

Gregory of Nyssa's *Great Catechism*

Quotations Related to Atonement: Chapters 8, 9, 15, 24 – 27, 29 – 32, 35, 37, 40

They who use the knife or cautery to remove certain unnatural excrescences in the body, such as wens or warts, do not bring to the person they are serving a method of healing that is painless, though certainly they apply the knife without any intention of injuring the patient. In like manner whatever material excrescences are hardening on our souls, that have been sensualized by fellowship with the body's affections, are, in the day of the judgment, as it were cut and scraped away by the ineffable wisdom and power of Him Who, as the Gospel says, "healeth those that are sick." For, as He says again, "they that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick." Since, then, there has been inbred in the soul a strong natural tendency to evil, it must suffer, just as the excision of a wart gives a sharp pain to the skin of the body; for whatever contrary to the nature has been inbred in the nature attaches itself to the subject in a certain union of feeling, and hence there is produced an abnormal intermixture of our own with an alien quality, so that the feelings, when the separation from this abnormal growth comes, are hurt and lacerated. Thus when the soul pines and melts away under the correction of its sins, as prophecy somewhere tells us, there necessarily follow, from its deep and intimate connection with evil, certain unspeakable and inexpressible pangs, the description of which is as difficult to render as is that of the nature of those good things which are the subjects of our hope. For neither the one nor the other is capable of being expressed in words, or brought within reach of the understanding. If, then, any one looks to the ultimate aim of the Wisdom of Him Who directs the economy of the universe, he would be very unreasonable and narrow-minded to call the Maker of man the Author of evil; or to say that He is ignorant of the future, or that, if He knows it and has made him, He is not uninfluenced by the impulse to what is bad. He knew what was going to be, yet did not prevent the tendency towards that which actually happened. That humanity, indeed, would be diverted from the good, could not be unknown to Him Who grasps all things by His power of foresight, and Whose eyes behold the coming equally with the past events. As, then, He had in sight the perversion, so He devised man's recall to good. Accordingly, which was the better way?—never to have brought our nature into existence at all, since He foresaw that the being about to be created would fall away from that which is morally beautiful; or to bring him back by repentance, **and restore his diseased nature to its original beauty?** But, because of the pains and sufferings of the body which are the necessary accidents of its unstable nature, to call God on that account the Maker of evil, or to think that He is not the Creator of man at all, in hopes thereby to prevent the supposition of His being the Author of what gives us pain,—all this is an instance of that extreme narrow-mindedness which is the mark of those who judge of moral good and moral evil by mere sensation. Such persons do not understand that that only is intrinsically good which sensation does not reach, and that the only evil is estrangement from the good. But to make pains and pleasures the criterion of what is morally good and the contrary, is a characteristic of the unreasoning nature of creatures in whom, from their want of mind and understanding, the apprehension of real goodness has no place. [...] **To whom belonged the restoration of the fallen one, the recovery of the lost, the leading back the wanderer by the hand? To whom else than entirely to Him Who is the Lord of his nature? For Him only Who at the first had given the life was it possible, or fitting, to recover it when lost. This is what we are taught and learn from the Revelation of the truth, that God in the beginning made man and saved him when he had fallen.**

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – c.395), *Great Catechism*, ch.8

Up to this point, perhaps, one who has followed the course of our argument will agree with it, inasmuch as it does not seem to him that anything has been said which is foreign to the proper conception of the Deity. But towards what follows and constitutes the strongest part of this Revelation of the truth, he will not be similarly disposed; the human birth, I mean, the growth of infancy to maturity, the eating and drinking, the fatigue and sleep, the sorrow and tears, the false accusation and judgment hall, the cross of death and consignment to the tomb. All these things, included as they are in this revelation, to a certain extent blunt the faith of the more narrow-minded, and so they reject the sequel itself in consequence of these antecedents. They will not allow that in the Resurrection from the dead there is anything consistent with the Deity, because of the unseemly circumstances of the Death. Well, I deem it necessary first of all to remove our thoughts for a moment from the grossness of the carnal element, and to fix them on what is morally beautiful in itself, and on what is not, and on the distinguishing marks by which each of them is to be apprehended. No one, I think, who has reflected will challenge the assertion that, in the whole nature of things, one thing only is disgraceful, and that is vicious weakness; while whatever has no connection with vice is a stranger to all disgrace; and whatever has no mixture in it of disgrace is certainly to be found on the side of the beautiful; and what is really beautiful has in it no mixture of its opposite. Now whatever is to be regarded as coming within the sphere of the beautiful becomes the character of God. Either, then, let them show that there was viciousness in His birth, His bringing up, His growth, **His progress to the perfection of His nature**, His experience

of death and return from death; or, if they allow that the aforesaid circumstances of His life remain outside the sphere of viciousness, they will perforce admit that there is nothing of disgrace in this that is foreign to viciousness. Since, then, what is thus removed from every disgraceful and vicious quality is abundantly shown to be morally beautiful, how can one fail to pity the folly of men who give it as their opinion that what is morally beautiful is not becoming in the case of God?

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – c.395), *Great Catechism*, ch.9

