

Towards a synthesis of East and West: Human nature, sin and salvation in Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa

For all its diversity and divisions, the Christian faith still holds forth a common agreed narrative: it is the problem of sin met with God's promise of salvation. However, disagreement begins with the effort to quantify these two essentials. Those of us in the Western church may be acutely aware of how these are disputed between the Catholic and Protestant traditions,¹ even within them,² but less conscious of a wider divergence from the Eastern church.

This divergence, although partially the result of unfolding history - the Latin West and Greek East, each developing its own distinctions according to the pressures it faced³ - has given rise to notably different presentations of the human condition, rooted in the writings of the patristic theologians celebrated in each stream to this day. J. Patout Burns identifies two figures in particular as exemplifying these two traditions: Gregory of Nyssa for the East, Augustine for the West.⁴ Both wrote extensively on the impact of sin and assurance of salvation, yet each interpreted these very differently, such that Eastern and Western theology can seem incompatible in these matters.

How, then, did Gregory and Augustine, and with them East and West, arrive at such a disparity? Such a question brings with it a daunting prospect, given the vast scope of the topic and the prolific work of each writer. Therefore, in this paper, we will narrow our assessment to how each understood the fall of humanity, and God's response to it. In doing so we may find that, far from being incompatible, the Eastern and Western traditions may combine to offer a richer perspective on God's redemptive work in His image.

¹ Consider, for example, the tenets of sola scriptura or sola fide.

² Within Protestantism, consider the significance of baptism (E.g. Sheila D. Klopfer, "From Personal Salvation To Personal Baptism: The Shaping Influence Of Evangelical Theology On Baptism," *Baptist History and Heritage* 45 (2010): 65-79, pp.65-77); within Catholicism, consider the changing face of purgatory (E.g. John E. Thiel, "Time, Judgement and Competitive Spirituality: A Reading of the Development of the Doctrine of Purgatory," *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 741-85, pp.741-42, or Robert L. Kinast, "The Pope, Purgatory and Process Theology," *Encounter* 73 (2013), pp.39-46).

³ Andrew Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology* (London: SPCK, 2013), xiii-xx.

⁴ J. Patout Burns, "The Economy of Salvation: Two Patristic Traditions," *Theological Studies* 37 (1976): 598-619, p. 599.

Original humanity

Augustine and Gregory agree that any view of the fall of humanity must begin by understanding where humanity fell from. As such, both hold forth a vision of a perfect humanity, manifest in its identity as the image of God (Gen 1:26-28). There are several notable similarities in how each describes this. It begins, in line with patristic ontological emphases,⁵ with God the Trinity,⁶ uncreated and eternal,⁷ the personification of Good,⁸ who creates humanity "in the superabundance of love,"⁹ composed of soul and body,¹⁰ to bear His image.¹¹ Specifically, it is the soul which carries this image identity,¹² possessing the divine marks of reason,¹³ immortality¹⁴ and free will.¹⁵

Where they differ is principally in function. For Gregory, the image of God is a corporate identity. In the beginning (Gen 1:1) "God made all things, at once."¹⁶ This creative moment included everything that would in time be formed into the finished creation,¹⁷ including every human soul.¹⁸ The number of souls, therefore, is finite and predetermined,¹⁹ and only together do they form one image of God.²⁰ This collective

⁵ D. H. Williams, "Justification By Faith: A Patristic Doctrine," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 57 (2006) 653.

⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Spirit*, 1.15-16; Augustine, *Unfinished Commentary on Genesis* 1.2; *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 1.6.12.

⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 1.26; *On the Making of Man* 16.12; cf. God is "incorruptible and incorporeal" Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 2.223; Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 1.18.36.

⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Beatitudes* 3.6; *On the Making of Man* 16.10; Augustine, *Concerning the Nature of Good* 1 and 30.

⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 5.

¹⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 29.1; *Against Eunomius* 2.13; Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 3.22.34, 6.7.12.

¹¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 5, *On the Making of Man* 3.1; *Song of Songs* 2; Augustine, *Unfinished Commentary on Genesis* 16.57; *City of God* 13.23.

¹² Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 16.9; Augustine, *City of God* 8.23; *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 7.24.35; *Eighty-Three Questions* 51.

