

Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith

Union, Knowledge, and Divine Presence

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Introduction

Faith the Christian Foundation

‘But the Law has found its fulfilment in Christ, so that all who have faith will be justified.’ So proclaimed Paul to the Christians at Rome.¹ ‘If you declare with your mouth’, he continues, ‘that Jesus is Lord, and if you believe with your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved.’² That faith, and not obedience to the Law, could open the doors of justification and salvation, Paul insisted, was nothing new, and he looks to Abraham as one who embodied this faith: ‘Abraham put his faith in God and this was reckoned to him as uprightness.’³ Indeed the Letter to the Hebrews provides a salvation history that focuses on acts of faith from Abel and Enoch through Abraham, Moses, and the prophets.⁴ What is true of Abraham is true of all believers: ‘it is people of faith who receive the same blessing as Abraham, the man of faith’.⁵

Faith as a doorway to God is foundational for Christianity from the beginning, but as Christianity began to move out and engage the Hellenistic culture in which it was immersed, this emphasis on faith as somehow providing access to God seemed to generate more heat than light. It was not that *pistis* meant nothing to a philosophical culture permeated by the spirit of Plato. It did indeed mean something, and Plato’s Allegory of the Line is often taken as the *locus classicus* in this regard:⁶ caught up in sense impression, faith was associated with a very low and unreliable form of knowledge. As E.R. Dodds observed long ago in his Wiles Lectures: ‘Had any cultivated pagan of the second century been asked to put in a few words the difference between his own view of life and the Christian one, he might reply that it was the difference between *logismos* and *pistis*, between reasoned conviction and blind faith. To anyone brought up on classical Greek philosophy, *pistis* meant the lowest

¹ Rom. 10: 4 (*The New Jerusalem Bible*).

³ Rom. 4: 3; cf. Gal. 3: 7 and Gen. 15: 6.

⁵ Gal. 3: 9.

² Rom. 10: 9.

⁴ Heb. 11.

⁶ *Republic* 511e.

grade of cognition.⁷ It was clearly not the case that Greek philosophy did not value the divine; Neoplatonism was especially concerned with divine union. What was required for this, however, was not faith but the non-discursive reaches of the intelligence. This is in many ways a suitable place to situate the subject of the present study of Gregory of Nyssa.

While Gregory of Nyssa spoke of faith in a variety of senses, this study will focus on a particular, indeed technical, use of the term *pistis*. We shall see that Gregory of Nyssa ascribes to faith qualities which Neoplatonism would reserve to the crest of the wave of *nous*. Indeed, for Gregory of Nyssa, faith becomes a faculty of union with God, who is beyond all comprehension, beyond the reach of concept, image, word. To speak of union with God beyond noetic activity is something with which Neoplatonism is very familiar, though it would not until Proclus see that faith had a role in this apophatic union. But Gregory does see the role of faith in union with God, and to develop his views on this matter he grounds himself not in Plotinus or Porphyry but in certain biblical figures who embody faith, especially Abraham, Moses, the bride of the Song of Songs, and Paul.⁸

Philo, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen had done much in their own Middle-Platonic context to show that biblical faith could be taken with epistemological seriousness. For Philo faith was the ‘queen of virtues’⁹ and he could ascribe to faith the capacity to unite with God: ‘What then is the cementing substance? Do you ask, what? Piety, surely, and faith: for these virtues adjust and unite (ἐνοῦσιν) the intent of the heart to the incorruptible Being: as Abraham when he believed is said to “come near to God” (Gen. 18: 23).’¹⁰ Clement of Alexandria attempted to give a thorough explanation of faith to assuage the objections of both Greek philosophy and the Gnostics, who considered their *gnosis* higher than simple faith. For Clement faith became the acceptance of the first principles of knowledge that cannot be proved, but without which there

⁷ E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge, 1965), 120–1.

⁸ More on Gregory’s relationship to aspects of Neoplatonism in Chapter 4.

⁹ Philo, *Abr.* 46. 270 (LCL, Philo vol. vi, trans. F. Colson). See H. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, vol. ii (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), 215–18. For a philological study of faith in Philo, see D. Lindsay, *Josephus and Faith: Πίστις and Πιστεύειν as Faith Terminology in the Writings of Flavius Josephus and in the New Testament* (Leiden, 1993), 53–73.

¹⁰ Philo, *Mig.* 24. 132 (LCL, Philo vol. iv, trans. F. Colson and G. Whitaker).

could be no *gnosis*.¹¹ In his *Contra Celsum* Origen is keen to refute Celsus' accusation that Christians accept things on faith without the support of reason.¹² Origen concedes that faith is 'useful for the multitude, and that we admittedly teach those who cannot abandon everything and pursue a study of rational argument to believe without thinking out their reasons'.¹³ He insists, however, that this is not the ideal and that faith with the support of reason is better than faith alone: 'it is in harmony with scripture to say that it is far better to accept doctrines with reason and wisdom than with mere faith'.¹⁴ But Origen is not always on the defensive about faith. Commenting on Luke 8. 48, 'My daughter your faith has saved you,' Origen likens philosophers to physicians who attempt but fail to heal humanity. 'But upon touching the fringe of Jesus' garment, who alone is the physician of souls and bodies, [humanity] is healed on the spot by the fire and warmth of faith. If we look to our faith in Jesus Christ and consider how great is the son of God and touch something of him, we will see that in comparison to the fringes in him we have touched but a fringe. But all the same the fringe heals us and enables us to hear Jesus say: "Daughter, your faith has saved you".'¹⁵ As much as Origen values the reasoned argument of philosophy, he can speak of faith as providing something that philosophy alone cannot provide. Faith mediates real contact with Jesus and brings healing.¹⁶

These brief glimpses of Philo, Clement, and Origen represent the early Christian concern to integrate the epistemological concerns of their philosophical-cultural *milieus* into a viable understanding of how Christian faith could lead to an experience of God. While Gregory of

¹¹ See esp. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 11, trans. J. Ferguson, FC 85 (Washington, DC, 1991). On faith and knowledge in Clement see E. Osborn, *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge, 1957), 127–45 and S. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study of Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford, 1971), 118–42; see also J. Moingt, 'La Gnose de Clément d'Alexandrie dans ses rapports avec la Philosophie', *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 37 (1950), 398–421; 37 (1950), 537–64; 38 (1951), 82–118; R. Mortley, *Connaissance religieuse et herméneutique chez Clément d'Alexandrie* (Leiden, 1973), 109–25; R. Berchman, *From Philo to Origen: Middle Platonism in Transition* (Chico, Calif., 1985), 176–9.

¹² For a broad survey of Middle-Platonic pagan criticism of Christianity see S. Benko, 'Pagan Criticism of Christianity during the First Two Centuries AD', in *ANRW* 11. 23/2, 1055–1117; see also R. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven, 1984).

¹³ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1. 10, trans. H. Chadwick (Cambridge, 1965), 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 1. 13 (Chadwick, 16).

¹⁵ Origen, *In Lucam fragmenta* (M. Rauer (ed.), 240. 25–35); trans. R. Daly in H. von Balthasar, *Origen, Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Anthology of His Writings* (Washington, DC, 1984), 94.

¹⁶ See F. Bertrand, *Mystique de Jésus chez Origène* (Paris, 1951), 121–40, esp. 130–2.

Nyssa is very much heir to this Alexandrian tradition, he writes in a Neoplatonic-cultural context which is much less hostile towards faith. Curiously, late Neoplatonism begins to look very much like a religion, not least in the way in which it came to value faith and revelation. Dodds remarks, ‘pagan philosophy tended increasingly to replace reason by authority—and not only the authority of Plato, but the authority of Orphic poetry, of Hermetic theosophy, of obscure revelations like the *Chaldaean Oracles*’.¹⁷ It is worth considering this rise of faith in late Neoplatonism, not to suggest that this was a direct influence on what Gregory claimed of faith as a faculty of union, but rather to show that the theological culture of late antiquity, *for both Christianity and late Neoplatonism*, saw immense, religious possibility in faith. The exaltation of faith was part of the spirit of the age.

Faith in Late Neoplatonism: Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus

One of the defining features of late Neoplatonism was its increasing religiosity and the manner in which it too came to extol faith. This is not without a certain irony; philosophical Hellenism in general had previously derided faith as among the lowest forms of cognition: ‘it was the state of mind of the uneducated, who believe things on hearsay without being able to give reasons for their belief’.¹⁸ But after Plotinus especially, Neoplatonism ‘became less a philosophy than a religion, whose followers were occupied like their Christian counterparts in expounding and reconciling sacred texts. For them too *pistis* became a basic requirement.’¹⁹ A propos of late antiquity as a whole, Dodds remarks: ‘The entire culture, pagan as well as Christian, was moving into a phase in which religion was to be co-extensive with life, and the quest for God was to cast its shadow over all other human activities.’²⁰ Dodds has suggested that this was in large part a parallel response from both Christians and pagans to the anxiety that marked the age, an age ‘so filled with fear and hatred as the world of the third century, any path that promised escape must have attracted serious minds. Many besides Plotinus must have given a new meaning to the words of Agamemnon in Homer, “Let us flee to our own country”’.²¹

An approach altogether different from Dodds’s reduction of religious aspiration and expression to anxiety-response is taken more recently by

¹⁷ Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, 122.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 100–1.

Jay Bregman. Bregman sees in later Hellenism the interaction of three distinct dynamics. First, is 'the Classical tradition of Greek customs, language, institutions and literature, an element of which nevertheless involved acknowledgment of the gods and religious practice'.²² Second, the Greek philosophical tradition, in the light of which the entire cultural heritage was to be interpreted, 'as in the Neoplatonism of Plotinus and Porphyry, in which the highest activities are contemplation, *unio mystica* and *amor intellectus dei*'.²³ Third, Bregman says, is 'the theurgic Neoplatonism of Iamblichus, Julian's guru, and Proclus, where rites and religious practice are basic and essential...'.²⁴ This is not to suggest that genuinely devout religious practice did not exist among non-Christian Hellenists until the late Neoplatonism of the fourth and fifth centuries; for certainly it did, as H.-D. Saffrey has sensitively demonstrated.²⁵ What Bregman usefully highlights, however, is a cultural trend in late Neoplatonism which witnesses the coming together of the classical philosophical patrimony and religious piety, indeed faith, what Gregory Shaw has aptly termed, 'the platonizing of popular religion'.²⁶ This can be sufficiently demonstrated by surveying some of the key moments in late Neoplatonism's change in attitude towards religious practice in general and towards the role of faith in particular; for 'no religion can dispense with *pistis*'.²⁷

Plotinus would seem to have had precious little time for faith. Its epistemological possibilities were advanced but little beyond that accorded it by Plato's Allegory of the Line.²⁸ While not disparaging it outright, for Plotinus, faith would have negligible relevance to the ascent to the One, the flight of the alone to the alone. As Rist has put it: faith for Plotinus is 'conviction derived from the experience of the senses'.²⁹ With his disciple Porphyry, however, things begin to change.