Even to this objection we are not at a loss for an answer consistent with our idea of God. You ask the reason why God was born among men. If you take away from life the benefits that come to us from God, you would not be able to tell me what means you have of arriving at any knowledge of Deity. In the kindly treatment of us we recognize the benefactor; that is, from observation of that which happens to us, we conjecture the disposition of the person who operates it. **If, then, love of man be a special characteristic of the Divine nature, here is the reason for which you are in search, here is the cause of the presence of God among men. Our diseased nature needed a healer. Man in his fall needed one to set him upright. He who had lost the gift of life stood in need of a life-giver, and he who had dropped away from his fellowship with good wanted one who would lead him back to good. He who was shut up in darkness longed for the presence of the light. The captive sought for a ransom, the fettered prisoner for some one to take his part, and for a deliverer he who was held in the bondage of slavery.** Were these, then, trifling or unworthy wants to importune the Deity to come down and take a survey of the nature of man, when mankind was so miserably and pitifully conditioned? “But,” it is replied, “man might have been benefited, and yet God might have continued in a passionless state. Was it not possible for Him Who in His wisdom framed the universe, and by the simple impulse of His will brought into subsistence that which was not, had it so pleased Him, by means of some direct Divine command to withdraw man from the reach of the opposing power, and bring him back to his primal state? Whereas He waits for long periods of time to come round, **He submits Himself to the condition of a human body, He enters upon the stage of life by being born, and after passing through each age of life in succession, and then tasting death, at last, only by the rising again of His own body, accomplishes His object,**—as if it was not optional to Him to fulfil His purpose without leaving the height of His Divine glory, and to save man by a single command, letting those long periods of time alone.” Needful, therefore, is it that in answer to objections such as these we should draw out the counter-statement of the truth, in order that no obstacle may be offered to the faith of those persons who will minutely examine the reasonableness of the gospel revelation. In the first place, then, as has been partially discussed before, let us consider what is that which, by the rule of contraries, is opposed to virtue. As darkness is the opposite of light, and death of life, so vice, and nothing else besides, is plainly the opposite of virtue. For as in the many objects in creation there is nothing which is distinguished by its opposition to light or life, but only the peculiar ideas which are their exact opposites, as darkness and death—not stone, or wood, or water, or man, or anything else in the world,—so, in the instance of virtue, it cannot be said that any created thing can be conceived of as contrary to it, but only the idea of vice. If, then, our Faith preached that the Deity had been begotten under vicious circumstances, an opportunity would have been afforded the objector of running down our belief, as that of persons who propounded incongruous and absurd opinions with regard to the Divine nature. For, indeed, it were blasphemous to assert that the Deity, Which is very wisdom, goodness, incorruptibility, and every other exalted thing in thought or word, had undergone change to the contrary. If, then, God is real and essential virtue, and no mere existence of any kind is logically opposed to virtue, but only vice is so; and if the Divine birth was not into vice, but into human existence; and if only vicious weakness is unseemly and shameful—and with such weakness neither was God born, nor had it in His nature to be born,—why are they scandalized at the confession that **God came into touch with human nature**, when in relation to virtue no contrariety whatever is observable in the organization of man? For neither Reason, nor Understanding, nor Receptivity for science, nor any other like quality proper to the essence of man, is opposed to the principle of virtue.

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – c.395), *Great Catechism*, ch.15

But possibly one who has given his attention to the course of the preceding remarks may inquire: “wherein is the power of the Deity, wherein is the imperishableness of that Divine power, to be traced in the processes you have described?” In order, therefore, to make this also clear, let us take a survey of the sequel of the Gospel mystery, where that Power conjoined with Love is more especially exhibited. In the first place, then, that the omnipotence of the Divine nature should have had strength to descend to the humiliation of humanity, furnishes a clearer proof of that omnipotence than even the greatness and supernatural character of the miracles. For that something pre-eminently great should be wrought out by Divine power is, in a manner, in accordance with, and consequent upon the Divine nature; nor is it startling to hear it said that the whole of the created world, and all that is understood to be beyond the range of visible things, subsists by the power of God, His will giving it existence according to His good

pleasure. But this His descent to the humility of man is a kind of superabundant exercise of power, which thus finds no check even in directions which contravene nature. **It is the peculiar property of the essence of fire to tend upwards; no one therefore, deems it wonderful in the case of flame to see that natural operation. But should the flame be seen to stream downwards, like heavy bodies, such a fact would be regarded as a miracle; namely, how fire still remains fire, and yet, by this change of direction in its motion, passes out of its nature by being borne downward. In like manner, it is not the vastness of the heavens, and the bright shining of its constellations, and the order of the universe and the unbroken administration over all existence that so manifestly displays the transcendent power of the Deity, as this condescension to the weakness of our nature; the way, in fact, in which sublimity, existing in lowliness, is actually seen in lowliness, and yet descends not from its height, and in which Deity, entwined as it is with the nature of man, becomes this, and yet still is that.** For since, as has been said before, it was not in the nature of the opposing power to come in contact with the undiluted presence of God, and to undergo His unclouded manifestation, therefore, in order to secure that the ransom in our behalf might be easily accepted by him who required it, the Deity was hidden under the veil of our nature, that so, as with ravenous fish [*The same simile is found in John of Damascus (De Fid. iii. 27), speaking of Death. "Therefore Death will advance, and, gulping down the bait of the Body, be transfixed with the hook of the Divinity: tasting that sinless and life-giving Body, he is undone, and disgorges all whom he has ever engulfed: for as darkness vanishes at the letting in of light, so corruption is chased away by the onset of life, and while there is life given to all else, there is corruption only for the Corrupter."], the hook of the Deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh, and thus, life being introduced into the house of death, and light shining in darkness, that which is diametrically opposed to light and life might vanish; for it is not in the nature of darkness to remain when light is present, or of death to exist when life is active. Let us, then, by way of summary take up the train of the arguments for the Gospel mystery, and thus complete our answer to those who question this Dispensation of God, and show them on what ground it is that the Deity by a personal intervention works out the salvation of man. It is certainly most necessary that in every point the conceptions we entertain of the Deity should be such as befit the subject, and not that, while one idea worthy of His sublimity should be retained, another equally belonging to that estimate of Deity should be dismissed from it; on the contrary, every exalted notion, every devout thought, must most surely enter into our belief in God, and each must be made dependent on each in a necessary sequence. Well, then; it has been pointed out that His goodness, wisdom, justice, power, incapability of decay, are all of them in evidence in the doctrine of the Dispensation in which we are. **His goodness is caught sight of in His election to save lost man; His wisdom and justice have been displayed in the method of our salvation; His power, in that, though born in the likeness and fashion of a man, on the lowly level of our nature, and in accordance with that likeness raising the expectation that he could be overmastered by death, he, after such a birth, nevertheless produced the effects peculiar and natural to Him. Now it is the peculiar effect of light to make darkness vanish, and of life to destroy death. Since, then, we have been led astray from the right path, and diverted from that life which was ours at the beginning, and brought under the sway of death, what is there improbable in the lesson we are taught by the Gospel mystery, if it be this; that cleansing reaches those who are befouled with sin, and life the dead, and guidance the wanderers, in order that defilement may be cleansed, error corrected, and what was dead restored to life?**

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – c.395), *Great Catechism*, ch.24

