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Bridging the Gap: Understanding Knowledge of God in Gregory of Nyssa's Commentary on the Song of Songs

Abstract:
The problem of how one knows God is central to the theological endeavor. This paper seeks to explore how Gregory of Nyssa deals with this problem. I suggest that it is by understanding the role of Christ in the incarnation that Gregory finds knowledge of God possible. The incarnation bridges the gap that exists between God and humanity. And, through bridging this gap, Christ enables a person to have mystical knowledge of God.

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This paper seeks to provide an exposition on Gregory of Nyssa’s work on how one might “know” God. Specifically, this paper will focus on one work of Gregory’s corpus, his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Here, one can begin to see the major themes associated with Nyssa’s conception of how one may know God. Also, in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, we get an adequate picture of how Nyssa talks around and tries to conceptualize the problem of knowledge about God. Specifically, I want to argue that it is through his thinking on the nature and person of Christ that Gregory believes he is able to make a way for “knowledge” of God. I will argue this first through an exploration of Gregory’s conception of the dialectic between the Uncreated (God) and the created (humanity). Second, I will look at Gregory’s conception of Christ in the commentary. Third, I will look at how Gregory conceives of the participatory element of knowledge, specifically as it relates to God.

However, to begin, I feel it necessary to offer a minor detour. This detour deals with the nature of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. This commentary is a way of using the biblical text of the Song of Songs to give modes of thinking about God and humans and their relationship. The text gives a set of metaphors for interpreting the relationship between the person and God. The goal, then, of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* is not theological insight (although this does come), but “union of the human soul with God.” Thus, what Gregory is doing in the commentary is a “mystical contemplation.”

This is significant because it means that we are not looking at theses that Gregory develops in a logical way in the text. We are looking at themes that come up again and again in Gregory’s thinking upon the human’s relationship with God. It is in Gregory’s thinking upon this subject that his theological insight really comes to the fore. We must be able to tread deeply with Gregory into the mystical contemplation that he offers to see the insight that Gregory gives on how one may know God. Knowledge of God, then, comes through a “mystical pedagogy” instead of through a set of propositions about God.

**Uncreated and Created – The Gap**

The guiding theme in Gregory’s thought on the human relationship with God is what I call “the gap” – which is Gregory’s view of the unbridgeable distance between God, who is Uncreated, and the human, who is created. This guides Gregory’s thinking because it is this “gap” that Gregory is trying to overcome in his “mystical contemplation.” At its most elementary, this gap is the unbridgeable distance between God and humanity. In fact, for Gregory, to talk about an unbridgeable distance would point to the fact that humanity and God are on the same plane, which he does not believe to be accurate. For Gregory, humanity and God stand on two very different planes of existence. It is such that the created cannot cross the gap – there is no bridging of the
gap for the person. The problem that must be solved, then, is how the human has a relationship and can subsequently know that which is on another plane of existence – utterly foreign to the person.

Something else must be noted quickly. Gregory always affirms that we can know that there is a God. Gregory never questions this. What he does question is the idea that a person can know the essence of God – one cannot know what God is. However, one can know “that God is” – meaning that we can know that God exists.

Obviously, though, Gregory does affirm something about God. Gregory affirms that God is unknowable – or at least that the ousia (being) of God is unknowable. Gregory finds theological justification for this in the concept of God’s infinity. In Gregory’s context, to affirm the infinity of the divine was to affirm the ultimate unknowableness of the divine. This is in contrast to Plotinus, who refused to use the word “infinity” in relation to the divine. For Plotinus, if something was infinite, it was unknowable because one could never reach the end of it for full knowledge. Gregory picks up on this and reverses it. He says that God must be infinite because God – in the Hebraic-Christian tradition – is eternal. This eternity results in God being of infinite expanse. Thus, Gregory predicates infinity of God and also, subsequently, the unknowability of God.

Gregory is able to say this based upon the work of God in the world. One example of this is in “The Fifth Homily” of his Commentary on the Song of Songs. Here, Gregory begins to predicate that the created must have come from an Uncreated. Gregory posits this “Being” – the Uncreated Being – as “being above beginning” and that “in which, all things are formed.” So, we have in the Uncreated a being who has no beginning (and presumably, no end) and who is the one who forms all things. This is a radically different kind of being than that of a human; so much so in fact that the human has an “impossibility of perceiving it.” This is because “it presents no marks of its inmost nature.” As that which has no beginning and is the one who does the forming/creating of the universe, this being is different.

