

M.A. Thesis - E. Klein; McMaster University – Religious Studies

THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD: ATHANSIUS AND GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS

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ATHANSIUS AND GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS ON THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

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Abstract

This thesis examines the concept of God as Father in the thinking of two Patristic authors: Athanasius (c. 293-373) and Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329-390). Since God is called Father frequently in the New Testament both Athanasius and Gregory see the name as fundamental to understanding the nature of the intradivine life, as well as God's relationship to humankind. The reliance of Patristic authors on the language of Father and Son brings relational language to the fore of Christological and trinitarian discussions of the 4th and 5th centuries. In this thesis, I endeavour to demonstrate the centrality of the fatherhood of God in the thinking of Athanasius and Gregory of Nazianzus, and to connect their thinking on this topic to larger theological questions of the period.

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Introduction

The fatherhood of God is a topic of fundamental importance in Patristic thought, and in particular, in the thinking of Athanasius (c. 293-373) and of Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329-390). Athanasius is renowned for his championing of the Nicene creed of 325, which defines the Father's relationship to the Son as one of coessentiality (expressed in the creed by the Greek term *ὁμοούσιος*), and for his life-long fight against the Arians, a group which, in his view, denied the divinity of Christ. Athanasius' arguments for the coequality of the Son with the Father turn on the names Father and Son themselves. For Athanasius, that God is called Father throughout the New Testament is paramount for understanding the status of the Son, as well as the Father's and Son's relationship to humankind. Since God is a father, Athanasius argues, then he must necessarily have an eternal son who shares in his essence. Christ status as the true Son of God who is fully divine is thus critical for Athanasius' conception of God, and for his soteriology. If the Son is not fully divine, Athanasius contends, then Christ is incapable of effecting salvation for humankind, which entails human beings' adoption as sons of God and their ability to know God.

For Gregory too, God's being called Father is basic to his conception of the divine. He maintains that since God is called Father he must have a Son from his essence, as Athanasius argues, but also that the Father must be the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Gregory understands the unity of the Trinity to come from God the Father, and the distinctness of the persons of the Trinity to be understood in the relational names of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Since the members of the Trinity bear these three names,

according to Gregory, they must be understood to stand in a certain relationship to one another. Moreover, Gregory's view of a unified yet ordered Trinity, with the Father as its monarch, is crucial for his understanding of the intersection of humankind with the Trinity, as humanity itself experiences unity in the church and yet order in creation because of the nature of the intratrinitarian relations. Like Athanasius, Gregory's soteriology is dependent on the question of the relationship between the Father and the Son, but also on the question of the Father's relationship with the Holy Spirit. Gregory concludes, as Athanasius does of the Son, that if the Spirit is not fully divine, then he cannot participate in God's salvific efforts, and since the Spirit is part of the soteriological plan laid out in the scriptures, Gregory argues, to deny the Spirit full divinity is to put salvation in jeopardy.¹ The meaning of God's fatherhood is critical for these two thinkers in their understanding of the nature of God, especially the status of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and thus is paramount to the major theological questions of the 3rd and 4th centuries.

Despite the importance of this topic and the frequent use of the names Father and Son in the writings of Patristic authors, little work has been done on the subject. Aside from Peter Widdicombe's study, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius*,² no major work has been done to help account for the language of fatherhood in early Christian thought. Christopher Beeley acknowledges that God is referred to as Father and that a statement about the Father's primacy in the Trinity is present in every one of Gregory's

¹ This argument is also nascent in Athanasius' work, in his *Letter to Serapion*, but the issue of the divinity of the Spirit did not come to the fore of the trinitarian controversies until the writings of Gregory.

² Peter Widdicombe *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

major doctrinal statements, but he spends little time developing this idea.³ This study, therefore, will examine several of the major works of both Athanasius and Gregory of Nazianzus in order to explore the centrality of the theme of God's fatherhood in Patristic writing.

There is another issue at stake in examining the work of these two authors in particular, which is the question of their theological relationship to one another. Gregory of Nazianzus, along with the other Cappadocian fathers (Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa), has long been considered Athanasius' theological successor and heir of the Alexandrian tradition. Beeley, in his recent book, however has challenged this notion; he contends that the Bishop of Nazianzus owes little to Athanasius' thought.⁴ Through an exploration of the idea of the fatherhood of God, then, I also intend to shed light on the theological similarities and dissimilarities between Athanasius and Gregory.

³ Christopher Beeley "Divine Causality and the Monarchy of God the Father in Gregory of Nazianzus" in the *Harvard Theological Review* 100 (2007), 206-207.

⁴ Christopher Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 161-163 and 277-285.

1. Athanasius on the Fatherhood of God

Introduction

Father and Son are the primary names which Athanasius uses for what will later be known as the first and second persons of the Trinity. He employs ‘Father’ and ‘God’ interchangeably, and although he does not often discuss the fatherhood of God as such, his works are replete with references to God as Father and arguments which are dependent on this name for God. For Athanasius, the terms ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ identify God and signify something about his essence.⁵ Athanasius writes, “For the Son is the Father’s all and nothing was in the Father before the Word, but in the Word is also will and through him the objects of will are carried to effect as the Holy Scriptures have shown.”⁶ This quotation highlights many of Athanasius’ assumptions about the implications of the language of fatherhood: the Son is proper to the Father, eternal and coequal with him (as he is in the Father and the Father’s all), the Father realizes his will (including creation and salvation) through the Son, and that, for Athanasius, these propositions are clearly stated in scripture. The fatherhood of God is not merely a metaphor, for Athanasius, but because the biblical text often uses the language of Father and Son, and because he sees it as paramount for correcting the error of the Arians, Athanasius refuses to diminish its importance. I will argue that Athanasius’ conception of the Father-Son relationship is fundamental to his opposition to the Arians, that the Father-

⁵ *Contra Arianos* I 14, 56, CA III 3 and *De Synodis* 34-35, from *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius of Alexandria* in series 2, volume 4 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Edited by Archibald Robertson, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978). See also, Peter Widdicombe *The Fatherhood of God*, 174.

⁶ CA III 67. Here, as elsewhere, archaic forms in the translation have been modernized without comment.

Son relationship exists prior to all other relationships, and that it informs his soteriology, epistemology and doctrine of creation.

I will explore Athanasius' thinking about the fatherhood of God primarily through an analysis of the *Contra Arianos* I, II and III where he is actively engaged in disputing the Arian claim that the Son is not equal to the Father, and where most of his sustained discussions of the fatherhood of God appear. I will, however, also examine his earlier work,⁷ *De Incarnatione*, where the soteriological implications of the fatherhood of God and the sonship of Christ are prominent, and his later letters, *De Decretis* and *De Synodis*. I will substantiate my claims about the centrality of the fatherhood of God in Athanasius' thought through a discussion, in section (I), of Athanasius' rebuttal of the Arian view of the Father-Son relationship as one of will rather than being, in section (II), his understanding of the name Father, the titles of Christ and his arguments for the divinity of the Son, and, in section (III), his view of soteriology, epistemology and our adoption as sons.

I. Father by Being, Father by Will

Athanasius' use of the names Father and Son developed in the context of the Arian controversy, and the *Contra Arianos* I, II and III are highly polemical texts directed at the Arians. The true shape of Arius' theology has been long debated, as many of Arius'

⁷ There is some dispute as to the dating of the *De Incarnatione*. For a summary of the debate see Khaled Anatolios *Athanasius: The Coherence of his Thought* (London: Routledge, 1998), 26-30. This debate, however, is not paramount for our purposes, since our question is concerned with the whole of Athanasius' thought, early and late, and, as Francis Young has pointed out, Athanasius' thought is "impressively consistent." Francis Young, *From Nicea to Chalcedon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 72. See a similar comment on p. 68 of the same work.

works have been lost, and much of what does survive is preserved through quotations in Athanasius' writings. The faithfulness of these quotations has often been questioned. On the one hand, Athanasius pushes Arian claims to conclusions which Arius himself probably would not have agreed with, and it is difficult to tell when Athanasius is quoting Arian texts, and when he is paraphrasing in such a way so as to make his point.⁸ On the other hand, Athanasius often makes arguments based on the specific wording of Arian slogans. For example, he continually criticizes the Arian phrase 'there was when he [the Son] was not,' arguing that the meaning of the slogan is 'there was *a time* when he was not.'⁹ Athanasius, in other words, does not misquote Arius and include the words 'a time,' but rather accuses Arius of attempting "to deceive the simple"¹⁰ based precisely on the language he does use. To further complicate matters, part of Athanasius' polemic is to include under the umbrella of 'Arianism' many who did not see themselves as having any affiliation with Arius the man, and perhaps not even with his ideas.¹¹

For my purposes, then, Arius' view of the fatherhood of God is seen primarily through Athanasius' eyes, and serves further to illuminate Athanasius' thought rather than that of Arius (or Arian groups). Athanasius considers the fatherhood of God a main point of contention with the Arians, as is revealed in the frequency with which he makes rebuttals based on the eternal correlativity of the Father and the Son, but as can also be

⁸ See Williams' comments on Athanasius' polemics in Rowan Williams, "The Logic of Arianism," *Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series, 34 (1983), 57-58.

⁹ CA I 13.

¹⁰ CA I 13. Other examples where Athanasius attacks the Arians based on their language in particular include his criticisms of the word 'unoriginate' (CA I 31) and of the slogan 'a creature but not as one of the creatures' (CA II 19). See Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God*, 153.

¹¹ As Williams puts it, "Arianism, as a coherent system, founded by a single great figure and sustained by his disciples, is a fantasy – more exactly, a fantasy based on the polemic of Nicene writers, above all Athanasius." See Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London: Dartman, Longman and Todd, 1987), 82.

seen in his summary of Arian beliefs. As Widdicombe has pointed out, when Athanasius reviews Arian beliefs in both *Contra Arianos* and *De Decretis*, the denial of God's eternal fatherhood is a prominent criticism, and is put first on his list of grievances against the Arians.¹²

Athanasius' primary strategy to refute the Arian view of God's fatherhood is to insist that the name Father entails a sharing of being, or, to put it otherwise, that it connotes a biological significance, and that the Father-Son relation is not merely one of will. For Athanasius, the Arians have an incorrect orientation towards understanding God as Father, because they ignore the primary meaning of the word father, which, in and of itself, indicates a sharing of essence. In this section, I will show that, for Athanasius, (a) a proper conception of God's fatherhood must include the notion of a sharing of essence between Father and Son, and that therefore, (b) the Arian view of the fatherhood of God is merely a 'human' one, and his is a 'divine' one. I will also discuss the idea that for Athanasius, (c) the Father-Son relationship is characterized not only by a sharing of essence, but also by mutual love and delight.

The heart of the Arian controversy lay in the status of the Son, more specifically, in determining whether the Son can be considered equal with that Father. Athanasius recounts that the Arians describe Christ as a 'creature' or 'made from nothing,' claiming Christ is "called Son by grace (χάρτι)," and "not from the Father, but he as others was made God by participation (μετοχῆ)." ¹³ Athanasius rejects these claims. He attacks them in a variety of ways, but since, for him, the status of the Son is inextricably bound up with

¹² CA I 9 and DD 23-26. See Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God*, 157-161.

¹³ CA I 9.

the understanding of God as Father, one of Athanasius' main concerns throughout his anti-Arian writings is to show that the Arian portrayal of God's fatherhood is insufficient and that because of this the Arians misrepresent the Son. For the Arians, the Father-Son relationship is one of will only, and in no way entails a sharing of being between Father and Son. Athanasius insistence on the coequality of the Son with the Father is first and foremost based in his understanding of the eternal correlativity of the Father and the Son. For Athanasius, the terms father and son are correlative – if a father, then a son - and it is inconceivable that there was a time when God was not Father. God is called Father frequently in the New Testament and since this authoritative source indicates God is Father, Athanasius, under the assumption that God is immutable, deems a denial of the divine and eternal status of the Son unacceptable. The proof is in the name: "Therefore 'Father' is proper to the 'Son;' and not 'creature,' but 'Son' is proper to the 'Father.'" ¹⁴ Athanasius returns repeatedly to verses which refer to God as Father or Christ as Son as foolproof evidence that the Son is eternal and of one essence with the Father. We will return to the importance of the title of 'Son' with respect to Christ's other titles in section II below, ¹⁵ but the principle of eternal correlativity underlies Athanasius' insistence that the Father and Son are consubstantial. I now turn to Athanasius' refutation of the Arian assertion that the Son is not of one essence with the Father.

One way in which Athanasius contests this Arian claim is by contrasting the role of a father with that of a creator or maker. A builder has no relationship of being to his works and creates by his will out of nothing, whereas a father is related in essence to his

¹⁴ CA II 59.

¹⁵ See below, pp. 20-25.

offspring. Athanasius explains that “the workman frames it [i.e., his work] when he will, but an offspring is not subject to will, but proper to the essence (οὐ βουλήσει ὑπόκειται ἀλλὰ τῆς οὐσίας ἐστὶν ιδιότης)”¹⁶ and “what is in building began to come into being at will, and is external to the maker; but the son is proper offspring of the father’s essence (ἴδιον ἐστὶ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς γέννημα).”¹⁷ Athanasius provides a longer explanation of the analogy in *De Decretis*, explaining that

as he who addresses an architect, does not under this designation allude to the son who is begotten from him, but in account of the art and science...calls him artificer...and in regard to his son calls him father, but in regard to his works, creator and maker.¹⁸

The essential point here, for Athanasius, is that the word father in its plainest sense connotes a sharing of being. This sense of the word is not only logically deducible using analogies such as the builder or architect and father but, for Athanasius, this meaning of ‘father’ is assumed in the biblical text as well, as we shall see.

When Athanasius speaks of God’s fatherhood in his refutation of the Arians, he rarely does so without scriptural support. In his rebuttal of the Arian position on the word ‘made,’ for example, Athanasius supplies abundant scriptural evidence of this word being applied to true sons, and he explicates any confusing scriptural instances of the word ‘made’ being applied to Christ. Athanasius explains that in the Old Testament figures like Solomon and David and Nathan are sometimes spoken of as ‘servants’ or ‘made,’ though they were certainly sons by nature.¹⁹ Athanasius also returns frequently to John 10.30 (“I

¹⁶ CA I 29.

¹⁷ CA III 62. See also CA III 6.

¹⁸ DD 26. The argument is also found in CA I 32.

¹⁹ CA II 3-4.

and the Father are one”), and insists that the verse indicates a sharing of essence.²⁰

Ultimately, for Athanasius, that God’s fatherhood intimates a sharing of being is obvious because it is clear in the biblical text itself. Words referring to offspring, which scripture uses plentifully of Christ and human children and the word ‘coessential,’ according to Athanasius, are tantamount to the same thing; “so the sense of ‘offspring’ and ‘coessential’ is one, and whoso considers the Son an offspring, rightly considers him also as ‘coessential.’”²¹ The Arians, on the other hand, according to Athanasius, use the unscriptural word ‘unoriginate’ instead of ‘Father’ to speak of God and so displace the language of fatherhood (and thus consubstantiality) from its rightful place of central importance.²² Demonstrating that the language of fatherhood and consubstantiality is scriptural, and that the Arians’ use of ‘made’ and ‘created’ when applied to Christ is unscriptural, is a major part of Athanasius’ project in the *Contra Arianos*.

Rowan Williams summarizes Arius’ position on the Father-Son relationship observing that

when we encounter the metaphor of sonship in such a context, we must be aware the ‘core’ element of the metaphor cannot, in the nature of the case, be the semantic field that covers kinship, biological continuity, membership of the same genus and so on; it must be the narrower field of familial intimacy, a dependency in trust or love...²³

For Arius, that God is Father is not a statement which suggests any biological significance, but rather a social or familial one, whereas for Athanasius, the biological

²⁰ For examples see *CA* III 1, *CA* III 4, *DS* 48, *DD* 21 and *DD* 29. See Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God*, 202.

²¹ *DS* 42.

²² *CA* I 31, *CA* II 2, *DD* 30-31. Invisible is also preferred to unoriginate, because it is scriptural, *CA* I 43. The Arian use of ‘unoriginate’ is taken up again below, see p. 33.

²³ Williams, *Arius*, 112.

understanding of the word ‘father,’ a sharing of being, is the basic sense. Williams draws out the point that for Athanasius, a sharing in being is absolutely essential for an understanding of fatherhood, whereas for the Arians it is intolerable.²⁴

Athanasius’ assumption that the word ‘father’ must carry a biological significance is also seen in his characterization of the Arian view of fatherhood as ‘human’ and his as ‘divine.’ For Athanasius, God as Father must structure our understanding of human fatherhood, and not the other way around. He argues that the Arian portrayal of God as Father by will is erroneously rooted in the temporal and corporeal aspects of human fatherhood. The Arians, according to Athanasius, appeal to human conceptions of parenthood to support their assertion that Christ was begotten outside of time, and yet was ‘after’ the Father. The Arians appeal to mothers, in asking “Had you a son before bearing? Now, as you had not, so neither was the Son of God before his generation.”²⁵ For Athanasius, this comparison is “disgraceful” because it likens God to humans and applies temporal categories to one who is outside of time.²⁶ In quoting the creed written at Sirmium by his opponents, Athanasius also implies that the Arians may have used the name ‘Father’ to prove that he is *de facto* superior to the Son: “for no one can doubt the Father is greater in honour and dignity in the Godhead and in the very name of Father ...”²⁷

²⁴ See also Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God*, 180.

²⁵ CA I 22 and 26. Also note the apparent lack of concern on the part both of Athanasius and Arius that God here is being compared to a mother. The essential issue for Athanasius is that temporal language is being applied to God.