A committed critic of Christianity, Porphyry was quick to deride the irrational faith of Christians.³⁰ This allegedly irrational faith, however, is

²² J. Bregman, 'Elements of the Emperor Julian's Theology', in J. Cleary (ed.), *Traditions of Platonism: Essays in Honor of John Dillon* (Aldershot, 1999), 339.

²³ Ibid. ²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ H. Saffrey, 'The Piety and Prayers of Ordinary Men and Women in Late Antiquity', in A. Armstrong (ed.), *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality* (New York, 1986), 195–213.

²⁶ G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, Pa., 1995), 231.

²⁷ Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, 123. ²⁸ *Republic* 511e.

²⁹ J. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge, 1967), 234; for some nuanced meanings of faith in Plotinus see also 235–9.

³⁰ See A. Meredith, 'Porphyry and Julian against the Christians', *ANRW* 11. 23/2, 1120–49, esp. 1125–37; see also Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*.

not Porphyry's final word on the possibilities of faith. In his later years Porphyry writes a letter to his wife Marcella that reveals both a respect for traditional religious practice and an acknowledged role for faith in a relationship with God.³¹ Writing to console his wife during an extended absence, Porphyry encourages Marcella to 'disregard the irrational confusion caused by passion and consider it no small thing to remember the divine doctrine by which you were initiated into philosophy "for deeds provide the positive demonstrations of each person's beliefs" and "whoever has acquired certainty must live in such a way that he himself can be a certain witness to the beliefs which he speaks about to his disciples"'.³² At first glance one might take the language of philosophical initiation to refer only to the type of philosophical life to which Porphyry would have been exposed by Plotinus, but Porphyry goes on to speak of traditional religious practice and honouring God in a manner that gives greater credence to traditional religion than Plotinus would have accorded it. 'For this is the principal fruit of piety: to honour the divine in the traditional ways, not because He needs it but because He summons us by his venerable and blessed dignity to worship him. God's altars, if they are consecrated, do not harm us; if they are neglected, they do not help us.'³³ Moreover, not only does Porphyry's philosophical piety include traditional Hellenic religious practice according to ancestral custom, but Porphyry can also speak quite positively of the role of faith in a relationship with God. 'Let four principles in particular be firmly held with regard to God: faith, truth, love, hope. For it is necessary to have faith that conversion toward God is the only salvation.'³⁴ This text has been much commented upon. Rist claims that the triad 'faith, truth, and love' marks a clear influence of the *Chaldaean Oracles* and constitutes, moreover, the first sign of direct influence of the *Chaldaean Oracles* to date.³⁵ Citing A.H. Armstrong, Rist says that faith in *Ad Marcellam* is ' "Platonic firm rational confidence" '.³⁶ Dodds was less

³¹ The attitude towards religion is so devout as to prompt some to suggest the unlikely case that Porphyry had been positively influenced by Christians; for a review of this opinion see *Porphyry the Philosopher: To Marcella*, trans. K. Wicker (Atlanta, 1987), 4.

³² *Ad Marcellam* 8. 137–50; critical text and translation by K. Wicker, *Porphyry the Philosopher*, 52–3.

³³ *Ad Marcellam* 18. 294–9 (Wicker, 60), translation by Wicker, 61.

³⁴ *Ad Marcellam* 24. 376–9 (Wicker, 66), translation by Wicker, 67; Porphyry goes on to speak likewise on truth, love, and hope.

³⁵ Rist, *Plotinus*, 239. Rist bases himself on H. Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire* (Cairo, 1956, new edition by M. Tardieu, Paris, 1978), 144–5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*; see A. Armstrong, 'Platonic Eros and Christian Agape', *Downside Review* 79 (1961), 105–21, at 116 n. 5.

certain that this triad came from the *Chaldaean Oracles*, but does think it a good deal more likely than Harnack's suggestion of the influence of 1 Cor. 13: 13 on Porphyry.³⁷ For our purpose, however, of indicating late Neoplatonism's gradual exaltation of faith, it is worth pointing out at least three things. First, Porphyry places faith in the context of a relationship with God. Second, while Porphyry does not suggest that union with God is mediated by faith (something which Plotinus would never have advocated, but which Proclus will indeed claim), it is nevertheless necessary, 'the first condition of the soul's approach to God'.³⁸ Third, what Porphyry has to say about both faith and the 'ancestral custom' of religious practice, provides a good place to take a sort of cultural pulse. For we see here an example of the cultural tendencies announced earlier by Bregan: the tendency in later Hellenism to interpret religious practice in the light of philosophy. In *Ad Marcellam* Porphyry is not simply advocating ancient religious practice; the letter is an instruction in the life of philosophy. What is noteworthy about Porphyry's positive views on faith and religious practice expressed here is that he sees them as ideal preparation for the life of philosophy. 'Porphyry remains the philosopher as he integrates the search for personal salvation into the metaphysical structure of Neoplatonism'.³⁹ This adds some precision and a slight corrective to Dodds's general observation that after Plotinus Neoplatonism became less a philosophy than a religion. Religious rites and practices did not replace Neoplatonism, but were integrated into Neoplatonism's description of the philosophical life for late antiquity. Porphyry, at least in *Ad Marcellam*, provides a clear pulse in this Platonizing of popular religion, but Iamblichus and Proclus provide a yet stronger pulse.

There is a certain urgency in Iamblichus' defence of theurgy.⁴⁰ Porphyry was not always so tolerant of theurgic rites, and in many ways the views of religious practices expressed to his wife represent a softening of the rather more critical and suspicious views expressed in the Letter to Anebo or in *De abstinentia*. Following Plotinus, Porphyry held that divine

³⁷ Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, 123 n. 2; Dodds emphasizes that, in contrast to the *Chaldaean Oracles*, 'Porphyry's *pistis* is a state of mind, not a cosmological principle' (ibid.). For a succinct overview of those who argue a Christian influence on Porphyry see *Porphyry the Philosopher*, trans. Wicker, 28–9, n. 23.

³⁸ Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, 122.

³⁹ *Porphyry the Philosopher*, trans. Wicker, 13. Wicker concurs with A. Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Platonic Tradition* (The Hague, 1974), 145.

⁴⁰ P. Hadot reminds us that the term 'theurgy' was coined by the author (or authors) of the *Chaldaean Oracles*; see P. Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. M. Chase (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 170.

union was achieved through νοῦς. ‘The philosopher... is detached from exterior things... and has no need of diviners or the entrails of animals. . . . Alone and through himself, as we have said, the philosopher will approach the god . . .’⁴¹ Theurgic rituals, according to Porphyry, did not lead to divine union but served only to purify the lower soul.⁴² This was cause for concern on the part of Iamblichus, his former pupil.⁴³ As Peter Brown has put it: ‘The austere philosophical transcendentalism of Porphyry threatened to deny that the gods were available on earth and hence to deny that heaven was accessible to men through the traditional rituals.’⁴⁴ ‘This doctrine’, says Iamblichus, ‘spells the ruin of all holy ritual and all communion between gods and men achieved by our rites, by placing the physical presence of the superior beings outside this earth.’⁴⁵ By exalting the role of theurgic rituals, however, Iamblichus was not abandoning the Platonism in which he was schooled, but adapting it in such a way that the ancient religious customs served a vital function in the life of the philosopher.

Gregory Shaw claims that Iamblichus’ *De mysteriis*, written in response to Porphyry’s Letter to Anebo, is late antiquity’s best example of the changes that were coming about in traditional pagan worship. ‘Iamblichus thoroughly revised and defended pagan divinational practices by placing them within the theoretical framework of Platonic and Pythagorean teachings . . .’⁴⁶ This, combined with the growing authority of the *Chaldaean Oracles*,⁴⁷ resulted in the theurgic rites that gave further shape to the religious complexion of Neoplatonism in the fourth century (and beyond). But why did Iamblichus see a philosophical need for theurgy and how did theurgy fulfil that need?

Iamblichus had taken a different view from both Plotinus and Porphyry regarding the structure of the soul. For Plotinus and Porphyry, the

⁴¹ Porphyry, *De abstinentia* 11. 52. 2–4, in *Porphyry: De l’abstinence*, ed. J. Bouffartigue and M. Patillon (Paris, 1977), quoted in G. Shaw, ‘Divination in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus’ in R. Berchman (ed.), *Mediators of the Divine: Horizons of Prophecy, Divination, Dreams and Theurgy in Mediterranean Antiquity* (Atlanta, 1998), 240.

⁴² Shaw, ‘Divination’, 240.

⁴³ See *ibid.*, 230–1 for a concise summary of Iamblichus’ fundamental disagreement with Porphyry.

⁴⁴ P. Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), 100–1.

⁴⁵ Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 1. 8 (28. 6), ed. E. des Places (Paris, 1966), 55, quoted in Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, 101.

⁴⁶ Shaw, ‘Divination’, 228.