This shows that God’s work as the one who is not created but creates, while forming humanity in God’s image, is radically different than humanity. God lives on a different plane of existence, exists in a different way than humanity. God, unlike humanity, has no beginning and no end – God is infinite and eternal. Also, God is the one who forms humanity and the rest of creation. This for Gregory shows that the created does not know the Uncreated.

In his contemplation upon the texts of Song of Songs, Gregory of Nyssa continues to enforce this idea that humans cannot know the nature of God. In “The Third Homily,” Gregory talks about the idea that the revelation presented to him shows that “divine nature transcends every conception
which tries to grasp it."8 Humans are not capable of this knowledge because it is "other than" or "beyond" them. This causes Gregory to say that we cannot place any limits upon the divine nature. Specifically, we cannot put a limit upon the greatness of God's nature. As that which is Uncreated, God is infinitely greater than the created. In this recognition of God's infinite greatness, the human begins to realize the utter transcendence that is God's nature and realizes that it is only in the "desire for more lofty things" that any sort of knowledge is possible or attainable.9

For Gregory, this infinite greatness of God's nature means that God is ineffable. The nature of God cannot be "accurately contained in a name; rather every capacity for concepts and every form of words and names, even if they seem to contain something great and befitting God's glory, are unable to grasp his reality."10 God's reality is not the human reality, although the human reality is a part of God's reality. God's reality far exceeds the reality of humanity. Based upon God's action in their reality, then, people make conjectures at the ungraspable.11

What we have shown in the above is that Gregory emphasizes the incomprehensible, great, infinite, ineffable nature of God. This places God in another reality and on another plane of existence from that of humanity. There is a radical difference between God and the human, the Uncreated and created. However, for Gregory, the created still struggles to talk about and know God. The question then, posed to the created, is "how?"

Daley points out that for Gregory, how we know God is a cognitive process. However, the cognition is the realization of the above – that God is infinite, ineffable, eternal, etc. – that one begins to cognitively realize that one does not know God and one cannot know God. So, in the knowing of the not-being-able-to-know, the person knows. The person realizes that any thoughts of God are not able to contain God because God is bigger than the thoughts that the person could possibly have of God.12

This leads the person into a contemplation in unknowing to know. "The Sixth Homily" exemplifies this through Gregory's use of the bride and bridegroom imagery derived from Ephesians 5, where he symbolizes Christ as the bridegroom and the believer (and Church) as the bride. He says, "She realizes that her sought-after love is known only in her impossibility to comprehend his essence, and that every sign becomes a hindrance to those who seek him."13 What is happening to the bride is that she realizes that the signs that point to the bridegroom are inadequate. The knowledge she used to draw from these signs does not comprehend God. In fact, she must realize that she has not comprehended God and that God is ultimately incomprehensible. She must begin to seek the love of God only, knowing that knowing God is an impossibility.

However, the person remembers that the Uncreated has created her in the Uncreated's own image (Gen 1:27). This means that when the person begins
to realize that God's essence is completely unknowable and that one could never grasp this, one can turn to an examination of one's soul. The soul provides a reflection of that which is sought — God — because it bears a certain likeness to God.14

In contemplating the image of the divine that our soul bears, though, the soul does not know God's essence. At most, what the soul can see is the beauty of God's creation and the splendor of what the Uncreated has done. One can see the beauty of God in the world. Of course, this still does not result in a knowing of God. It results in realizing that God's beauty exists in the existence of the created, but that one could never exhaust this beauty. The only thing to do in light of God's beauty is to respond and for Gregory this response must be in awe and worship.15

All of the above discussion enforces Gregory's realization of the complete ineffability of God. In "The Third Homily," he uses an analogy to talk about the ineffability of God. He talks about how when someone talks of gold, one is not actually giving the essence of gold but only the likeness of gold. One can talk about its beauty or how it shines or its worth but this is not to talk of gold as gold is in itself; it is to talk of the likeness of gold. Similarly, when someone talks of God, one can talk of the likenesses of God in the world — God's beauty, Uncreated nature, infinity, etc. However, one cannot talk about God as God exists in the Godself. One cannot give God, but only the likeness of God.16

The above discussion shows the disparity that Gregory posits between the Uncreated and the created. However, as one will remember from above, the real issue at stake in Gregory's Commentary on the Song of Songs is the human's relationship with God. The relationship just described is not a very good one. It is a relationship on two different planes of existence, with an infinite "gap" between the two. The goal, then, for Gregory is to bridge the gap.

