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ABSTRACT:

The relationship between the Rule of Benedict and the writings of Gregory the Great is complex and controversial. Each depicts contexts in which the Christian is able to recover and manifest to others aspects of primordial glory. The Rule of St. Benedict presumes an anticipation of eschatological renewal and transformation that occurs within the Christian community. With "eyes open to the deifying light" the innermost heart "expands in God" as members of the cenobium learn to honor and revere what they see each other becoming. In Gregory the Great the "uncircumscribed light of God" transforms the Christian ascetic into a contemplative who helps others to behold transcendent realities in ordinary circumstances.

THEOSIS/DEIFICATION *in* BENEDICT *of* NURSIA *and* GREGORY *the* GREAT: CONTEMPLATING CHRIST *in* THE OTHER *and in* THE SELF

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1. What do We Mean by "Deification" in Early Medieval Western Texts?

We encounter the words "divinzation" "deification" and *theosis* with increasing frequency these days, even in articles and books by Christians who have traditionally regarded these terms with skepticism or contempt. The rediscovery of eastern Christianity by western Christians has apparently stimulated a reappraisal of *theosis* by Lutheran, reformed, evangelical and Baptist theologians, who now point to elements in their respective traditions that they regard as analogous or equivalent to the eastern Christian doctrine of *theosis*.[1] Roman Catholic theologians progressively warmed to this concept throughout the *Ressourcement* of the mid-twentieth century, and are now specifically enjoined to reacquaint themselves with this doctrine in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, where "*deification*" is described as equivalent to the scholastic notion of "sanctifying grace."[2]

While this approach may be praiseworthy as a sign of both ecumenical zeal and a desire to enrich the systematic and spiritual theology of the Christian West, it can also be criticized as having the potential for diluting or even completely obscuring what is meant by "divinization" or *theosis.* In attempting to discern the presence of this concept in one's own spiritual tradition, there

[1] Roland Chia, "Salvation as justification and deification," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 64, no. 2 (2011), 125–139. Paul Gavrilyuk, "The Retrieval of Deification: How a Once-Despised Archaism Became an Ecumenical Desideratum," *Modern Theology* 25, no. 4 (October 2009), 647-659. Roger Olsen, "Deification in Contemporary Theology" *Theology Today* 64, (2007), 186-200. Wesche, K.P. "The Doctrine of Deification A Call to Worship", *Theology Today*, 65 (2008), 169–179. Simo Peura and Antti Raunio, ed., *Luther und Theosis: Vergöttlichung als Thema der abendländischen Theologie* (Helsinki: Luther- Agricola-Gesellschaft, 1990) 1- 232.

[2] "The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. It is the sanctifying or deifying grace received in Baptism*." The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Huntington, IN: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000).§1999. The notion of divinization is also invoked, and classical texts on *theosis* by Irenaeus, Athanasius, Augustine, and Serapion are cited in *Catechism* §460, §398, and §1988.

can arise a tendency to define "divinzation" so broadly as to deprive the term of any real content. Roger Olsen has noted that it is "confusing to find 'deification' being used of something that has for a very long time been called 'sanctification,' or 'union with Christ,' or 'communion with God,' or even 'being filled with God.'"[3] He argues that a more robust definition of *theosis* should take into account Gregory Palamas' distinction between the essence and the energies of God: that is, between the transcendent and ultimately unknowable divine nature on the one hand, and the divine power to heal and refashion the soul in God's image on the other.[4] Olsen cites the Orthodox theologian Zizoulas in arguing that a doctrine of *theosis* without such a distinction inevitably leads to either "a near-pantheistic identity of the redeemed person with God or belief that deification is merely a metaphor and not real participation in God."[5] In an article written in 2009 Paul Gavrilyuk recommends that in addition to the Palamite energies/essence distinction any serious definition of *theosis* should also include "synergistic anthropology [and] sacramental realism".[6]