²⁶ CA I 22 and CA II 35.

²⁷ DS 28.

Athanasius, however, asserts that the fatherhood of God and thus the fatherhood of men both require a sharing of being. In accepting this assumption, according to Athanasius, he understands God's fatherhood as the pattern for human fatherhood, and thus does not apply false temporal or corporeal categories to God, but rather uses eternal categories to help illuminate the relations of humankind. Athanasius reasons that if the Arians ask of women "Had you a son before bearing?" they should similarly ask "are your children like your nature and essence?" This question elicits a far more elucidating response than Arius', according to Athanasius, for as he maintains "what we beget is like, not our good pleasure, but like ourselves; nor do we become parents by previous counsel, but to beget is proper to our nature, since we too are images of our fathers."²⁸ According to Athanasius, the Arians apply the terms of human fatherhood to God, rather than the terms of divine fatherhood to men and thus have missed the key component of God's fatherhood which is realized in the human experience: a sharing of being. A sharing of being does not risk the false application of human qualities to God, in Athanasius' estimation, and he makes clear that God is not diminished nor divided by sharing his being with the Son, nor does God beget by the passion associated with human reproduction.²⁹ A proper examination of earthly fatherhood and God as Father will confirm the "point of nature" and show false "the point of time."³⁰

Moreover, Athanasius elsewhere rebuts the Arian criticism of his own work on the basis that they apply temporal or 'human' language to God. The Arians argue, according

²⁸ CA III 67.

²⁹ See for example CA I 22, CA I 28, CA III 1 and DD 22.

³⁰ CA I 28. The "point of time" refers here to the Arian insistence that fathers are before their sons, and the "point of being" refers to Athanasius' insistence that sons are of one being with their father.

to Athanasius, that if the Son were true image and offspring of the Father (as Athanasius portrays him) then the Son too would beget his own son and become a father.³¹ In other words, Christ too would need to become a father in order to be called coessential with the Father. Athanasius argues that this chain of father-then-son-then-father is earthly and corporeal, and it is not acceptable to have “earthly ideas concerning the Father himself, ascribing to him severings and effluences and influences.”³² God is not like a man, and does not become a parent like a man. This argument shows that, for Athanasius, Father and Son are absolute and eternal identities. Human fathers have sons, and their sons have sons and thus properly speaking, humans have no fixed identity as either father or son, but have flexible and changing roles within time and space.³³ For Athanasius, this cannot be so in the case of divine fatherhood,

for not as man is God; for the Father is not from a father, therefore he does not beget one who shall become father...the Father is properly (κυρίως) father and the Son properly (κυρίως) son, and in them and them only does it hold that Father is ever Father and the Son ever Son.³⁴

Here, Athanasius emphasizes the immutability and eternity of God, which he suggests the Arians have compromised. Though earthly fathers and sons are subject to changing roles, God’s essence and identity is unchanging; thus if God is called Father in scripture he must have always been Father and, correlatively, the Son must always have been Son. Christ is the perfect image of the Father, but this does not include his becoming begetter;³⁵ this is true only of men, and so again, for Athanasius, God is not like

³¹ CA I 21.

³² CA I 21.

³³ CA I 21.

³⁴ CA I 21.

³⁵ CA I 21. See also DS 49.

humankind, but rather structures our understanding of existence. The Father and Son are the defining models of human fatherhood precisely because they always maintain their roles and Athanasius uses Ephesians 3.15 to establish that divine fatherhood is the pattern for human fatherhood.³⁶ It is because of God that human fathers bear the name father, “for of him ‘is every fatherhood in heaven and earth named’ (Eph. 3.15).”³⁷ To illustrate this further, Athanasius contends that if humans had not been made in time and were as God, their children too would be ever coexistent with them.³⁸

Athanasius’ contention that the Arians apply a human-invented understanding of fatherhood to God reinforces a crucial idea underpinning Athanasius’ view of fatherhood, to which we have already pointed: for Athanasius, God’s relationship with his Son defines reality and the names father and son properly apply to the Father and Son only. The proper understanding of human fatherhood, then, is that human fatherhood reflects the sharing of essence from the Father to the Son. Williams identifies Arius’ conception of the fatherhood of God with “the field [of meaning] evoked for us when *we* call God ‘Father.’”³⁹ For Arius, Christ’s calling God Father and our calling God Father is much closer in its range of meaning than it is for Athanasius. For Athanasius, that Christ calls God Father allows us to identify our own fathers by that name, because both the divine

³⁶ See Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God*, 177-178. Widdicombe points out that Athanasius is first among the major Alexandrian thinkers to use Eph. 3.15 in connection with the fatherhood of God.

³⁷ CA I 23.

³⁸ CA I 27.

³⁹ Williams, *Arius*, 112.

Father-Son and earthly father-son relationship is one of being, but it cannot mean that God is our father in the same way that he is Christ's father.⁴⁰

Though coessentiality is crucial to understanding the Father-Son relationship, according to Athanasius, the word 'Son' is not merely shorthand for 'coessential with the Father.' The sonship of Christ also indicates for Athanasius that the Son is the eternal object of God's goodness and love. That God is Father and Christ is Son means that the two are in a relationship of constant and reciprocal love, which, according to Athanasius, is clearly shown in Matthew 17.5 ("This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased") and John 3.35 ("The Father loves the Son and shows him all things"). On the basis of these verses,⁴¹ Athanasius concludes that

the Son then is the object of the Father's pleasure and love...For by that good pleasure wherewith the Son is the object of the Father's pleasure is the Father the object of the Son's love, pleasure and honour; and one is the good pleasure which is from Father in Son, so then here too we may contemplate the Son in the Father and the Father in the Son.⁴²

As the Father loves and honours the Son, so the Son loves and honours the Father, but their love and honour are one. Through an apprehension of this mutual and eternal love, Athanasius explains, the unity of God and Christ may also be further understood. Athanasius expresses a similar idea in his assertion that the Father always takes delight in the Son. The Father rejoices in the Son, and since the Father's joy could never have been

⁴⁰ I will discuss what it means, for Athanasius, when we call God Father with respect to adoption below pp. 30-31.

⁴¹ Matt. 17.5 and Jn. 3.35 are the primary verses Athanasius uses in order to prove that there is a relationship of love between Father and Son, and he also cites a number of Christ's titles throughout scripture to disprove that the relationship could be one of will, see CA III 65.

⁴² CA III 66.

increased as he is immutable, this rejoicing is without beginning and end.⁴³ Moreover, all delight of the Father stems from his eternal delight in the Son. When God takes joy in mankind at its creation, he rejoices over it because it is made after his own image, which is Christ.⁴⁴ God's rejoicing over mankind is dependant on the joy of the Father-Son relationship. As with the Father's love, the Son also reciprocates joy: "the Son rejoices in the Father, saying, 'I was by him, daily his delight, rejoicing always before him' (Prov. 8.30)"⁴⁵ Proverbs 8.30 shows, then, for Athanasius, not only that the Son's existence is eternal ("always before him"), but also that the Father-Son relationship is grounded in perpetual joy. The Father-Son relationship, then, is both eternal and dynamic. The relationship of the Father and the Son is characterized by continual action as the Father begets the Son, loves him and rejoices in him and, in turn, the Son images, loves and rejoices in the Father.

For Athanasius, therefore, the Father and Son certainly have a relationship of being, but also one of will, whereby the Son is the object of the Father's love and joy. Athanasius uses the eternity of God's goodness to refute the Arians' erroneous distinction between God acting 'by will' or 'by good pleasure' and acting out of necessity. As God is good eternally but also by his own will (that is, not necessarily), argues Athanasius, so is God Father eternally *and* by his good pleasure.⁴⁶ Christ, is brought forth perpetually from the Father's essence and yet also by the Father's pleasure, and is the object of the Father's love, esteem and delight, which the Son reciprocates.

⁴³ CA III 82.

⁴⁴ CA III 82.

⁴⁵ CA III 82.

⁴⁶ CA III 63 and 66.

In Athanasius' refutation of the Arian's position on the status of the Son, he endeavours to demonstrate that to be a son is to share in essence with a father, and he does this using both analogy and scriptural language. He also demonstrates through his rejection of Arian language, which he sees as being temporal or 'human,' that the divine Father-Son relationship structures reality and gives shape to its human equivalent. Moreover, it is clear that for Athanasius the Father-Son relationship also involves the exercise of the will, in the mutual love and rejoicing between God and Christ.

II. The Name Father, the Titles of Christ and Arguments for the Divinity of the Son

Out of the Arian controversy came the creed of Nicea, and Athanasius is most famous for his defence of the creed and for his insistence that the Son is coequal and of one essence (ὁμοούσιος) with the Father, eternal and true Son. The main purpose of his polemical texts, as we have surveyed above, is to show that the Son is not a creature of God's will. To put it positively, Athanasius endeavours to show that God's being a father must mean that Christ is always with the Father, existing eternally as the Father does (i.e., that he is a coeternal) and also springs from the Father's being, and is not created *ex nihilo* (i.e., that he is coessential). Athanasius attempts to demonstrate that Christ is coeternal and coessential based on arguments from scripture, most often, from the titles given to Christ. A survey of how Athanasius uses these titles will help to illuminate further his view of fatherhood, as well as to show the centrality of the title 'Son.' As we will see, the name Son is the primary title upon which the others rely for their meaning. In this section I will deal with (a) the arguments Athanasius makes for the coeternality and

consubstantiality of the Son based on the titles Word, Wisdom, Power and Image, (b) the images Athanasius uses to help illustrate these arguments, and (c) the arguments Athanasius makes from Christ's name of Son and how it relates to the other titles.

Before engaging in a discussion of the titles, however, I will briefly consider Athanasius' use of scripture, as much of the Arian debate, and Athanasius' understanding of God as Father more generally, turns on the interpretation of controversial passages in the Bible. Athanasius has a high view of the authority of scripture. For Athanasius, the scriptures are divinely inspired and "sufficient for the exposition of the truth."⁴⁷ They describe philosophical and natural matters more accurately than any other source, as well as provide moral instruction which demands obedience.⁴⁸ Furthermore, for Athanasius, the interpretation of scripture must be done in light of church tradition. Athanasius criticizes Arian interpretation on the basis that it is done "in a private sense"⁴⁹ and much of the *De Decretis* aims to show that Arian propositions are not in accordance with the creeds and definitions previously laid down in the church.⁵⁰ Athanasius' high view of scripture and his insistence that the Arians have departed from a traditional reading of passages concerning God's fatherhood will play a significant role in the course of our discussion.

Athanasius makes the majority of his arguments for the divinity of the Son based on titles assigned to Christ in scripture: Christ as Word (Jn. 1.1), Power and Wisdom (1

⁴⁷ *Contra Gentes* 1 from *Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione* in *Oxford Early Christian Texts*, R. Thomson, trans. and ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

⁴⁸ Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God*, 155-156.

⁴⁹ CA I 37.

⁵⁰ See Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God*, 156-158.

Cor. 1.24, Prov. 8.22-25) and Image (Col. 1.15, Heb. 1.3).⁵¹ Although he draws arguments for the eternity of Christ from throughout the biblical text,⁵² he returns again and again to passages pertaining to these four titles (and that of Son, as we will see). Athanasius takes seriously the names used of Christ in scripture, and throughout his arguments he either employs biblical terms, or defends the use of any non-biblical ones, on the grounds that they capture the intended meaning of scripture.⁵³ His arguments are rooted in this dependence on scriptural language and the belief that God is immutable. The arguments made with respect to each of these titles (Word, Power, Wisdom and Image) are similar. Athanasius contends that if Christ is called the Word of God, he must always have existed, since God does not change and thus would never have been without his Word. Simply put, “the Father being everlasting, his Word and his Wisdom must be everlasting.”⁵⁴ Moreover, without his Word and Power God could not have created, since the Word was present at creation, and indeed it was through God’s Word and Power, which is the Son, that creation came to be (Jn. 1.1-3).⁵⁵ Lastly is Christ’s name of ‘image’, which Athanasius primarily uses to affirm the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, rather than his coeternality. If Christ is not from the Father’s essence, Athanasius argues, he cannot be a true image and exact representation of God’s being (as in Heb. 1.3). He

⁵¹ All scriptural quotations are taken from the NRSV unless cited from the writings of Athanasius themselves.

⁵² For example, Athanasius cites as evidence many verses which, for him, explicitly state Christ’s divinity such as Jn. 10.30, Jn. 10.37-38, Jn. 14.9-10, Phil 2.9 and 1 Cor 8.6. He often uses these verses in conjunction with arguments from the correlativity of Father and Son.

⁵³ For example, see DS 37-38. See also Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God*, 158.

⁵⁴ CA I 9.

⁵⁵ CA I 12.

writes: “if the Son is not like the Father in essence, something is wanting to the image and it is not a complete image, nor a perfect radiance.”⁵⁶

Athanasius also employs a number of images to illustrate his arguments for the coeternality and consubstantiality of Christ. As Origen (and others before him) had,⁵⁷ Athanasius uses the image of the sun and its rays to show the distinctness and yet inseparability of the Son from the Father, and their coeternality. The sun’s radiance is not the same as the sun itself, and yet the sun is never without its radiance, nor can the radiance exist without its source. Furthermore, as with the Father and Son, the sun is neither divided nor diminished by the emission of its rays.⁵⁸ Athanasius also uses the similar image of a fountain and the stream flowing from it as an analogy for the eternal begetting of the Son from the Father. As rays always come forth from the sun and a stream from a fountain, so the Father is the eternal source of the Son’s essence, as well as the perpetual font of all wisdom and goodness.⁵⁹

The image of the sun and the fountain, however, are seldom used by Athanasius as arguments for the eternal generation of the Son, rather they are employed to clarify and illustrate the reality of the shared essence from Father to Son. For example, arguing for the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father on the basis of John 10.38 (“I in the Father and the Father in me”), Athanasius writes, “For the Son is in the Father as it is

⁵⁶ DS 38. For another example of where he makes this argument, see CA III 6.

⁵⁷ See Origen, *Homily on Jeremiah IX 4*. Justin Martyr prefers the image of two torches, and criticizes the image of the sun and its rays because it is liable to be misinterpreted in a modalistic way (*Dialogue with Trypho* 128). For Origen’s use of the image see Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God*, 90.

⁵⁸ See Athanasius’ use of this image in CA II 33, CA III 3, CA III 36 and DS 52.

⁵⁹ See, for example, CA I 14 CA III 1, CA III 3, *De Decretis* 15, DS 41 and DS 45 and *De Incarnatione 3* from *Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione* in *Oxford Early Christian Texts*, R. Thomson, trans. and ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

allowed us to know, because the whole being of the Son is proper to the Father's essence, as radiance from light and stream from fountain."⁶⁰ Athanasius uses these images as a means to describe how the generation of the Son works, and to give a tangible example which illustrates the possibility of eternal begetting, often without giving a thorough-going explanation of his analogies.⁶¹

Athanasius' images and arguments are grounded in and related to his understanding of the eternal correlativity of the Father and the Son. We have already introduced this idea in the discussion of Athanasius' rebuttal of the Arians;⁶² the essential point is that an unchanging God who is called Father could never have been without his Son, as he was never without his Word, Wisdom, Power and Image. Because of this title of Christ, Athanasius contends that the Arians simply do not account for scriptural language of fatherhood.

It is plain from this that the Arians are not fighting with us about their heresy, but while they pretend that they fight us, their real fight is against the Godhead itself. For if the voice were ours which says 'This is my Son' (Matt 17.5), our complaint of them would be small; but if it is the Father's voice, and the disciples heard it...are they not fighting against God?⁶³

God has declared himself to be Father before the disciples and all men, and thus God's fatherhood must be an accurate description of his essence. According to Athanasius, the Arians have missed a crucial clue to understanding God; he is Father, and has himself identified his own Son. In *De Decretis* 6, Athanasius applies the logic of eternal correlativity negatively to Arian slogans.

⁶⁰ CA III 3.

⁶¹ Though not usual, he sometimes fully explicates the analogy; see *DD* 24.

⁶² See above, p. 8.

⁶³ CA II 32. See also CA I 10; God would not have said "this is my beloved Son," if in fact Christ was merely a creature.

They say what the others held and dared to maintain before them; 'Not always Father, not always Son; for the Son was not before his generation, but as others, came to be from nothing; and in consequence God was not always Father of the Son, but when the Son came to be and was created, then was God called his Father...'⁶⁴

Since, for Athanasius, the correlativity of Father and Son is assumed, he is able to reverse the statement in order to rebuke the Arians: if there was not always a Son, then there was not always a Father. Therefore, any attempt to undermine Christ's status as true Son poses a direct threat to a proper conception of divinity itself. If the Arians deny that there is a Son, they deny that there is a Father and threaten his immutable character.

For Athanasius, then, the Father-Son relationship is evidently eternal, and the names Father and Son are fundamental for his campaign to establish the full divinity of the Son. Moreover, the Father-Son relationship also underlies Athanasius' conceptions of Christ as Word, Wisdom, Power and Image, which we already briefly discussed. Although Athanasius makes frequent use of these four titles, he rarely provides the evidence for Christ as Wisdom, Word, Power and Image alone when arguing for the consubstantiality and eternity of Christ, but first makes a statement about status of Christ as true Son. He writes, "He [Christ] is the true Son of God, having his being from God as from a father, whose Word and Wisdom and Power he is."⁶⁵ Here, 'the true Son of God' (θεοῦ υἱός ἀληθινός) is the subject of the sentence, with Word and Wisdom and

⁶⁴ *DD* 6.