¹³ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection* p.815, 822, 824; Augustine, *City of God* 13.23.

¹⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 5; Augustine, *City of God* 8.2.

¹⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 12; Augustine, *City of God* 5.9; *On Grace and Free Will* 2; cf. Ernest V. McClear, "The Fall of Man and Original Sin in the Theology of Gregory of Nyssa," *Theological Studies* 9 (1948): 175-212, p. 178.

¹⁶ Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II Volume 5: Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises Etc* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 25.

¹⁷ Everything is contained in him: Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 2.237-240; cf. *Great Catechism* 5.

¹⁸ Schaff, *NPNF II-05*, 25 cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 16.16-18.

¹⁹ Schaff, *NPNF II-05*, 25 cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, p.855-56; *On the Making of Man* 29.1.

²⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 16.17-18; *On the Faith* 2.

understanding shapes Gregory's view of humanity's purpose, which is to reflect God's nature,²¹ thereby ruling as king over creation²² as a virtuous "impression of true divinity."²³ This is possible because of God's indwelling presence: "God dwells in you, penetrates you and is not confined in you."²⁴

Augustine, in contrast, viewed the image of God more personally. He agreed the image is shared insofar as it is conferred upon all humanity, male and female,²⁵ but he held that the body is so intrinsic to humans that the image must be recognised within every "ensouled" individual.²⁶ Moreover, although God certainly foreknows how many will be born,²⁷ He leaves it to the free will of humans to decide.²⁸ He also tended toward a more inward view of purpose, interpreting God's blessing (Gen 1:28) as the attainment of virtue, which will fill the earth with spiritual life, and subdue the inner passions.²⁹

Within these differences, both prioritise virtue, but this, too, is understood differently. Augustine presented it almost entirely for personal benefit, growing inwardly by reflecting God. Gregory presented a two-way benefit, *reflecting* God inwardly to nourish the soul and *representing* God outwardly to bless the world, with the first releasing the second as God's image *resonates* His presence. Thus Gregory expressed the same blessings that God spoke into His image (Gen 1:26-28): humanity established as God's *tselem* (indicating God's presence within),³⁰ so they "fill the earth and subdue it," as God had modelled in creation. While both aspire towards relationship with God, therefore, Gregory's is the higher aspiration and more complete understanding. That said, the emphasis each places on a moral meaning suggests they both underestimate the potential for exercising actual life-giving, authoritative power in the world.

²¹ "For the enjoyment of the Divine good." Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 5.

²² In which virtue, immortality and righteousness are bestowed in place of purpose, sceptre and diadem. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 3-4; For humanity's superiority over creation, see Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 3.1-2; *Song of Songs* 2.

²³ Gregory of Nyssa, *Song of Songs* 2, cf *Song of Songs* 15.

²⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *Song of Songs* 2.

²⁵ Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 3.21, 31-33.

²⁶ Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 6.25.36.

²⁷ Augustine, *Unfinished Commentary of Genesis* 3.6, 10; *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 3.21.33.

²⁸ Augustine, *City of God* 5.9.

²⁹ Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 7.3.4.

³⁰ Crispin Fletcher-Louis, "God's Image, His Cosmic Temple and the High Priest: Towards an Historical and Theological Account of the Incarnation," in *Heaven on Earth: The Temple in Biblical Theology* (ed. S. Gathercole and T. D. Alexander; : Paternoster, 2004).

Original fall

Having established such a lofty vision for humanity, made from the blueprint of the Creator, not creation, the task is then to explain why this is not reflected in current human experience.³¹ The answer, both assert, can be found in Eden (Gen 2:4-3:24). Here again, we find much that is similar between them. Crucially, it is by the misuse of free will that humans brought about their own downfall.³²

It begins with God placing His image in a good garden,³³ to enjoy His blessings³⁴ in His presence.³⁵ God wants a relationship with His image and so sets before him a choice centred on two trees: one that promises life, the other, death.³⁶ This second tree is forbidden,³⁷ but not withheld, and it is up to humanity to choose God's way, thereby establishing a relationship. This seems to be a tremendous risk, since the choice for evil is equally accessible, and indeed Adam and Eve do make the wrong choice, "circumvented with cunning" by the serpent,³⁸ who offered them pleasure³⁹ and high rank.⁴⁰ God therefore banished them from the garden, denying them access to the tree of life.⁴¹

Nevertheless, their agreement on the narrative does not take them on the same journey through it. Indeed, they veer from one another at the very start. For Gregory, it was an expressly allegorical tale. This affords him the license to draw conclusions that Augustine, in his more literal reading, cannot. Specifically, he is able to ascribe power to the trees in the garden. One bestows eternal life, the other knowledge,⁴² which Gregory understands to mean a muddled discernment of good and evil.⁴³

³¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 5.

³² Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 12; Augustine, *On Grace and Free Will* 4.

³³ Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 5; Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 8.8.15.

³⁴ "To live in the Garden and to luxuriate in what was planted there," Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Beatitudes* 3.6; cf. Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 8.9.18.

³⁵ Cf. Gregory's depiction of the cleft of the rock in which Moses encountered God's presence Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 2.246-49.

³⁶ Augustine, *Handbook on Faith, Hope and Love*, 4.15; Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 5.

³⁷ Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 8.6.12, 8.13.28; Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 20.2.

³⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 12, p.663; *On the Making of Man* 20, 3-4.

³⁹ "Pleasure is truly like evil's bait." Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 2.300; cf. Augustine, *On Grace and Free Will* 3.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 11.30.38-39; cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 2.13.

⁴¹ Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 11.40.54-55; Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Beatitudes* 3.6.

⁴² Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 20.2-3.

⁴³ "The majority of men judge the good to lie in that which gratifies the senses." Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 20.3.

Augustine, on the other hand, argues that there can be no evil power in the tree, because God makes all things good. Instead, it was the prohibition itself that mattered.⁴⁴

The first implication of this is on free will. Augustine defends the gift of free will in humanity, but affirms that the only true freedom is in obedience to God's decree, because obedience is "the one and only virtue for every creature that is a rational agent under the authority of God."⁴⁵ Gregory opposes this with the view that "liberty is the coming up to a state which owns no master and is self-regulating."⁴⁶ As such, it is left entirely to human freedom to choose God, in the knowledge that liberty "has a natural attraction to itself"⁴⁷ and so can hold humanity to God's side.

This, then, drives Gregory and Augustine into very different directions regarding the relationship that is sought. For Gregory it is one of aspiration. The soul moves naturally upward (epektasis)⁴⁸ and so Adam and Eve must choose the inclination of the soul over the inclination of the body,⁴⁹ thereby attaining to the divine nature. He likens this to a painter's apprentice, copying their teacher's masterpiece by painting with virtue.⁵⁰ The goal is likeness, the process akin to discipleship. Conversely, Augustine sees Eden portraying a relationship of subservience: "We are his servants and slaves for our benefit, not his."⁵¹ This he saw as the path of true joy and freedom,⁵² leading to comprehensive immortality as the body follows its master to become "enspirited," thereby sharing the immortality of the soul,⁵³ rather than any negative destination. Indeed, both emphasised the importance of obedience, but the question is: obedience to what? Augustine saw a relationship maintained by obedience to a rule; Gregory saw a rule upheld by obedience to a relationship.

This divergence became all the more pronounced as they wrestled with the entrance of sin. Both identified the serpent as the progenitor of evil,⁵⁴ while agreeing on the ultimate culpability of Adam and Eve, who chose to submit to their enemy. For

⁴⁴ Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 8.13.28.

⁴⁵ Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 6.8.12.

⁴⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection*, p.842.

⁴⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection*, p.842.

⁴⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 2.225.

⁴⁹ Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Song of Songs* 4.

⁵⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Perfection* in V.Callahan (trans.), *St Gregory: Ascetical Works - Fathers of the Church Vol.58* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 110-1.

⁵¹ Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 8.11.24.

⁵² Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 8.8.15-8.9.18.

⁵³ Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 6.24.35.

⁵⁴ Augustine, *On Nature and Grace* 2; Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 20.4; *On Virginity* 12.