These are important observations. However, our purpose here is to consider *theosis* in two early Western authors.. It should be borne in mind that Gregory Palamas wrote in Greek in the early fourteenth century, and it is thus hardly reasonable to expect his conclusions or theological precision to be obvious in much earlier Latin sources that employ a very different theological vocabulary. Nevertheless, the Palamite distinction could be considered an important touchstone, if not a *sine qua non* for the concept of *theosis*; and to it a second Palamite insight could be added, namely the interrelationship between *theosis* and *theoria*, between deification and contemplation. Palamas wrote in defense of Hesychasts, practitioners of the Jesus Prayer, who described an experience of interior divine light during their contemplative exercise. He defended the Hesychasts against charges of blasphemy and heresy, explaining that what they beheld within their innermost self, their *nous*, was the "Taboric light" seen by the disciples at the Transfiguration, and that this light represents the divine energies, rather than God's essence. For Palamas this contemplation of divine light was both evidence of *theosis* and one of its several sources.[7] As will be described, comparable if not identical themes are found in the *Rule of Benedict* and the writings of Pope Gregory the Great.

2. Benedict and Gregory the Great: The Authors and their Texts

"Benedict" is the name traditionally given to the author of what has come to be known as the *Rule of Benedict*, a sixth century reworking of earlier monastic legislation that during the succeeding three centuries first accompanied then gradually supplanted other rules and combinations of rules to become the dominant monastic rule in the Christian West. The traditional identification of the author of this rule with the founder of Monte Cassino and the "Benedict" who is the subject of Book Two of Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* is less certain today than it was in the past,[8] and almost no biographical data concerning its author can be deduced from the text of the

[3] Olsen, "Deification in Contemporary Theology," 192-3
[4] Olsen, "Deification in Contemporary Theology," 199.
[5] Olsen, "Deification in Contemporary Theology," 191.
[6] Gavrilyuk, "Retrieval of Deification," 655.
[7] Nicholas Gendle, edit. & transl., Gregory Palamas, *The Triads, Defense of the Holy Hesychasts* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 32. These themes recur thoughout Palamas' writings, most clearly and concisely in *Triads* 1.3,5; 1.3,23; 1.3,27; 2.3,9; 3.1,34 ; 3.3,13.
[8] Thus, for example, in a recent article De Simone presumes and defends Gregory's familiarity with Benedict's Rule: M.O. De Simone, "Another Look at Benedict in Gregory's Dialogues," *Cistercian Studies* 49, no. 3 (2014): 327. Diem, on the other hand, not only denies that Gregory knew Benedict's Rule, but suggests that apart from the traditional identification there is no reason to date the Rule earlier than the 630s, that is after Gregory's time. Albrecht Diem, "Inventing the Holy Rule: Some Observations on the History of Monastic Normative Observance in the Early Medieval West," in *Western Monasticism ante litteram: The Spaces of early monastic observance,* ed. Hendrik Dey and Elizabeth Fentress (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 72-75.

Rule. What is now almost universally agreed is that, especially in the first seven chapters of his rule, Benedict relies heavily on the anonymous, early sixth-century *Rule of the Master* as well as the earlier monastic legislation of which the Master made use. Since we possess no other texts from Benedict's pen than his Rule, we would know nothing whatever of his life were it not for Gregory's *Dialogues*. Sometime after the year 600 Pope Gregory the Great assembled four books of *Dialogues,* a compilation of local hagiography intended to encourage and edify, interspersed with Gregory's often theologically-sophisticated commentary and pastoral exhortation. The second book of this work is devoted entirely to the life of Benedict, although as a work of hagiography the historical circumstances of Benedict's life have clearly been subordinated to Gregory's theological and pastoral purposes. The question whether Gregory the Great was, indeed, the author of the *Dialogues* has been vigorous raised in recent times, particularly by Francis Clark,[9] who noted among other characteristics that the author of the *Dialogues* relies heavily on reported miracles and visions, and that the literary style of this work appears deliberately adapted to a more rustic audience than Gregory's other writings. Nevertheless, present scholarly consensus generally favors Gregorian authorship.[10] Unlike the *Rule of Benedict* which remained unknown in the Christian East, the *Dialogues* were translated into Greek, probably by Pope Zacharias around the year 700. This assured Gregory's Benedict a place in Eastern hagiography and earned Gregory himself esteem in the Greek Church with the cognomen *Gregorios Dialogos*. Thanks to the labors of Jean Neufville and Fr. Adelbert De Vogüé, excellent critical editions of Benedict's Rule and Gregory's *Dialogues* are available in the series *Sources Chretiennes,* and will constitute the principal sources to be considered here.