⁶⁵ *DI* 32. Here I follow the St. Vladimir's translation, as Thomson's translation ("that he is the true Son of God, proceeding as very Word from the Father and Wisdom and Power") uses the anachronistic 'proceeding' to translate *ὑπάρχων* and he places *Λόγος* apart from *Σοφία καὶ Δύναμις*, which does not reflect the Greek. This obscures the meaning, since in the Greek 'Word, Wisdom and Power' are put together and are attributes of God, but Thomson's translation would suggest that 'Word' is somehow helping to describe the begetting of the Son. See also, *CA* I 9, *CA* I 58, and *CA* II 62.

Power being provided as secondary titles which also show Christ's eternity and divine character.

That the name Son entails the consubstantiality of Christ with the Father also allows Athanasius to use Hebrews 1.3 and Colossians 1.15, which call Christ the image of God, as definitive evidence to support his case. Images can come in two varieties, according to Athanasius: images which participate in the essence of that which they are imaging, and those which do not. Humankind, for example, has been “made according to his [God's] image and likeness” (Gen. 1.26), but this is only in order that humans may apprehend “the image, that is, the Word of the Father.”⁶⁶ Here Athanasius uses the same word, image (εἰκόνα), to describe humankind (ποιεῖ τούτους κατὰ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ εἰκόνα) and Christ (τὴν εἰκόνα...λέγω δὴ τὸν τοῦ Πατρὸς Λόγον). What makes Christ the image proper, rather than being merely after the image, is a sharing in essence with the Father, and this can only be achieved by a true Son; “for if he is not Son, neither is he image.”⁶⁷

Therefore, the name Son takes precedence over all other names for Christ, and as we have seen, Athanasius often appeals to the names of Father and Son themselves in order to refute Arian contentions. For example, because Athanasius characterizes the Son as being eternal, as well as of one essence with the Father, the Arians, according to Athanasius, charge him with portraying Christ not as a Son, but as a brother of God.⁶⁸ Athanasius appeals to scriptural language for his defence, and he points to his repeated assertion that the Son is called the only-begotten of the Father, which a brother of God

⁶⁶ *DI* 11.

⁶⁷ *CA* II 2.

⁶⁸ *CA* I 14.

could not be.⁶⁹ For Athanasius, however, the charge is ultimately without gravity because “the Father is Father and not born of any Son, and the Son is Son, and not brother.”⁷⁰

Athanasius insists that because of the existence of these two correlative names, Father and Son, the Son could never be confused for a brother despite the fact that he is coeternal and of one essence with the Father. For a similar reason, Athanasius rejects the interpretation that the word ‘become’ in Hebrews 1.2 (“when he had by himself purged our sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels”),⁷¹ implies the Son was not always higher than the angels. He draws attention to the fact that Christ is called Son in the passage,

Nor does even the expression ‘become,’ which occurs here show that the Son is originate, as you suppose. If indeed it was simply ‘become’ and no more, a case might stand for the Arians; but, whereas they are forestalled with the ‘Son’ throughout, showing that he is other than things originate.⁷²

For Athanasius, the word Son immediately dispels any thought that Christ could be created, since to be a true son entails a sharing of essence, as we have already seen.

Although the passage in question, according to Athanasius, may seem to suggest that Christ was made by God and later exalted, the presence of the name Son alone contradicts the idea and “forestalls” faulty interpretations at every turn. Athanasius also uses the very names Father and Son to guard against a Sabellian interpretation of the language of consubstantiality,

For they are one, not as one thing divided into two parts, and these nothing but one, nor as one thing twice named, so that the same becomes at one time Father and at another his own Son, for this Sabellian holding was judged a heretic. But

⁶⁹ CA I 14.

⁷⁰ CA I 14.

⁷¹ CA I 55.

⁷² CA I 56.

they are two, because the Father is Father and is not also Son, and the Son is Son and not also Father; but the nature is one.⁷³

The Father and Son, in Athanasius' view, could not possibly be the same, because their identities are fixed; the Father could not also be the Son nor the begetter suddenly the begotten, a point which we have also observed in our discussion of 'human' and 'divine' language.⁷⁴ Both the oneness of God and the distinctness of the identities of the Father and the Son are evident because God is called Father and Christ is called Son, as everything of the Father is said of the Son except his being called Son and not Father.⁷⁵

De Synodis 41 has similar anti-Sabellian connotations. Athanasius writes,

For not even as a man's word is part of him, nor proceeds from him according to passion; much less God's Word; whom the Father has declared to be his own Son, lest, on the other hand, if we merely heard of 'Word' we should suppose him, such as in the word of a man, unsubstantial (ἀνυπόστατος); but that, hearing that he is Son, we may acknowledge him to be living Word (ζῶντα λόγον) and substantive Wisdom (ἐνούσιον σοφίαν).⁷⁶

Athanasius writes that the Son is not unsubstantial (ἀνυπόστατος), but rather substantive (ἐνούσιον), both affirming the positive ἐνούσιον and denying its antonym ἀνυπόστατος to elucidate the point. Athanasius also adds that the Son is the living Word (ζῶντα λόγον) to make clear that the Son has his own distinct existence; and all of this is evident, for Athanasius, on the basis of the names Father and Son alone. This passage reinforces the idea, discussed above, that the name Son proves the consubstantiality of the Father and Son and confirms their eternal immutable identities and the passage also eliminates any

⁷³ CA III 4.

⁷⁴ See above, pp. 10-12.

⁷⁵ DS 49.

⁷⁶ DS 41.

suggestion of a Sabellian understanding of Christ's title of Word and Wisdom, that is, as a human word and human wisdom which do not have their own proper existence.

Moreover, the name Father literally describes God's essence, and is not an analogy or metaphor, for "if God is simple, as he is, in saying 'God' and naming 'Father' we name nothing about him, but signify his essence itself."⁷⁷ Similarly, Christ is not called Power because he is powerful, nor Wisdom because he wise, nor Son because he is adopted; if he were, then these titles become merely a collection of meaningless words, "And then after all, what is he? For he is none of these himself, if they are but his names: and he has but a semblance of being, and is decorated with these names for us."⁷⁸ Rather, the name Son directly communicates the relationship of Christ to God and creation: he is one with the Father, and ontologically other than humankind.

In conclusion, for Athanasius, there can be no notion of God aside from God as Father and it is not conceivable for him that there was a time when God was not Father, that is, when God was without his Son.⁷⁹ The Father-Son relationship underlies all of his arguments for Christ's divinity. In works such as *The Life of Anthony* and *De Incarnatione*, in which Athanasius is not engaged in responding to the Arians, the title Son of God implies his divinity, with no explanation given.⁸⁰ Athanasius indeed insists that Christ's being the "true Son of the Father" is sufficient evidence to show that he is also

⁷⁷ *DD* 22. Though ultimately, for Athanasius, it is impossible to know God's essence. See later in this passage (*DD* 22) and *CA* II 36.

⁷⁸ *CA* II 38. See also *CA* I 9 and *CA* III 10.

⁷⁹ *CA* III 66.

⁸⁰ See, for example, *The Life of Anthony* 94 and *DI* 19.

natural and genuine, proper to his [ie. God's] essence, Wisdom only-begotten, and very and only Word of God...not a creature or work, but an offspring proper to the Father's essence, wherefore he is very God, existing one in essence (ὁμοούσιος) with the very Father.⁸¹

III. Soteriology, Epistemology and Adoption as Sons

The unity of the Father and the Son, that is, their coessentiality and the closeness of their relationship, has thus far been our main focus. Equally as important, however, is the ontological distance of the Father and the Son from creation. Emphasizing this distance helps Athanasius to ensure that the Son is considered fully divine and not a creature, an anti-Arian concern we have repeatedly observed, and so to explain how Christ, who is not distanced from God as human beings are, can help human beings come into a relationship with God as Father. Unlike Origen, Athanasius does not divide existence into the categories of matter and spirit, but rather into the categories of divine and created. God as architect creates works *ex nihilo* and God as Father begets a Son from his essence. Christ is either a true Son and God, or an adopted son and like a man. Son and creature are mutually exclusive designations, “for if he is a Son, he is not a creature; but if he is a creature, then not a Son”⁸² There can be no semi-divine elements in this model. Athanasius argues that even if Arian propositions were accepted, and it was granted that the Son was the first and best of all creations, it would not change his ontological status.

⁸¹ CA I 9.

⁸² DS 36.

It matters not, whether the Son has something more and was made first, but we something less and were made afterwards, as long as we all partake and are called sons of the same Father. For the more or less does not indicate a different nature.⁸³

There is only God and his creation, and one cannot be Lord who is counted among the creation, no matter how magnificent the creature.⁸⁴

That the ontological difference between the Son and the created world is fundamental is at least in part, for Athanasius, based on his understanding of John 1. Athanasius repeatedly asserts that in the beginning God created all things through his Word, and that the Son cannot be both a creature and the one who brings forth the creation. Moreover, if Christ is seen as an interceding agent who brings forth the rest of creation, and yet is not himself divine, then God cannot properly be said to have created at all.⁸⁵ The Father would be withdrawn, removed and at second hand from his creation, which is inconsistent with the biblical account of the God who watches over sparrows and who humbles himself to become a man.⁸⁶ Since “all the works are made through the Word and the Wisdom as it is written ‘In wisdom you have made them all’ (Ps. 104.24) and ‘All things were made by him and without him was not anything made, (Jn. 1.3),”⁸⁷ it follows that only through an eternal, divine Word could creation have been realized. Christ fully participates in the act of creation and exercises the “illuminating and creative power, specially proper to the Father.”⁸⁸ The Son and Father form the world with the same creative power as one God.

⁸³ *DD* 9.

⁸⁴ *CA* III 65.

⁸⁵ *CA* II 25 and *DD* 7.

⁸⁶ Matt. 10.29, *CA* II 25.

⁸⁷ *CA* II 5. See another example, *CA* II 62.

⁸⁸ *CA* II 52.

We have already seen why the conception of the full divinity of the Son is important, for Athanasius, with respect to the relationship of Father and Son within the divine life, and that the Son must be ontologically distinct from creation if creation is to exist in the first place. But, insofar as we creatures and our fallen state are concerned, it is equally crucial that Christ be a true Son, of one essence with the Father for the sake of (a) salvation, which entails, (b) epistemology, (c) our adoption as sons, a topic of fundamental importance for Athanasius, and more broadly, for the sake of (d) the ordering of all human relations and the life of the church.

That Christ is other than creation (and the same as the Father) in essence is imperative, first of all, for the salvation of humankind. For Athanasius, a creature cannot save another creature.

For if being a creature, he had become man, man had remained just as he was, not joined to God; for how had a work been joined to the creator by a work? Or what succour had come from like to like, when one as well as the other needed it? And how, if the Word were a creature, had he the power to undo God's sentence and to remit sin, where it is written in the prophets that this is God's doing?⁸⁹

Like creation, salvation is an act proper to God alone, and the scriptures attest to it. As Athanasius points out, "it is written in the prophets."⁹⁰ A creature's attempt to unite itself with God or to cleanse itself of sin will be met with failure, since it is by fallen nature not capable of achieving these transformations without divine aid. Christ, however, is shown to be active and effective in the redemption of humankind at every stage and so cannot be a creature. Christ reverses the sentence of death and corruption and renews the image of

⁸⁹ CA II 67.

⁹⁰ Athanasius also goes on in this passage to cite numerous scriptural examples to support his claim.

God in men; “he both rid us of death and renewed us.”⁹¹ Christ is able to save men because he is other than them and thus not in need of saviour himself: “nor would a portion of the creation have been the creation’s salvation, as needing salvation itself.”⁹² As a creature, Christ would have himself required forgiveness, renewal and redemption, but as divine he is capable of accomplishing these things for the sake of creatures.

Athanasius also links salvation closely with divine love, which, as we have already seen, is grounded in the Father-Son relationship.⁹³ The Father and Son love each other eternally and with that same loving kindness they also bring into existence and love creation, and so redeem it through the incarnation. The Father loves creation in loving his Son, and yet the divine love is one. He writes, “for by this offspring the Father made all things and extended his providence unto all things; by him he exercises his love (φιλανθρωπεύεται) to man, and thus he and the Father are one, as has been said.”⁹⁴ Since the Son is the eternal object of the Father’s love, it is through the Son that God loves humankind. It is “because of the Father’s love for man” that creation was both realized and redeemed through the Son.⁹⁵ Likewise, it was out of love that the Son became incarnate, and endured the ignominy of mocking and crucifixion. Athanasius instructs us to “admire the loving kindness of the Word, because for our sake he is despised that we might be honoured.”⁹⁶

⁹¹ *DI* 16.

⁹² *CA II* 69.

⁹³ See p. 14 above.

⁹⁴ *DD* 24.

⁹⁵ *CA II* 63.

⁹⁶ *DI* 34.

Secondly, the Son's coessentiality with the Father is critical for humankind's coming to a knowledge of God, which is a fundamental part of Athanasius' soteriology. Only that which is like God in nature can have perfect knowledge of God, and Athanasius balks at the Arian contention that "the Son does not have exact knowledge of the Father, nor does the Word see the Father perfectly; and neither exactly understands nor knows the Father."⁹⁷ The suggestion that the Son falls short of having perfect knowledge of the Father is not only in and of itself offensive to the Son, for Athanasius, but it also causes serious problems where human beings are concerned. God has revealed himself through the Son, and if the Son does not have perfect knowledge of the Father, neither has mankind received any knowledge about God.

How does he [i.e., Christ] alone reveal the Father, and none else but he know the Father? For if he, a work, could possibly know the Father, then the Father must also be known by all to the proportion of the measures of each: for all of them are works as he is. But if it is impossible for things originate either to see or to know, for the sight and knowledge of him surpasses all (since God himself says 'No one shall see my face and live' (Ex. 33.20)), yet the Son has declared, 'No one knows the Father save the Son,' (Matt. 11.27) therefore the Word is different from all things originate, in that he alone knows and alone sees the Father...⁹⁸

Again, Athanasius stresses the ontological gulf that lies between the created and the divine, and draws on scripture to show where the Son must stand. If the Son is a creature, he does not know the Father any better than another creature. But, if Christ is God, he alone is in a position to help originated things understand the transcendent Father, "and beholding the Son, we see the Father; for the thought and comprehension of the Son is knowledge and concerns the Father, because he is his proper offspring from his

⁹⁷ CA I 9.

⁹⁸ CA II 22.

essence.”⁹⁹ The Father, then, is the eternal object of not only the Son’s love, but also his contemplation. It is because of the closeness of this relationship that humankind is able to apprehend the Father so readily in the Son, in his earthly body, works and teaching.

By emphasizing that the Son alone knows the Father, and that the incarnation is humankind’s only way to gain true knowledge of God, Athanasius again can make the point that an improper understanding of the Son leads to an improper understanding of divinity itself, “for how can he [ie. Arius] speak truth concerning the Father, who denies the Son that reveals concerning him?”¹⁰⁰ Astutely employing the rhetoric of his time,¹⁰¹ Athanasius accuses Arius of the very charge he is most eager to avoid. Arius denies coeternal status to the Son in order to safeguard a proper understanding of the uniqueness and transcendence of God the Father.¹⁰² According to Athanasius, however, by failing to give the Son his due, Arius cannot gain a proper conception of God at all.

Thirdly, Christ’s status as true Son ensures that we who are creatures may be adopted as sons. Our adoption, for Athanasius, is the way in which human beings can be joined with God and share in the divine life. “He himself,” Athanasius explains, “has made us sons of the Father and deified man by becoming himself man.”¹⁰³ Only a true Son, who knows the Father and is coessential with him, can vouchsafe the restoration of human relations with the divine, and Christ does do this, by means of the incarnation. If Christ does not know the Father, “how in that case can any at all know God as their

⁹⁹ CA I 16.

¹⁰⁰ CA I 8.

¹⁰¹ See Williams, *The Logic of Arianism*, 57.

¹⁰² See, for example, Arius’ concern in his *Letter to Alexander of Alexandria* (2) – “We know one God – alone begotten, alone everlasting, alone without beginning, alone true...” and following.

¹⁰³ CA I 28.

Father? For there cannot be adoption apart from the real Son, who says ‘No one knows the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.’ (Matt. 11.27)”¹⁰⁴

Similarly,

We too are made sons truly, and using the name of the Father we acknowledge from that name the Word in the Father. But if he wills that we should call his own Father our Father, we must on no account measure ourselves with the Son according to nature, for it is because of the Son that the Father is so called by us, for since the Word bore our body and came to be in us, therefore by reason of the Word in us names through us his own Father as ours, which in the Apostle’s meaning when he says, ‘God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.’ (Gal. 4.6)¹⁰⁵

For Athanasius, as we have already discussed, Christ must be divine in order to bring the knowledge of God which saves, but he must also be a *son* to do these things, because only the Son can know God as Father. We could not know God as Father if not for the condescension of the true Son in coming into the flesh, and his providing for us the model of perfect sonship by which we may be adopted. Thus, the eternal Father-Son relationship is crucial for repairing the human-divine relationship.

Finally, the Father-Son relationship orders all human relationships. Christians experience unity because of the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: “as we are sons and gods because of the Word in us, so we shall be in the Son and in the Father and we shall be accounted to have become one in Son and in Father, because that Spirit is in us, which is in the Word, which is in the Father.”¹⁰⁶ In light of John 17.20-21 (“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in

¹⁰⁴ CA I 29.

¹⁰⁵ DD 31. See also, CA II 59.

¹⁰⁶ CA III 25.

us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me”), Athanasius argues, those in the church are also called to unity with one another as a reflection of divine unity.