That Deity should be born in our nature, ought not reasonably to present any strangeness to the minds of those who do not take too narrow a view of things. For who, when he takes a survey of the universe, is so simple as not to believe that there is Deity in everything, penetrating it, embracing it, and seated in it? For all things depend on Him Who is [Ex.3:14], nor can there be anything which has not its being in Him Who is. If, therefore, all things are in Him, and He in all things, why are they scandalized at the plan of Revelation when it teaches that God was born among men, that same God Whom we are convinced is even now not outside mankind? For although this last form of God's presence amongst us is not the same as that former presence, still His existence amongst us equally both then and now is evidenced; only now **He Who holds together Nature in existence is transfused in us; while at that other time He was transfused throughout our nature, in order that our nature might by this transfusion of the Divine become itself divine, rescued as it was from death, and put beyond the reach of the caprice of the antagonist. For His return from death becomes to our mortal race the commencement of our return to the immortal life.**

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – c.395), *Great Catechism*, ch.25

For it is as when some worthless material has been mixed with gold, and the gold-refiners burn up the foreign and refuse part in the consuming fire, and so restore the more precious substance to its natural lustre: (not that the

separation is effected without difficulty, for it takes time for the fire by its melting force to cause the baser matter to disappear; but for all that, this melting away of the actual thing that was embedded in it to the injury of its beauty is a kind of healing of the gold.) **In the same way when death, and corruption, and darkness, and every other offshoot of evil had grown into the nature of the author of evil, the approach of the Divine power, acting like fire, and making that unnatural accretion to disappear, thus by purgation of the evil becomes a blessing to that nature, though the separation is agonizing.** Therefore even the adversary himself will not be likely to dispute that what took place was both just and salutary, that is, if he shall have attained to a perception of the boon. For it is now as with those who for their cure are subjected to the knife and the cautery; they are angry with the doctors, and wince with the pain of the incision; but if recovery of health be the result of this treatment, and the pain of the cautery passes away, they will feel grateful to those who have wrought this cure upon them. In like manner, when, after long periods of time, the evil of our nature, which now is mixed up with it and has grown with its growth, has been expelled, and when there has been a restoration of those who are now lying in Sin to their primal state, a harmony of thanksgiving will arise from all creation, as well from those who in the process of the purgation have suffered chastisement, as from those who needed not any purgation at all. **These and the like benefits the great mystery of the Divine incarnation bestows. For in those points in which He was mingled with humanity, passing as He did through all the accidents proper to human nature, such as birth, rearing, growing up, and advancing even to the taste of death, He accomplished all the results before mentioned, freeing both man from evil, and healing even the introducer of evil himself. For the chastisement, however painful, of moral disease is a healing of its weakness.**

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – c.395), *Great Catechism*, ch.26

It is, then, completely in keeping with this, that He Who was thus pouring Himself into our nature should accept this commixture in all its accidents. For as they who wash clothes do not pass over some of the dirt and cleanse the rest, but clear the whole cloth from all its stains, from one end to the other, that the cloak by being uniformly brightened from washing may be throughout equal to its own standard of cleanness, in like manner, since the life of man was defiled by sin, in its beginning, end, and all its intermediate states, there needed an abstergent force to penetrate the whole, and not to mend some one part by cleansing, while it left another unattended to. For this reason it is that, seeing that our life has been included between boundaries on either side, one, I mean, at its beginning, and the other at its ending, at each boundary the force that is capable of correcting our nature is to be found, attaching itself to the beginning, and extending to the end, and touching all between those two points [*“**In order that the sacrifice might be representative, He took upon Him the whole of our human nature and became flesh, conditioned though that fleshly nature was throughout by sin. It was not only in His death that we contemplate Him as the sin-bearer: but throughout His life He was as it were conditioned by the sinfulness of those with whom His human nature brought Him into close and manifold relations.**”—Lux Mundi, p. 217 (Augustine, de Musica, vi. 4, quoted in note, “Hominem sine peccato, non sine peccatoris conditione, suscepit”).]. Since, then, there is for all men only one way of entrance into this life of ours, from whence was He Who was making His entrance amongst us to transport Himself into our life? From heaven, perhaps some one will say, who rejects with contempt, as base and degraded, this species of birth, i.e. the human. But there was no humanity in heaven: and in that supramundane existence no disease of evil had been naturalized; but **He Who poured Himself into man adopted this commixture with a view to the benefit of it.** Where, then, evil was not and the human life was not lived, how is it that any one seeks there the scene of this wrapping up of God in man, or, rather, not man, but some phantom resemblance of man? **In what could the recovery of our nature have consisted if, while this earthly creature was diseased and needed this recovery, something else, amongst the heavenly beings, had experienced the Divine sojourning? It is impossible for the sick man to be healed, unless his suffering member receives the healing. If, therefore, while this sick part was on earth, omnipotence had touched it not, but had regarded only its own dignity, this its pre-occupation with matters with which we had nothing in common would have been of no benefit to man. And with regard to the undignified in the case of Deity we can make no distinction; that is, if it is allowable to conceive at all of anything beneath the dignity of Deity beside evil. On the contrary, for one who forms such a narrow-minded view of the greatness of the Deity as to make it consist in inability to admit of fellowship with the peculiarities of our nature, the degradation is in no point lessened by the Deity being conformed to the fashion of a heavenly rather than of an earthly body. For every created being is distant, by an equal degree of inferiority, from that which is the Highest, Who is unapproachable by reason of the sublimity of His Being: the whole universe is in value the same distance beneath Him.** For that which is absolutely inaccessible does not allow access to some one thing while it is unapproachable by another, but it transcends all existences by an equal sublimity. Neither, therefore, is the earth further removed from this dignity, nor the heavens closer to it, nor do the things which have their existence within each of these elemental worlds differ at

all from each other in this respect, that some are allowed to be in contact with the inaccessible Being, while others are forbidden the approach. Otherwise we must suppose that the power which governs the Universe does not equally pervade the whole, but in some parts is in excess, in others is deficient. Consequently, by this difference of less or more in quantity or quality, the Deity will appear in the light of something composite and out of agreement with itself; if, that is, we could suppose it, as viewed in its essence, to be far away from us, whilst it is a close neighbour to some other creature, and from that proximity easily apprehended. But on this subject of that exalted dignity true reason looks neither downward nor upward in the way of comparison; for all things sink to a level beneath the power which presides over the Universe: so that if it shall be thought by them that any earthly nature is unworthy of this intimate connection with the Deity, neither can any other be found which has such worthiness. **But if all things equally fall short of this dignity, one thing there is that is not beneath the dignity of God, and that is, to do good to him that needed it. If we confess, then, that where the disease was, there the healing power attended, what is there in this belief which is foreign to the proper conception of the Deity?**