Augustine, however, their failure was the result of pride,⁵⁵ provoked by the prohibition⁵⁶ and evidenced in their negligence in guarding the garden, thereby allowing the serpent to enter.⁵⁷ In so doing, they fell into concupiscence and adopted evil into humanity.⁵⁸ Gregory, on the other hand, argued for a degree of moral infancy,⁵⁹ in which they were as yet too immature to hold the passions of the body at bay.⁶⁰ Consequently, the fall was an inevitable catastrophe,⁶¹ the result of humanity discovering evil.⁶²

The root of sin identified, this directs their respective views of the fallout from it. In response to deliberate disobedience, Augustine finds justice in God's judgement of guilt and punishments of pain, toil, expulsion and death;⁶³ whereas Gregory, convinced of humanity's vicinal culpability, as opposed to guilt, sees God describing the consequences of their actions.⁶⁴ By separating themselves from God they had entered death, evidenced by the need for sexual reproduction, which produces mortal children (he had envisaged an angelic reproduction of immortal beings had they remained perfect),⁶⁵ and their diminished authority over the land, such that they must leave the garden.⁶⁶ Having entered the garden by the same way, then, identifying humanity as the image of God, Gregory and Augustine depart in opposing directions: Augustine towards the cell God had prepared, Gregory towards the bed humanity had made.

Original sin

Adam and Eve enter the world (Gen 3:24), and what becomes immediately clear is that their fallen state has been inherited by their children. Cain is envious and murderous (Gen 4:5-8), traits handed down to his descendents (Gen 4:23-24), and

⁵⁵ Augustine, *Eighty-Three Questions* 3.

⁵⁶ Augustine, *City of God* 8.5.

⁵⁷ Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 8.8-11.

⁵⁸ Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence* 1.27.

⁵⁹ Andrew P Klager, "Free Will and Vicinal Culpability in St. Gregory of Nyssa's *De vita Moysis*," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 55 (2010): 149-79, p. 159.

⁶⁰ Cf. *On the Making of Man* 18.2.

⁶¹ Schaff, *NPNF II-05*, 24.

⁶² Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 12.

⁶³ Augustine, *On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins* 1.2.

⁶⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 2.13.

⁶⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 17.2-3.

⁶⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Beatitudes* 3.6.

Seth heads a line whose primary distinction is the onset of death, as lifespan gets shorter with each generation (Gen 5:6-32).⁶⁷ How did this happen? And how is it that these same traits have recurred in every human life since? For both Gregory and Augustine the answer is the same. Sin.

Sin, according to Gregory, is both the product and producer of evil. Evil itself is not a thing, so much as an absence of good, just as darkness is an absence of light, with sin the wilful action to choose the dark.⁶⁸ It is rooted in envy,⁶⁹ characterised by submission to "slavish passions,"⁷⁰ and marked by death⁷¹ and alienation from God.⁷² Consequently, when the first humans sinned they left a lasting legacy for all humanity to inherit.⁷³ This happened because, in turning away from God's virtue, His image was disfigured, as were the divine blessings: reason yielding to passion, immortality lost to death, and epektatic free will hindered by the distractions of the brute nature.⁷⁴ Each of the image blessings remain, but are diminished, and so God's image has become like a blade covered in rust, like people who slip into mud.⁷⁵

Augustine also described sin as the enactment of evil, which he spoke of subtly differently from Gregory, calling it a diminishment of good,⁷⁶ absent in its measurable goodness.⁷⁷ As we have seen, he identified its root in pride,⁷⁸ but the damage of sin itself occurred with the act of disobedience, for it was at this point that humanity's eyes were opened and were overcome with lusts (Gen 3:6-7).⁷⁹ Where this leaves humanity is in a state of spiritual desolation, with God's image almost utterly lost.⁸⁰ God's good creation took on "another nature of wicked spirit and mortal body,"⁸¹ such that not only death and sinful tendency, but even the guilt of that first sin was

⁶⁷ With the notable exceptions of Enoch (Gen 5:22-23) and Methuselah (Gen 5:26-27).

⁶⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 12.

⁶⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 2.257.

⁷⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 2.273.

⁷¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 2.307.

⁷² Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 2.13.

⁷³ "The whole procession of darkness entered into man's life for his undoing, and from a tiny source poured out upon mankind an infinite sea of evil." Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 12.

⁷⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 2.225-30.

⁷⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 12.