Therefore, not that we might become such as he [i.e., Christ], did he say ‘that they may be one as we are;’ (Jn. 17.21) but that as him being the Word, is in his own Father, so that we too, taking an exemplar and looking at Him, might become one towards each other in concord and oneness of spirit.¹⁰⁷

Divine unity provides the precedent and the power for human beings to live in harmony with others. Christ enjoins the church to “learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matt. 11.29), not so that we may become divine as is the Son, but rather “that looking towards him, we may remain meek continually, so also here, wishing that our good disposition towards each other should be true and firm and indissoluble.”¹⁰⁸ When human beings begin to understand the oneness of Father and Son, they can strive to emulate this perfect unity in living out their own relationships. Christ is the true Son, and so “has the real and true identity of nature with the Father,” but this is of great importance to humankind since “to us is given to imitate it.”¹⁰⁹ Moreover, as in the Father-Son relationship, the communion amongst human beings is also to be characterized by love. Athanasius, speaking here in the voice of Christ as he interprets John 17, writes “And the work is perfected because of men, redeemed from sin, no longer remain dead, but being deified, have in each other, by looking at me, the bond of charity (τὸν σύνδεσμον τῆς ἀγάπης).”¹¹⁰

Christ the Son redeems human beings from sin, saves them from the penalty of death, deifies them through adoption, and so enables them to have a relationship of unity

¹⁰⁷ CA III 19.

¹⁰⁸ CA III 20.

¹⁰⁹ CA III 22.

¹¹⁰ CA III 23.

and love, not only with God their Father, but with their fellow man. Because of the actions attributed to Christ in scripture, namely, creation, salvation and the revelation of God, Christ must be declared divine since these are actions of the divine. This is far from an exhaustive list of the achievements of the incarnation, for Athanasius, but they reveal the importance of Christ's sonship, including his love for, knowledge of and unity with the Father, for the way in which God redeems the created world.

Moreover, proof of the centrality of the Father-Son relationship, for Athanasius, is evident in the lived life of the church. Athanasius is interested not only in establishing the fact of Christ's sonship and God's fatherhood, but he is also concerned to show how the importance of the Father-Son relationship is manifest in the life of the believer.

Athanasius insists that Christ is treated as true Son and God as true Father by the church. For example, Athanasius protests the Arians' use of the word 'unoriginate' (ἀγέννητος) to describe God, both because it is unscriptural, and because the Christian is not taught to address God as unoriginate. When Jesus "teaches us to pray, He says not 'When you pray say 'O God unoriginated,' but rather 'When you pray say, our Father, which art in heaven' (Matt. 6.9)."¹¹¹ The name Father is preferable to unoriginate because it is used by Christ himself in scripture. It is also preferable because 'Father' says something about God's essence, whereas 'unoriginate' merely speaks about God with respect to his works,¹¹² a point Athanasius makes, as we have previously seen, in his analogy of the father and builder.¹¹³ Although Athanasius does not explicitly make the connection to

¹¹¹ *DD* 31.

¹¹² *CA* II 2.

¹¹³ See p. 8 above.

adoption here, it seems that the believer is able to address God as Father because Christ allows creatures to be adopted as sons and even this straightforward experiential evidence indicates that Father is a superior name to unoriginate: Father is the name the believer actually uses to call upon God.

Similarly, the importance of the Father-Son relationship is evident in the rite of baptism, which for Athanasius, is fundamental for our being adopted as sons. It is not accidental that the names ‘Father and Son’ appear in the baptismal formula, which Christ himself uses in scripture (Matt. 28.19). The Arians’ error is clear in their failure to abide by this command. Athanasius asks

if the consecration is given to us in the name of Father and Son, and they [i.e., the Arians] do not confess a true Father, because they deny what is from him and like his essence, and deny also the true Son, and name another of their own framing as created out of nothing, is not the rite administered by them altogether empty and unprofitable, making a show, but in reality being no help towards religion? For the Arians do not baptize into the name of Father and Son, but into creator and creature, and into maker and work.¹¹⁴

The baptismal formula too reveals the importance of a proper understanding of the Father-Son relationship. If the Arian view of the Father and Son were to prevail, argues Athanasius, baptism would no longer be a beneficial rite. Unless the Son holds the power to join men with God, his name would not be invoked; as Athanasius contends “superfluous, according to you [i.e., the Arians], is the naming of the Son in baptism.”¹¹⁵ Athanasius argues, however, that Father and Son act together in baptism to bestow grace, “for where the Father is there is the Son, and where the Father works, he works through

¹¹⁴ CA II 42.

¹¹⁵ CA II 41.

the Son...so also when baptism is given, whom the Father baptizes the Son baptizes.”¹¹⁶ Baptism is visible and immediate evidence that the Father and Son work as one, and that the divinity of the Son is the basis for our adoption. More generally, Athanasius throughout the *Contra Arianos* maintains that proof of Christ’s divinity lay in the worship of the church.¹¹⁷ Were Christ merely a creation, the worship of the Son would be idolatrous. But, in fact, the Son is worshipped ubiquitously and through him the Father. And, idolatry was broken by his power, as, “now throughout the whole world men are abandoning the superstitious worship of idols and are taking refuge in Christ, and worshipping him as God; and through him they also recognize the Father, of whom they had been ignorant.”¹¹⁸

Khaled Anatolios has argued that in both the *Contra Gentes-De Incarnatione* and the Anti-Arians writings, it is paramount for Athanasius to show how God intersects with the created world through the incarnation of his Son.¹¹⁹ Athanasius’ concern with the fullness of Christ’s divinity (and indeed his humanity, though I have not dealt with that here) is also a concern with how God will be proven good in redeeming, enlightening and adopting his wayward creation. To investigate the relationship between Father and Son is to investigate the inner divine life, but as Anatolios has pointed out, since the Father, for Athanasius, is often representative of transcendence and the Son of immanence, “the question of the relation between the Father and Son is, by implication, a question of the

¹¹⁶ CA II 41.

¹¹⁷ See CA I 17 and 42-43, CA II 23-24, CA III 6, 16 and 32.

¹¹⁸ DI 46.

¹¹⁹ See Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of his Thought*, throughout.

relation of divine immanence and transcendence.”¹²⁰ In this final section, I have endeavoured to show how the Father-Son relationship (and, indeed, the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father) plays a fundamental role both in salvation, and in the activity of the church.

Conclusion

That God is Father and Christ is Son is, for Athanasius, a statement about the nature of the relationship of the divine within itself *and* of the relationship of the creator with his creation. God is called Father and so Christ is Son eternally; Christ is the true Son of God who is also God’s Word, Wisdom, Power and Image. Christ is one in essence with the Father, eternally knows and loves the Father, and became a man because of the love which the Father exercises through him. The relationship of the Father and the Son is the grounding for Athanasius’ conception of how the universe and humankind came to be, and it defines how relationships ought to work on earth. The Son brings the knowledge of God to humankind and brings humankind back to God through adoption. Moreover, Christ must be true Son, because it is evident, both in scripture and in church practice, that the Father-Son relationship in fact effects creation, salvation and revelation. The Father-Son relationship, then, lies at the heart of Athanasius’ thought, and is fundamental to his Christology, soteriology, epistemology, and his thinking more broadly about the question of divine transcendence and immanence.

¹²⁰ Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of his Thought*, 16.

2. Gregory of Nazianzus on the Fatherhood of God

The fatherhood of God is fundamental to Gregory of Nazianzus' understanding of the nature of God, the intratrinitarian life, and the human ascent to God. Gregory ubiquitously uses the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit to identify the three members of the Trinity and argues that it is through these names that we know the distinctness of the three persons in their relationship to one another.¹²¹ That God is Father means for Gregory that he is the source of the other two members of the Trinity, as well as the source of human and divine unity. Gregory's understanding of a unified yet ordered Trinity, which, for him, is confessed in the Nicene creed, is grounded in his conception of God as Father. In this chapter I will seek to delineate what it means, for Gregory, that God is Father and to show how this idea is connected to his view of the Father as source, to the relational identities of the Trinity and to the Trinity's relationship to humankind.

There are, however, a number of complications in undertaking this study. As in the works of Athanasius, the fatherhood of God is not a topic of sustained discussion in the work of Gregory of Nazianzus, and contextual concerns must remain in sight as we undertake a study of his conception of God's fatherhood. Gregory's theological writings mostly survive in homiletic form, in his series of *Orationes*, and they are not systematic. This means that, like Athanasius, Gregory repeats similar arguments in different works, and I will often discuss short passages taken from different orations which pertain to the question of fatherhood. Arianism is addressed in the *Orationes*, as are Gregory's other

¹²¹ See *Oration 25.16, Or. 28.16, Or. 31.9 and Or. 34.10*. For the *Orationes* I will be using the translation found in *The Christology of the Later Fathers*. Edward R. Hardy, ed. and Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, trans. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1992), unless otherwise noted.

theological opponents, including the camps of Eusebius, Marcellus and Eunomius.

Eusebius and his followers emphasized Christ as the image of God¹²² and were wary of Nicene formulations, particularly the assertion that the Son was of one being with the Father, which, in their view, did not properly express the Son's distinct existence from the Father. Marcellus, on the other hand, was a supporter of the ὁμοούσιος formulation of Nicea, but argued that the Son was the enfleshed power or energy of the Father and would be eventually return to the Father and be subsumed.¹²³ These two groups existed up to and after the council of Nicea, supporting Arius and the Nicene confession respectively.

Eunomius was a champion of the Heterousians, who argued that the Son was unlike the Father in essence.¹²⁴ This position strongly favoured the subordination of the Son to the Father, which Gregory took to represent the pinnacle of the denial of Nicene orthodoxy and of a proper trinitarian confession.¹²⁵

Gregory's theological work, therefore, emerged under somewhat tense conditions in Asia Minor over the status of the Son, and his understanding of the Father and Son are shaped by these concerns. Moreover, Gregory was one of the foremost proponents of the campaign to establish the divinity of the Spirit, a point that was rejected by a group known as the Pneumatomachians (the so-called 'Spirit-Fighters'), and Gregory's sermons are replete with arguments for the full inclusion of the Spirit in the Trinity.¹²⁶ Gregory's concern with the Spirit adds another level of complexity to the question of the fatherhood

¹²² The title of 'image' for Eusebius, unlike for Athanasius, did not imply the Son's coessentiality with the Father.

¹²³ Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 17.

¹²⁴ Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 21.

¹²⁵ Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 21.

¹²⁶ Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 29.

of God, as Gregory, in many places, seems to transform arguments used in the Nicene debate over the divinity of the Son and apply them to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit, unlike the Son, does not have a name which connotes his relationship to the Father, and Gregory must then strive to understand God's fatherhood with respect to the Holy Spirit as well as to the Son.

Furthermore, there has been much scholarly debate about Gregory's view of divine causality and little work done on his view of fatherhood. Although Beeley in his recent book contends that "the monarchy of God the Father...lies at the heart of each of Gregory's major doctrinal statements,"¹²⁷ thus confirming the importance of the primacy of the Father in Gregory's thought, Beeley's claim is cast in terms of God's monarchy rather than his fatherhood. The meaning of the word 'monarchy' in Gregory's work is unclear, and has not been rendered consistently in the translations of Gregory's *Orationes*. Furthermore, the suggestion has been made by a number of scholars that Gregory's view of the monarchy of God the Father is merely a kind of modified subordinationism.¹²⁸

Bearing both these contextual elements and scholarly concerns in mind, I will begin in section (I) with a discussion of Gregory's view of God the Father as source. This is critical to the question of the fatherhood of God in Gregory's work as it is his principal way of expressing the fatherhood of God, as well as central to the scholarly debate about Gregory's view of divine causality. I will deal with this scholarly dispute more thoroughly in section (II), which will include a discussion of *Oration* 31.14. This passage has been the primary text used by scholars attempting to understand Gregory's view of

¹²⁷ Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 206.

¹²⁸ See below, pp. 55-56.

the primacy of the Father within the Trinity, and his trinitarian thought more generally. In section (III) I will explore Gregory's view of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as relational identities. Defining the divine three in terms of their relationships to one another is Gregory's primary strategy for maintaining the diversity yet oneness of the Trinity. In section (IV) I will deal with the question of the relationship between the fatherhood of God and the church.

I. God the Father as Source

In this section, I will argue that the role of God the Father as the source of the other two members of the Trinity is central to Gregory's understanding of God as Father. I will first give a brief account of the type of language Gregory uses to describe the Father as the source; Gregory's use of this language has been taken as evidence of his subordinationist tendencies. In his *Orations*, Gregory frequently identifies God the Father as the source (ἀρχή) and cause (αἰτία, αἴτιος, αἴτιον) of the other two members of the Trinity. This is the primary way in which he identifies God the Father as distinct from the Son and the Holy Spirit, and indeed his being the source and cause defines him as Father. These two terms, for Gregory, are often used as synonyms, and always cover a similar field of meaning.¹²⁹ Gregory argues that we should not “minimize the Father's rank as ultimate cause (τὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς ἀξίωμα),”¹³⁰ and that the Son and Spirit should be referred “back to one original cause (εἰς ἓν αἴτιον).”¹³¹ Likewise, he explains that the Father

¹²⁹ See John Egan “αἴτιος / ‘Author’, αἰτία / ‘Cause’ and ἀρχή / ‘Origin’, synonyms in selected texts of Gregory Nazianzen,” *Studia Patristica* 32 (1997) 102-107 and also Beeley “Divine Causality,” 199.

¹³⁰ *Or.* 20. 6 from *Gregory of Nazianzus*, Brian Daley, trans. (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹³¹ *Or.* 20.7 (Daley).

is without origin (ἀνάρχος), for his being does not come from another source, nor even from a source within himself (οὐ γὰρ ἐτέρωθεν αὐτῷ, οὐδὲ παρ' ἑαυτοῦ τὸ εἶναι). But the Son is not without origin (οὐκ ἀνάρχος), if one understands as his origin (αἴτιον) the Father – for the Father, as the cause of the Son, is his origin also (ἀρχὴ γὰρ Υἱοῦ Πατὴρ ὡς αἴτιος).¹³²

In these three quotations Gregory unambiguously describes the Father as the origin and cause of the Son, and he uses both ἀρχή and αἴτιος to express this idea of causation. The Father himself is uncaused, and cannot even find a cause within himself, yet the Son and Spirit find their origin in the Father. Elsewhere, Gregory makes clear that the Father's being a source does not simply mean that he brings about creation. The Father is “said to be both without origin and origin himself (καὶ ἀνάρχου, καὶ ἀρχῆς) – origin (ἀρχῆς), in that he is cause (αἰτίου) and spring (πηγῆς) and eternal light; but the Son is not at all without origin (ἀνάρχου), yet himself is the origin (ἀρχῆς) of all things.”¹³³ Here again, Gregory calls the Father the origin, but the Son he also claims as an origin, that is, the origin of created things. This quotation serves to illustrate, by implication, that the language of causation when applied to the Father is not merely a statement, for Gregory, about his being the author of creation, but it applies to his special role as the source of the Son and Holy Spirit. Gregory similarly identifies the Father as the source of the other divine hypostases, rather than a general first cause, in *Oration 34*: “The former is called God, and subsists in three greatest, namely, the Cause (αἰτίῳ), the Creator (δημιουργῷ), and the Perfecter (τελειοποιῷ); I mean the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”¹³⁴ Since in this passage the title of creator is here given to the Son, it suggests that, for Gregory,

¹³² *Or.* 20.7 (Daley).

¹³³ *Or.* 20.7 (Daley).

¹³⁴ *Or.* 34.8 from series 2, volume 7 of *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, C.G. Browne and J.D. Swallow, trans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966). Here, as elsewhere, archaic forms in the translation have been modernized without comment.

the Father as Father is the cause of the other two divine persons, rather than merely creator of the world.

In a number of texts, then, Gregory identifies the Father as the source of the other two divine persons,¹³⁵ and his statements about God as Father and God as source will be further examined in this section. I will show that Gregory's understanding of God as Father and source means that (a) the Father's relation to the Son and Holy Spirit is one of essence, (b) the Father is logically prior to the Son and the Holy Spirit, and (c) the Father is the source of Trinitarian unity, but that (d) it does not imply that the Father is in any way ontologically superior or temporally prior to the other two members of the Trinity.

For Gregory, that God is called Father necessarily means that the Son and the Holy Spirit are one in essence with the Father.¹³⁶ In the following passage, Gregory contends that if the Son is not of one essence (or nature) with the Father then the title Father would not properly apply to God. A son who is estranged in being from his father truly has no father, nor does he have an origin or cause. Gregory writes,

It is necessary neither to be so devoted to the Father, as to rob him of his fatherhood, for whose Father would he be, if the Son were separated and estranged from him, by being ranked with the creation (τοῦ Υἱοῦ τὴν φύσιν κεχωρισμένου καὶ ἀπεξενωμένου μετὰ τῆς κτίσεως), for an alien being (τὸ ἀλλότριον), or one which is combined and confounded with his father, and, for the sense is the same, throws him into confusion, is not a son; nor to be so devoted to Christ, as to neglect to preserve both his sonship, (for whose son would He be, if his origin (ἀρχὴν) were not referred to the Father?) and the rank of the Father as

¹³⁵ See also *Or.* 23.7, *Or.* 25.15, *Or.* 29.3 and *Or.* 29. 7. God (θεός) elsewhere is described as the source of all things; for an example from the *Theological Orations*, see *Or.* 28.6 and *Or.* 28.13.