⁴⁷ J. Dillon, ‘Iamblichus of Chalcis’, *ANRW* 11. 36/2, 868–9, at 878; more on the *Chaldaean Oracles* in Chapter 4.

essence of the soul was undescended in body and, hence, never lost its divine status. Porphyry was not being flippant when he stated in *De abstinentia*, ‘the philosopher will approach the god’.⁴⁸ The statement reveals his understanding of the nature of the soul, whose essence, undescended in the body, remains eternal and well placed ‘to approach the god’ without mediation by theurgy. Not so for Iamblichus; the essence of the soul is descended in the body, with the result that, of the soul’s two functions—animating the body and uniting with the divine—the soul can only perform the former. It is the precise role of theurgy to make up for what soul cannot do, by allowing the gods to come to soul and use it as their instrument.⁴⁹ Ancient rituals such as divination became for Iamblichus theurgic rites, divine works that did far more than merely cleanse the lower soul (something which Porphyry admitted).⁵⁰ Theurgic rituals ‘bridged the gap between the soul’s *ousia* and *energeia*: it allowed the divinity of the soul to be experienced immediately as divine but at the cost of its singular self-consciousness’.⁵¹

Because of Iamblichus’ understanding of the structure of soul, we can see more clearly how vital a role something like divination can now be seen to play. Iamblichus says, ‘only divination, therefore, in uniting us with the gods, truly enables us to share in the life of the gods, and since it participates in the foreknowledge and thought of the Divine, we ourselves may truly attain to divinity by means of it; and divination is the authentic guarantee of our good, since the blessed Intellect of the gods is replete with good of every kind’.⁵² With Iamblichus the old rites, with their entrails and oracles and sacrifices, can no longer be said to be mere superstition; they are the means of uniting with the divine. Iamblichus has given them an anthropological grounding in the structure of the soul itself, which makes them crucial for the life of the philosopher.⁵³

Amongst those inspired by Iamblichus, Julian the Emperor must be reckoned the most famous in the fourth century. A convert to Iamblican Neoplatonism through Maximus of Ephesus, Julian ‘was the most

⁴⁸ *De abstinentia* 11. 52. 2–4; cf. Plotinus, *Ennead* 11. 9. 2.

⁴⁹ See Shaw, ‘Divination’, 240–8; Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, 171; see also L. Siorvanes, *Proclus: Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Science* (Edinburgh, 1996), 191.

⁵⁰ See R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 2nd edn. (London, 1975), 107–10.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 245.

⁵² Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* x. 4 in *Les Mystères d’Égypte*, ed. E. des Places (Paris, 1966), quoted in J. Gregory, *The Neoplatonists: A Reader*, 2nd edn. (London, 1999), 152.

⁵³ See Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 231: ‘Iamblichus provided a theoretical justification for well-known religious practices of the Greco-Roman world.’

enthusiastic fourth-century religious Hellenes',⁵⁴ and theurgy, according to Rowland Smith, 'is the most strikingly fourth-century feature in the devotional and intellectual make-up of the man'.⁵⁵ Some scholars see Julian establishing an Hellenic church 'with its own orthodoxy and priestly hierarchy under his direction' very much driven by Iamblican theurgy.⁵⁶ Rowland Smith, however, while acknowledging Julian's personal debt to theurgic Neoplatonism, nevertheless cautions strongly against exaggerating its influence on his public religious programme.⁵⁷ To whatever degree, great or little, theurgic Neoplatonism affected the Empire during his brief reign, Julian remains an important example of how the Iamblican reforms of Neoplatonism were still very much alive. As Philip Rousseau has recently put it: 'Especially among the followers of Iamblichus, [Julian] harnessed the energies of a generation that had already steeled itself in the face of Constantine's tolerance and conversion . . .'⁵⁸

If the Iamblican theurgic reforms of the fourth century were in a large measure responsible for late Neoplatonism's sustained religious complexion, we might well expect to see the role of faith also come to the fore. While we have seen Porphyry speak of faith sympathetically, it is really Proclus we must turn to in order to see the positive regard in which late Neoplatonism came to hold faith.

If indeed Porphyry was the first Neoplatonist to give evidence of the growing influence of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, he was clearly not the last.⁵⁹ Iamblichus 'turned them into the ultimate theological authority',⁶⁰ and Proclus on several occasions refers to the famous Chaldaean triad of faith, truth, and love. Saffrey maintains that the entrance of the *Chaldaean*

⁵⁴ Bregman, 'Elements of Julian's Theology', 337.

⁵⁵ R. Smith, *Julian's Gods: Religion and Philosophy in the Thought and Action of Julian the Apostate* (London, 1995), 112.

⁵⁶ Bregman, 'Elements of Julian's Theology', 337; for similar views see also J. Bidez, *La Vie de l'Empereur Julien* (Paris, 1930); G. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1990); P. Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism* (Oxford, 1981).

⁵⁷ Smith, *Julian's Gods*, 110–13: 'Iamblican theurgy impinged on him deeply, to be sure; but it was a part of his personal credo, not the whole of it. It belonged principally to the philosophic piety of the private man . . .' (113); see also 220–4. Bregman, 'Elements of Julian's Theology', 348 n. 30, would seem to take exception to Smith but does not attempt to counter all of Smith's claims.

⁵⁸ P. Rousseau, *The Early Christian Centuries* (London, 2002), 197.

⁵⁹ Rist, *Plotinus*, 239.

⁶⁰ H. Saffrey, 'Neoplatonist Spirituality II: From Iamblichus to Proclus and Damascius' in A. H. Armstrong (ed.), *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality* (New York, 1986), 253.

Oracles into Neoplatonism had two important consequences. First, it gave rise to what Iamblichus developed as theurgy.⁶¹ Second, the *Chaldaean Oracles* became a theological authority that gave Neoplatonists a new way of reading Plato. Appearing probably in second-century Syria, the *Chaldaean Oracles* were thought to be the transmissions of a medium in communication with Plato.⁶² ‘Since the *Oracles* were Platonic, Plato himself became a god capable of proffering oracles; his writings thus became the revelation of a sublime doctrine, a truly “holy scripture”.’⁶³ One can see how Iamblichus’ theory of the descended soul accommodates within Neoplatonism this new need for revelation: because the soul is fully descended, it cannot save itself; the philosopher stands in need of divine assistance. These Platonic oracles supplied such guidance, which Iamblichus worked into his theurgic rites. While Proclus certainly continued to see a role for theurgy within fifth-century Neoplatonism, he is particularly useful for seeing the role which faith comes to play in the soul’s search for divine union in the context of theurgy.⁶⁴

Proclus ascribes to faith qualities which Plotinus and Porphyry would never have done. More than conviction derived from either the senses or intellect, faith becomes for Proclus a faculty of divine union beyond the level of intellect. His clearest statement of this is to be found in the *Platonic Theology*. With the Chaldaean triad of love, truth, and faith in the background, Proclus discusses how each is a means of contact with the divine. Love establishes contact with Beauty and truth with Wisdom, but, ‘What’, he asks, ‘will unite us with the Good? What will still all activity and movement? . . . In a word, it is the Faith of the gods which, by means beyond description, brings all the ranks of gods and *daemons*, and the blessed among souls, into union with the Good. For the Good must be sought not by knowledge and its imperfection, but only by surrender to the divine radiance.’⁶⁵ As the means of union with the Good, this faith has a certain pride of place: ‘Neither Beauty nor Wisdom nor any other property of Being is for all things so worthy of Faith, so secure, so indubitable, so incomprehensible to the sequential

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid. For a more in-depth treatment see H. Saffrey, ‘Les néoplatoniciens et les *Oracles Chaldaïques*’, *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 27 (1981), 209–25.

⁶³ Saffrey, ‘Neoplatonist Spirituality’, 254.

⁶⁴ For a helpful examination of differences between Iamblichian and Proclan theurgy, see A. Sheppard, ‘Proclus’ Attitude to Theurgy’, *Classical Quarterly* 32 (1982), 212–24.

⁶⁵ Proclus, *Platonic Theology* 1. 25, ed. H. Saffrey and L. Westerink, *Théologie Platonicienne* (Paris, 1968), 110, 1–10; translation by Gregory, *The Neoplatonists: A Reader*, 170.

movement of thought, as is the Good.⁶⁶ It is clear that Proclus is not using faith in the sense that Plato and Plotinus used it.⁶⁷ Faith is not, as Siorvanes has put it, ‘the absence of demonstrable argument or truth’.⁶⁸ Because the Good is beyond discursive knowing, the means of contact must be non-discursive. This is what Proclus sees in faith. For Proclus faith is an unknowing that is higher than knowing that unites with the Good, that is beyond the grasp of all noetic activity. What makes possible this union with the Good is precisely the role of theurgy: ‘theurgy leads to a supra-intellectual faith which reaches God’.⁶⁹

With Proclus, then, we see most clearly the religious possibilities that late Neoplatonism came to see in faith. Clearly this is not the inferior knowledge described by Plato in the Allegory of the Line; nor is it just the rational faith that Porphyry came to see as ‘a fundamental requirement of the philosopher’.⁷⁰ Proclus asks: ‘What is the cause of this initiation except that faith? For on the whole the initiation does not happen through intellection and judgement, but through silence which is unifying and is superior to every cognitive activity. Faith imparts this . . .’⁷¹

Since at least Plato, the approach to the divine has been through love and truth. Why has Proclus seen in faith a third possibility for the philosopher, a possibility on a par with, if not nobler than, love and truth? Three reasons suggest themselves for consideration. One important reason is that the *Chaldaean Oracles* has upgraded faith by incorporating it into the triad along with love and truth. Thanks to the *Chaldaean Oracles*, which is considered Platonic revelation, faith has become a category whose importance is guaranteed by such revelation. Given this, the exalted understanding of faith, tied to higher theurgy, should be understood as a development *within* Platonism.⁷² Second, this exalted role of faith corresponds to the changes regarding the soul wrought by Iamblichus. A fully descended soul stands in need of assistance to realize

⁶⁶ Proclus, *Platonic Theology* i. 25, ed. H. Saffrey and L. Westerink, *Théologie Platonicienne* (Paris, 1968), 110, 1–10; translation by Gregory, *The Neoplatonists: A Reader*, 170.

⁶⁷ Indeed Proclus distances himself from just this understanding at i. 25 (Saffrey and Westerink, 110, 17–22).

⁶⁸ Siorvanes, *Proclus*, 191–2.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 192; see 192–9 for an account of Proclus’ range of views on theurgy; see also Sheppard, ‘Proclus’ Attitude to Theurgy’, 219, and Rist, *Plotinus*, 244.

⁷⁰ Rist, *Plotinus*, 238; Porphyry thought the Christians exemplified irrational faith, which ‘does not find God’ (Rist, *Plotinus*, 238).