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – c.395), *Great Catechism*, ch.27

But they change their ground and endeavour to vilify our faith in another way. They ask, if what took place was not to the dishonour of God or unworthy of Him, why did He delay the benefit so long? **Why, since evil was in the beginning, did He not cut off its further progress?**—To this we have a concise answer; viz. that this delay in conferring the benefit was owing to wisdom and a provident regard for that which would be a gain for our nature. **In diseases, for instance, of the body, when some corrupt humour spreads unseen beneath the pores, before all the unhealthy secretion has been detected on the skin, they who treat diseases by the rules of art do not use such medicines as would harden the flesh, but they wait till all that lurks within comes out upon the surface, and then, with the disease unmasked, apply their remedies. When once, then, the disease of evil had fixed itself in the nature of mankind, He, the universal Healer, waited for the time when no form of wickedness was left still hidden in that nature.** For this reason it was that He did not produce his healing for man's disease immediately on Cain's hatred and murder of his brother; for the wickedness of those who were destroyed in the days of Noah had not yet burst into a flame, nor had that terrible disease of Sodomite lawlessness been displayed, nor the Egyptians' war against God [*θεομαχία, a word often applied by the Greek Fathers to the conduct of the Egyptians, in reference, of course, to Pharaoh], nor the pride of Assyria, nor the Jews' bloody persecution of God's saints, nor Herod's cruel murder of the children, nor whatever else is recorded, or if unrecorded was done in the generations that followed, the root of evil budding forth in divers manners in the wilful purposes of man. When, then, wickedness had reached its utmost height, and there was no form of wickedness which men had not dared to do, **to the end that the healing remedy might pervade the whole of the diseased system, He, accordingly, ministers to the disease; not at its beginning, but when it had been completely developed.**

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – c.395), *Great Catechism*, ch.29

If, however, any one thinks to refute our argument on this ground, that even after the application of the remedial process the life of man is still in discord through its errors, let us lead him to the truth by an example taken from familiar things. Take, for instance, the case of a serpent; if it receives a deadly blow on the head, the hinder part of the coil is not at once deadened along with it; but, while the head is dead, the tail part is still animated with its own particular spirit, and is not deprived of its vital motion: in like manner we may see Sin struck its deadly blow and yet in its remainders still vexing the life of man. But then they give up finding fault with the account of Revelation on these points, and make another charge against it; viz. that the Faith does not reach all mankind. "But why is it," they ask, "that all men do not obtain the grace, but that, while some adhere to the Word, the portion who remain unbelieving is no small one; either because God was unwilling to bestow his benefit ungrudgingly upon all, or because He was altogether unable to do so?" Now neither of these alternatives can defy criticism. For it is unworthy of God, either that He should not will what is good, or that He should be unable to do it. "If, therefore, the Faith is a good thing, why," they ask, "does not its grace come upon all men?" Now, if in our representation of the Gospel mystery we had so stated the matter as that it was the Divine will that the Faith should be so granted away amongst mankind that some men should be called, while the rest had no share in the calling, occasion would be given for bringing such a charge against this Revelation. [*The following passage is anti-Calvinistic. Gregory here, as continually elsewhere, asserts the freedom of the will; and is strongly supported by Justin Martyr, i. 43: "If it has been fixed by fate that one man shall be good, and another bad, the one is not praiseworthy, the other not culpable. And again, if mankind has not power by a free choice to flee the evil and to choose the good, it is not responsible for any results, however shocking."] But if the call came with equal meaning to all and makes no distinction as to worth, age, or different national characteristics (for it was for this reason that at the very first beginning of the proclamation of the Gospel they who ministered the Word were, by Divine inspiration, all at once enabled to speak in the

language of any nation, viz. in order that no one might be destitute of a share in the blessings of evangelical instruction), with what reasonableness can they still charge it upon God that the Word has not influenced all mankind? For He Who holds the sovereignty of the universe, out of the excess of this regard for man, permitted something to be under our own control, of which each of us alone is master. Now this is the will, a thing that cannot be enslaved, and of self-determining power, since it is seated in the liberty of thought and mind. Therefore such a charge might more justly be transferred to those who have not attached themselves to the Faith, instead of resting on Him Who has called them to believe. For even when Peter at the beginning preached the Gospel in a crowded assembly of the Jews, and three thousand at once received the Faith, though those who disbelieved were more in number than the believers, they did not attach blame to the Apostle on the ground of their disbelief. It was, indeed, not in reason, when the grace of the Gospel had been publicly set forth, for one who had absented himself from it of his own accord to lay the blame of his exclusion on another rather than himself.

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – c.395), *Great Catechism*, ch.30

Yet, even in their reply to this, or the like, they are not at a loss for a contentious rejoinder. For they assert that God, if He had been so pleased, might have forcibly drawn those, who were not inclined to yield, to accept the Gospel message. But where then would have been their free will? Where their virtuous merit? Where their need of praise from their moral directors? It belongs only to inanimate or irrational creatures to be brought round by the will of another to his purpose; whereas the reasoning and intelligent nature, if it lays aside its freedom of action, loses at the same time the gracious gift of intellect. For upon what is he to employ any faculty of thought, if his power of choosing anything according to his inclination lies in the will of another? But then, if the will remains without the capacity of action, virtue necessarily disappears, since it is shackled by the enforced quiescence of the will. Then, if virtue does not exist, life loses its value, reason moves in accordance with fatalism, the praise of moral guardians is gone, sin may be indulged in without risk, and the difference between the courses of life is obliterated. For who, henceforth, could with any reason condemn profligacy, or praise sobriety? Since every one would have this ready answer, that nothing of all the things we are inclined to is in our own power, but that by some superior and ruling influence the wills of men are brought round to the purpose of one who has the mastery over them. The conclusion, then is that it is not the goodness of God that is chargeable with the fact that the Faith is not engendered in all men, but rather the disposition of those by whom the preaching of the Word is received.