¹³⁶ Note that while Gregory often uses the word φύσις (nature) to describe the coessentiality of the Father and Son, but that in his work 'one in nature' is conceptually indistinguishable from the ὁμοούσιος statement of Nicene orthodoxy, which Gregory unreservedly confessed. See Lampe's *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), p. 1496 for numerous examples of φύσις being explicitly equated with οὐσία and contrasted with ὑπόστασις. Lampe gives examples from both Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus.

origin (τὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς ἀξίωμα), inasmuch as he is the Father and generator (πατρὶ καὶ γεννήτορι); for he would be the origin of petty and unworthy beings, or rather the term would be used in a petty and unworthy sense, if he were not the origin of Godhead and goodness (μὴ θεότητος ὄν ἀρχὴ καὶ ἀγαθότητος), which are contemplated in the Son and the Spirit: the former being the Son and the Word, the latter the proceeding and indissoluble Spirit.¹³⁷

Here, Gregory seems to be using the concept of the fatherhood of God to refute both the heterousian and Marcellan positions on the Son. The heterousians are too “devoted to the Father” and so deny the Son equal status with the Father. This is unacceptable for Gregory, since if the Son is not one in nature with the Father, then the name ‘Son’ becomes incomprehensible; unless the Son is coessential, he is not a son. Marcellus, however, is over-devoted to the Son, and claims that the Son is equal to the Father to the point of threatening his unique identity in sonship. If the Father has no Son, argues Gregory, it threatens his special rank, which is that of “Father and generator (πατρὶ καὶ γεννήτορι).” God’s roles as ‘father and generator’ appear together, and so the concepts of God as Father and of God as source are linked. In order for the Father to be considered the source of the other divine persons, and the Father of the Son, the Son and Spirit must be one in nature with the Father. Neither the heterousian nor the Marcellan ideas about the Son, for Gregory, adequately account for the names of Father and Son, as the one alienates the Son from his Father, and the other confuses the Son with the Father, “for an alien being, or one which is combined and confounded with his father, and, for the sense is the same, throws him into confusion, is not a son.”¹³⁸ Moreover, Gregory notes that the Son must not be considered a creation, but placed on the divine side of the ontological

¹³⁷ *Or.* 2. 38 (Browne and Swallow).

¹³⁸ *Or.* 2. 38 (Browne and Swallow).

gulf, “for whose Father would he be if the Son were separated and estranged from him, being ranked with creation?”

In *Oration 20*, Gregory repeats the same argument, but the formulation is slightly different. He explains that

the right thing is that we should neither be such partisans of the Father that we end up cancelling his fatherhood - for whose Father would he be, if the Son’s nature is alienated (τοῦ Υἱοῦ τὴν φύσιν ἀπεξενωμένου) from him, and made into something else through this talk of creation? - nor such partisans of Christ that we no longer even preserve his sonship - for whose Son would he be, if he does not look towards the Father as his cause (αἴτιον)? Nor should we minimize the Father’s rank as ultimate cause (τῆς ἀρχῆς), insofar as he is Father and begetter (Πατρὶ καὶ γεννήτορι) - for he would be the cause of minor and unworthy beings, if he were not the cause of the divinity that we recognize in the Son and the Spirit (θεότητος ὧν αἴτιος τῆς ἐν Υἱῷ καὶ Πνεύματι θεωρουμένης).¹³⁹

Again, we see the language of causation applied to Son. If the Son is uncaused then he cannot be a son, “for whose Son would he be, if he does not look towards the Father as his cause (αἴτιον)?” And again, the names Father and begetter (Πατρὶ καὶ γεννήτορι) appear together. Here, however, even more so than in *Oration 2*, Gregory makes God’s fatherhood contingent on a shared essence between Father and Son. If God is to maintain his fatherhood, he must beget one who is not alien to him in nature, and to take away the relationship of essence between Father and Son would be to rob them of their fatherhood and sonship. Humans do not qualify to be called God’s proper children, as elsewhere Gregory makes clear: “for with respect to us God is properly called our God, but not properly our Father.”¹⁴⁰ We cannot be considered proper children of God because we are not begotten from the Father’s essence. Gregory draws attention to a human comparison,

¹³⁹ *Or.* 20.6 (Daley).

¹⁴⁰ *Or.* 30.8.

where honour is brought to a father if his child takes after him in every respect, and, he points out that “you would prefer to be the father of a single child rather than the master of countless slaves.”¹⁴¹ God is not merely a lord over servants, but the Father of a Son who is like him in essence. Elsewhere, Gregory explicitly equates the term ‘Son’ with ‘identical in essence,’ commenting that “in my opinion he is called Son because he is identical with the Father in essence (ταὐτόν ἐστι τῷ Πατρὶ κατ’ οὐσίαν).”¹⁴²

Moreover, for Gregory, the Son shares specifically in the Father’s essence, not in a general divine essence. I will revisit this point again, as some scholars have argued that Gregory finds the source of the Trinity in divinity itself, which is part of the debate over *Oration* 31.14, which I will examine below.¹⁴³ Gregory always unfolds his arguments about the Trinity in the order of Father, then Son, then Holy Spirit. The Son is always said to share in the Father’s essence, or the two are said to be of one nature, but the Father does not share in the essence of the Son. An example of this can be found in *Oration* 30,

for all things that the Father has are the Son’s, and on the other hand, all that belongs to the Son is the Father’s. Nothing, then is peculiar, because all things are in common. For their being itself is common and equal (αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι κοινὸν καὶ ὁμότιμον), even though the Son receives it from the Father (εἰ καὶ τῷ υἱῷ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς). It is in respect of this that it is said ‘I live by the Father’ (John 5.17); not as though life and being were kept together by the Father, but because he has his being from all time and beyond all cause.¹⁴⁴

Gregory makes it clear that although the Father and Son have an equal share in everything, including being, the Father is ultimately the uncaused possessor of being and of all things.

The Son receives his being from the Father, and lives by the Father, not by his own divine

¹⁴¹ *Or.* 23.7 from *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: Select Orations*. Martha Vinson, trans. (Washington D.C., Catholic University of American Press, 2003).

¹⁴² *Or.* 30.20. This passage goes on to outline other reasons why he is called Son as well. See also *Or.* 29.10.

¹⁴³ See below, pp. 54-62.

¹⁴⁴ *Or.* 30.11.

essence or a prior ontological reality. In Gregory's poem, *A Hymn to God*, he praises God the Father for his Son, writing "Now the Word you [the Father] speak to form us / Is your Son, who shares your substance (σου θεός Υιός ὁμοούσιος γὰρ ἐστίν)/ With his Father's glory equal."¹⁴⁵ In this poem, as well, Gregory identifies the Father as the originator of the Son, here, as the speaker of the Word, and also affirms that the Son shares in the essence of the Father.

Gregory also tackles the question of whether or not Christ is to be considered a Son if he is a product of God's will, an important issue in the Arian controversy, as we saw in the work of Athanasius. In *Oration 28* Gregory makes two arguments against the idea of Christ as a Son by will. First, Gregory argues that any result of the will (including children) is not the child of will at all, but rather the child of the one who willed it, as one's human father has to (at some point) will that he have a child.¹⁴⁶ Will alone cannot, by definition for Gregory, be a parent and his opponents accordingly "invent a new sort of mother for him [the Son], the will, in place of the Father."¹⁴⁷ Secondly, but related to his first point, Gregory highlights the absurdity of characterizing all of God's actions as either voluntary or involuntary. "Did God," he asks, "create all things voluntarily or under compulsion? If under compulsion, here also is the tyranny, and one who played the tyrant; if voluntarily, the creatures are also deprived of their God."¹⁴⁸ Here, Gregory does not distinguish between the act of begetting and creating (a distinction Athanasius is keen to maintain), but merely points out that it is illogical to claim that God must do all things

¹⁴⁵ *A Hymn to God*, lines 17-20 (Daley).

¹⁴⁶ *Or.* 28.6.

¹⁴⁷ *Or.* 28.6.

¹⁴⁸ *Or.* 28.6.

either of necessity or by choice. Gregory concludes, in fact, that with God it is possible for there to be no intermediary will at all; the will to beget the Son is generation itself.¹⁴⁹ Thus, he concludes, the Son shares in essence with the Father, and he leaves aside the question of will altogether, as even with human willing and generation, the distinction makes no sense.¹⁵⁰

Moreover, for Gregory, the coessentiality of the Son with the Father is paramount for the salvation of humankind. Gregory argues that either the Son is divine, or to be ranked with creation. If the Son is not properly God, Gregory asks, “in what sense is he God at all?”¹⁵¹ Gregory, however, for polemical reasons, makes a more concerted effort to apply these types of arguments about salvation to the Spirit; if the Holy Spirit “is God, then he is neither a creature nor a thing made.”¹⁵² Gregory contends that the Spirit must be divine and not a creature, because a creature could not aid humans in the process of sanctification; if the Holy Spirit is a creature, “how are we made perfect in him?”¹⁵³ He voices a similar concern in *Or.* 34. He frames his discussion as an appeal to the Trinity, and audaciously claims that “I cannot believe that I am saved by one who is my equal. If the Holy Spirit is not God, let him first be made God, and then let him deify me.”¹⁵⁴ He argues that the Spirit is prayed to and in,¹⁵⁵ that the Holy Spirit’s name is invoked in baptism and is worshipped in the church,¹⁵⁶ thus he must be considered fully God as only

¹⁴⁹ *Or.* 28.6.

¹⁵⁰ *Or.* 28.10-12.

¹⁵¹ *Or.* 30.14.

¹⁵² *Or.* 31. 6.

¹⁵³ *Or.* 31.6.

¹⁵⁴ *Or.* 34.12. (Browne and Swallow)

¹⁵⁵ *Or.* 31.28.

¹⁵⁶ *Or.* 31.12.

God can empower prayer, baptism and inspire worship. He contends that the Spirit performs actions which only God can do, as he “guides, talks, sends forth, is angry or tempted, reveals, illumines, quickens, or rather is the very light and life, makes temples, deifies, perfects so as even to anticipate baptism, yet after baptism to be sought as a separate gift; does all that God does.”¹⁵⁷ Gregory himself often appeals to the Spirit as he opens or closes a sermon, demonstrating his own point that the Spirit is an object of worship and devotion.¹⁵⁸

We may conclude then, that for Gregory, the Father is the source and cause of the Son and Holy Spirit, and that this causation must be one of being. The Father, however, is also ‘greater,’ for Gregory, than the other two members of the Trinity by virtue of his being cause. Gregory provides the following solution to Jesus’ statement in John 14.28 (“The Father is greater than I”): “the ‘greater’ refers to origination, while the ‘equal’ belongs to the nature.”¹⁵⁹ Gregory does make reference to other interpretations of the John 14.28 as referring to Jesus’ humanity, but he comments that these readings are rather mundane; of course God is greater than human beings.¹⁶⁰ In the light of the Arian and Eunomian controversies still ongoing in Gregory’s time, it is striking that Gregory is prepared to speak of the Father as ‘greater’ than the other members of the Trinity in any sense, as Beeley has pointed out,¹⁶¹ but the ordering of the Trinity as Father, Son, Holy

¹⁵⁷ *Or.* 31.29.

¹⁵⁸ See, for example, *Or.* 29.1.

¹⁵⁹ *Or.* 30.7. It is unclear to which passage Gregory is referring when he claims that the word ‘equal’ also appears, as it does not occur in John chapter 14. Perhaps he is making an allusion to Jn. 5.18 (“making himself equal to God”) or Phil. 2.6 (“though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited”).

¹⁶⁰ *Or.* 30.7.

¹⁶¹ Beeley, “Divine Causality,” 208.

Spirit is an important element in Gregory's thinking about God as Father. God is Father and cause, and so is first.

This structuring of the Trinity can be seen, for example, in *Or.* 29. In this passage, while Gregory is explaining the temporal equality of the three in the Trinity, he simultaneously maintains their logical order of Father, then Son, then Holy Spirit. Gregory asks,

When did these [the Son and the Spirit] come into being? They are above all 'when,' but – if I am to speak with something more of boldness – when the Father did. And when did the Father come into being? There never was a time when he was not. And the same thing is true of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Ask me again, and again I will answer you, when was the Son begotten? When the Father was not begotten. And when did the Holy Spirit proceed? When the Son was not – not proceeding, but begotten – beyond the sphere of time and the grasp of reason.¹⁶²

Beyond the grasp of human logic, all three members of the Trinity were existent from the beginning of time (“there never was a time when he was not. And the same thing is true of the Son and Holy Spirit”) and yet they still exist in the ordering of Father, Son, Holy Spirit; the cause, the begotten and the proceeding. Gregory frequently makes such statements about the Trinity which reflect his concern with a proper ordering of the three. For example, echoing the baptismal formula, he writes that we must “guard the truth we have received from our fathers, revering Father and Son in the Holy Spirit; knowing the Father in the Son, the Son in the Holy Spirit, in which names we have been baptised... dividing before combining them, and combining them before we divide them.”¹⁶³

Similarly, in Gregory's creedal statement about the Trinity in *Oration 25* Gregory's

¹⁶² *Or.* 29.3.

¹⁶³ *Or.* 6.22 (Vinson).

thoughts closely parallel that of the Nicene creed, which unfolds God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁴

A proper understanding of the distinctness of the three persons for Gregory, therefore, must include a conception of the Trinity as both consubstantial and in ordered harmony. The doctrine of the Trinity, for Gregory, would be understood merely on

empty terms, if we suppose the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit to be one and the same person only: or, on the other hand, severing it into three, either foreign and diverse, or disordered and unprincipled (ἡ ἀτάκτους καὶ ἀνάρχους), and, so to say, opposed divinities, thus falling from the opposite side into an equally dangerous error: like some distorted plant if bent far back in the opposite direction.¹⁶⁵

Gregory identifies two ways in which the Trinity is improperly severed into three: either the three can be considered “foreign and diverse,” that is not of the same essence, or they can be considered “disordered and unprincipled (ἡ ἀτάκτους καὶ ἀνάρχους),” literally “disordered and without origin.” A proper conception of the distinctness within the Trinity not only means the three must be coessential, but also ordered and originated from within the divine life. In *Oration* 31, Gregory attributes to the names Father and Son an inherent sense of order, explaining that “it was needful that the distinctive property of Father and Son should remain peculiar to them lest there be confusion in the Godhead which brings all things, even disorder itself into due arrangement and good order.”¹⁶⁶ He expresses similar concerns in *Oration* 29, in the hopes of safeguarding Christianity from the error of the pagans. He recounts that

¹⁶⁴ *Or.* 25.15 and Beeley, “Divine Causality,” 205.

¹⁶⁵ *Or.* 2.36 (Browne and Swallow).

¹⁶⁶ *Or.* 31.29.

The most ancient three opinions concerning God are Anarchia, Polyarchia and Monarchia. The first two are the sport of the children of Hellas, and may they continue to be so. For anarchy is a thing without order. And the rule of man is factious, and thus anarchical and thus disorderly. For both these tend to the same thing, namely disorder; and thus to dissolution, for disorder is the first step to dissolution. But monarchy is that which we hold in honor. It is, however, a monarchy that is not limited to one person... therefore unity having from all eternity arrived by motion at duality, found its rest in trinity. This is what we mean by Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father is begetter and the emitter (ὁ μὲν γεννήτωρ καὶ προβολεὺς)... the Son is the begotten (γενήμμα) and the Holy Spirit is the emission (πρόβλημα).¹⁶⁷

Here, Gregory makes two related points. The first is to say that the Trinity is unified in its rule over creation, that is, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not in tension with one another. He goes on, however, to locate order within the Trinity itself, as the Father is again identified as the source of both the Son and the Spirit (ὁ μὲν γεννήτωρ καὶ προβολεὺς). Gregory is also concerned to point out that a properly unified yet orderly Trinity would never suffer the fate of “dissolution.” The rule of the Trinity is not one of factions, and thus three never need to be dissolved into one to achieve harmony or maintain unity. Gregory’s effort to uphold the unity and ordered distinctness of the Trinity, therefore, is also Anti-Sabellian, or perhaps more specifically, anti-Marcellan,¹⁶⁸ and Gregory elsewhere connects the idea of discord in the Trinity with dissolution. He writes, “for there is no discord in the Godhead, and as a result, no dissolution, since dissolution is the child of discord, but so great is the element of harmony both internally and in relation to the secondary beings”¹⁶⁹ that God himself is called peace and love.

¹⁶⁷ *Or.* 29. 2. (Hardy). See also, *Or.* 23.8, where a lack of order is again associated with Greek polytheism.

¹⁶⁸ See also Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 209.

¹⁶⁹ *Or.* 6.12 (Vinson). Gregory frequently defines orthodoxy against the extremes of Sabellianism and Arianism, and affirms that the Son and Holy Spirit are indissoluble. See *Or.* 2.37-38, *Or.* 20.7 and *Or.* 30.6.

Some scholars have argued that Gregory's attempt to maintain both the ontological equality of the Trinity and yet the logical priority of the Father is incomprehensible and inconsistent with Nicene faith.¹⁷⁰ We have provided some evidence here that it is precisely the concept of an equal-yet-ordered Godhead which constitutes, for Gregory, a proper understanding of the Trinity which is in harmony with itself and yet consists of three distinct, indissoluble persons. We will return to this question below, when we discuss *Oration* 31.14 and the use of the word 'monarchy' in Gregory's work.¹⁷¹ For now, it will suffice to say that Gregory himself recognizes the paradoxical nature of his understanding of the Trinity,¹⁷² and often makes recourse to the mystery of the divine nature, as well as the mystery of begetting and procession to deal with the problem.¹⁷³ Putting aside whether or not it is considered tenable, Gregory does indeed maintain that God the Father is the source, and that this entails the logical priority of the Father to the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Gregory, moreover, not only sees the Father as the prior source of the Son and the Holy Spirit in essence, but he is also the source of their harmony and unity. We have already cited one passage from *Oration* 29 in which the Father is identified with unity, "It [the Trinity] is, however, a monarchy that is not limited to one person... therefore unity having from all eternity arrived by motion (κίνηθεῖσα) at duality, found its rest in trinity.