⁷⁶ Augustine, *Enchiridion* 11.

⁷⁷ Augustine, *Eighty-Three Questions* 6.

⁷⁸ Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 11.15.19.

⁷⁹ Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 11.31.40-42.

⁸⁰ Emphasis on "almost" - Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter* 48.

⁸¹ Augustine, *Concerning the Nature of Good* 2.

transmitted to the whole of humanity.⁸² This is original sin:⁸³ "The entire mass, therefore, incurs penalty and if the deserved punishment of condemnation were rendered to all, it would without doubt be righteously rendered."⁸⁴

We have already seen how the first evidence of original sin is found in Cain, but perhaps more significant is the only thing we are told about Seth: that he was made, not in the image of God, but of Adam (Gen 5:3). Augustine also pointed to Romans to support his argument, asserting that "many died through one man's trespass." (Rom 5:15).

In some regards, this is similar to Gregory's theology, inasmuch as both agree there is a radical shift in human nature that is suffered by all. However, while Gregory's depiction of sin is original in that all are affected by the consequences of that first sin, Augustine's assertion that humanity continues to bear the guilt of that first sin presses the devastation of the human soul further. Specifically, free will is disempowered to such an extent that none can escape their guilt and are destined only to deepen it,⁸⁵ adding to the original sin with their own actual sins. Gregory, on the other hand, insists that free will is maintained, lessened certainly by the inherited attraction to passions, but still sufficient for the soul to participate in its restoration. It is to this that we must finally turn.

Original salvation

Augustine's view of original sin as the transmission of "criminal nature"⁸⁶ presents a seemingly insurmountable problem, which is that God's punishment leads inevitably to even greater descent into sin, which itself must be punished. This punishment seems to all but discredit human free will. Countering this, however, is the all-surmounting "absolute priority of grace."⁸⁷ In His goodness, God forgives all who are converted to faith in Christ,⁸⁸ as they come under the covering sacrifice of his

⁸² Augustine, *City of God* 13.2-3.

⁸³ Ernesto Bonaiuti and Giorgio La Piana, "The Genesis of St Augustine's Idea of Original Sin," *Harvard Theological Review* 10 (1917): 159-75, p. 163.

⁸⁴ Augustine, *On Nature and Grace* 3-5.

⁸⁵ Bonaiuti and La Piana, "The Genesis of Augustine's Idea of Original Sin," 163.

⁸⁶ Augustine, *On Nature and Grace* 3.

⁸⁷ Williams, "Justification By Faith," 663.

⁸⁸ Augustine, *On Nature and Grace* 2.

death.⁸⁹ This grace is given freely to all who are baptised⁹⁰ and has the power not only to save, but to restore free will in its fullness,⁹¹ so that Christians can, as renewed images of God,⁹² pursue the Christ-likeness that is necessary to enter heaven.⁹³ With regards both justification and discipleship, this grace must be entered into, thereby restoring the relationship between God and humanity. Upon death, this same grace carries the baptised through the fire of judgement and purgatory into heaven and immortality.⁹⁴ Those who deny Christ, however, fail to participate in grace and are destroyed by those same flames.⁹⁵

Contrary to this vision of restored human freedom, Augustine has been criticised for his inclusion of predestination in his salvific framework, since it appears to strip free will from humanity as a whole, selecting only a few to receive personal freedom. However, this is not entirely fair, since the emphasis of his argument is on God's foreknowledge,⁹⁶ suggesting that Augustine's argument is actually that God has fully restored free will and extended it to all He foreknew would choose Him,⁹⁷ thereby restoring His image.

Gregory also recognised the need for God's grace and mercy, released through the death and resurrection of Jesus, but he saw this, not as God's way of relinquishing punishment, but as "the removal of what is foreign," healing and restoring God's image.⁹⁸ However, contrary to Augustine's view of free will, Gregory maintained that free will was never lost, only diminished. Indeed, free will is the ultimate solution to the problem as it is the voluntary sacrifice of the human Jesus that ushers in salvation. In response, it remains humanity's responsibility to follow God,⁹⁹ entering into grace by pursuing virtue.¹⁰⁰ This synergy of humanity and the

⁸⁹ Augustine, *Concerning the Nature of Good* 38.