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – c.395), *Great Catechism*, ch.31

What other objection is alleged by our adversaries? This; that (to take the preferable view) it was altogether needless that that transcendent Being should submit to the experience of death, but He might independently of this, through the superabundance of His power, have wrought with ease His purpose; still, if for some ineffable reason or other it was absolutely necessary that so it should be, at least He ought not to have been subjected to the contumely of such an ignominious kind of death. **What death, they ask, could be more ignominious than that by crucifixion? What answer can we make to this? Why, that the death is rendered necessary by the birth, and that He Who had determined once for all to share the nature of man must pass through all the peculiar conditions of that nature. Seeing, then, that the life of man is determined between two boundaries, had He, after having passed the one, not touched the other that follows, His proposed design would have remained only half fulfilled, from His not having touched that second condition of our nature. Perhaps, however, one who exactly understands the mystery would be justified rather in saying that, instead of the death occurring in consequence of the birth, the birth on the contrary was accepted by Him for the sake of the death; for He Who lives for ever did not sink down into the conditions of a bodily birth from any need to live, but to call us back from death to life. Since, then, there was needed a lifting up from death for the whole of our nature, He stretches forth a hand as it were to prostrate man, and stooping down to our dead corpse He came so far within the grasp of death as to touch a state of deadness, and then in His own body to bestow on our nature the principle of the resurrection, raising as He did by His power along with Himself the whole man. For since from no other source than from the concrete lump of our nature** [*Cf. Rom. ix. 21: φύραμα is used for the human body often in the Greek Fathers, i.e. Athanasius, Chrysostom, John Damascene: by all of whom Christ is called ἀπαρχή τοῦ ἡμετέρου φουράματος. Cf. Gen. ii. 7; Job x. 9: Epictetus also calls the human body πηλοῦ κομψῶς πεφουραμένον] had come that flesh, which was the receptacle of the Godhead and in the resurrection was raised up together with that Godhead, therefore just in the same way as, in the instance of this body of ours, the operation of one of the organs of sense is felt at once by the whole system, as one with that member, so also the resurrection principle of this Member, as though the whole of mankind was a single living being, passes through the entire race, being imparted from the Member to the whole by virtue of the continuity and oneness of the nature. What, then, is there beyond the bounds of probability in what this Revelation teaches us; viz. that He Who stands upright stoops to one

who has fallen, in order to lift him up from his prostrate condition? **And as to the Cross, whether it possesses some other and deeper meaning, those who are skilled in mysticism may explain; but, however that may be, the traditional teaching which has reached us is as follows. Since all things in the Gospel, both deeds and words, have a sublime and heavenly meaning, and there is nothing in it which is not such, that is, which does not exhibit a complete mingling of the human with the Divine, where the utterance exerted and the deeds enacted are human but the secret sense represents the Divine, it would follow that in this particular as well as in the rest we must not regard only the one element and overlook the other; but in the fact of this death we must contemplate the human feature, while in the manner of it we must be anxious to find the Divine** [**ἐν μὲν τῷ θανάτῳ καθορῆν τὸ ἀνθρώπινον, ἐν δὲ τῷ τρόπῳ πολυπραγμονεῖν τὸ θεϊότερον.* This is Krabinger's reading (for ἐν τῷ ἀθανάτῳ...ἐν δὲ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ) on the authority of Theodoret's quotation and two Codd. for the first, and of all his Codd. for the second. Hervetus also seems to have read the same, "in morte quidem quod est humanum intueri, in modo autem perscrutari quod est divinius." Glauber, however, translates the common text, "Man muss bei dem Unsterblichen zwar das Menschliche betrachten, aber bei dem Menschen auch das Göttliche hervorsuchen:" notwithstanding that he hints his preference for another reading, σκοπῶ for this last; cf. just above, "but the secret sense represents the Divine," which would then be parallel to this last sentence.]. **For since it is the property of the Godhead to pervade all things, and to extend itself through the length and breadth of the substance of existence in every part—for nothing would continue to be if it remained not within the existent; and that which is this existent properly and primarily is the Divine Being, Whose existence in the world the continuance of all things that are forces us to believe in,—this is the very thing we learn from the figure of the Cross; it is divided into four parts, so that there are the projections, four in number, from the central point where the whole converges upon itself; because He Who at the hour of His pre-arranged death was stretched upon it is He Who binds together all things into Himself, and by Himself brings to one harmonious agreement the diverse natures of actual existences. For in these existences there is the idea either of something above, or of something below, or else the thought passes to the confines sideways. If, therefore, you take into your consideration the system of things above the heavens or of things below the earth, or of things at the boundaries of the universe on either side, everywhere the presence of Deity anticipates your thought as the sole observable power that in every part of existing things holds in a state of being all those things.** Now whether we ought to call this Existence Deity, or Mind, or Power, or Wisdom, or any other lofty term which might be better able to express Him Who is above all, our argument has no quarrel with the appellation or name or form of phrase used. Since, then, all creation looks to Him, and is about and around Him, and through Him is coherent with itself, things above being through Him conjoined to things below and things lateral to themselves, it was right that not by hearing only we should be conducted to the full understanding of the Deity, but that sight also should be our teacher in these sublime subjects for thought; and it is from sight that the mighty Paul starts when he initiates the people of Ephesus in the mysteries [Eph.3:18], and imbues them through his instructions with the power of knowing what is that "depth and height and breadth and length." In fact he designates each projection of the Cross by its proper appellation. The upper part he calls height, the lower depth, and the side extensions breadth and length; and in another passage [Phil.2:10] he makes his thought still clearer to the Philippians, to whom he says, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth." In that passage he includes in one appellation the centre and projecting arms, calling "things in earth" all that is in the middle between things in heaven and things under the earth. Such is the lesson we learn in regard to the mystery of the Cross. And the subsequent events which the narrative contains follow so appropriately that, as even unbelievers must admit, there is nothing in them adverse to the proper conceptions of the Deity. That He did not abide in death, that the wounds which His body had received from the iron of the nails and spear offered no impediment to His rising again, that after His resurrection He showed Himself as He pleased to His disciples, that when He wished to be present with them He was in their midst without being seen, as needing no entrance through open doors, and that He strengthened the disciples by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and that He promised to be amongst them, and that no partition wall should intervene between them and Him, and that to the sight He ascended to Heaven while to the mind He was everywhere; all these, and whatever like facts the history of Him comprises, need no assistance from arguments to show that they are signs of deity and of a sublime and supereminent power. With regard to them therefore I do not deem it necessary to go into any detail, inasmuch as their description of itself shows the supernatural character. But since the dispensation of the washing (whether we choose to call it baptism, or illumination, or regeneration; for we make the name no subject of controversy) is a part of our revealed doctrines, it may be as well to enter on a short discussion of this as well.