¹⁷⁰ See a summary of the position of these scholars below, pp. 55-57. See Beeley, "Divine Causality," 212 and Richard Cross, "Divine Monarchy in Gregory of Nazianzus" *The Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14 (2006), 105-116.

¹⁷¹ See below, pp. 54-62.

¹⁷² *Or.* 29.3; here, after explaining a number of paradoxical propositions about the Trinity, Gregory notes that they are "beyond the sphere of time and above the grasp of reason." See also p. 42 above.

¹⁷³ For example, see *Or.* 20.10, *Or.* 23.11 and *Or.* 29.8.

This is what we mean by Father, Son and Holy Ghost.”¹⁷⁴ Here, the Father is represented by the quality of unity itself, with Son and Holy Ghost representing plurality; the three persons of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are called unity (Father), duality (Son) and Trinity (Holy Spirit). Corroborating evidence appears in *Oration* 40, where Gregory is hesitant to call the Father ‘greater,’

I should like to call the Father the greater, because from him flows both the equality and the being of the equals (ἐξ οὗ καὶ τὸ ἴσοις εἶναι, τοῖς ἴσοις ἐστὶ, καὶ τὸ εἶναι) (this will be granted on all hands), but I am afraid to use the word origin (ἀρχὴν), lest I should make him the origin of inferiors, and thus insult him by precedencies of honour. For the lowering of those who are from him is no glory to the source.¹⁷⁵

As we have seen before, Gregory explains in what way the Father is to be considered the origin and source: he is the origin of the essence of beings not inferior to him, but rather of the other members of the Trinity. He also, however, credits the Father with being the source of equality within the Trinity itself. The Father both generates two coequal persons, and ensures that they are still one.

That the Father is the source of unity in the Trinity is also implied by Gregory’s language of ‘returning’ to God the Father. Gregory speaks of God the Father as source and also as the end of all things, in other words, the going out and coming back of the Trinity and all of creation is a dynamic expression of the unity which is grounded in God the Father; he is the one “from whom all blessings both originate and reach fruition.”¹⁷⁶ In *Oration* 42, an explicit statement about the Father as source entails a statement about him as the place of return as well; “the union [of the Trinity] is the Father from whom and to

¹⁷⁴ *Or.* 29. 2.

¹⁷⁵ *Or.* 40.43 (Browne and Swallow).

¹⁷⁶ *Or.* 6.12 (Vinson).

whom the order of persons runs its course.”¹⁷⁷ Gregory again equates the Father with the “union” of the Trinity, but also implies that the Father’s role as source means that he is the point of return.¹⁷⁸

Lastly, we must take care to note that although Gregory unambiguously identifies the Father as the source of the Son and Holy Spirit, and as the cause of unity, Gregory, sometimes even in the same breath, refers to the Son and Spirit as uncaused. In other words, Gregory is always concerned to establish both the unity and plurality within the Trinity, and is prepared to make paradoxical statements about the causation of the divine persons in order to do so. Gregory, in explaining Proverbs 8.22 (“The Lord created me at the beginning of his work”), confirms that the verse applies to Christ, but avers that the whole Godhead is unoriginate; “What among all things that exist is unoriginate? The Godhead.”¹⁷⁹ He attributes the paradoxical caused-yet-uncaused statements about the Son and the Holy Spirit to the different angles from which you can look at the question. From the perspective of time, all three are unoriginate, but with respect to being, the Father is the source. Gregory asks,

How, then, are they not all alike unoriginate (ἀναρχον), if they are coeternal (αἰδιον)? Because they are from him, not after him. For that which is unoriginate is eternal, but that which is eternal is not necessarily unoriginate, so long as it may be referred to the Father as its origin. Therefore in respect to cause they are not unoriginate (οὐκ ἀναρχα οὖν τῷ αἰτίῳ); but it is evident that that the cause is not necessarily prior to its effects, for the sun is not prior to its light. And yet they are in some sense unoriginate (ἀναρχά), with respect to time.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ *Or.* 42.15 (Browne and Swallow). See also, Lewis Ayres *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 244-245, and Beeley, “Divine Causality,” 204.

¹⁷⁸ We will discuss the concept of the Trinity as a model of unity below, pp. 70-72.

¹⁷⁹ *Or.* 30.2.

¹⁸⁰ *Or.* 29.3.

This passage in *Oration 29* appears closely following a discussion of the begetting of the Son and the proceeding of the Spirit, and perhaps part of Gregory's agenda here is to distinguish between the language of begetting (and proceeding) from that of origination, an important distinction in Athanasius' work (although Athanasius is primarily concerned to distinguish between the word ἀγέννητος, unbegotten, and, ἀγέννητος, unoriginate, terms that Gregory does not discuss here). It also, however, shows Gregory's sensitivity to the problem of language and his willingness to describe, using the same word (ἀναρχα), the Son and Spirit as both originate and yet not originated. Elsewhere, Gregory recognizes that different conclusions may be drawn "when contemplating the Trinity collectively" rather than each of the three individually.¹⁸¹ It is important to keep in mind, then, that for Gregory the logical priority of the Father does not mean a temporal or ontological superiority, and often in the course of his discussion about the Father as source, he will attempt to ensure that his readers understand the statement in a sense which does not include time or space, as we have already seen above.¹⁸² Moreover, in his *Orations* Gregory often first considers the persons of the Trinity as individuals, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and then the Trinity as a whole, all three unoriginate and the source of creation.

II. Divine Causality, Monarchy and *Oration 31.14*

Scholars have long been perplexed by some of Gregory's descriptions of divine causality in the *Theological Orations*, and, in particular, by *Oration 31.14*. Given our discussion above, the text is indeed puzzling, and this passage has been considered of

¹⁸¹ *Or.* 23.10.

¹⁸² *Or.* 40.43 (Browne and Swallow), p. 53 above.

fundamental importance for understanding Gregory's conception of the divine causality, the monarchy of God the Father and the intratrinitarian life. The troubling part of the text is as follows:

To us there is one God, for the Godhead is one, and all that proceeds from him is referred to one, though we believe in three persons. For one is not more and another less God; nor is one before and another after, nor are they divided in will or parted in things; but the Godhead is, to speak concisely, undivided in separate persons; and there is one mingling of lights, as it were of three suns joined to each other. When, then, we look at the Godhead (θεότης), or the first cause, or the monarchia, that which we conceive is one; but when we look at the persons in whom the Godhead dwells and at those who timeless and with equal glory have their being from the first cause (ἡ πρώτη αἰτία), there are three whom we worship.¹⁸³

This text seems to suggest that, for Gregory, the whole Trinity is caused by and finds its grounding in some prior 'divinity.' The three together seem to be referred to as the 'Godhead,' 'first cause' and 'monarchia,' but the individual members of the Trinity "have their being from the first cause." The paragraph also echoes a passage earlier in this oration, where Gregory explains that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit all derive from "the single whole" which, some think, also refers to divinity itself.¹⁸⁴ In this section I will (a) seek to summarize the scholarly debate about *Or.* 31.14, and (b) suggest what our study can contribute to this discussion.

The history of the debate about *Oration* 31.14 has been discussed in recent articles by both Christopher Beeley and Richard Cross, whose summaries I closely follow below. The issue with this passage in *Oration* 31 was first raised in the 1970s by E.P. Meijering, who maintained that Gregory's view of the priority of the Father was illogical. Meijering

¹⁸³ *Or.* 31.14.

¹⁸⁴ See Beeley, "Divine Causality," 200.

argued that the only two consistent accounts of the Father-Son relationship are either that of the subordination of the Son to the Father (as, he argues, is Plotinus' view) and that of complete equality in which the Son is not caused by the Father (as, he argues, is Athanasius' view).¹⁸⁵ Gregory's attempt to combine these mutually exclusive ideas, and his conflation of οὐσία and αἰτία, according to Meijering, is the result of the influence of Greek thought and a lingering subordinationism.¹⁸⁶ John Meyendorff¹⁸⁷ and then Frederick Norris¹⁸⁸ follow Meijering's lead, and read *Oration* 31.14 as "somehow qualifying (or correcting) an unmodified subordinationism,"¹⁸⁹ although Meyendorff affirms that Gregory finds the cause of the Son and Spirit in the Father, whereas Meijering and Norris argue that Gregory understands the cause of the Trinity to be found in divinity itself.¹⁹⁰ Thomas Torrance similarly argues that the trinitarian theology of Gregory is the result of an unsuccessful attempt to marry the subordinationism of Origen and the Athanasian view that the three members of the Trinity are entirely equal.¹⁹¹

Further attempts to solve the puzzle of *Oration* 31.14 have come from John Egan, Richard Cross and Christopher Beeley. Egan reviews a number of modern and ancient sources which interpret Gregory's reference to "the first cause" as a reference to the

¹⁸⁵ Eginhard P. Meijering "The Doctrine of the Will and of the Trinity in the Orations of Gregory of Nazianzus," *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* 27 (1973) 224-34; repr. in idem *God, Being, History: Studies in Patristic Philosophy* (Amsterdam: American Elseveir) 101-113). See Beeley, "Divine Causality," 200-201 and Cross, 107.

¹⁸⁶ Meijering, 233. See Beeley, "Divine Causality," 201.

¹⁸⁷ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), 183.

¹⁸⁸ Frederick W. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 46 and 198-99.

¹⁸⁹ Cross, 107.

¹⁹⁰ See Cross, 107. See also Beeley, "Divine Monarchy", 202.

¹⁹¹ Thomas Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (New York: T&T Clark, 1988) 319-322. See Beeley, "Divine Monarchy," 202 and Cross, 108.

Father himself. In *Nicea and its Legacy*, Lewis Ayres agrees with Egan's reading. He concludes that "although it may be that Gregory is simply being incoherent, John Egan suggests that a number of commentators are right to argue that Nazianzen's expression in the passage [*Or.* 31.14] is loose and that he intends us to see that Father as the primal cause *and* as the source of his own being."¹⁹² The strength of the reading, as Egan concludes, is that it makes *Oration* 31.14 consistent with Gregory's insistence elsewhere that the Father is the source of the Son and the Spirit.¹⁹³ The problem with this reading, however, as Cross points out (and Egan himself also notes) is that it interprets *Or.* 31.14 to imply that the Father is somehow the cause of himself, a point Gregory explicitly rejects elsewhere,¹⁹⁴ and so presumes that Gregory "either did not notice [this point] or did not care."¹⁹⁵

Cross, however, taking up Gregory use of the word 'monarchia,' argues that while many scholars have misunderstood the word as referring to the special activity of the Father, it is more appropriate to think of it as a term which signifies the indivisible divine essence. The term, he claims, is not used to identify the Father but the unity of the whole Trinity.¹⁹⁶ Gregory's concern in *Or.* 31.14, accordingly, is to refute the Eunomians who contend that if the Father is considered the source of the Son and the Spirit, then the divine essence must necessarily be divisible. Thus, argues Cross, Gregory uses causal language to emphasize that the three members of the Trinity are one in essence despite

¹⁹² Ayres, 248.

¹⁹³ John P. Egan, "Primal Cause and Trinitarian Perichoresis in Gregory Nazianzen's *Oration* 31.14," in *SP* 27, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Louvain: Peeters, 1993), 21–28.

¹⁹⁴ See, for example, *Or.* 20.7.

¹⁹⁵ Cross, 107.

¹⁹⁶ Cross, 114.

the Father's being the cause. Moreover, the causal language reflects Gregory's belief that universalities are the cause of particulars and thus cannot support the idea that the Trinity is caused by the divine essence. Gregory's use of the analogy of three suns and their light shows that he is thinking in this way; just as three suns are not caused by light, neither are the three persons caused by a prior divinity. Cross concludes that Gregory's argument is not the most refined, but that it is an over-reading to claim that the passage deemphasizes the Father as source. He concludes that

the argument is not all that elegant, since the less we emphasize the causal components, the less the argument will stand to rebut the Eunomians. But despite this somewhat *ad hominem* and even *ad hoc* feel, the argument's overall contours are clear enough. The divine essence is co-ordinatively common to the three persons, and there is no reason to accept the Eunomian inference from causality within the godhead to tritheism. What secures monotheism is the indivisibility of the divine essence. There is thus no reason to take *Oration* 31.14 as an attempt to mitigate the causal priority of the Father.¹⁹⁷

The Eunomian context of the theological orations explains the strange formulation, argues Cross, and the point Gregory is trying to make is clear.

Beeley takes a different tack. He notes that most of those who have engaged in the debate over *Or.* 31.14 have relied heavily on passages from the *Theological Orations*, and have not taken into account Gregory's work as a whole. In every one of Gregory's major doctrinal statements as they occur throughout his writings, Beeley notes, the monarchy of God the Father is present, and in these passages the Father is considered the source of the Son and the Spirit.¹⁹⁸ He points out that in the polemical context of the *Orations*, it is quite striking that Gregory insists the Father be considered 'greater' than the Son and the

¹⁹⁷ Cross, 118.

¹⁹⁸ Beeley, "Divine Causality," 208.

Holy Spirit despite his Eunomian opponents who argue for a subordinationism on the basis of such verses as John 14.28 (“the Father is greater than I”). Beeley comments that “the fact that the heroically pro-Nicene Gregory does not go to great lengths to avoid suggesting that the Father is in any way superior to the Son and the Spirit should give us pause as modern interpreters.”¹⁹⁹ In other words, to suggest that Gregory is somehow an unwitting subordinationist because he maintains that the Father is ‘greater’ than the Son and Holy Spirit would be to assume that Gregory has little awareness of the arguments for a subordinationist view, which were still being employed by his contemporary opponents. Beeley argues that there is nothing particularly unusual about *Or.* 31.14, and that it merely states the affects of the monarchy of the Father (shared divinity) before referring to the idea of the monarchy itself. He cites a phrase from *Oration* 20, “there is one God because the Son and the Spirit are referred back to a single cause,”²⁰⁰ as an example of the unity resulting from the monarchy of the Father. To those who would argue that Gregory’s view is inconsistent with Nicea, he responds that the monarchy of God the Father and the way in which it structures the divine economy is at the heart of the Nicene controversy, and thus of Gregory’s orthodoxy. The priority of God the Father is a real and eternal ordering, and, he concludes that “the extent to which this aspect of Gregory’s theology has not been recognized among contemporary theologians is probably an indication of a more general unease with the Nicene faith itself.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ *Or.* 20.7. Beeley, “Divine Causality,” 212.

²⁰⁰ Beeley, “Divine Causality,” 211.

²⁰¹ Beeley, “Divine Causality,” 214.

Our present study will not provide a solution to this controversy, but will offer two suggestions which further support the criticisms of Meijering (and the others who follow him) raised by both Beeley and Cross. The first contribution of this study is to highlight a point raised by Beeley and Egan: the Father is referred to as source of the Son and Spirit without ambiguity in numerous other passages in Gregory's works, and so it is best to read *Oration* 31.14 in light of those passages. We have already discussed a number of these passages above. My discussion of God the Father as source has suggested, moreover, that not only is the Father called source elsewhere, but it is the Father's role as the cause and source of the Son and the Holy Spirit which defines him as Father, and to take away this role is to rob him of his fatherhood and his distinction within the Trinity. It is difficult to imagine that Gregory has any conception of the Trinity as being caused by a prior divine essence, or even of the Father finding a cause within himself, as this would compromise his view of fatherhood as found throughout his *Oration*s. If the Trinity were caused by divinity itself, the Father would cease to be Father, and the Son Son. Our examination of fatherhood, then, suggests that Meijering (as Beeley contends) relies too heavily on *Oration* 31.14, but it also provides good reason to reject Egan's and Ayres' reading of "the first cause" in *Oration* 31.14 as 'the Father,' since this would imply that the Father causes himself.

The second suggestion which arises from our study is related to Cross' observations about the word 'monarchia.' There does not seem to be a consistent stance in Cross', Beeley's and Egan's articles about what this word connotes in Gregory's work, and, in particular, whether or not it applies to the Father or to the Trinity as a whole. Our

study suggests, however, that the word is applied by Gregory both to the order within the Trinity, *and* to union of the Trinity which is brought about by the Father. In order to argue for a reading of monarchia as referring to the whole Trinity, Cross points to *Or.* 29.2, “It is however, a monarchy that is not limited to one person... but one that is a union of mind, an identity of motion, and a convergence of its elements into unity.”²⁰² In this passage, Cross contends, Gregory is using monarchy to refer to the rule of the whole Trinity as a unity over the created order. In *Oration* 40, Gregory again applies the word monarchia to the unity of the three. Gregory, explaining basic trinitarian faith for baptismal candidates, writes that the Trinity is

in every respect equal, in every respect the same; just as the beauty and the greatness of the heavens is one; the infinite conjunction of three infinite ones, each God when considered in himself; as the Father so the Son, as the Son so the Holy Spirit; the three one God when contemplated together; each God because they are consubstantial; one God because of the monarchia.²⁰³

As in the passage cited by Cross from *Or.* 29, Gregory here attributes the unity of the three members of the Trinity to the monarchia. The consubstantiality of the three, Gregory uses as proof that each have divine status, the monarchia he uses to show that there are not three Gods but one. In *Or.* 31.17 Gregory similarly defends against the charge of tritheism, again arguing that both the consubstantiality and the monarchia of the Trinity must be maintained. He writes that

as for the arguments with which you would overthrow the union we support... what is this argument? Things of one essence, you say, are counted together and by this ‘counted together’ you mean they are collected into one number. But things which are not of one essence are not thus counted... to save yourselves

²⁰² *Or.* 29.2. See Cross, 114.