The Uncreated Created - Bridging the Gap

If the goal is to bridge the gap, the question becomes, "how does one bridge the gap?" For Gregory, what is entailed is positing a figure that exists on both planes of existence — both the Uncreated and the Created. Gregory believes the person who accomplishes this is Jesus the Christ. Due to this, Gregory's theology has a definite incarnational foundation. Gregory believes in Christ we have the Second Person of the Trinity uniting Godself to humanity in such a way as to "restore the divine friendship we had" in the Garden of Eden.17 For Gregory, this comes out of the human's longing for contact with the divine. In "The Fifth Homily," we see Gregory talking of how the bride desires above all else to see her bridegroom — the person seeking God seeks to see the Word of God in the flesh. This is so that "God may be seen in the flesh and speak about the divine promises of eternal
happiness for those who are worthy.” 18 This comes out of the love that God has for us. So, Gregory uses Christ to bridge the gap, as the Second Person of the Trinity appearing in the flesh, bringing God to humanity and humanity to God. It becomes necessary then to see how Gregory goes about using Christ to bridge this gap.

“The Fifth Homily” is the point where Gregory goes through the movement of Uncreated, to created, to the one who is the Uncreated/created. First, Gregory talks of how the Uncreated/God is completely infinite and ineffable. God, in God’s nature, possesses all that God possesses in “infinite and unbounded measure.” This nature also does not change because this nature is always good in superabundance. He then moves to talk about the created nature. The created nature allows evil and good to exist simultaneously, meaning that the soul always has the capacity to do evil and not participate in the good. Thus, for the created, even in participation with God, there is still infinite distance between the two because the human soul always has the capacity to do evil. This moves Gregory to talk about that which is the Uncreated/created – the Word, Jesus Christ. The Word brings the person (Gregory uses the image of the bride), through virtue, into participation with God. This comes through the fact that the Word gives light, beginning with the prophets and then fully through the incarnation. In the light of the prophets, the person can begin to participate in the goodness of God, which cultivates inner beauty. The Word, then, in the incarnation gives more virtue and invites the person to participate in a higher beauty. There is infinite progression. Thus, what the Word has done is to bridge the gap so that the person can begin to contemplate God and participate in God’s inner beauty such that the person never exhausts God, but always remains the created – just the created that is infinitely participating in the Uncreated.19

“The Thirteenth Homily” continues the theme of the Uncreated and the created united in Christ. Gregory affirms the Uncreated nature of Christ in saying that Christ is “before all the ages, eternally incomprehensible, and totally ineffable.” However, in spite of this, Christ makes God known and appear in the flesh to the people. In this appearing, the Uncreated takes on the flesh and being of the created in that “it has been formed according to the lowliness of our body [Phil. 3:21].” Thus, in Christ, we have the simultaneity of the Uncreated and created and in this simultaneity, Christ allows something of the Uncreated to be known to the created.20 It is in the person of Christ in the incarnation that knowledge of God becomes possible. This is specifically because in Christ, the “invisible” – that which is of God’s nature – is made “visible” – that which is of human nature.21 In the work of Christ, then, in the incarnation, God is available for knowledge by humanity.

However, we now ask: What is the work of the Incarnation? What is that Jesus the Christ does? And, I think most important, how does the person
of Christ function in theology? It is these questions that Gregory now gives attention to. 22

For Gregory, the person of Christ is central to his theology. Gregory believes that in the incarnation one finds the archetype of what it means to participate in God. Gregory sees in Jesus the Christ what the complete transformation of a person should look like. This is because in the incarnation, a human person is “taken up” into the Word who makes the person’s humanity God’s own. It is this “taking up” of humanity into the divinity of the Word that becomes the “model and explanation of the ‘mystical’ union of totally unequal realities.”23 We see this also in Gregory’s thought on the Nicene Creed. For Gregory, the Nicene Creed is not a strictly dogmatic proposition about God or about Jesus being of one substance with the Father. This only begins Gregory’s thought. This is because Gregory also sees the Nicene Creed affirming the fact that Jesus took on the flesh of humanity. In doing this, the Christological hymn of Phil. 2:6-11 becomes central. This hymn allows Gregory to assert that the God who has no form loves humanity enough to take on the form of humanity in a historical place and time. This form of the Word in the flesh then does not change God, but it changes humanity in that it allows humanity participation into the divine.24