3. *The Rule of St. Benedict*

There is one instance in *The Rule of St. Benedict* of a Latin term associated with the doctrine of deification. In the ninth verse of the Prologue Benedict offers a poetic couplet taken directly from the *Rule of the Master*.[11] Benedict invites his readers to arise from spiritual sloth and:

> Open our eyes to the deifying light (*apertis oculis nostris ad deificum lumen)*
> and attune our ears to hear the divine voice (*attonitis auribus audiamus, divina … uox*)
> that admonishes us, daily crying out:
> *Today if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts* (Ps 95:7-8);
> And again, *You who have ears to hear, hear what the Spirit says to the churches* (Rev. 2:7).[12]

The translation of *deificum lumen* in this passage as "deifying light", although accepted by some scholars and commentators,[13] is debatable. Some translators render it "divine light"[14] or some

[9] Francis Clark, *The Pseudo-Gregorian Dialogues* (Leiden: Brill, 1987).
[10] Paul Mayvaert, "The Authentic Dialogues of Gregory the Great," *Sacris erudiri* 43 (2004), 55-130. Adalbert deVogüé, "Is Gregory the Great the author of the *Dialogues*?," *The American Benedictine Review* 56 (2005), 309-314. Matthew Dal Santo, "The Shadow of a Doubt? A Note on the *Dialogues* and *Registrum Epistolarum* of Pope Gregory the Great (590-604)," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 61, no. 1 (2010): 3-17.
[11] *The Rule of the Master* (hereafter "RM"), Theme Sequence 5.
[12] RB Prol 9-11. Fry, RB 80, 158.
[13] Blair and Delatte/McCann have "deifying light." Hunter Blair, *The Rule of St. Benedict* (Fort Augustus, Edinburgh: Sandy & Co, 1906) 5. Paul Delatte, *Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict,* trans. Justin McCann, (London: Burns & Oates, 1921), 7. Puzicha translates *ad deificum lumen* as "auf dem göttlichen Licht", but comments that this implies "das vergöttlichende Licht," ("the divinizing light"). Michaela Putzicha, *Kommentar zur Benediktusregel* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 2002), 51. Similarly, Kardong translates the term as "divine light" but admits somewhat grudgingly that "it is not impossible that the term refers to deification:" Terence Kardong, *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 3, 11.

variant thereof, emphasizing the light's origin in God, rather than its transforming effect on the one who contemplates. However, the translation "deifying light", which at least hints at a doctrine of *theosis,* can be defended. The use of *deificus* in the sense of "deifying", rather than simply "divine" occurs in Latin texts employed by both Benedict and the Master, most notably in the first Latin version of the *Life of Antony*, where it is used numerous times in the sense of "rendering God-like".[15]