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – c.395), *Great Catechism*, ch.32

But the descent into the water, and the trine immersion of the person in it, involves another mystery. **For since the**

method of our salvation was made effectual not so much by His precepts in the way of teaching as by the deeds of Him Who has realized an actual fellowship with man, and has effected life as a living fact, so that by means of the flesh which He has assumed, and at the same time deified [*the flesh which He has assumed, and at the same time deified. “Un terme cher aux Pères du IV^e siècle, de nous déifier” (Denis, Philosophie d’Origène, p. 458). This θεοποίησις or θεώσις is more than a metaphor even from the first; “vere fideles vocantur θεοί, non naturā quidem, sed τῆ ὁμοιώσει, ait Athanasius;” Casaubon, In Epist. ad Eustath. “We become ‘gods’ by grasping the Divine power and substance;” Clement, Stromata, iv. That the Platonists had thus used the word of τὸ πρὸς μείζονα δόξαν ἀνωψωθὲν is clear. Synesius in one of his Hymns says to his soul:— “Soon commingled with the Father Thou shalt dance a ‘god’ with God.” Just as elsewhere (in Dione, p. 50) he says, “it is not sufficient not to be bad; each must be even a ‘god.’” Cf. also Gregory Thaum. Panegy. Origenis, §142. When we come to the Fathers of the 4th century and later, these words are used more especially of the work of the Holy Spirit upon man. Cf. Cyrill. Alex.: “If to be able to ‘deify’ is a greater thing than a creature can do, and if the Spirit does ‘deify,’ how can he be created or anything but God, seeing that he ‘deifies’?” “If the Spirit is not God,” says Gregory Naz., “let him first be deified, and then let him deify me his equal;” where two things are implied, 1. that the recognized work of the Holy Spirit is to ‘deify,’ 2. that this “deification” is not Godhead. It is “the comparative god-making” of Dionysius Areopag. whereby we are “partakers of the Divine nature” (2 Pet. i. 4). On the word as applied to the human nature of our Saviour Himself, Huet (Origeniana, ii. 3, c. 17), in discussing the statement of Origen, in his Commentary on S. Matthew (Tract 27), that “Christ after His resurrection ‘deified’ the human nature which He had taken,” remarks, “If we take this word so as to make Origen mean that the Word was changed into the human nature, and that the flesh itself was changed into God and made of the same substance as the Word, he will clearly be guilty of that deadly error which Apollinaris brought into the Church (i.e. that the Saviour’s soul is not ‘reasonable,’ nor His flesh human); or rather of the heresy perpetrated by some sects of the Eutychians, who asserted that the human nature was changed into the Divine after the Resurrection. **But if we take him to mean that Christ’s human nature, after being divested of weakness after death, assumed a certain Divine quality, we shall be doing Him no wrong.**” He then quotes a line from Gregory’s Iambics:— “The thing ‘deifying,’ and the thing ‘deified,’ are one God:” and this is said even of Christ’s Incarnation; how much more then can it be said of His Resurrection state, as in this passage of the Great Catechism? Huet adds one of Origen’s answers to Celsus: “**His mortal body and the human soul in Him, by virtue of their junction or rather union and blending with that (deity), assumed, we assert, qualities of the very greatest kind.... What incredibility is there in the quality of mortality in the body of Jesus changing, when God so planned and willed it, into an ethereal and Divine**” (i.e. the matter, as the receptacle of these qualities, remaining the same)? It is in this sense that Chrysostom can say that “Christ came to us, and took upon Him our nature and deified it;” and Augustine, “your humanity received the name of that deity” (contr. Arian.).], everything kindred and related may be saved along with it, it was necessary that some means should be devised by which there might be, in the baptismal process, a kind of affinity and likeness between him who follows and Him Who leads the way. Needful, therefore, is it to see what features are to be observed in the Author of our life, in order that the imitation on the part of those that follow may be regulated, as the Apostle says, after the pattern of the Captain of our salvation. For, as it is they who are actually drilled into measured and orderly movements in arms by skilled drill-masters, who are advanced to dexterity in handling their weapons by what they see with their eyes, whereas he who does not practise what is shown him remains devoid of such dexterity, in the same way it is imperative on all those who have an equally earnest desire for the Good as He has, to be followers by the path of an exact imitation of Him Who leads the way to salvation, and to carry into action what He has shown them. It is, in fact, impossible for persons to reach the same goal unless they travel by the same ways. For as persons who are at a loss how to thread the turns of mazes, when they happen to fall in with some one who has experience of them, get to the end of those various misleading turnings in the chambers by following him behind, which they could not do, did they not follow him their leader step by step, so too, I pray you mark, the labyrinth of this our life cannot be threaded by the faculties of human nature unless a man pursues that same path as He did Who, though once in it, yet got beyond the difficulties which hemmed Him in. I apply this figure of a labyrinth to that prison of death, which is without an egress [*ἀδιέξοδον...φρουράν. Krabinger’s excellent reading. Cf. Plato, Phæd. p. 62 B, “We men are in a sort of prison.”] and environs the wretched race of mankind. What, then, have we beheld in the case of the Captain of our salvation? A three days’ state of death and then life again. Now some sort of resemblance in us to such things has to be planned. What, then, is the plan by which in us too a resemblance to that which took place in Him is completed? Everything that is affected by death has its proper and natural place, and that is the earth in which it is laid and hidden. Now earth and water have much mutual affinity. Alone of the elements they have weight and gravitate downwards; they mutually abide in each other; they are mutually confined. Seeing, then, the death of the Author of our life subjected Him to burial in earth and was in accord with our common nature, the imitation which we enact of that death is expressed in the neighbouring element. And as He, that Man from above [Jn.3:31; 1