In Gregory’s view, for God the Word to be able to take up the humanity of the person, it is essential that the human that God takes up be fully human. “So, it is essential for him to conceive of Christ the Saviour as possessing all that is vulnerable and variable in our nature, including our mind.”25 This allows Gregory to see the Word as taking up all of humanity, not just what is easily brought into participation with God. Gregory sees the Word as bringing all that is “rebellious” and “inferior” into subjection to Godself. In his view, all those things in human nature that are in the way of the Word, all that could keep the human away from God, is taken up into the Word and made able to participate in God.26 This means that eventually, through the taking up of the human nature into the Word, that we should lose the “distinguishing characteristics of our fallen race.”27

The work of Christ in taking up the nature of humanity into the divine is given its strongest form in the resurrection and the ascension. For Gregory, these two acts are not primarily about determining the divinity of Jesus. They are the salvation of humanity and the possibility for the participation of humanity into the divine. This is because in the ascension and resurrection of Christ, the divine is united permanently to the human. Here, the humanity of Christ was brought into the divinity of Christ, the transformation of humanity becomes complete. However, the humanity of Jesus never changes, but is only brought into the divine. Thus, the theological promise of the resurrection and ascension for Gregory is that the humanity of Jesus is still the same humanity as that which he lived with on earth – the
one very similar/the same as ours. For Gregory, then, the resurrection and ascension of Christ glorifies humanity and brings humanity into the divine while still leaving the humanity of Christ the same as ours. In this, the person is allowed to become divine in a participatory way through Christ’s humanity.28

The above discussion shows that for Gregory it is through participation in Christ that allows us to participate in divinity that is the key to knowledge of God. This participation is the key to knowledge of God. However, what has been made implicit is that this knowledge is not a full cognitive knowledge. Cognitive knowledge of God is not possible. But we can know God through “mystical knowledge” which is a knowledge predicated upon the participation that we have in God. Christ is the one that makes this participation possible through the incarnation. In the incarnation, the Uncreated takes on the life of the created, meaning Christ brings the life of the infinite God to earth to allow humanity to share in it by being drawn into this life. This knowledge is a knowledge of participation — a mystical knowledge.29 Thus, it is through Christ’s “bridging of the gap” that knowledge of God becomes possible.

Mystical Knowledge — The Bridged Gap

At first, we talked about the gap that existed between the Uncreated and the created. We talked about how God and humanity are on two different planes of existence. We talked about the need to bridge this gap. And then we posited that this gap is bridged by Christ. Christ does this through his simultaneous taking on of the divine nature and human nature. Christ bridges the gap by bringing the divine nature into human nature and by bringing human nature into the divine nature. This allows Gregory of Nyssa to say that Christ’s bridging of the gap brings knowledge of the divine to the human. This knowledge is a mystical knowledge known through participation. Now, we must begin to look at how humanity participates in the divine nature.

For Gregory, knowledge of God is only possible through the transformation that takes place by becoming a disciple of Christ — through participation in Christ.30 In “The Third Homily” he describes this transformation that must take place through the imagery of the Exodus and leaving Egypt. He says that the disciple must have no thought of Egypt and must leave every part of the old Egyptian life behind in the water. The disciple must be cleansed by God, leaving behind all of “the Egyptian plagues,” thus allowing transformation to begin.31

This cleansing of the soul leads to a greater desire for the Word. The Word responds to this desire. In this response, the Word “exhorts her to greater perfection by receiving what is already present, for praise of deeds rightly done instills a keener desire for the Good.”32 What the Word does is to
exhort the person to continue participating in the Good by doing good so that one can come to greater knowledge of God. For Gregory, it is only in the advancement of the person in virtue that one can rightly come to perfection that gives greater knowledge of God. It is in this advancement in virtue through the work of the Word that the person "is transformed from glory to glory [2 Cor. 3:18]." This advancement "from glory to glory" leads to perfection being established in different people which then leads to a "different character" shining through in life of the person due to the person's "increase in the good." Gregory believes that as the person advances in perfection toward God the person gains knowledge of the Good and in doing so continues to do the good. In so doing, the person becomes more virtuous, which eventually, will cause the person to become a "different character" - a transformed person.

For Gregory, then, the virtue that is present in the transformed person's life "is the outward manifestation of divinization, manifesting outwardly the divine presence in which it participates." Gregory makes this quite explicit in saying "the end of the virtuous life is likeness to God." For Gregory, the virtues are what give us "purity of soul and freedom from the disturbance of passion." This leads to a greater way of life in which "the transcendent nature might become present." Here, Gregory shows that the virtuous life leads to likeness with God because it is a life where the person is cleansed from sin and from the disruption that might take away from the one real joy that Gregory seeks - God. The virtuous life opens up the person to being like God in that it seeks God over the evil that could also be present in a person's life. The person chooses the good which in turn is a choice for God.

