing the crisis modern post-idealist epistemology poses to the Christian faith.¹²⁵ Reading these texts in the way I have just suggested makes the authors, their language and sensibilities, and their common ground transparent to the over-arching cultural problem in France (and all of Europe) operative since the late nineteenth century in a way which the standard “Vatican I versus Modernism” narrative does not.¹²⁶

The purpose of this article was not to locate the three books under discussion to any other writings, anterior or posterior, by each author; nor did I set out to uncover continuities or discontinuities in the thought of each author when considered diachronically. The subject of this article is the synchronicity of a very specific argument in these three, roughly contemporary, Francophone monographs. An argument invoking Eunomius, in the way that I have shown, is a trope among the three authors despite their substantially different theological conceptual fields.¹²⁷ As my detailed reading of the three monographs has shown, the existence of a synchronic argument is undeniable—even if one doubts its significance

¹²⁴ Schloesser's *Jazz Age Catholicism* is now a fundamental resource for understanding the presence of this malaise in pre-World War II modern France.

¹²⁵ The widely circulated origin story of “*ressourcement* contra Scholasticism” limits the malaise of rationalism to one specific institutional cause—Scholasticism or “manualism”—but my “Hellenization” model reflects what these authors actually say (shared across different ecclesiastical traditions).

¹²⁶ A collection such as *Romance and the Rock: Nineteenth-Century Catholics on Faith and Reason*, ed. by Joseph Fitzer (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), can be read as though the rationalist crisis was a uniquely Catholic event—indeed, an intra-ecclesiastical conflict of “reason” versus “faith” in a world in which the relationship of these two had otherwise been settled. It was not. In addition to Schloesser's (oft-cited) *Jazz Catholicism*, see Grogan's *Bergsonian Controversy*, Cohen's *Piety and Politics*, and Hastings's *Catholicism and the Roots of Nazism*.

¹²⁷ Unlike Gregory the authors will decline to link their theology of “knowing God” (their *théologie mystique*) with their Trinitarian theology. (The most important exception to this is Daniélou's Christocentric reading of Gregory's “mystical assimilation” to the Trinity through Christ.) The Christological and Trinitarian “logics” of all *ressourcement* authors needs to be investigated.

(e.g., its "place" in an author's work). However, if the reader discovers common ground among any of the authors where before none was imagined, then so much the better.¹²⁸

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¹²⁸ In this article *ressourcement* is a broader collection of theologians than just that cadre of Catholic theologians associated with *Nouvelle Théologie*. The term legitimately applies to a movement among theologians in France (principally in Paris)—Catholic, Russian Orthodox, and Protestant—who were motivated to retrieve the literature and theology of the Church Fathers as a means of fostering renewal in spirituality and theology. This motivation found social expression in the private seminars Nikolai Berdyaev sponsored from 1927 until the early thirties. Catholic members of this seminar include Jacques Maritain, Gabriel Marcel, Charles du Bos, Lucien Laberthonniere, Jules Lebreton, Étienne Gilson, and Edouard Leroy; Orthodox theologians include Berdyaev himself, Georges Florovsky, Sergei Bulgakov, Myrrha Lot-Borodine, and Vasily Zenkovsky. Among the Francophone *ressourcement* members we may also include earlier Orthodox precursors Dumitry Staniloae and Basil Krivocheine. Marcel had influence in both the Catholic and Orthodox "French *ressourcement*" theologians; Lot-Borodine had a strong influence on Jean Daniélou and Vladimir Lossky—both of the next generation after hers. See Andrew Louth, "French *Ressourcement* Theology and Orthodoxy: A Living Mutual Relationship," in *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, ed. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press Online, 2011); and Nicolas Lossky, "Incidences en Occident (Et en Russie) du renouveau théologique russe au XXe siècle Authors," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 29, no. 3/4 (1988): 553–59. A book such as Jurgen Mettepenningten's 2010 *Nouvelle Théologie* treats superfluously the important intersection of all these theologians working in France over a twenty-five-year period and ignores the broad cultural (French) context. The fundamental historical accounts of this period in French theology is Étienne Fouilloux's 1997 *Les chrétiens français entre crise et libération 1937–1947*, followed by Edward Baring, *Converts to the Real: Catholicism and the Making of Continental Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).