Cor.15:47], having taken deadness on Himself, after His being deposited in the earth, returned back to life the third day, so every one who is knitted to Him by virtue of his bodily form, looking forward to the same successful issue, I mean this arriving at life by having, instead of earth, water poured on him, and so submitting to that element, has represented for him in the three movements the three-days delayed grace of the resurrection. **Something like this has been said in what has gone before, namely, that by the Divine providence death has been introduced as a dispensation into the nature of man, so that, sin having flowed away at the dissolution of the union of soul and body, man, through the resurrection, might be refashioned, sound, passionless, stainless, and removed from any touch of evil. In the case however of the Author of our Salvation this dispensation of death reached its fulfilment, having entirely accomplished its special purpose. For in His death, not only were things that once were one put asunder, but also things that had been disunited were again brought together; so that in this dissolution of things that had naturally grown together, I mean, the soul and body, our nature might be purified, and this return to union of these severed elements might secure freedom from the contamination of any foreign admixture. But as regards those who follow this Leader, their nature does not admit of an exact and entire imitation, but it receives now as much as it is capable of receiving, while it reserves the remainder for the time that comes after.** In what, then, does this imitation consist? It consists in the effecting the suppression of that admixture of sin, in the figure of mortification that is given by the water, not certainly a complete effacement, but a kind of break in the continuity of the evil, two things concurring to this removal of sin—the penitence of the transgressor and his imitation of the death. By these two things the man is in a measure freed from his congenital tendency to evil; by his penitence he advances to a hatred of and averseness from sin, and by his death he works out the suppression of the evil. But had it been possible for him in his imitation to undergo a complete dying, the result would be not imitation but identity; and the evil of our nature would so entirely vanish that, as the Apostle says, “he would die unto sin once for all [Rom.6:10].” But since, as has been said, we only so far imitate the transcendent Power as the poverty of our nature is capable of, by having the water thrice poured on us and ascending again up from the water, we enact that saving burial and resurrection which took place on the third day, with this thought in our mind, that as we have power over the water both to be in it and arise out of it, so He too, Who has the universe at His sovereign disposal, immersed Himself in death, as we in the water, to return [Phil.1:23] to His own blessedness. If, therefore, one looks to that which is in reason, and judges of the results according to the power inherent in either party, one will discover no disproportion in these results, each in proportion to the measure of his natural power working out the effects that are within his reach. For, as it is in the power of man, if he is so disposed, to touch the water and yet be safe, with infinitely greater ease may death be handled by the Divine Power so as to be in it and yet not to be changed by it injuriously. Observe, then, that it is necessary for us to rehearse beforehand in the water the grace of the resurrection, to the intent that we may understand that, as far as facility goes, it is the same thing for us to be baptized with water and to rise again from death. But as in matters that concern our life here, there are some which take precedence of others, as being those without which the result could not be achieved, although if the beginning be compared with the end, the beginning so contrasted will seem of no account (for what equality, for instance, is there between the man and that which is laid as a foundation for the constitution of his animal being? And yet if that had never been, neither would this be which we see), in like manner that which happens in the great resurrection, essentially vaster though it be, has its beginnings and its causes here; it is not, in fact, possible that that should take place, unless this had gone before; I mean, that without the laver of regeneration it is impossible for the man to be in the resurrection; but in saying this I do not regard the mere remoulding and refashioning of our composite body; for towards this it is absolutely necessary that human nature should advance, being constrained thereto by its own laws according to the dispensation of Him Who has so ordained, whether it have received the grace of the laver, or whether it remains without that initiation: but I am thinking of the restoration to a blessed and divine condition, separated from all shame and sorrow. For not everything that is granted in the resurrection a return to existence will return to the same kind of life. There is a wide interval between those who have been purified, and those who still need purification. For those in whose lifetime here the purification by the laver has preceded, there is a restoration to a kindred state. Now, to the pure, freedom from passion is that kindred state, and that in this freedom from passion blessedness consists, admits of no dispute. But as for those whose weaknesses have become inveterate, and to whom no purgation of their defilement has been applied, no mystic water, no invocation of the Divine power, no amendment by repentance, it is absolutely necessary that they should come to be in something proper to their case,—just as the furnace is the proper thing for gold alloyed with dross,—in order that, the vice which has been mixed up in them being melted away after long succeeding ages, their nature may be restored pure again to God. Since, then, there is a cleansing virtue in fire and water, they who by the mystic water have washed away the defilement of their sin have no further need of the other form of purification, while they who have not been admitted to that form of purgation must needs be purified by fire.

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – c.395), *Great Catechism*, ch.35