This participation in God, through the virtues, leads Gregory to the conclusion that it is through the virtuous life that one can have knowledge of God. He says, "Whichever expression we take, one idea is common to all, namely, that from the virtues we obtain knowledge of the good which transcends all understanding just as the beauty of an archetype can be inferred from its image." As is evident here, the virtuous life that is lived through the power of the Word gives one the ability to know God who passes all understanding. However, this knowledge is not cognitive or cerebral. It is a knowledge predicated on one's participation with God in the good of the virtuous life.

The virtuous life then is only possible through the Word. It is possible because it is through the Word's power of taking humanity into divinity that this life is possible. However, it is also possible because of the person's participation in the divine life through the imitation of the Word as the Word was on earth. In this, the person imitates the way the Word brings God into the world. In this imitation, we drink from the well that is God. In this drinking from the well that is God, we become partakers of God by drinking
God’s water. And this is possible only in Jesus Christ, the Lord.37 In this, the person only experiences God and the greatness of God through the imitation of Christ in the virtuous life.

So far we have seen that with the unknowability of God comes the fact that we grow in God through participation in Christ. Our participation in God leads to greater participation in God which leads to greater knowledge of our non-knowledge of God. However, we do still have knowledge of God but only knowledge of God through the transformed Christian life whereby we participate in God. Thus, it is a knowledge that comes strictly from living life in God through Christ. It is a mystical knowledge in that it is a knowledge that comes from our participation in the divine.

What becomes key for Gregory in the midst of this is that this knowledge is never a “full knowledge” or “static knowledge.” We have already seen that Gregory posits God as infinite. In this declaring of God as infinite Gregory sees that for the person to come to full participation in God would take away the infinity of God. If the human could exhaust God in his or her participation in God this would do away with the infinity of God which is central to God for Gregory. Thus, for Gregory, the participation must be a boundless participation which is always dynamic, never static. It is a constantly moving participation in the life of God through Christ.

We see Gregory talk about this in “The Eleventh Homily” in the Commentary on the Song of Songs. Gregory talks of how the person is on a path that is “boundless” as it rises up to God. This boundlessness of the path comes from the person’s knowledge. The knowledge the person receives of God is always a knowledge that is not adequate. Thus, the person constantly starts over again in trying to gain knowledge of God. The person is always at the beginning of her participation in God because there is always an infinite distance to traverse to get to God.38 Brian Daley sums Gregory best here when he states, “the perfection of our knowledge of God is precisely a process of restless, endless growth beyond the knowledge we already possess.”39

Gregory also brings the role of the Word to play here. He sees the person as always understanding that what s/he understood is infinitely less than what is to be known about God. The Word sees this and thus, appears to the person. He comes to the person and gives the person the ability to participate. Often the Word is not seen, but the Word is promised. This promise brings with it the fact that the divine has brought the human into the economy of the divine. And so, the Word helps the person to bridge the infinite distance that is the gap between human and divine.40

This bridging of the distance by the Word can result in a union between the Uncreated and the created, as the union is present in the Word. However, even in this union there is infinite distance between the Uncreated and the
created. So, for Gregory the person never has her fill of God; one is never satisfied with her knowledge of God but always looks for more God. Thus, the person always longs for God, looking to participate in God more and more.41

In discussing how Gregory views participation with God, I have tried to examine how this participation gives knowledge of God in Gregory's view. The reality is that participation does not give knowledge, but that living a virtuous life does. Thus, it becomes imperative for Gregory to live the virtuous life. The way to the virtuous life is only through the Word and so it becomes necessary to participate in the life of the Word so as to live the virtuous life. Thus, the Word is necessary to live the virtuous life which gives knowledge of God. And this knowledge of God that comes through the virtuous life, which is based upon our participation in the Word, is always a beginning knowledge. We always realize that the knowledge we have is infinitely distant from the reality which is God. Our knowledge never grasps anything of God's nature. And thus, even in union with God, we always long for God, looking to participate more and more in God.