Benedict's call to "open our eyes to the deifying light" is in this context part of an invitation to attend to the transforming presence of God in sacred scripture.[16] It initiates an exegesis of Psalms 33 and 14 as well as a catena of biblical citations. Two biblical verses are cited here as instances of the divinizing light and divine voice: Ps. 95:7-8, the warning not to "harden the heart" on hearing the divine voice, recited daily at the beginning of Vigils (or "Matins") the first office of the day; and Rev. 2:7, the magisterial voice of Christ commanding the hearer to listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches. Benedict's citation of these verses emphasizes the importance of listening to the voice of God as it is heard in proclaimed biblical texts. These verses and the emphasis on sacred scripture they reveal are reminders that in the *Rule of Benedict* the experience of contemplation, the ability to perceive God's presence and hidden purposes beneath surface appearance, is very often invoked using the analogy of hearing, rather than the traditional and more frequent metaphor of seeing. The first word of Benedict's Rule is *obsculta*, "listen"; and unlike the *Rule of the Master* on which he depends, Benedict primarily understands the voice to which we listen as that of Christ, rather than of the abbot or "master". The conviction that psalmody and meditation on sacred scripture can lead to contemplation had been gaining considerable traction since the time of Origen, and Benedict's eastern contemporary Pseudo-Dionysius the Aereopagite would describe in detail the deifying power of scripture, especially when read or chanted in the liturgical assembly.[17] In the Christian West a similar emphasis on sacred scripture as divinizing is found in Ambrose and especially in Cassian,[18] whose *Conferences* Benedict particular recommends in Chapter 73, the concluding chapter of his Rule.

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[14] Fry has "light that comes from God." Timothy Fry, et al., *The Rule of St. Benedict, 1980* (hereafter, "*RB 80*")(Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1980), 159. Similarly, deVogüé renders it as "lumière de Dieu," noting that it is a metaphor for the sacred scripture, the *divina vox.* Adalbert deVogüé, edit. & tr. *La Règle de saint Benoît*, vol. 1, ser. *Sources chrétiennes*, (hereafter "SC") 181 (Paris: Edit.du Cerf, 1987) 415, n. 9.

[15] It appears to have been the Anonymous Latin version of the *Life of Antony* that was available to the Master and Benedict. Vincent Desprez, "Saint Anthony and the Origins of Anchoretism II," *American Benedictine Review* 43, no. 2 (1992), 160, fn.100. The translator of the Anonymous Latin Version of Athanasius' *Life of Antony* employs *deificus* very frequently when there is no basis for doing so in the Greek original, often as a way of describing Antony's virtue and ascetical practice. Ludovicus Lorié, *Spiritual Terminology in the Latin Translations of the Vita Antonii: With Reference to Fourth and Fifth Century Monastic Literature* (Nijmegen/Utrecht: Dekker & Van De Vegt N.V., 1961), 73-74,84. Lois Gandt, *A Philological and Theological Analysis of the Ancient Latin Translations of the "Vita Antonii,"* (PhD diss., Fordham University, New York, 2008), 122-124, 249, 253, 254. In the Greek original of the *Life of Antony* θεοποιέω, "to deify", is used only once (ch. 76) and in a perjorative sense referring to idolotry: "…making god[s] of creatures" (θεοποιῆσαι τὰ ποιήματα). *Athanase D'Alexandrie, Vie d'Antoine,* G. Bartelink, ed. & trans., SC 400 (Paris: Cerf, 1994) 330, li. 11-12.

[16] Delatte notes (*Commentary,* 8) and deVogüé emphasizes that both the *deificum lumen* and the *divina vox* of Prol. 9-10 refer to the sacred scripture, cited here and throughout Prologue. deVogüé *La Règle* v.1, 415, n. 9. This identity between scripture and the "divine light" and "divine voice" is also the basis for the practice of psalmody and daily *lectio divina* (RègBen v.7, pp.). deVogüé, *La Règle*, vol. 7, *Commentaire Doctrinal et Spirituel* (Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 1987), 184-240, 338-350.