²⁰³ *Or.* 40.41 (Browne and Swallow).

trouble in your championship of the monarchia, you have denied the Godhead and abandoned the question to your opponents.²⁰⁴

This passage follows shortly after the controversial passage *Or.* 31.14 and the anti-Eunomian concerns here in 31.17, as Cross highlights, are clear. It is a prelude to an argument Gregory makes about how one should count different types of substances, and his intention is to maintain that the three members of the Trinity are of one essence and yet still a monarchia. In this passage Gregory argues that an over-emphasis on the monarchia can lead to subordinationism, which would compromise the oneness of the Trinity (here called ‘the Godhead’). In the broader context of this passage, therefore, Gregory is using monarchia to express an ordering in the Trinity and the distinctness of the persons, since it is an over-emphasis on the order of the members of the Trinity which causes a subordinationist view.

In light of our discussion of God the Father as source, monarchia could in fact connote two things for Gregory. On the one hand, the monarchy of God the Father ensures an ordering in the Trinity (and Gregory does call the Father is called a ‘monarch’ elsewhere),²⁰⁵ the championing of which Gregory feared could result in a Eunomian view of the Trinity. On the other hand, it is also the monarchy of God the Father which ensures the unity of the three, and thus the word could also be used as a shorthand for trinitarian unity itself. Thus, in *Or.* 31.14 the phrase, “when, then, we look at the Godhead (θεότης), or the first cause, or the monarchia, that which we conceive is one” could be understood to be a complex statement wherein ‘monarchia’ is not a synonym for the Father, but does

²⁰⁴ *Or.* 31.17.

²⁰⁵ See, for example, *A Hymn to God* line 1.

entail the idea of the Father being the source as a necessary condition for the unity about which he is speaking.

III. Identity of Relationship

We have now established that the fatherhood of God plays a fundamental role in Gregory's conception of the inner life of the Trinity. The Father is Father because of his role as source and cause of the Son and Spirit and because he is the grounding for Trinitarian unity. The names Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for Gregory, also define the distinctiveness of the three persons by identifying their relationships to the other members of the Trinity. In this section, I will discuss Gregory's assumption of (a) the eternal correlativity between Father and Son, as the argument from correlativity seems to underlie Gregory's emphasis on relations within the Trinity and (b) how Gregory describes Father, Son and Holy Spirit as in a relationship with one another.

Gregory assumes the argument made from the eternal correlativity of Father and Son, but spends little time on its development. In *Oration 29*, after listing the names of Christ in scripture which prove his divinity, including Wisdom, Power and Image, Gregory goes on, "there never was a time when he [the Father] was without the Word, nor when he was not Father, or when he was not true, or not wise, or not powerful, or devoid of life, or of splendour or of goodness."²⁰⁶ Here, Gregory summarizes many of the arguments we saw in Athanasius in one sentence. God is immutable, and therefore is always in full possession of every attribute used to describe him; there never was a time when God was not Father, nor when he was without his wisdom and power. In another

²⁰⁶ *Or.* 29.18. See also, *Or.* 29.4.

passage, in *Oration 31* on the Holy Spirit, Gregory seems to assume that the argument from eternal correlativity can be applied to the Holy Spirit,

If ever there was a time when the Father was not, then there was a time when the Son was not. If ever there was a time when the Son was not, then there was a time when the Spirit was not. If the one was from the beginning, the three were so too.²⁰⁷

Here again, Gregory does not explain the eternal correlativity of these three, but merely asserts that they must exist together at all times, for if they did not then the Trinity would at some time have been imperfect. The argument is similar to arguments we found in Athanasius (if God is immutable then the Son must always have existed), but here, the concept of fatherhood is not central to the argument. Instead, it is the language of perfection upon which Gregory focuses. This language of completion or perfection allows him to insist that the Holy Spirit too is eternal with the Father and Son, since the Spirit is the perfecter of all things, including the Trinity.²⁰⁸

More evidence appears in two other passages, *Oration 2.38* and *Oration 20.6* discussed above,²⁰⁹ where Gregory argues that God would be robbed of his fatherhood if he did not have a Son from his essence. Although Gregory's concern in these passages is to establish that the Son is of one essence with the Father, rather than to prove the Son is coeternal with the Father, the argument rests on the assertion that there can be no father without a son. In general, the argument from eternal correlativity is not one to which Gregory often appeals, but it seems to remain an assumption which underlies Gregory's trinitarian discussions. The emphasis on Father and Son as correlatives is perhaps less

²⁰⁷ *Or.* 31. 4.

²⁰⁸ For examples of Gregory referring to the Holy Spirit's role as perfecter see *Or.* 31.6 and *Or.* 34.8.

²⁰⁹ See pp. 42-43 above.

prominent in Gregory's work because he is seeking to fit the Holy Spirit into the scheme. As we saw from the quotation from *Oration 31* above, Gregory is most concerned to show the Holy Spirit is also coeternal with the Father and Son, and emphasizing the relationship between a father and a son is not as valuable for achieving this end. It is possible that Gregory is reworking correlative arguments previously made by Origen and Athanasius to include the Holy Spirit. Thus the correlative language of Father and Son serves as Gregory's cue to interpret the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit as relational terms, an idea in Gregory's thought which we will now discuss.

For Gregory, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit maintain their distinctness not because they are divided in their being or their activity, but rather because each has a distinct relation to one another. In *Or. 29 (First Oration on the Son)* he explains this concept with reference to the Son, writing that

Father is not a name of either an essence or an action, most clever sirs. But it is the name of the relation in which the Father stands to the Son and the Son to the Father. For as with us these names make known a genuine and intimate relation, so in the case before us too they denote an identity of nature between him that is begotten and him that begets.²¹⁰

Fatherhood is proper to God the Father, and this name is indicative of the relationship he has with the other members of the Trinity. This is evident, for Gregory, from the natural usage of familial terms among human beings, as even "with us these names make known a genuine and intimate relation." Gregory goes on in this passage to argue that it is essentially misleading to try to locate the distinctness of the persons in their actions or

²¹⁰ *Or. 29.16.*

ontological statuses.²¹¹ Gregory elsewhere takes on the task of explaining why the Holy Spirit is not also called Son. He reports that his opponents claim that if the Holy Spirit were equal in status to the Son, he too would be called the Son of God. Gregory refutes this by arguing for a unique relationship of each member of the Trinity with one another.

What then, say they, is there lacking to the Spirit which prevents his being a Son, for if there were not something lacking he would a Son? We assert there is nothing lacking – for God has no deficiency. But the difference is of manifestation, if I may so express myself, and their mutual relations, one to another, has caused the difference of names. For indeed it is not some deficiency in the Son which prevents his being Father (for sonship is not deficiency, and yet he is not Father).²¹²

Just as is in his *First Oration on the Son* (*Or.* 29), where Gregory argues that God’s being called Father is a relational term, and that the Son does not need to be a father in order to have equal status in the Godhead, here, in his *Oration on the Holy Spirit* (*Or.* 31), Gregory reproduces the argument for the same end with respect to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not lesser merely because he is called Spirit, but in fact each of the three members of the Trinity are God in his fullness (having “no deficiency”) and the names signify their unique relationship to the other two members of the Trinity. That Father, Son and Holy Spirit are relational terms means, first of all, that the three are coequal, but it also means that these three names are the fundamental way in which we can understand the intratrinitarian life and the uniqueness of each of the members of the Trinity. Gregory writes that Father, Son and Holy Spirit “are not without individual reality nor do they compromise a single reality as though our treasure lay in names and not actual fact.”²¹³

²¹¹ *Or.* 29.16.

²¹² *Or.* 31.9.

²¹³ *Or.* 6.22 (Vinson).

Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not merely names, but point to a reality about the Trinity, which, for Gregory, is that these three stand in a certain relationship to one another, which is described in these names.

Moreover, Gregory's assertion that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are defined by these relational names underlies his affirmation that these names eternally belong to the Godhead. These are the names by which the three are identified, and they possess them perfectly and forever. He contends that

We should believe that Father is truly a father, far more truly a father, in fact, than we humans are, in that he is uniquely, that is, distinctly so unlike corporal beings; and that he is one alone, that is, without mate, and Father of one alone, his only-begotten; and that he is a Father only, not formerly a son; and that he is wholly Father, and father of one wholly his son, as cannot be affirmed of human beings; and that he has been Father from the beginning and did not become Father in the course of things. We should believe that Son is truly a Son in that he is the only Son of one and only Father and only in one way and only a Son. He is not also Father ... we should also believe that the Holy Spirit is truly holy in that there is no other like it in quality or manner and in that its holiness is not conferred, but is holiness in the absolute.²¹⁴

God is truly a Father, Gregory explains, and this means that he is Father in a unique way beyond human fatherhood. Unlike humans, God is without a spouse and was not a son first, that is, he is beyond the temporal chain of events wherein one is a son first and then a father later. In the same way, the Son has a fixed identity of relationship with the Father and is wholly Son, by virtue of being God's only Son. The Son has no brothers or uncles and the Father has no spouse or additional children, but there is only one who is wholly Father, and one who is wholly Son. The Father-Son relationship is complete in themselves. The Holy Spirit is unique as well, in his holiness. The Holy Spirit's holiness

²¹⁴ *Or.* 25.16 (Vinson). See also *Or.* 29. 5, where Gregory expresses the same idea: Father and Son are Father and Son in the absolute sense.

is not conferred, that is, he does not receive his holiness from a higher source, just as the Father and the Son do not receive their fatherhood and sonship from a higher source, but they all possess these names, and thus their relationships with each other, in the absolute. In *Oration* 31 Gregory rejects the idea the Holy Spirit is a ‘grandson’ of God and calls it absurd.

For it does not follow that because the Son is Son in some higher relation (inasmuch as we could not in any other way than this point out that he is of God and consubstantial), it would also be necessary to think that all names of this lower world and our kindred be transferred to God.²¹⁵

For Gregory, familial relations are realized completely in the Father and Son alone, and to extend the language to the Holy Spirit would be to apply human language to God and mistake the Father and Son for their earthly equivalents. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit describe relationships which have some semblance to earthly ones, but they are ultimately in a “higher relation” after which earthly names are patterned. The names Father and Son “do not belong to us in an absolute sense because we are both and not more one than the other,” whereas Father and Son possess these names absolutely.²¹⁶ Although the Holy Spirit does not have an obviously relational name, like the Father and Son do, Gregory works the Spirit into his trinitarian model, and maintains that the name in fact denotes a relationship to the Father and Son. He is not willing, however, to entertain the notion that the Holy Spirit’s relationship to the Father and Son should also be described in familial terms.

²¹⁵ *Or.* 31.7.

²¹⁶ *Or.* 29.5.

For Gregory, then, the “higher relation” of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is difficult to understand in terms of human relationships as the Father-Son is the perfect model of its earthly equivalent, but we have at least one hint of what it might mean for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to stand in a unique relationship to one another. In the first section, we saw that Gregory closely links God’s role as source with his fatherhood, and the Son and Holy Spirit with their roles as begotten and proceeding.²¹⁷ In *Oration* 34 Gregory also makes this connection.

But if all that the Father has belongs likewise to the Son, except causality; and all that is the Son’s belongs also to the Spirit, except his sonship (υιότητος), and whatsoever is spoken of him as to incarnation for me a man, and for my salvation, that, taking of mine, he may impart his own by this new commingling; then cease your babbling.²¹⁸

All that the Father has belongs to the Son except for his fatherhood, which is here equated with the Father being the cause, and so the mutual relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is at least partly described by the process of sharing the divine essence; the Father is the source of the divine nature, and the Son and Spirit share in it. And yet, this quotation from *Oration* 34 is silent about how the Son retains his ‘sonship’ in the face of the presence of a third, the Spirit; it merely states that the Son is unique in his sonship (not in his being ‘begotten’). Beyond affirming that there is a sharing of essence from Father to Son and Spirit, the content of what it means for the Father to be in a certain relationship with the Son and Holy Spirit otherwise remains unknown. It, like begetting itself, is mysterious and attempting to discern a meaning behind the names Father, Son

²¹⁷ See, for example, above, p. 50.

²¹⁸ *Or.* 34.10 (Browne and Swallow). See also *Or.* 25.16, where Gregory describes the Holy Spirit’s unique characteristic as procession.

and Holy Spirit is impossible. Of the Father-Son relationship, Gregory concludes that “it is enough for me to hear that there is a Son and he is from the Father, and that the one is Father and the other is Son.”²¹⁹ The identity of the members of the Trinity rests on these names, despite the limited ability of humankind to describe what sort of relationship they have. Ayres suggests that having established that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three and one, the thinkers of the third and fourth centuries next faced the task of showing “how this three-in-oneness reflected the nature of God.”²²⁰ Gregory answers this question in terms of relations, as we have seen, which seems to stem from the familial language of Father and Son. Although it is difficult for Gregory to maintain relational language based on familial terms once the Holy Spirit is brought into the discussion, Gregory takes for granted the logic of the eternal correlativity of Father and Son, and maintains that all three names are the names of relations.

IV. The Trinity and the Church

Having established that the inner life of the Trinity is defined by the relationship in which the three persons stand to one another, I now turn to the question of how the relational identity of the Trinity affects humankind and the life of the church. For Gregory, both the unity and the distinctness of the persons are reflected within time and space. Thus, the relational identity of the Trinity, a Trinity which is in harmony and yet made of three distinct persons, is crucial for Gregory’s understanding of a church which is in harmony and that exists within history. I will discuss (a) the unity of the Trinity, which is

²¹⁹ *Or.* 20.10 (Daley).

²²⁰ Ayres, 245.

reflected in the unity of the church and its harmony of doctrine, and then I will discuss (b) the ordering of the Trinity, which is reflected in human history, the individual ascent of the Christian to God and the order of the cosmos.

In *Or.* 6, Gregory closely links the unity of the church to trinitarian unity, and maintains that unity amongst Christians is one of the chief effects of a devotion to the Trinity. Gregory writes that previous to reconciliation with one another, humanity is full of sorrow and pain and groaning, but when

we of the One have become one, when we of the Trinity like in nature and same in heart and in honor; we of the Logos above unreason; we of the Spirit *aglow* (Jn. 14.6) with, not against, one another; we of the Truth *of the same mind* (Phil. 2.2) and voice we of Wisdom, conscientious and wise; we of the Light, *honest as in the day* (Rom. 13.13), we of the Way all straight in our course, we of the Door all inside, we of the Lamb and the Shepherd gentle and share the same fold and single shepherd... when we of him who suffered the passion for our sake have become compassionate and lighten one another's *burdens* (Gal. 6.2), we of the Head joined as one body and knit together, unified completely in the Spirit... he who *makes all things and changes them* (Am. 5.8), to our greater advantage, will turn our mourning into joy.²²¹

Trinitarian unity is referred to a number of times in this passage, both the unity of the Trinity as a whole, and the role of each member of the Trinity in securing the unity of the church. Unity is the first sign of humanity's changed condition ("when we of the One have become one") and this unity seems to be associated with God the Father, as a statement about the Son (Logos) and the Holy Spirit (the "Spirit *aglow*") follow shortly thereafter. The 'One' may here refer both to the Father, and the unity of the Trinity (a Trinity which is "like in nature and heart and honour") which he brings about. In the following phrase, unity is referred to again. The unity of Christians is brought about by

²²¹ *Or.* 6.4 (Vinson).

the Holy Spirit, as “we of the Spirit” are not against each other, but are of the same mind. Next, Gregory attributes to Christians the virtue of wisdom because they are found to be in the way, the truth and light, that is, Christ. Christ, moreover, is the foundation of unity as he is the “single shepherd” over all the church which belongs to the “same fold.” The Son also inspires those in the community to have compassion on one another, through the example of the passion, and serves as the head of the church, whose body is knit together by the Spirit. Thus, for Gregory, the overcoming of sorrow and pain and groaning is achieved by trinitarian unity being realized in the church. The Father is the ground of the unity within the Trinity, the Spirit brings about the unity, and the Son is head of the church as well as the sole shepherd over the flock. The roles of each member of the Trinity are not neatly identified, but all three work together as one to make the church one. In the same oration he notes that the angels too “draw their unity, as indeed their radiance,” from the Trinity, which is “one God, as much for its inner harmony as for its identity of substance.”²²²

Gregory also connects unified doctrinal belief to the unity of the Trinity in both *Or. 23* and *Or. 42*. In *Or. 23.4*, Gregory provides the unity of doctrinal belief in the church as a counter-example to his opponents who reject a true trinitarian confession. He writes that, unlike his adversaries, “we concur and agree regarding the Godhead in no less a fashion than the Godhead is in internal agreement with itself, if it is not presumptuous to say this and we have become *one lip and one language* (1 Cor. 14.25).”²²³ Trinitarian harmony is manifest in the church because of its concord with regard to the doctrine of

²²² *Or. 6.13* (Vinson).

²²³ *Or. 23.4* (Vinson).

the Trinity, a doctrine which itself features unity, that is, the unity and coequality of the three persons of the Trinity. Gregory's confession of faith in three consubstantial persons exalts the "Father, Son and Holy Spirit with one heart and one voice."²²⁴ In *Or.* 42, Gregory is giving his final address to the council of Constantinople, over which he had hitherto been presiding. This is the last oration he gave before relinquishing his position as chair of the council.²²⁵ He argues, as he had done throughout the proceedings, for the full inclusion of the Spirit in the Godhead and, in *Or.* 42.15, he makes a statement about the importance of unified doctrinal belief.