⁷¹ Proclus, *Platonic Theology*, iv. 31 quoted in Siorvanes, *Proclus*, 193.

⁷² L. Rosán, *The Philosophy of Proclus* (New York, 1949), 215 n. 152, suggested that Proclus’ emphasis on faith might reflect a Christian influence.

its divine nature; 'it has to be "lifted up" by divinity itself'.⁷³ The revealed text of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, along with its theurgy that led to faith,⁷⁴ was this divine assistance that lifted the soul to salvation. Finally, for Neoplatonism generally, and certainly for Proclus, the One is beyond all noetic activity. Because of faith's ties to theurgy, plus the fact that faith itself does not require the grasp of comprehension, faith seems an obvious virtue to develop when speaking of the approach to and union with the One.

While Christianity has espoused the way of faith from the beginning, late Neoplatonism eventually came to do something similar, as Dodds has observed. As to why, Dodds points to the anxiety of the age and ultimately prefers to see it 'as an illustration of the old and true saying that "we grow like what we hate"'.⁷⁵ I have suggested that changes within Neoplatonism regarding the fallen nature of the soul, ushered in most notably by Iamblichus, are a significant factor in explaining the religious character that late Neoplatonism took on. Pierre Hadot has recently observed: 'For Neoplatonism and Christianity, the two spiritual movements which dominated the end of antiquity and opposed each other, man cannot save himself by his own strength but must wait for the divine to take the initiative.'⁷⁶ For both traditions, the fallen state of the human requires that the divine take the initiative, what Christians would call grace and revelation. Hadot, moreover likens, late Neoplatonist reliance on 'the material and sensible rites' of theurgy to the Christian need for 'the mediation of the incarnate Logos and the sensible signs of the sacraments in order to enter into contact with God'.⁷⁷ Interesting as these and other parallels are, in the course of this study of what Gregory of Nyssa had to say about Christian faith as a means of union with God we shall see striking differences.

The exaltation of faith by both Christians and late Neoplatonists was part of the theological climate of late antiquity generally, but despite some interesting parallels between Gregory and Neoplatonism regarding how faculties of union work, there is important divergence regarding faith. Commenting on the difference between Christian faith and Proclan faith, Rist says: 'Πίστις then in Proclus is not very like the Christian's faith, for there is no real parallel between the Christian's faith in

⁷³ Siorvanes, *Proclus*, 191.

⁷⁴ For a good discussion of higher and lower theurgy in Proclus see Sheppard, 'Proclus' Attitude to Theurgy'.

⁷⁵ Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, 123.

⁷⁶ Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, 171.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Christ and the Neoplatonist's reliance on the *Chaldaean Oracles*.⁷⁸ Rist does not elaborate on Christian faith, but as for Gregory of Nyssa's special account of it, we shall see emphases that will ultimately distinguish it sharply from the late Neoplatonist account of it. Gregory will emphasize, among other things, the sacramental origins of faith and highlight, whether boldly or with characteristic subtlety, the developmental character of faith and the transformation of soul as a result of the union mediated by faith. But most of all Gregory presumes in faith a real relationship with the Incarnate Word, immanent in creation, in sacred scripture and in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. To this faith of Abraham, Moses, the bride, and Paul let us now turn.

⁷⁸ Rist, *Plotinus*, 245.

The Exaltation of Faith: The State of Current Research

Faith in Gregory of Nyssa: the Critical Heritage

In his recent book on Gregory of Nyssa, Bernard Pottier¹ notes the centrality of faith in the thought of the fourth-century Cappadocian.² Moreover, he identifies faith as the heart of Gregory's mystical theory.³ Nor is Pottier a solitary voice in drawing attention to this fact. For indeed, since the beginning of the twentieth century, scholars of Gregory of Nyssa have noted the importance of faith in his thought.

Not least among these scholars is the eminent figure of Hans Urs von Balthasar, whose pioneering work, *Présence et Pensée: Essai sur la philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse*, was one of the first twentieth-century studies

¹ B. Pottier, *Dieu et le Christ selon Grégoire de Nysse: Etude systématique du 'Contre Eunome' avec traduction inédite des extraits d'Eunome* (Namur, 1994), 215.

² For a general orientation to the fourth-century Roman province see A. Di Berardino, 'La Cappadocia al tempo di Basilio', in *Mémorial Dom Jean Gribomont*, *Studia Ephemerides Augustinianum* 27 (Rome, 1988), 167–82. J. Daniélou, *Le IV^{ème} siècle: Grégoire de Nysse et son milieu* (Paris, 1965). B. Gain, *L'Eglise de Cappadoce au IV^e siècle d'après la correspondance de Basile de Césarée (330–379)*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 225 (Rome, 1985). A.H.M. Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces* (Oxford, 1937). R. Heine, 'Cappadocia', in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, ed. A. Di Berardino, trans. A. Walford (Cambridge, 1992), s.v. J.-R. Pouchet, *Basile le Grand et son univers d'amis d'après sa correspondance: Une stratégie de communion*, *Studia Ephemerides Augustinianum* 36 (Rome, 1992). P. Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, *Transformation of the Classical Heritage* 20 (Berkeley, 1994).

³ Pottier, *Dieu et le Christ*, 215: 'Le thème de la foi est central dans la pensée de Grégoire, et rien de ce qui concerne la connaissance de Dieu ne peut se traiter sans l'aborder. L'approche mystique à laquelle nous invite Grégoire, est d'abord une approche par la foi, car la foi est le cœur de la mystique'. Throughout this study all translations of ancient and modern languages are my own unless otherwise indicated.

to sound the depths of Gregory's thought.⁴ Von Balthasar is perhaps the first to identify the exalted epistemological status which Gregory accords faith.⁵ Commenting on Gregory's interpretation of Abraham as he set out from his homeland, not guided by any of the representations of God present to his mind, von Balthasar says that true knowledge takes place beyond all light in a divine night. This night, says von Balthasar, is faith which performs two functions: it mediates the approach to God and unites the mind to God.⁶

Von Balthasar's overall treatment of faith in Gregory of Nyssa is very sparse indeed. Nevertheless, he prompts one to consider the question of faith in the context of the more searching question of what mediates between *intellectus* and God. Hence, while he does not pursue the question of the role of faith in Gregory's thought, he has framed the question for us: what mediates between mind and God?

Jean Daniélou, whose pioneering work, *Platonisme et théologie mystique: doctrine spirituelle de saint Grégoire de Nysse*, has in many ways set the stage for the study of Gregory's mystical doctrine, likewise sees the role of mediation and union played by faith in the celebrated text on the migration or ascent of Abraham.⁷ Faith makes present what escapes the grasp of discursive knowledge. Such knowledge, says Daniélou, is 'opposed to the simplicity of faith which alone introduces the things of God to the mind'.⁸ Hence, he detects another function of the mediational role of faith: not only does faith unite the mind to God, it also gives to the mind something of what it 'knows' of God. This point should be stressed, says Daniélou, as a characteristic of Gregory's thought.⁹

But perhaps Daniélou's outstanding contribution in this regard is his designation of faith as an organ or faculty of knowledge. Like von

⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Présence et Pensée: Essai sur la philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris, 1942).

⁵ von Balthasar, *Présence et Pensée*, 67.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 73–4.

⁷ *Contra Eunom.* II. 84–93, GNO I. 251–4. Both von Balthasar and Daniélou have in mind the important text on the migration of Abraham from the *Contra Eunomium*, GNO I. 251–4, a text which we shall have occasion to consider in greater detail in Chapter 3.

⁸ J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique: Essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de saint Grégoire de Nysse*, 2nd edn. (Paris, 1953), 143: '... opposée à la simplicité de la foi qui seule introduit à l'intelligence des choses de Dieu'. Daniélou is speaking specifically of *curiositas* (πολυπραγμοσύνη).

⁹ *Ibid.*: 'Cette vue majeure devait être mise en relief, car elle caractérise la pensée de Grégoire'.

Balthasar Daniélou also focuses on the migration of Abraham and sees in it three clearly indicated levels, indeed a ‘hierarchy of three orders of knowledge’.¹⁰ Each level of knowledge has a particular organ or faculty of knowledge proper to it. Hence, when Abraham goes beyond Chaldaean philosophy, the father of the faith is going beyond that level of knowledge concerned with appearances. The particular faculty concerned with the level of sense-knowledge is, according to Daniélou, αἴσθησις.¹¹ Next Abraham passes beyond the level of knowledge concerned with abstract realities such as God’s power, goodness, or infinity. Daniélou calls this symbolic philosophy and aligns it with the faculty of φαντασία καταληπτική.¹² Finally the patriarch, having been purified of all conjectures and concepts, arrives at pure faith. Daniélou calls this apophatic philosophy, and the relevant faculty of knowledge is precisely πίστις.¹³ Hence, Daniélou sees in the migration of Abraham three levels, and ‘each of these levels corresponds to a particular faculty: αἴσθησις, for appearances, φαντασία καταληπτική, for abstractions, πίστις, for realities’.¹⁴

Daniélou detects in the bride’s apprehension of the Beloved another important example of Gregory’s notion of faith. In Homily 6 on the Song of Songs, the bride embarks on one of her many ascents. Not unlike Abraham she leaves behind all creatures and forsakes all manner of comprehension. Having done so she finds her beloved by faith. This finding by means of faith renders the bride’s heart a divine dwelling place.¹⁵ Daniélou observes that faith is operating at a level beyond the

¹⁰ Ibid., 146.

¹¹ Ibid. Cf. *Contra Eunom.* II. 89, GNO I. 252. 24–8. One should distinguish this sense of the term αἴσθησις from its reserved sense found in the well-known text in Homily 11 on the Song of Songs (*In Cant.* XI, GNO VI. 324. 10–11). See the observations of Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 195–7, and especially those of M. Canévet, ‘La Perception de la présence de Dieu: A propos d’une expression de la XI^e Homélie sur le Cantique des Cantiques’, in *Epektasis: Mélanges Patristiques Offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou*, ed. J. Fontaine and C. Kannengiesser (Paris, 1972), 443–54.