[17] According to Pseudo-Dionysius the chanting of scripture, especially psalmody, has the power, "for those capable of being divinized" (τοῖς πρὸς θέωσιν ἐπιτηδείοις ὑφηγήσατο), to "harmonize the habits of our souls and […] establish unity of mind and feeling with things Divine, with [our]selves and with one another:" τὰς ψυχικὰς ἡμῶν ἕξεις ἐναρμονίως [...] τὴν πρὸς τὰ θεῖα καὶ ἑαυτοὺς καὶ ἀλλήλους ὁμοφροσύνην. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Ecclesiastical Hierarchies III.3.4-5, Günter Heil &, Adolf Ritter, ed. *De Coelesti Hierarchia, de Ecclesiastica Hierarchia, de Mystica Theologia, & Epistulae*, ser, *Corpus Dionysiacum* II (de Gruyter, 1991) 83-84.

[18] Ambrose considered the soul that hears and believes the sacred scripture as analogous to the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Annunciation. In commenting on Lk. 1.44-45 he notes that such a soul, Like Mary, "incarnates" and "bears" the Divine Word: "Every soul that believes — that soul both conceives and gives birth to the Word of God. […] For every

Another point of relevance in regard to a possible theology of divinization in Benedict's Rule is his recurring emphasis on cenobitic rather than eremitical monasticism. He inherited from Jerome and Cassian a tradition that the life of the hermit is superior to that of the cenobite; and although he repeats this conventional wisdom with his own modifications in Chapter 2, it is significant that nowhere in his Rule does Benedict explain how a monk can become a hermit. He mentions the hermit life as a theoretical goal,[19] but offers no practical steps by which it may be attained. Indeed, his Rule is explicitly intended for those who "persevere in [Christ's] teaching in the monastery until death".[20] And it is within the community, serving one another, that the monks learn the contemplative art of perceiving Christ in each another and rendering fitting honor to one another as Christ-bearers. First, the monks learn to "see" Christ in the Abbot, "who is believed to hold the place of Christ in the monastery."[21] But Christ must also be contemplated aurally and perhaps paradoxically in the voice of the youngest newcomers to the monastery, through whose counsel God often (*saepe*) indicates what is best for the community to do.[22] Guests, too, are to be contemplated as Christ-bearers: on arrival and departure they "are to be received as Christ" and venerated with a bow or prostration, "because Christ is to be adored in them just as he is received in them".[23] Similarly, monks visiting from another monastery may be the unexpected bearers of a prophetic message from Christ.[24] Finally, the sick are "truly to be served as Christ Himself […] out of honor for God"[25]

For Benedict the monastic community is not only a setting where monks learn the contemplative art of seeing Christ in one another and in guests: it is also a context where the innermost self, the heart, is changed. That the community is a locus of contemplative transformation is particularly clear at the end of the Prologue where Benedict modifies the Master's definition of the monastery as a "school of the Lord's service" (*dominici schola servitii*).[26] Unlike the Master, Benedict's *schola* includes "nothing harsh, nothing burdensome," but only the strictness necessary to amend vice and safeguard love.[27] The word "*schola*" can be understood here as a place intended for both communal instruction and learning a skill or trade; but

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soul can receive the Word of God" (*quaecumque enim crediderit anima et concipit et generat Dei Verbum ...secundum fidem tamen omnium fructus est Christus.* […] *Omnis enim anima accipit Dei Verbum.* Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam* 2.26. M. Adriaen ed., CCSL 14 (Tournhout: Brepols, 1957) 42, li. 361-367. For Cassian the biblical text is the source of "fiery" (imageless, wordless) prayer."(*Conferences* 9.15; 9.25-27; 10.11) and "contemplation of things divine (*contemplatio rerum divinarum*) (*Conf.* 14.1.3, 14.8.1-7). John Cassian, *Conferences* (*Conlationes XXIIII*), ed. M. Petschenig, ser. *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (hereafter: "CSEL") 13 (Vienna, 1886), 262-264, 272-274, 286-332, 398-399, 404-407.