Conclusion – Bringing it All Together

In this paper, I have made an effort to work out the notion of the incomprehensibility of God in Gregory of Nyssa. In doing this, I have found Christ to be the hermeneutical turning point. This is because what Gregory is searching for is a way to bridge the infinite gap between God and humanity, the Uncreated and the created. Gregory wants to bridge this gap because his soteriology is based upon participation in God. This gap is then bridged by the work of the Word where the divine "swallows up" the human into the divine where the human never loses its humanity; and, also, the divine is brought into the realm of the human. Thus, the gap is bridged. However, in bridging the gap, Christ never allows for a full, cognitive knowledge of God, but only a knowledge of God based on our participation in God which teaches us that we do not know God but that we must continue to participate in God to know our unknowing better. For Gregory, then, there is never knowledge of God, but only participation in God and the knowledge that our knowledge is never cognitive, but based upon the way that we participate in God through our living with the Word. This participatory knowledge is a mystical knowledge, and so, only mystical knowledge based upon our participation in God gives adequate knowledge of God.
Footnotes

1 All citations to Gregory of Nyssa's Commentary on the Song of Songs refer to the edition by J.P. Migne, PG 44. All English quotations are taken from Gregory of Nyssa, Commentary on the Song of Songs, trans. Casimir McCambley (Brookline, MA: Hellenic Scholars Press, 1987). The reference here is to page 772.

2 Ibid., 765.

3 For a modern example of mystical pedagogy, see Mark A. McIntosh, Divine Teaching: An Introduction to Christian Theology (Oxford and Malden: 2008).


6 This is a terse statement on what Carabine is doing in her article. Specifically see Carabine, 86.

7 Gregory of Nyssa, Commentary on the Song of Songs, 873.

8 Ibid., 821.

9 Ibid., 892.

10 Ibid., 892.

11 Ibid., 781.

12 Daley, "'Bright Darkness' and Christian Transformation...," 216.

13 Gregory of Nyssa, Commentary on the Song of Songs, 893.

14 Ibid., 820.

15 Ibid., 1009.

16 Ibid., 820.


18 Gregory of Nyssa, Commentary on the Song of Songs, 880.

19 Ibid., 873-76.

20 Ibid., 1045.

21 Ibid., 1049.

22 Here I will be reliant upon the work of Brian J. Daley, S.J. This is because Daley has done an excellent job at constructing Gregory of Nyssa's Christology in various articles. Also, Daley is drawing upon multiple sources that enrich the work of Gregory's Commentary on the Song of Songs and upon which Gregory's Christology in the work is based. Thus, I will rely on much of Daley's research to guide my thinking on Gregory's Christology. See his articles, "'Heavenly Man' and 'Eternal Christ': Apollinarius and Gregory of Nyssa on the Personal Identity of the Savior," Journal of Early Christian Studies 10, no. 4 (Winter 2002); "'Bright Darkness'

23 Daley, “‘Bright Darkness’ and Christian Transformation...,” 222.

24 Brian E. Daley, S.J., “‘Heavenly Man’ and ‘Eternal Christ:’ Apollinarius and Gregory of Nyssa on the Personal Identity of the Savior,” 480. The work that Daley is drawing upon (and for which I am dependent upon him) is from Gregory of Nyssa’s work Antirrhétikos adv. Apollinarium.


26 Gregory of Nyssa, Commentary on the Song of Songs, 861. See also Daley, “Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation...,” 501.

27 Daley, “Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation...,” 499. See also, Gregory of Nyssa, Commentary on the Song of Songs, 1045.

28 Daley, “‘Heavenly Man’ and ‘Earthly Christ’...,” 482-3.

29 Daley, “‘Bright Darkness’ and Christian Transformation...,” 224.

30 Ibid., 224.

31 Gregory of Nyssa, Commentary on the Song of Songs, 813. I think it is significant here that Gregory uses Exodus language of “leaving every evil and sin in the water.” This also evokes the scene of baptism, where the person would be cleansed of sin and be brought into the believing life of the community, participating in the mystical body of Christ.

32 Ibid., 809.

33 Ibid., 896.


35 Gregory of Nyssa, Commentary on the Song of Songs, 961.

36 Ibid., 824.

37 Ibid., 977. See also the eleventh homily, 996.

38 Ibid., 1000.

39 Daley, “‘Bright Darkness’ and Christian Transformation...,” 221. The term that is often associated with Gregory’s notion of infinite progress in the divine is epektasis which was coined by Jean Danielou. However, as Louth notes, this term is only used once in Gregory when referring to mystical growth in the divine. So, I have chosen not use it here, but to struggle through the language with Gregory. For an adequate, yet terse discussion of this see Louth, Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition, 89ff.

40 Ibid., 201.

41 Ibid., 50-51.