¹² Ibid. Cf. *Contra Eunom.* II. 89, GNO I. 253. 1–10; it should be noted that the phrase ‘φαντασία καταληπτική’ itself does not appear in the text in question. While the distinct level of knowledge which Daniélou wishes to establish seems arguable, Gregory uses a rather more general phraseology and, with respect to a *precise* faculty of knowledge, somewhat elliptical: καὶ πᾶν τὸ καταλαμβανόμενον ὑπὸ τῆς ἰδίας δυνάμεως (GNO I. 253. 9–10). Φαντασία καταληπτική, however, is used three times in the *Contra Eunom.* (I. 364, GNO I. 134. 22; III. 7. 16, GNO II. 220. 23–4; III. 8. 3, GNO II. 238. 19) and twice in the *Commentarius in Canticum canticorum* (*In Cant.* I. GNO VI. 35. 7 and *In Cant.* XII, GNO VI. 357. 6).

¹³ Ibid.; cf. *Contra Eunom.* II. 89, GNO I. 253. 10–17.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ *In Cant.* VI, GNO VI. 183. 5–13.

grasp of concepts, hence in darkness, and mediates contact between the soul and God.¹⁶ Only in this 'pure faith can one mysteriously touch the one who remains ever hidden in darkness'.¹⁷

Whereas von Balthasar designated the roles of union and mediation in Gregory's use of faith, Daniélou goes beyond this to highlight the epistemological function of faith and to identify the apophatic as its proper area of concern: the realm of apophatic philosophy is that of faith.¹⁸

In 1955 Walther Völker published his important contribution to the study of Gregory of Nyssa.¹⁹ As in the two previous studies, relatively little ink is spilt on the notion of faith in Gregory. This would apparently be justified in the eyes of the German scholar, for there are very few precise ideas regarding the topic in question. The most one could hope for, then, would be a few general observations.²⁰

As Völker pointed out in his book on Philo, faith is not a technical term in the Alexandrian Jew but a word with a wide range of meaning. Völker would wish to argue the same for Gregory of Nyssa.²¹ For in Gregory's written corpus faith is used, according to Völker, in a variety of senses such as 'credibility', 'fidelity', 'demonstration', and even the 'profession of faith'.²² But in general faith signifies the relationship between a person and God in such a way that presents no particular problem for interpretation.²³ Philo, however, is more interested in how faith arises. Gregory, by contrast, is much less interested in this question. Only once, says Völker, does Gregory observe that faith comes from free decision.²⁴ Moreover, Völker suggests that Gregory leaves to one side both the question of whether faith is the gift of divine grace as well as the relationship between faith and grace. Furthermore, the relationship between faith and knowledge, especially the Aristotelian-Stoic

¹⁶ Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 195.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 146: 'Le domaine de la philosophie apophatique est proprement celui de la foi.'

¹⁹ Walther Völker, *Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker* (Wiesbaden, 1955).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

²¹ *Ibid.*: 'Könnten wir bei Philo beobachten, daß das Wort πίστις kein fester terminus technicus ist, sondern in verschiedenen Bedeutungen verwandt wird, so ist Gregor wenig interessiert'. Cf. *idem*, *Fortschritt und Vollendung bei Philo von Alexandrien* (Leipzig, 1938), 244 n. 1.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*: 'Aber im allgemeinen meint es doch das Verhältnis des Menschen zu Gott, so daß sich für die Interpretation kaum Schwierigkeiten ergeben dürften'.

²⁴ *Ibid.* Völker supports this observation with *Orat. cat.* xxxvi. 2 and suggests that Gregory is following Clement; see *Stromateis* v. 3. 2 (SC 278, 28).

doctrine, is altogether absent from Gregory of Nyssa. Even though the rationalism of Eunomius had given him the opportunity to address this issue, Gregory fails to do so in any detail.²⁵

Nevertheless, Völker does acknowledge that Gregory accords faith a high epistemological status, placing it beyond the level of discursive reason.²⁶ He also admits that faith has various levels of meaning, beginning with adhesion or consent to doctrine handed down, which ultimately grows and develops into a means of union with God, as seen in the well-known migration of Abraham.²⁷ Indeed faith is of capital importance whether in the realm of knowledge or in the realm of the virtues. In this Gregory is more or less in harmony with the Alexandrian tradition. Yet Völker acknowledges that when Gregory attributes to faith capabilities which exceed those of the mind, he parts company with the Alexandrian tradition.²⁸

In concluding his brief examination of faith in Gregory of Nyssa, Völker says that if one considers Gregory's views on faith in the context of his overall doctrine on perfection, one is convinced of the organic unity that occupied his interior life.²⁹ Indeed Gregory sees in faith the seed from which everything develops.³⁰

With the publication of Mariette Canévet's study of Gregory of Nyssa the question of faith in Gregory's thought crosses a new threshold.³¹ In her study of the linguistic strategies and symbolism in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, she builds on the insights of what previous scholars have said about faith but identifies other important characteristics as well.

Like von Balthasar, Daniélou, and Völker, Canévet observes that Gregory situates faith in an epistemological and apophatic context. Focusing her comments on an important passage in Homily 3 on the Song of Songs, where the soul arrives at an understanding of what cannot be grasped except by faith,³² Canévet says that as attached as

²⁵ Ibid., 141.

²⁶ Ibid. Völker relies on *De vita Greg. Thaum.*, GNO x. i. 10. 5–7.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., n. 7: 'In dieser hohen Wertung des Glaubens verläßt Gregor die Bahnen der christlichen Alexandriner.' In making this observation Völker has in mind an important passage from Homily 3 on the Song of Songs (*In Cant.* 111, GNO VI. 87. 5–9), particularly the phrase *διὰ μόνης πίστεως*.

²⁹ Ibid., 143.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ M. Canévet, *Grégoire de Nysse et l'herméneutique biblique: Étude des rapports entre le langage et la connaissance de Dieu* (Paris, 1983); see also idem, 'Grégoire de Nysse (saint)', in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, s.v. Grégoire de Nysse, vol. vi (Paris, 1967), 971–1011, esp. 994–6.

³² *In Cant.* 111, GNO VI. 87. 2–8.

Gregory is to apophatic vocabulary and to the ungraspable nature of God, he does know the vocabulary of grasping. This grasping is accomplished beyond all concepts by the sole mediation of faith.³³

Moreover, while this grasping by means of faith is not on the level of discursive thought, it is nevertheless a form of knowledge.³⁴ Like Völker, Canévet sees that the mediation of faith is also accompanied by divine indwelling. The *locus classicus* in this regard is the bride in Homily 6 on the Song of Songs, who, having found the Beloved by means of faith, becomes a dwelling place for God.³⁵ For Canévet, then, this grasping by faith results in the indwelling of the Word in the soul.³⁶

But to say that faith is beyond thought should not imply that it has nothing whatever to do with discursive thought. For this ‘*intuition de la foi*’, as Canévet terms it, attempts to translate itself into concepts even though the infinity of the divine essence be incompatible with the finite character of discursive thought.³⁷ According to the French scholar this is the significance of the drops of the night on the locks of the Beloved in Homily 11 on the Song of Songs.³⁸ In this rather cryptic text Gregory says it is not possible for the soul entering the Sanctuary to encounter torrential showers of knowledge; rather one must be content if truth but bedew one’s knowledge with thoughts delicate and indistinct, these rational drops being distilled through the saints and inspired ones.³⁹

Canévet says that this particular thought is often referred to by Gregory as ‘that which is produced in us’.⁴⁰ As evidence she proposes David, who is ‘obliged to write the Psalms because he cannot otherwise teach us the knowledge of the mysteries which is produced in him, coming from God’.⁴¹ While indeed the divine nature cannot be grasped by the mind, one must attempt ‘to unveil the intuition (ὕπνοια) of

³³ Canévet, *Grégoire de Nysse et l’herméneutique biblique*, 62.

³⁴ Ibid, 63: ‘... cette saisie devient réellement une connaissance, car c’est la foi qui sert de médiation dans la quête apparemment vaine de l’essence divine: à travers les mots, les pensées, l’âme se tend vers Dieu: c’est la foi qui l’unit à Lui.’

³⁵ *In Cant.* VI, GNO VI. 183. 7–12.

³⁶ M. Canévet, *Grégoire de Nysse et l’herméneutique biblique*, 63: ‘La saisie par la foi n’est donc pas de l’ordre de la pensée: elle consiste en l’inhabitation du Verbe dans l’âme.’

³⁷ Ibid.: ‘cette connaissance essaie cependant de se traduire en pensées, bien que l’infinité de l’essence divine soit incompatible avec le caractère défini de nos concepts’.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *In Cant.* XI, GNO VI. 325. 21–326. 5.

⁴⁰ Canévet, *Grégoire de Nysse et l’herméneutique biblique*, 64; see *Contra Eunom.* II, 578, GNO I, 395, 2–3: ... τὴν ἐγγενομένην ὑμῖν περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπνοια.

⁴¹ Ibid., 64. Canévet is citing *Contra Eunom.* II, 394, GNO I. 341. 20–1.

God which is produced in us'.⁴² This thought, says Canévet, is like an image or imitation of the one whom we seek and which is produced in us. While it resembles what we seek it does not manifest directly its form (which no eye has seen) but as through a mirror it produces a reflection of that which is sought.⁴³ Finally, Canévet says, 'the intuition is obliged to enter into definite concepts in order to be expressed'.⁴⁴

The contribution of Canévet to the understanding of faith in Gregory of Nyssa can be summarized as follows. She would seem to be in basic agreement with von Balthasar, Daniélou, and Völker that faith is properly understood in the context of Gregory's epistemology and characteristically comes into play at the zenith of an apophatic ascent. In such an apophatic context faith can be observed to do two things: faith unites and mediates.⁴⁵ While Canévet has not, as has Daniélou, described faith as an organ or faculty of knowledge, her observations would seem to harmonize well with Daniélou's. For Canévet too, faith is a faculty which unites and mediates.

But that which carries the discussion of faith across the threshold of debate into a new level of discussion is, first, her observation that Gregory's faith can somehow manage paradoxically to grasp the ungraspable. Moreover, this intuitive grasping on the part of faith constitutes in some sense knowledge of God. Second, the intuition of faith is characterized by a dynamic tendency to translate itself into concepts in order to be spoken.