But since the human being is a twofold creature, compounded of soul and body, it is necessary that the saved should lay hold of the Author of the new life through both their component parts. Accordingly, the soul being fused into Him through faith derives from that the means and occasion of salvation; for the act of union with the life implies a fellowship with the life. But the body comes into fellowship and blending with the Author of our salvation in another way. For as they who owing to some act of treachery have taken poison, allay its deadly influence by means of some other drug (for it is necessary that the antidote should enter the human vitals in the same way as the deadly poison, in order to secure, through them, that the effect of the remedy may be distributed through the entire system), in like manner **we, who have tasted the solvent of our nature** [*Gregory seems here to refer to Eve's eating the apple, which introduced a moral and physical poison into our nature. General Gordon's thoughts ("in Palestine") took the same direction as the whole of this passage; which Fronto Ducæus (as quoted by Krabinger) would even regard as a proof of transubstantiation], **necessarily need something that may combine what has been so dissolved, so that such an antidote entering within us may, by its own counter-influence, undo the mischief introduced into the body by the poison. What, then, is this remedy to be? Nothing else than that very Body which has been shown to be superior to death, and has been the First-fruits of our life. For, in the manner that, as the Apostle says, a little leaven assimilates to itself the whole lump [1 Cor.5:6], so in like manner that body to which immortality has been given it by God, when it is in ours, translates and transmutes the whole into itself. For as by the admixture of a poisonous liquid with a wholesome one the whole drought is deprived of its deadly effect, so too the immortal Body, by being within that which receives it, changes the whole to its own nature. Yet in no other way can anything enter within the body but by being transfused through the vitals by eating and drinking. It is, therefore, incumbent on the body to admit this life-producing power in the one way that its constitution makes possible. And since that Body only which was the receptacle of the Deity received this grace of immortality, and since it has been shown that in no other way was it possible for our body to become immortal, but by participating in incorruption through its fellowship with that immortal Body, it will be necessary to consider how it was possible that that one Body, being for ever portioned to so many myriads of the faithful throughout the whole world, enters through that portion, whole into each individual, and yet remains whole in itself.** In order, therefore, that our faith, with eyes fixed on logical probability, may harbour no doubt on the subject before us, it is fitting to make a slight digression in our argument, to consider the physiology of the body. Who is there that does not know that our bodily frame, taken by itself, possesses no life in its own proper subsistence, but that it is by the influx of a force or power from without that it holds itself together and continues in existence, and by a ceaseless motion that it draws to itself what it wants, and repels what is superfluous? When a leathern bottle is full of some liquid, and then the contents leak out at the bottom, it would not retain the contour of its full bulk unless there entered in at the top something else to fill up the vacuum; and thus a person, seeing the circumference of this bottle swollen to its full size, would know that this circumference did not really belong to the object which he sees, but that what was being poured in, by being in it, gave shape and roundness to the bulk. In the same way the mere framework of our body possesses nothing belonging to itself that is cognizable by us, to hold it together, but remains in existence owing to a force that is introduced into it. Now this power or force both is, and is called, nourishment. But it is not the same in all bodies that require aliment, but to each of them has been assigned a food adapted to its condition by Him who governs Nature. Some animals feed on roots which they dig up. Of others grass is the food, of others different kinds of flesh, but for man above all things bread; and, in order to continue and preserve the moisture of his body, drink, not simply water, but water frequently sweetened with wine, to join forces with our internal heat. He, therefore, who thinks of these things, thinks by implication [*δυνάμει] of the particular bulk of our body. For those things by being within me became my blood and flesh, the corresponding nutriment by its power of adaptation being changed into the form of my body. With these distinctions we must return to the consideration of the question before us. The question was, how can that one Body of Christ vivify the whole of mankind, all, that is, in whomsoever there is Faith, and yet, though divided amongst all, be itself not diminished? Perhaps, then, we are now not far from the probable explanation. If the subsistence of every body depends on nourishment, and this is eating and drinking, and in the case of our eating there is bread and in the case of our drinking water sweetened with wine, and if, as was explained at the beginning, the Word of God, Who is both God and the Word, coalesced with man's nature, and when He came in a body such as ours did not innovate on man's physical constitution so as to make it other than it was, but secured continuance for His own body by the customary and proper means, and controlled its subsistence by meat and drink, the former of which was bread,—just, then, as in the case of ourselves, as has been repeatedly said already, if a person sees bread he also, in a kind of way, looks on a human body, for by the bread being within it the bread becomes it, so also, in that other case, the body into which God entered, by partaking of the nourishment of bread, was, in a certain measure, the same with it; that nourishment, as we have said, changing itself into the nature of the

body. For that which is peculiar to all flesh is acknowledged also in the case of that flesh, namely, that that Body too was maintained by bread; which Body also by the indwelling of God the Word was transmuted to the dignity of Godhead. Rightly, then, do we believe that now also the bread which is consecrated by the Word of God is changed into the Body of God the Word. For that Body was once, by implication, bread, but has been consecrated by the inhabitation of the Word that tabernacled in the flesh. Therefore, from the same cause as that by which the bread that was transformed in that Body was changed to a Divine potency, a similar result takes place now. For as in that case, too, the grace of the Word used to make holy the Body, the substance of which came of the bread, and in a manner was itself bread, so also in this case the bread, as says the Apostle, “is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer” [1 Tim.6:5]; not that it advances by the process of eating to the stage of passing into the body of the Word, but it is at once changed into the body by means of the Word, as the Word itself said, “This is My Body.” Seeing, too, that all flesh is nourished by what is moist (for without this combination our earthly part would not continue to live), just as we support by food which is firm and solid the solid part of our body, in like manner we supplement the moist part from the kindred element; and this, when within us, by its faculty of being transmitted, is changed to blood, and especially if through the wine it receives the faculty of being transmuted into heat. Since, then, that God-containing flesh partook for its substance and support of this particular nourishment also, and since the God who was manifested infused Himself into perishable humanity for this purpose, viz. that by this communion with Deity mankind might at the same time be deified, for this end it is that, by dispensation of His grace, He disseminates Himself in every believer through that flesh, whose substance comes from bread and wine, blending Himself with the bodies of believers, to secure that, by this union with the immortal, man, too, may be a sharer in incorruption. He gives these gifts by virtue of the benediction through which He transelements the natural quality of these visible things to that immortal thing.

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – c.395), *Great Catechism*, ch.37

Indeed, the sinner’s life of torment presents no equivalent to anything that pains the sense here. Even if some one of the punishments in that other world be named in terms that are well known here, the distinction is still not small. When you hear the word fire, you have been taught to think of a fire other than the fire we see, owing to something being added to that fire which in this there is not; for that fire is never quenched, whereas experience has discovered many ways of quenching this; and there is a great difference between a fire which can be extinguished, and one that does not admit of extinction. That fire, therefore, is something other than this. If, again, a person hears the word “worm,” let not his thoughts, from the similarity of the term, be carried to the creature here that crawls upon the ground; for the addition that it “dieth not” suggests the thought of another reptile than that known here. Since, then, these things are set before us as to be expected in the life that follows this, being the natural outgrowth according to the righteous judgment of God, in the life of each, of his particular disposition, it must be the part of the wise not to regard the present, but that which follows after, and to lay down the foundations for that unspeakable blessedness during this short and fleeting life, and by a good choice to wean themselves from all experience of evil, now in their lifetime here, hereafter in their eternal recompense.

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – c.395), *Great Catechism*, ch.40