[19] The *Rule of Benedict* (hereafter "RB") 1.3-4. Benedict inherited this traditional praise of the hermit life from the *Rule of the Master,* (RM 1.3-4). The trope of the hermit's supposed spiritual superiority to the cenobite was inspired by the *Life of Antony,* the *Sayings* and *Lives* of the Desert Fathers and the *Institutes* and *Conferences* of Cassian. Rather than overtly contradicting this received wisdom, Benedict subtly calls it into question by failing even to mention hermits elsewhere in his Rule, and by recommending to his readers the *Rule of Basil* whose author extolls the cenobium and explicitly rebukes hermits. After reminding his readers that Christ washed the feet of His disciples, Basil asks, "Whose feet, therefore, will you wash? To whom will you minister? In comparison with whom will you be the lowest, if you live alone? (*Tu ergo cujus pedes lavabis… cum solus vivas*?)" Basil of Caesarea, *Rule* (Latin version of Rufinus) Q.3.35-36, Klaus Zelzer, ed., CSEL 86 (Vienna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1985), 31.

[20] RB Prol. 50: *in eius doctrinam usque ad mortem in monasterio perseverantes*. Fry, *RB 80,* 166.

[21] RB 2.24: Christi enim agere vices in monasterio creditor. Fry, *RB 80,* 174.

[22] RB 3.3: "all should be called to council because it is often to the younger that the Lord reveals what is best" (*quia saepe iuniori Dominus revelat quod melius est*). Fry, *RB 80,* 178-180.

[23] RB 53.1,7: *Omnes supervenientes hospites tamquam Christus suscipiantur* […]*Christus in eis adoretur qui et suscipitur*. Fry, *RB 80,* 254-256.

[24] RB61.4: "if [a visiting monk] reasonably and with humble charity criticizes or suggests something, the abbot should prudently consider whether the Lord may not have sent him for this very reason" (*pro hoc ipsud eum Dominus direxerit*). Fry, *RB 80,* 274.

[25] RB 36:1,4: *sicut revera Christo ita eis serviatur* […] *in honorem Dei sibi servire*. Fry, *RB 80,* 234.

[26] RB Prol. 45. Fry, *RB 80,* 164.

[27] RB Prol. 46-47: *nihil asperum nihil grave nos constituturos speramus; sed et si quid paululum restrictius, dictante aequitatis ratione, propter emendationem vitiorum vel conservationem caritatis processerit*. Fry, *RB 80,* 164.

it also carries the implication of the English idiom, "a school of fish", suggesting a community that moves together with a common purpose, towards a common goal.[28]

The result of attending to the divinizing light and divine voice is, according to both Benedict and the Master, a transformed heart that, in the words of Psalm 119:32, is widened, expanded by "running" the path of Christian obedience, an ascetical "way of salvation" that necessarily seems narrow (*angusto*) at the beginning. The narrow "restrictiveness" (*restrictio*) of the school of the Lord's service, however, serves only to preserve fairness, heal from vice, and preserve love (*caritas*).[29] In his commentary on Psalm 119 Ambrose had stressed that the Christian's heart must be widened to allow the indwelling of the Triune God".[30] Benedict appears to echo this sentiment, noting that the widened heart becomes the habitation of "inexpressibly sweet love (*dilectio*)": "Truly as we advance in this way of life and faith, our hearts open wide, and we run with unspeakable sweetness of love on the path of God's commandments."[31]