⁹⁰ Augustine, *On Nature and Grace* 4; *On the Soul and its Origin* 1.13; *Confessions* 9.1; *On the Soul and its Origin* 1.9.

⁹¹ Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter* 52.

⁹² Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 6.19-20.

⁹³ Augustine, *On Faith and Works* 14.

⁹⁴ Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 6.20.31.

⁹⁵ Augustine, *Concerning the Nature of Good* 38; *On Grace and Free Will* 5.

⁹⁶ Augustine, *On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins* 2.47; *On Man's Perfection in Righteousness* 13.

⁹⁷ Augustine, *On Man's Perfection in Righteousness* 20; *On the Grace of Christ* 13.

⁹⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 12; *Great Catechism* 27.

⁹⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 2.252-53.

¹⁰⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Christian Mode of Life* in V.Callahan (trans), *St Gregory: Ascetical Works - Fathers of the Church Vol.58* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 131-2.

Spirit working together, joined by prayer,¹⁰¹ restores humanity to its original state (apokatastasis),¹⁰² conforming to Christ,¹⁰³ because he is the perfect image of the Father.¹⁰⁴

This seems to hold the high line of relationship that has been evident throughout Gregory's treatment of fallen humanity. However, at the very last moment he shrinks away from it, seemingly influenced by his Plotinic background¹⁰⁵ and certainly necessitated by his first assumption about humanity: that it collectively forms one image of God. This perfect inception is God's apocatastatic goal and so must include all souls, because of the "fixed goodness of His nature" overruling "the variableness of the human will."¹⁰⁶ In the end, Gregory's commitment to God's mercy compels this view of justice,¹⁰⁷ in which Jesus offers himself as a ransom for all humans,¹⁰⁸ so that all may pass through purgatory into immortality and the restoration of God's image.¹⁰⁹

Original relationship

Stepping back, then, to consider the whole journey, we find that Gregory and Augustine have taken different roads towards the same conclusion: that free will is essential to humanity's fall and restoration. It is God's greatest and riskiest gift, culminating in Christ's death, something He must have foreknown and deemed worth the cost. That said, they face different directions. Where Augustine's freedom was lost in the fall, it was found in God's grace; where Gregory's was maintained through the fall, it was lost in God's mercy. In each case, they underestimate relationship at critical moments.

Augustine's view of perfection by compliance leads to elevating God's warning (Gen 2:17) to the ultimate decree, broken on pain of death. However, there is

¹⁰¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Christian Mode of Life*, 137.

¹⁰² Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 17.2-4; Sachs, "Apocatastasis in Patristic Theology," 634.

¹⁰³ Gregory of Nyssa, *Song of Songs* 15.

¹⁰⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Faith* 1.

¹⁰⁵ Sachs, "Apocatastasis in Patristic Theology," 633.

¹⁰⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 20.

¹⁰⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 22.

¹⁰⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 23-24.

¹⁰⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 26; *On Virginity* 12.

evidence of problems in the divine-human relationship before this rule was broken. Genesis 3 begins with Eve beside the forbidden tree, followed by her failure to subdue the serpent and misrepresentation of God's words (Gen 3:1-3). Each represents a diminishment of God's image, exposing the problem in Eden not as a broken rule, but a broken relationship. Where Augustine argued that pride leads to sin, which is disobedience, the Eden narrative counters that pride *is* sin, which leads to disobedience. Gregory's argument for consequence is, therefore, more compelling, as is his vision for God's image to reflect, represent and resonate God; yet his assumption that God's image is corporate dilutes the strength of relationship he asserted in Eden. In this regard, Augustine elevates free will when it matters most, and discovers a God who never imposes Himself on those He chooses, so that when they choose Him what emerges is a genuine, powerful relationship.

Nevertheless, it remains true that both aspire to the restoration of relationship between God and His image, and it draws our gaze to see how both are correct. Gregory reveals the human narrative through human eyes, beholding God, desiring his virtue and living in His mercy. Augustine reveals God's image seen through God's eyes, watching over humanity, filled with compassion and grace. Both may have made mistakes that prevented them from delighting in the full panorama, but as we draw them together we are surely able to catch a glimpse.

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