In her study of grace and freedom in Gregory of Nyssa, V.E.F. Harrison likewise addresses the notion of faith.⁴⁶ At the outset of her concise treatment of faith Harrison situates the theme in its proper epistemological context. Like the other scholars we have considered, she sees the journey of Abraham as being a text of great importance⁴⁷ and observes that faith comes not at the beginning of the Patriarch's journey but at the conclusion of various stages of increasing

⁴² Ibid. Canévet is citing *Contra Eunom.* 11. 578, GNO 1. 395. 2–3.

⁴³ Ibid. Canévet is citing *In Cant.* 111, GNO VI. 86. 14–18.

⁴⁴ Ibid.: 'L'intuition est enfin obligée d'entrer dans des concepts définis pour être dite'.

⁴⁵ Each of these scholars has based his or her views largely on two texts of crucial importance to the matter in question: the migration of Abraham in *Contra Eunom.* 11, GNO 1. 252–3 and the experience of the bride, particularly in *In Cant.* VI, GNO VI. 182. 4–183. 13.

⁴⁶ V. Harrison, *Grace and Human Freedom according to Gregory of Nyssa*, (Lewiston, NY, 1992).

⁴⁷ *Contra Eunom.* 11. 84–93, GNO 1. 251–4.

knowledge.⁴⁸ In other words, faith comes into play at the apex of an epistemological ascent, 'a pilgrimage of the mind'.⁴⁹

Harrison would query those scholars who claim there is no knowledge of God in Gregory and who conclude that there is only faith as a sort of consolation prize. According to Harrison these scholars would view Abraham's experience as a vain quest for the impossible (i.e. knowledge of God), a quest which Abraham ultimately abandons, settling for faith.⁵⁰ The Orthodox scholar has specifically in mind Barmann and Heine.

Barmann thinks Gregory contrasts faith with knowledge. 'When knowledge fails faith provides a kind of possession or presence of what cannot be possessed by knowledge. . . . [F]aith brings not knowledge but darkness.'⁵¹ According to Heine, Gregory teaches that 'man does not relate to God primarily by knowledge, . . . but by faith which reaches out beyond knowledge'.⁵²

According to Harrison both Barmann and Heine fail to pay sufficient attention to the Eunomian context and therefore miss an important point: 'It is not all knowledge but knowledge in the Eunomian sense that Gregory contrasts with faith. Abraham really does know God as he manifests himself in his creative activity. Only when Abraham tries to reach beyond this to the divine essence does he find not knowledge but faith.'⁵³

Having argued for the epistemological status of faith, she identifies the function of faith as that of bridging the ontological gulf between the created and the uncreated. Faith 'brings us into a relation with the divine essence'.⁵⁴ In saying this Harrison joins the ranks of von Balthasar, Daniélou, Völker, and Canévet, all of whom acknowledge that faith performs this function of union.

Franz Dünzl's study of the *Commentarius in Canticum canticorum* devotes several pages to the theme of faith.⁵⁵ Following Völker, Dünzl maintains that Gregory departs from the Alexandrian understanding of faith as

⁴⁸ Harrison, *Grace and Human Freedom*, 64. ⁴⁹ *Ibid.* ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 66–7.

⁵¹ B. Barmann, 'The Cappadocian Triumph over Arianism' (Ph.D. thesis, Stanford University, 1966), 396–7.

⁵² R. Heine, *Perfection in the Virtuous Life: A Study of the Relationship between Edification and Polemical Theology in Gregory of Nyssa's 'De Vita Moysis'* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), 144. It should be noted that on 146 Heine quotes *Contra Eunom.* 11. 91, GNO I. 253. 25–8.

⁵³ Harrison, *Grace and Human Freedom*, 67.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ F. Dünzl, *Braut und Bräutigam: Die Auslegung des Canticum durch Gregor von Nyssa* (Tübingen, 1993).

something which must be surpassed through knowledge.⁵⁶ Nor is faith some sort of ‘alternative or corrective to theology’.⁵⁷ Dünzl would agree with others, especially with Canévet, that faith is the means of becoming ‘beast of burden and dwelling place of God’.⁵⁸ Faith transcends both thought and speech, but in this process theology is neither absolutized nor negated.⁵⁹ Thought, which by nature seeks to grasp, seeks God who cannot be grasped. Faith resolves this aporia: the ‘grasp of faith’⁶⁰ does not violate divine incomprehensibility. Faith does not render thought superfluous because the thought’s seeking implies a continuous process of detachment.

Dünzl’s treatment, then, acknowledges not only the exalted status of faith in Gregory of Nyssa, but also the harmonious relationship with thought which faith nevertheless transcends.

One of the more sustained treatments of faith to date has been Bernard Pottier’s recent study of the *Contra Eunomium*. Just as thought has priority over language in Gregory of Nyssa, so, according to Pottier, faith has priority over knowledge.⁶¹ While Pottier would seem to agree with Harrison that the movement into faith is a movement of the mind,⁶² Pottier goes on to suggest that, even though faith and knowledge are epistemological categories,⁶³ there is a marked discontinuity between knowledge and faith. While Gregory’s earlier writings, says Pottier, may well have allowed for more of a continuity between the two, the controversy with Eunomius marks a threshold in the Cappadocian’s thought, beyond which ‘thought is more radically refused access to the encounter with God’.⁶⁴ For this reason, then, Pottier says that ‘the passage from knowledge to faith appears as a rupture’.⁶⁵ For Pottier the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 295–6. ⁵⁷ Ibid., 296.

⁵⁸ Ibid.: ‘Gregor sieht in der πίστις vielmehr das (einzige) Mittel, “Jochtier” und “Wohnung” Gottes zu werden.’

⁵⁹ Ibid. ⁶⁰ Ibid., 297: ‘Zugriff des Glaubens’.

⁶¹ Pottier, *Dieu et le Christ*, 207. In an overall positive review of Pottier’s book, C. Kannengieser laments that Pottier’s treatment of the priority of faith over thought is ‘trop discret’; see *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 42 (1996), 181–4, at 182.

⁶² Harrison, *Grace and Human Freedom*, 64, describes the ascent to faith as a ‘pilgrimage of the mind’; Pottier, *Dieu et le Christ*, 207, describes it as ‘la recherche de Dieu par l’esprit humain . . .’.

⁶³ Pottier clearly says so on 214: ‘Πίστις et γνώσις deviennent ainsi deux catégories à teneur épistémologique . . .’.

⁶⁴ Ibid., ‘Il semble que avec la polémique eunomienne, “la critique du langage . . . est devenue extrême”, et la rencontre de Dieu, refusée plus radicalement à la pensée.’ Pottier cites M. Canévet, *Grégoire de Nysse et l’herméneutique biblique*, 52.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 207: ‘Le passage de la connaissance à la foi . . . se donne comme une rupture.’

‘radical metaphysical rupture between the created and Uncreated’ is the model for the distinction between faith and knowledge.⁶⁶ Harrison, by contrast, would seem to be more cautious, and probably more accurate, when she says that in this pilgrimage of the mind faith ‘surpasses’ knowledge.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, Pottier’s observation leads him to assert that there is a certain development in Gregory’s thought: ‘before the *Contra Eunomium*, God is accessible by thought; with the *Contra Eunomium*, God is rigorously unknowable for thought; in the mystical works, while commenting on the journey of Abraham, of Moses, or of the bride in the *In Canticum*, Gregory maintains the positive encounter with God beyond all thought’.⁶⁸

Pottier summarizes Gregory’s doctrine as follows: ‘The general teaching of Gregory is that the knowledge which does not attain to *what* God is, comes to us through the energies, but that faith, in the night, touches God as he is—but it is not knowledge.’⁶⁹ Moreover, faith is oriented towards (*acheminée vers*) this ‘beyond knowing’.⁷⁰

A final work to be considered in this survey of research on Gregorian faith is that by Claudia Desalvo.⁷¹ Desalvo is aware of the immediate epistemological implications of Gregory’s concept of God as infinite. Since God cannot be grasped by concepts, there must be a new cognitive approach, an approach which Gregory identifies as faith.

The value of Desalvo’s treatment lies in her illustration of the epistemological innovation involved in Gregorian faith. Desalvo observes how Gregory has made, by his exaltation of faith, some dramatic adjustments to the traditional Platonic levels of knowledge. Gregory has removed faith from the sphere of opinion and placed it at the top of the noetic sphere, above knowledge.⁷² This departure of Gregory, she claims, is not surprising, for he grounds his epistemology in his ontological distinction between infinite creator and finite creature,⁷³ an

⁶⁶ Ibid., 214. Pottier clearly says so on 214: ‘Πίστις et γνώσις deviennent ainsi deux catégories à tenir épistémologique . . .’.

⁶⁷ Harrison, *Grace and Human Freedom*, 69. I will have more to say about the continuity and discontinuity between faith and knowledge in Gregory of Nyssa.

⁶⁸ Pottier, *Dieu et le Christ*, 207–8.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 209: ‘La doctrine générale de Grégoire est que la connaissance qui n’atteint pas ce que Dieu est, nous vient par les énergies, mais que la foi, dans la nuit, touche Dieu tel qu’il est—ce n’est pourtant pas une connaissance.’

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Claudia Desalvo, *L’‘oltre’ nel presente: La filosofia dell’ uomo in Gregorio di Nissa* (Milan, 1996), 215–35.

⁷² Ibid., 223; see *Republic* vi. 511 d–e.

⁷³ For a concise statement of this distinction see *In Cant.* vi, GNO vi. 173–4.

ontological presupposition which Plato did not share. For Gregory, faith opens up a new cognitive path.

In her survey of representative texts, then, she can identify two levels of Gregorian faith. One level is characterized by an awareness of the ontological limits of our cognitive capacity. According to Desalvo, faith does not constitute a cognitive step towards the divine but rather a renunciation of knowledge. Nevertheless it stays within the limits of discursive reason and does not attempt to cross over the boundary between finite creature and infinite creator. Desalvo considers this to be a philosophical concept of faith. But Desalvo also acknowledges a higher level of faith. More than just a renunciation of knowledge, faith opens the way to union with God. This is not simply a recognition of the infinity and unknowability of God but is also the way of uniting with God, towards whom the energy of reason tends. Since God is infinite, the cognitive journey opened up by faith is also without limit; it is epistemology rooted in ontology.