One concise proclamation of our teaching, an inscription intelligible to all, is this people, which so sincerely worships the Trinity, that it would sooner sever anyone from this life, than sever one of the three from the Godhead: of one mind, of equal zeal, and united to one another, to us and to the Trinity by unity of doctrine.²²⁶

As in *Or.* 23, a unanimous confession about the unity of the three members of the Godhead is directly related to the church's unity with the Trinity. Gregory explains that "this people," that is, the whole of the church, are united to one another, to the council ("us") and to the Trinity because of their "unity of doctrine." The primary element of this unity of doctrine is a shared belief about the unity of the Godhead. Thus the existence of a unified Trinity, and Gregory's belief in that unity, brings about unity within the church, between the bishops present at the council, and with the Trinity itself. The unity of the Trinity, then, inspires the unity of the church, of the angels, and the harmony of doctrine.

Having discussed how the unity of the Trinity affects the life of the church, I will now consider evidence of the ordering of the Trinity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in

²²⁴ *Or.* 23.4.

²²⁵ *Or.* 42.1 (Browne and Swallow).

²²⁶ *Or.* 42.15 (Browne and Swallow).

human history, in the personal ascent of the Christian to God, and in the cosmos. In history, Gregory argues, just as in the Trinity itself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit were made manifest to humankind in their order.

For the matter stands thus: the Old Testament proclaimed the Father openly, and the Son more obscurely. The New Testament manifested the Son, and suggested the deity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit itself dwells among us, and supplies us with a clearer demonstration of himself... by gradual additions, and as David says, goings up and advances the progress from glory to glory (Ps. 84.7) the light of the Trinity might shine upon the more illuminated.²²⁷

The role of the Father as the source is evident again in this process of revelation; it comes first from God the Father, and then through the Son, and now through the Spirit, who in turn runs his course back to the Father in perfecting the Trinity and humankind's knowledge of it simultaneously. Revelation, in general then, comes in an ordered form, but a similar order is reflected in Gregory's personal attainment to spiritual understanding. In *Or.* 2, Gregory uses the image of light as he expresses his own desire to progress in his ascent to God. He explains that he finds himself wanting to be distanced from the desires of the flesh and to be "constantly growing more and more to be a real unspotted mirror of God and divine things, as light is added to light."²²⁸ For Gregory, the doctrine of the Trinity can be summarized using the light imagery of Psalm 36.9 ("In thy light we shall light"), as we are "comprehending out of light [the Father], light [the Son] in light [the Spirit]."²²⁹ Thus, just as in the intratrinitarian life, where the Father is the source whose light is comprehended in light, so in our lives, for Gregory, we make our way back to God by adding light to light. Both the historical revealing of God to humankind, and the

²²⁷ *Or.* 31.26.

²²⁸ *Or.* 2.7 (Browne and Swallow).

²²⁹ *Or.* 31.4.

journey of an individual to God are ordered as the Trinity is ordered; the ordering of the Trinity is reflected in the reordering of humanity.

Moreover, in *Or.* 6 Gregory implies that the role of God as Father is reflected in the order of the cosmos. Gregory comments on the beauty of the cosmos, a “great and celebrated sign of God” brought about by the Logos.²³⁰ He praises the peace of the sky and yet movement of the winds, the balance of earth and the sea, the bounty of the air and the earth with their gifts of breath and food and concludes that they are all “faithful imitations of parental love.”²³¹ God the Father, like a good parent, has brought about an ordered yet peaceful cosmos through the Logos, his Son. Gregory goes on to describe the ordering of the celestial bodies, of rivers, of the elements and of the animals. All of these things are in their place and behave according to a pattern because they are “guided and directed in accordance with the first causes of harmony (κατὰ τὰς πρώτας αἰτίας τῆς ἁρμονίας),” that is, the Trinity as a whole, which works this ordered harmony in the cosmos as “proclamations of love and concord, teaching mankind unanimity through their example.”²³² It seems that for Gregory, therefore, the cycles of the earth exist in an ordered unity which reflects the trinitarian life itself.

Conclusion

Gregory’s vision of a unified yet ordered Trinity brought about by God the Father and perfected by the Holy Spirit is evident throughout the passages we have examined.

²³⁰ *Or.* 6.14 (Vinson).

²³¹ *Or.* 6.14 (Vinson).

²³² *Or.* 6.15 (Vinson).

The Father must be the source of the other two members of the Trinity in order to ensure the special roles of each of three persons (each stands in a unique relationship to the Father, and the Father to them), to provide the grounding of the shared essence which makes the unity of the Trinity possible, and also to act as the monarch over an ordered Trinity which unfolds as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God's fatherhood is also evident in the world and human relations. As source, the Father represents the unity in which Christians partake, and is the point of return of the Christian ascent. The Trinity also provides the cosmos with a peaceful order, which is evidence of the Trinity's parental-like love and unified rule. The name Father is fundamental to Gregory's insistence that the Father is 'greater' than the Son and the Holy Spirit, and his resulting view of an ordered Trinity in turn affects his view of divine causality (the Son and Spirit are caused by the Father), of trinitarian identity (which is defined by relationships), and of epistemology and salvation (which also have an order unfolding in time according to the trinitarian pattern).

3. A Comparison of Athanasius and Gregory on the Fatherhood of God

Having established that the concept of God as Father is of fundamental importance for the theology of both Athanasius and Gregory of Nazianzus, I now turn to the question of the relationship between the thought of our two authors on this topic. The question of continuity between these thinkers is a complicated one, as it is unclear what texts of Athanasius Gregory may have read, and in what form he received Athanasian arguments for the divinity of the Son.²³³ Moreover, as we have already mentioned, Athanasius' and Gregory's thinking about the fatherhood of God is not systematic, and the texts which survive from these two men differ both in genre and polemical concerns. Gregory also does not use the same Greek terms as Athanasius even when expressing the same ideas. For example, Gregory uses φύσις more frequently than οὐσία to describe the divine nature or being.²³⁴ Nevertheless, it is possible to trace a theological trajectory from Athanasius to Gregory, and to show strong similarities in the way in which the two conceive of God as Father. I will argue (a) that many of the assumptions about the Father-Son relationship are the same for both Athanasius and Gregory, and that (b) this is particularly evident in their soteriology. I will also discuss (c) ideas which are prominent in Gregory's work, but are nascent in Athanasius, in particular, the Father as the source of the Son and Holy Spirit and the full inclusion of the Spirit in the Godhead.

Gregory appears to be working broadly within the framework laid down by Athanasius for understanding what it means for God to be Father. Gregory assumes the eternal correlativity of the Father and the Son, as we have already seen above; Gregory

²³³ Beeley, 159-161.

²³⁴ See p. 42 and footnote 136 above.

merely states that the Father and Son must be coequal (and the Spirit with them), without recourse to a fuller form of the argument.²³⁵ Gregory assumes Athanasius' contention that the Father can never be without the Son and no explanation is needed, for Gregory, to demonstrate that "to rob him [God] of his fatherhood"²³⁶ is to take away something which is basic to God. For both Athanasius and Gregory if God is Father and God is immutable, then he must necessarily have an eternal Son.

The assumption of the logic of eternal correlativity for both authors, results in their insistence that the names Father and Son indicate eternal identities; that God is Father and has a Son means that the Father and Son possess these names perfectly and eternally, and both thinkers argue that the relationship between Father and Son is defined by these names alone. This is a critical point for both Athanasius and Gregory. Thus, Athanasius argues that the presence of the name Son alone in certain passages of scripture proves that the Son is coequal with the Father, as well as in possession of his own unique existence, and Athanasius contends that the name 'Son' alone prevents anyone from thinking the Son could be called a brother of God, as the Arians reportedly argue.²³⁷ The eternal identities of Father and Son are similarly important for Gregory, as he maintains that the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit define the intratrinitarian life; Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the names of relationships not activities or essences.²³⁸ This is evident, for Gregory, from the relational nature of names Father and Son themselves.

²³⁵ See *Or.* 29.18 and pp. 67-68 above.

²³⁶ *Or.* 2.38.

²³⁷ See pp. 22-24 above.

²³⁸ See *Or.* 29.16 And p. 64 above.

Furthermore, the eternal relationship described by the names Father and Son indicate, for both Athanasius and Gregory, that the name Father is not merely a title, but it must say something about God's essence, as well as about human relationships. What the name says about God's essence is that the Father and Son are of one being. For both authors, if Father and Son are not coessential they cannot be called Father and Son at all. The ontological divide is placed between the divine and created, and if the Son is not found to be divine with the Father by sharing in his essence, then 'Son' is tantamount to a courtesy title. Gregory, like Athanasius before him, insists on a biological connotation of the word 'Father' rather than merely a social or familial one. Both use the images of light (and the rays of the sun) as well as water from a fountain to describe the process of eternal begetting.²³⁹ Moreover, that the Father and Son possess these names eternally allows both Athanasius and Gregory to maintain that the divine relationship structure human relationships. Both authors insist that the names 'Father and Son' cannot be fully understood with recourse to human fatherhood, but rather it is these names by which human fatherhood is defined. Since the eternal Father-Son relationship defines human reality, Athanasius and Gregory can both speak of church unity in terms of trinitarian unity.

This group of shared assumptions, that is, that the Father and Son are eternally correlative, have eternal identities as Father and Son, are coequal in essence and structure human relations, is particularly evident in the soteriological discussions of Athanasius and Gregory. Athanasius argues that in order for the Son to save, he must be coequal,

²³⁹ See, for example, *Or.* 29.18 and *DD* 24.

coeternal and coessential with the Father; only then is he in an ontological position to help repair the human-divine relationship. If the Son does not share in the Father's essence, he is the same as a creature and thus in need of salvation, and not able to provide it.²⁴⁰ Similarly, Gregory argues the Holy Spirit is unable to participate in God's salvific acts unless he himself is God.²⁴¹ Both Athanasius and Gregory discuss the use of the names 'Son' and 'Holy Spirit' in the rite of baptism as proof of their participation in divine acts, and both point to the ongoing prayer to and worship of the Son and the Spirit in the church as evidence of their divinity.²⁴² Although Beeley has recently argued that Gregory does not progress in his soteriological thinking from the divinity of the Son to the divinity of the Spirit,²⁴³ Gregory does at least in one place suggest that the arguments for the coequality of the Son with the Father can be applied to the Spirit. In response to opponents who accuse him of Tritheism because of his insistence on the divinity of the Spirit, he asks,

What right do you who worship the Son have, even though you have revolted from the Spirit, to call us Tritheists? Are you not Ditheists? For if you deny also the worship of the only-begotten you have clearly ranged yourself among our adversaries... But if you do worship him, and are so far in the way of salvation, we will ask you what reasons you have to give for your Ditheism if you are charged with it? If there is in you a word of wisdom, answer, and open for us also a way to an answer. For the very same reason with which you will repel a charge of Ditheism will prove sufficient for us against one of Tritheism.²⁴⁴

In this passage, Gregory charges his opponents to explain how the worship (and thus the divinity) of the Son does not threaten monotheism, pointing out rhetorically that they do

²⁴⁰ See pp. 27-28 above.

²⁴¹ See pp. 46-48 above.

²⁴² See pp. 34-35 and 47 above.

²⁴³ Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 152.

²⁴⁴ *Or.* 31.13.

in fact worship the Son. He then goes on to aver that whatever arguments make it possible for the Son to be considered divine can also be applied to the Spirit.

Even if Gregory does not deliberately apply arguments Athanasius had previously made for the divinity of the Son to the Spirit, Gregory certainly accepts Athanasius' casting of the soteriological problem. Gregory presupposes that the divine and the created are absolutely divided from each other, and that only that which is divine can save, and therefore concludes that the Holy Spirit, inasmuch as he has participated in salvation, must be deemed coessential with the Father and not a creature. This is the same conclusion Athanasius draws with respect to the Son under the same assumptions. Athanasius even makes similar soteriological arguments to Gregory with respect to the Spirit in his *Letter to Serapion*, which we have not dealt with in this study. The arguments are more prominent in Gregory's work than in Athanasius', but the fact that Athanasius in his later work did make soteriological arguments for divinity of the Spirit shows either an indebtedness of Gregory to Athanasius, or a consistency in their logic about soteriological matters, as we have just suggested.

There are, of course, several elements in Gregory's theology which are not major features of Athanasius' writing on the fatherhood of God, two of which I will discuss here: divine causality, and the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father. In the work of Gregory much more than that of Athanasius, God's being Father is associated with him being the cause or source of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Although it is not explicit, however, there are at least two passages in the *Contra Arianos* which suggest that Athanasius had a conception of the Father as the source of the Son. One is found in

Contra Arianos I.16. In this passage, Athanasius is teasing out exactly what it means for the Son to be begotten and of one being with the Father, and he makes the following comment about the sharing of essence from the Father to the Son: “the Son partakes of nothing, but what is partaken of the Father, that is the Son.”²⁴⁵ Here, Athanasius suggests that the sharing of essence from the Father is a one way process; the Son is not drawing out the Father’s essence nor partaking in it, but rather that which is begotten by the Father is the Son. Similarly, in nearly all of Athanasius’ statements about the divinity of the Son, the Son is said to be equal with the Father; the Father is not said to be equal to the Son. These sorts of formulations suggest that Athanasius did indeed have some notion of the primacy of the Father. Another passage appears later in *Contra Arianos* I, where Athanasius is explaining the meaning of John 14.28 (“The Father is greater than I”). He explains that the Son is “indeed not ‘greater’ in greatness nor in time, but because of his generation from the Father himself.”²⁴⁶ Athanasius’ statement about John 14.28 appears to be similar to Gregory’s explanation of the passage found in *Or.* 30.²⁴⁷ The Father is greater not in quality nor because of his priority in time, for in those ways the Son is equal to the Father, but rather it is by virtue of his generation that the Son calls the Father ‘greater.’ The phrasing in Athanasius’ formulation is more ambiguous than it is in Gregory’s, and he does not go on to describe the Father as the source of the Son, but rather to emphasize that the Son is coessential with the Father because of this generation. Nevertheless, Athanasius does appear to be attributing to the Father the same kind of

²⁴⁵ *CA* I.16.

²⁴⁶ *CA* I.58.

²⁴⁷ *Or.* 30. 7. See above, p. 47.

logical priority which was to become the hallmark of Gregory's thinking about the fatherhood of God.²⁴⁸

These hints notwithstanding, Athanasius' primary concern in the *Contra Arianos* is not to establish that the fatherhood of God implies that the Father is the source of the Son, but rather to show that God's being a Father must mean that the Son is coessential with the Father. But, as Ayres has suggested,²⁴⁹ perhaps once it had been established at Nicea, and then reinforced by Athanasius, that the Son was coequal with the Father, the task of those who followed was to explain how the Father-Son relation described the intratrinitarian life. This is the task which Gregory takes on, and defines the Trinity in terms of relationship and God's fatherhood in terms of his being the source of the other two members of the Trinity.

This development in the thought from Athanasius to Gregory can also be seen in Gregory's thinking about the Holy Spirit, which is the last topic I will now briefly take up. In the *Contra Arianos* there is very little material about the status of the Holy Spirit. It is not one of Athanasius' major concerns in these works.²⁵⁰ There are two ways in which Gregory's thinking on the Spirit develops from Athanasius. First, Athanasius does not yet have a term which expresses the distinctness of the three members of the Trinity. He champions the word 'ὁμοούσιος' as the ideal term to describe the oneness of the Father and Son, but has no such term to describe their unique identities. Gregory, along with the

²⁴⁸ See also, Beeley, "Divine Causality," 201 footnote 12. He too points to *CA* I.16 and *CA* I.58 as evidence of Athanasius' conception of divine causality, as well as *CA* III.6, and *Ad. Serap.* 1.14 and 1.16. He notes that "though it is a widely held perception among twentieth-century theologians, the claim that Athanasius teaches pure divine equality apart from causality is simply unfounded."

²⁴⁹ Ayres, 245. See above p. 67

²⁵⁰ It is, however, taken up in Athanasius' *Letter to Serapion*, as we mentioned above, p. 80.

other Cappadocians, employs the term ‘ὕπόστασις’ to express the individual existence of each of the persons of the Trinity. Secondly, since Athanasius does not use the term ‘ὕπόστασις’, he therefore does not make any explicit statements about the relational nature of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as the defining characteristics of their hypostatic existence, as we observe in the writings of Gregory. Athanasius does assert that both the sharing of essence from Father to Son and their unique identities are evident from the names Father and Son alone, and he uses the presence of these names in certain biblical passages to refute Arian claims about the status of the Son.²⁵¹ Gregory takes this logic one step further, however, and develops a view of a Trinity which is defined by the intratrinitarian relationship described in the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For Gregory, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the names which define their existence as relational; Athanasius does not develop this concept.

As I have already suggested, Gregory’s point of departure seems to be from the correlative names of Father and Son, and the basic content of the Father-Son relationship, that is, coeternality, coessentiality and coequality, he applies to the Spirit.²⁵² This development in Gregory’s thinking could once again be seen, following Ayres’ suggestion, as the attempt to make sense of what it means for God to be three-and-one, once the coessentiality of the Trinity had been established. Taking his cue from Athanasius’ emphasis on the relationship between Father and Son, Gregory’s doctrine of the Trinity highlights the relational nature of all three members of the Trinity, which

²⁵¹ See above, pp. 23-24.

²⁵² See above, pp. 68-69.

necessitates both the unity and equality of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as well as their distinctness.

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