New Directions

This survey of research on the topic of faith in Gregory of Nyssa yields a fairly homogenous consensus based on a more or less fixed collection of texts. Faith performs functions of mediation between the mind and God and is the faculty that unites one to God. Although Gregory himself does not explicitly say that faith is a faculty or *dynamis*, the fact that it performs functions of mediation and union leads us to agree with Daniélou that to conceive of faith as a faculty is helpful in viewing Gregory's largely idiosyncratic way of speaking of faith in certain epistemological and apophatic contexts.

While von Balthasar was amongst the first to observe the exalted epistemological role of faith and to identify these functions of mediation and union seen in the famous ascent of Abraham in the *Contra Eunomium*, he seems either to have changed his mind or to have lost sight of this observation when speaking of Denys the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor in a subsequent essay, 'Fides Christi'. In this essay von Balthasar says that

to an ever increasing extent in the philosophy of late antiquity, the *excessus*, beyond all γνώσις, which is the true organ for the encounter with God, bears the name πίστις. But this πίστις and the apophatic approach of a 'philosophical' theology keep their connection with Christian theology because of the work

of Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor. They accomplished this so thoroughly that it was put in the very centre of theology and—as high scholasticism shows—Christian thought can no longer ignore their legacy.⁷⁴

The statement is curious indeed. Not that Denys and Maximus did not consider faith ‘the true organ for the encounter with God’,⁷⁵ but that von Balthasar would seem to give them credit and not Gregory of Nyssa. While indeed it may be argued that Denys and Maximus the Confessor have exerted greater influence on the West, it would seem that von Balthasar’s own research suggests that Gregory of Nyssa would be the one responsible for the aforementioned. For before either Denys or Maximus it was Gregory of Nyssa who broke with the great master Origen and the general thrust of the Alexandrian tradition by overcoming knowledge through faith.

Not only is there consensus that faith performs this mediation and union, but, beginning with Canévet, who is in turn followed by Dünzl, there are other important characteristics: though faith is beyond concepts it tends to translate itself into concepts. Hence, David is obliged to write the Psalms and the bride is obliged to speak to her maiden companions of her ineffable encounters with the Beloved.

If these various components constitute the basic parameters of the *status quaestionis* concerning faith, how could one propose to advance the question? Several possible new directions present themselves for consideration.

(A) Von Balthasar makes an explicit connection between faith and darkness.⁷⁶ Von Balthasar is but one of the many scholars who have highlighted Gregory’s ‘mysticism of darkness’. While we agree with the connection between faith and darkness, we feel the need to adjust the view that Gregory’s mystical theology is fundamentally a mysticism of darkness. We say *adjust* rather than *correct*. For while Gregory’s view of the spiritual life involves without doubt what can be called a mysticism of darkness (but only when the scriptural texts upon which he is commenting dispose him to do so), it is only part of the picture. Indeed text after text, especially in the *Commentarius in Canticum canticorum*, suggests that Gregory’s mystical theology is no less one of light than

⁷⁴ ‘Fides Christi’, in *Spouse of the Word: Explorations in Theology II*, trans. E. Oakes (San Francisco, 1991), 76 f.

⁷⁵ See *De div. nom.* vii. 4.

⁷⁶ von Balthasar, *Présence et Pensée*, 73–4, where he identifies πίστις with θεία νόξι.

one of darkness, and that faith, in the exalted sense with which the present study is concerned, has to do with both light and darkness.

A celebrated and beautiful passage from the Homily 11 on the Song of Songs depicts the spiritual life as a progressive movement into darkness.⁷⁷ This text has led scholars to conclude that Gregory, in contrast to Origen, conceives the spiritual life as a movement into the divine darkness.⁷⁸ But our reading of Gregory of Nyssa suggests this estimation is in need of redress. For there are any number of texts, in fact the majority of relevant texts, which speak of the spiritual life in the language of light and of movement into light. Nor are these texts necessarily about less advanced stages of the spiritual life, for many of them refer to the very divinization of the soul. A passage from Homily 5 on the Song of Songs, which speaks of divine indwelling as the work of the Holy Spirit in the decidedly luminous imagery of daylight pouring forth its rays and removing the shadows of life, is but one of numerous examples.⁷⁹

Perhaps more representative of Gregory's thought on the subject is an equally beautiful, yet more succinct, description of the spiritual life. In Homily 12 on the Song of Songs Moses ascends through various stages, enters a cloud, and then enters the darkness where God is. But Moses then becomes like the sun, unable to be approached by others.⁸⁰ Moses enters the darkness where God is but becomes light; he stays in the darkness of unknowing but is deified in light. This text, with its interplay of both light and darkness, seems to me to be more representative of the subtle word-play, of the consistent intermingling of the luminous and the obscure and especially of Gregory's ubiquitous liking for the oxymoronic throughout the broad sweep of the *Commentarius in Canticum canticorum*.⁸¹ If indeed Gregory of Nyssa is a mystic of darkness, he is no less one of light.

(B) From the outset of our survey we have seen that the exalted role of faith has been placed in rather bold epistemological relief by virtually all the scholars we have considered. Desalvo has noted how this is an intended departure from the general lines of Platonic epistemological

⁷⁷ *In Cant.* xi, GNO vi. 322–4.

⁷⁸ See for example A. Louth's helpful presentation of Gregory's mystical theory in *Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford, 1981), 80–97.

⁷⁹ *In Cant.* xi, GNO vi. 169.

⁸⁰ *In Cant.* xii, GNO vi. 355. 11–14.

⁸¹ Harrison takes a similar view; see *Grace and Human Freedom*, 72–3 and 86–7.

tradition based on Gregory's ontological distinction between infinite creator and finite creature.⁸²

Going back to Plato himself, we see that faith was amongst the lowest forms of knowledge possible and to be superseded by progressively higher forms of knowledge.⁸³ The *Republic* provides the *locus classicus*. At the end of Book VI Plato presents his well-known Allegory of the Line. Here (511d–e) faith has no access to ultimate truth, being limited to common sense assurance about things. Access to ultimate truth is attained by ἐπιστήμη in the sphere of νόησις. For Gregory of Nyssa, by contrast, it is faith which has access to ultimate truth. This is indeed a radical departure from Plato, and Desalvo has done well to point out that Gregory has grounded this new epistemological view of faith in ontology; I wish to build on this and take it further by claiming, with the migration of Abraham as the case in point, not only that Gregory's epistemology is rooted in his ontology, as Desalvo has shown, but that this epistemology is rooted in exegesis. Indeed Desalvo has hinted at this. I wish to make it more explicit by showing that Gregory's important treatment of the migration of Abraham is from beginning to end guided by Gregory's reading of Paul.

(C) We may ask, moreover, what is the relationship between faith and the mind? Völker, in agreement with von Balthasar and Daniélou, acknowledges the mediational role of faith but then goes on to suggest that, as in Philo, faith is not a technical term, but rather a word with a wide range of meanings such as credibility, fidelity, demonstration. But in general faith signifies the relationship between God and the human person. Völker's position, however, would seem to be open to considerable question.

The word 'faith' occurs with relative frequency in Gregory's writings.⁸⁴ There is indeed a wide range of meaning. But the clear *minority* of these occurrences demonstrates faith in this exalted sense of a faculty which mediates and unites the mind to God. The vast majority displays a variety of general meanings such as notional assent,⁸⁵ considered

⁸² Desalvo, *L' 'oltre' nel presente*, 223–4; this point has likewise been made by A. Meredith, *The Cappadocians* (London, 1995), 67 and 88–9.

⁸³ Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, 120–3.

⁸⁴ For example, the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* produces some 350 matches for the forms of πιστεύω and for πίστις (and its oblique forms) in the *Contra Eunomium*, 68 matches in *De vita Moysis*, and 137 matches in the *Commentarius in Canticum canticorum*.

⁸⁵ e.g. *Contra Eunom.* 1. 23. 1, GNO 1. 88. 23; 219, GNO 1. 90. 14; 220, GNO 1. 90. 24.

opinion,⁸⁶ or an item of faith or creed.⁸⁷ Only the minority of occurrences reveals faith in its exalted role of that which bridges the gap between mind and God, and it is with this sense that the present study will concern itself.

Furthermore, Völker claims that Gregory does not use faith in a technical sense. I would suggest quite the opposite—that this is a helpful way to view Gregory’s reserved use of faith and the role this reserved use plays in his thought as a whole. Virtually all the significant uses of faith in this exalted sense occur either as an object of the preposition *dia* or as the instrumental dative. Gregory does this often enough to lead one to the conclusion that he employs faith as a technical term denoting that faculty of union which bridges the gap between the mind and God and which mediates knowledge (in a qualified sense).⁸⁸ We see this clearly, for example, in Homily 3 on the Song, where Gregory speaks of the soul which is led through conceptions to an understanding of the ungraspable by faith alone and which establishes in itself a nature that transcends intelligence.⁸⁹ Faith is used in the dative singular in this same epistemological sense in Homily 6, where the bride searches for the Beloved in darkness and finally finds him ‘by means of faith’. Immediately after this Gregory uses the same instrumental sense of faith when the bride says that she will never let go of the Beloved once he has been found by the grasp of faith.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ e.g. *Contra Eunom.* i. 376, GNO i. 137. 22; 384, GNO i. 139. 16; 406, GNO i. 145. 18.

⁸⁷ e.g. *Contra Eunom.* i. 122, GNO i. 64. 9; 127, GNO i. 65. 18; 137, GNO i. 68. 15.

⁸⁸ Speaking of πίστις in this same exalted sense in *De vita Greg. Thaum.*, GNO x. i. 10. 5–7, R. Hübner, in his book *Die Einbeit des Leibes Christi bei Gregor von Nyssa* (Leiden, 1974), 189, says that ‘Glaube hat in diesen Aussagen sicherlich eine sehr viel umfassendere Bedeutung. ... Glaube kann auf diese Weise ein weites Bedeutungsfeld haben.’ Our contention, while acknowledging that Gregory speaks of faith in a variety of senses, will maintain that when Gregory speaks of πίστις as something above intelligence he is not using it in a general or wide sense at all, but rather in a quite specific, indeed technical, sense.

⁸⁹ *In Cant.* III, GNO VI. 87. 5–8: τὴν οὖν διὰ τῶν τοιούτων νοημάτων χειραγωγουμένην ψυχὴν πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἀλήπτων περινοίαν διὰ μόνης πίστεως εἰσοικίζειν ἐν ἑαυτῇ λέγει δεῖν τὴν πάντα νοῦν ὑπερέχουσαν φύσιν. Several other texts employ the formulation διὰ μόνης πίστεως: *Contra Eunom.* i. 371. 4, GNO i. 136. 17; *Contra Eunom.* III. 8, GNO II. 243. 11; and *De hom. op.*, PG 44, 208B; and *In Cant.* III, GNO VI. 87. 15 shows divine indwelling being mediated διὰ πίστεως.

⁹⁰ *In Cant.* VI, GNO VI. 183. 7–9: καὶ πᾶσαν καταληπτικὴν ἔφοδον καταλιπούσα, τῇ πίστει εὖρον τὸν ἀγαπώμενον καὶ οὐκέτι μεθήσω τῇ τῆς πίστεως τοῦ εὐρεθέντος ἀντεχομένη ...

Further still, Völker suggests that Gregory leaves to one side the question of the relationship between faith and knowledge and between faith and grace. This too seems open to question. In *De virginitate*, arguably his earliest work, Gregory considers David in ecstasy. Gregory says that David contemplated the intelligibles ‘through the mind alone’.⁹¹ Gregory uses the word *dianoia* for mind or faculty of (discursive) knowledge. But by the time Gregory composes the *Contra Eunomium* and speaks of a similar ascent, this time by Abraham, faith, not mind, is the means of approach—not the intelligibles as before but beyond them into the non-discursive realm. And in one of Gregory’s latest works, *Commentarius in Canticum canticorum*,⁹² the same experience is attained ‘through faith alone’.⁹³ This is a noteworthy development on the part of Gregory. What at the beginning of his career took place only through mind, becomes, through the Eunomian controversy, something that takes place only through faith. In light of this is it likely that Gregory did not consider the relationship between faith and knowledge?

There is a paucity of texts which speak explicitly of faith and grace. On the other hand, however, it would be extraordinary indeed to assert that Gregory saw no relation whatever between the two. For Gregory the mind itself is the subject of grace, without which it could never embark upon its ascents. We see this clearly in *De vita Moysis*, for example, when the grace of baptism purifies mind and puts to death its ‘grabbing’ tendency,⁹⁴ or when sacred scripture (the grace of revelation) leads the mind (χειραγωγεί τὴν διάνοιαν).⁹⁵ For Gregory of Nyssa, then, the mind is immersed in and guided by grace.

When the bride in Homily 6 on the Song, for example, having let go of all concepts, finds the ever-elusive Beloved by means of faith, this happens at the height of the ascent of graced *dianoia*.⁹⁶ It would hardly seem likely that the grace which has purified mind and taken it by the hand at the beginning of the process would be somehow absent, as this ascent comes to fruition in the grasp of faith.

⁹¹ *De virg.*, SC, x. 2. 9: διὰ μόνης διανοίας.

⁹² On the chronology of Gregory’s works see J. Daniélou, ‘La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse’, *Studia Patristica* 7 (Texte und Untersuchungen 92, Berlin, 1966), 159–69; G. May, ‘Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregor von Nyssa,’ in M. Harl (ed.), *Écriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nysse* (Leiden, 1971), 51–67; see also J. Cahill, ‘The Date and Setting of Gregory of Nyssa’s “Commentary on the Song of Songs”’, *Journal of Theological Studies* 32 (1981), 447–60.

⁹³ *In Cant.* III, GNO VI. 87. 7.

⁹⁴ *De vita Moysis*, SC, II. 125. 10.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, II. 152. 2: χειραγωγεί τὴν διάνοιαν.

⁹⁶ *In Cant.* VI, GNO VI. 182. 5 f.

In drawing attention to the relationship between knowledge and faith and to the relationship between grace and faith, Völker has raised an important question. But his solution, that Gregory has simply left the question to one side, is untenable. Indeed to understand properly Gregory's concept of exalted faith, this relationship between mind and faith will need considerable examination.

(D) Amongst the scholars we have considered there is a general consensus that faith, in its exalted sense, operates in the realm of the apophatic. Like *gnophos*, faith is part of Gregory's apophatic vocabulary. But there is another aspect of Gregory's notion of exalted faith which stands in dialectical tension with its properly apophatic role. This characteristic has been hinted at, it seems to me, by Canévet (and to a certain extent by Dünzl). Canévet identifies an important characteristic of faith both when she says that it is a form of knowledge and especially when she observes that the intuitions of faith attempt to translate themselves into concepts.⁹⁷ This idea is not developed to any extent. But it can be seen often enough in the Cappadocian (with or without the explicit mention of faith) to merit investigation. I propose that it reveals another dimension of Gregory's thought which stands in tension with the more readily acknowledged apophatic dimension. I propose the neologism '*logophasis*' to designate that dynamic tendency of faith to express itself in concepts and language after it has reached the heights of apophatic ascent typified by the letting-go of such concepts and language. Logophatic discourse, then, is to be distinguished from kataphatic discourse. If *kataphasis* involves language that is searching for God, *logophasis*, as we shall see, involves language that is full of God. This would be yet another of the coincidences of opposites that is fairly typical of Gregory of Nyssa. One example among many can be seen in Homily 1 on the Song of Songs.

The bride wishes to touch the good.⁹⁸ By virtue of the kiss of the Beloved, the bride searched the depths of God within the innermost Sanctuary. Note that in this encounter with God there is no mention of faith. But because of what he has said elsewhere and more specifically about the dynamics of union, one may assume its presence in the bride. The thrust of this passage is interior and apophatic.⁹⁹ However, the

⁹⁷ Canévet, *Grégoire de Nysse et l'herméneutique biblique*, 63–4.

⁹⁸ *In Cant.* 1, GNO VI. 40. 2 f. ψαύω and the language of touch in general is part of Gregory's vocabulary of union.

⁹⁹ For Gregory there is but imageless silence in the sanctuary.

tenor changes, and the bride, having stood face to face with the Word, has suddenly become a source of nourishment for others as she feeds those who are infants in Christ.¹⁰⁰

This encounter with God is immediately followed by another encounter along similar lines. John places his heart like a sponge on the Lord's breast, the fountain of life, and is filled by an ineffable (ἄρρητος) transmission of the hidden mysteries in the heart of the Lord. The apophatic context, albeit subtle, is clearly present. But then John takes the breast of the Word, upon which he has lain, and offers us the good things he has received and he *proclaims* the Word who exists from all ages.¹⁰¹ An encounter which started out as apophatic (ἄρρητος) has of its own dynamism become 'logophatic'.

Another example is seen in Homily 3 on the Song of Songs. Paul (or the soul) becomes a dwelling place through faith, a vessel of election,¹⁰² and reveals Christ living and speaking in him.¹⁰³ Here faith mediates a process of union whose apophatic context has been established a little earlier.¹⁰⁴ But balancing, or standing in tension with, this apophatic thrust is a 'logophatic' one: Christ speaking within.¹⁰⁵

Each of these examples, and there are many more, reveal a similar structure. In each case something happens and something follows. There is contact or union with God in an apophatic context; this union is either explicitly or implicitly mediated by faith. However, this apophatic dimension does not rest alone: the bride yet feeds the infants in Christ through the breast of the Word, with whom she is one; John turns round and offers us the teat of the Word and fills us with the good things he himself received; and Christ dwelling within Paul speaks. This second phase, following the apophatic phase, I term '*logophasis*'.

¹⁰⁰ *In Cant.* 1, GNO VI. 41. 3–4.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 41. 6–13.

¹⁰² This image of a vessel which can be filled will be of some importance for understanding Gregory's notion of divinization and virtue. Cf. the image of the crystal vase at *In Cant.* xv, GNO VI. 441. 12–15, where this motif is even stronger: the clear vase reveals on the outside what lies within: lilies of radiant virtue.

¹⁰³ *In Cant.* III, GNO VI. 87. 15–88. 6.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 87. 5–8: τὴν οὖν διὰ τῶν τοιοῦτων νοημάτων χειραγωγουμένην ψυχὴν πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἀλήπτων περινοίαν διὰ μόνης πίστεως εἰσοικίζειν ἐν ἑαυτῇ λέγει δεῖν τὴν πάντα νοῦν ὑπερέχουσαν φύσιν.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 88. 4–6: ἐν δὲ τῷ μηκέτι αὐτὸν ζῆν, ἀλλ' ἐν ἑαυτῷ δεικνύειν ζῶντα ἐκείνον καὶ δοκιμὴν διδόναι τοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ λαλοῦντος Χριστοῦ οἴκος περιληπτικὸς τῆς ἀπεριλήπτου γενόμενος φύσεως.

These themes having been announced, this study will unfold in the following manner. Chapters 2 and 3 are to be taken more or less in tandem. Chapter 2 will have as its purpose to describe in some detail what Gregory has to say about the discursive and non-discursive capabilities of the mind in the context of grace. This will be helpful for establishing the backdrop against which the specific role of faith may be seen in bolder relief in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 will then examine the significant occurrences of exalted faith with a view to designating what Gregory means when he uses faith as a technical term. With this technical sense clearly established, Chapter 4 will attempt to situate this faculty of apophatic union in the more general history of the Hellenic concern for such a mediating faculty; whilst Gregorian faith is rather idiosyncratic, the designation of a mediating faculty of union has clear parallels in Gregory's cultural heritage.

While Chapters 3 and 4 clearly emphasize the apophatic context in which exalted faith operates, Chapter 5 will explore how Gregory yet values propositional, orthodox teaching and grounds this in the experience of God. Chapter 5 serves to prepare the ground for examining a largely unnoticed dimension of Gregory's apophaticism, which I have termed *logophasis*: the Word's tendency to express Itself through the deeds and discourse of those who experience apophatic communion with the Word. Finally, in Chapter 7 the question of Gregory's mysticism of darkness will be examined with a view to redressing the over-identification of Gregory with this theme.