If it is possible to speak of a doctrine of divinzation in Benedict's Rule, then it is both in the conclusion to the Prologue and also in Chapter 72 that he portrays most clearly the effects of such divinization: namely a heart opened wide by the practice of asceticism, able to behold, even to venerate Christ who is perceived both within the depths of the monk's own heart and also in the other members of the monastic community with whom one journeys, "running" as it were towards eternal life. Chapter 72 is the penultimate chapter and concluding summary of Benedict's rule. It serves a literary purpose analogous to Athanasius' portrayal of Antony the Great in chapter 14 of the *Life of Antony*. Both Peter Brown and Derwas Chitty have emphasized this passage as a attempt to portray the possibility of a return to the primordial, natural and glorified state of prelapsarian humankind.[32] Athanasius depicts the monk Antony emerging from twenty years of solitary asceticism, a living exemplar of restored primordial integrity and the form divinization could take in a teacher and spiritual guide. Antony is "like an initiate in sacred mysteries (μεμυσταγωγημένος), filled with God (θεοφορούμενος)." Having achieved perfect inner balance (ὅλος ἴσος) he now lives in accordance with nature (κατὰ φύσιν). Antony further exemplifies the monastic virtues through compassionate attentiveness to the spiritual struggles of those who seek his counsel. [33] In Chapter 72 of his Rule Benedict offers a similar idealized portrait of the transforming power of monastic practice. This chapter on the "good zeal which monks ought to have" gives concrete form to the Prologue's image of the "widened heart"; but it also expands on practical themes Benedict had introduced earlier in Chapter 7, the "Ladder of Humility". It will thus be helpful to briefly summarize Benedict's important modification of texts on humility he inherited from the earlier monastic tradition.

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[28] Both meanings are discussed in detail in Fry. *RB 80,* 165 (n to Prol 45) and 365-366. The term *schola* also occurs in Cassian. *Conf.* 3.1, 18.16, 19.2. It is tempting to speculate whether the notion of a musical *schola*, a group of singers whose blended voices lead the community in chanted prayer, might not also be in play; however, the equation of *schola* with "cantors" does not appear in the literature of the West until the eighth century.

[29] RB Prol. 47-48: *sed et si quid paululum restrictius, dictante aequitatis ratione, propter emendationem vitiorum vel conservationem caritatis processerit, non ilico pavore perterritus refugias viam salutis quae non est nisi angusto initio incipienda*." Fry, *RB 80,* 164.

[30] Ambrose, *Commentary on Psalm 118*.32, Serm. 4 (*Daleth*) 27. CSEL 62, 80-81. Íde Ní Riain, trans. *Commentary of Ambrose on Psalm 118* (Dublin: Halcyon Press, 1998), 52.

[31] RB Prol. 49: *Processu vero conversationis et fidei, dilatato corde inenarrabili dilectionis dulcedine curritur via mandatorum Dei* Fry, *RB 80,*164-166.

[32] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society, Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1988) 223-224. Derwas Chitty, *The Desert a City*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966) 3-5.

[33] Athanasius, *The Life of Antony* 14.7, 18-19: μεμυσταγωγημένος καὶ θεοφορούμενος [...] ὅλος ἦν ἴσος, ὡς ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου κυβερνώμενος, καὶ ἐν τῷ κατὰ φύσιν ἑστώς. G.J.M. Bartelink, ed, *Athanase D'Alexandrie, Vie d'Antoine,* SC 400 (Paris: Cerf, 1994), 128) The Latin *Vita Prima* renders Antony's ascetical practice (ἀσκούμενος) during his twenty years in seclusion in the abandoned fort as as *deifico uacans* (*Viginti itaque annos prope sic transiuit solus studio deifico uacans*). Hoppenbrouwers, H., *La plus ancienne version latine de la vie de S. Antoine*. ser. *Latinitas Christianorum primæva* 14 (Nijmegen: Dekker & Van de Vegt, 1960), 96.

Numerous commentators have observed that Chapter 72 of Benedict's Rule effectively "takes up where Chapter 7 on humility leaves off."[34] Benedict's ladder of humility is taken almost word-for-word from the *Rule of the Master*, whose author had transformed John Cassian's twelve "signs" (*indiciis*) of humility" (*Institutes* 4:28) into twelve steps or rungs (*gradus*) of a ladder of humility (RM 10). These steps include mortification of desires, obedience, gentleness, patience, and taciturnity. In all three, Cassian, the Master, and Benedict, they culminate in a yet higher step: namely, love (*caritas/amor*). However, Benedict is not content to make love simply the goal or the spiritual consequence of humility: he recognizes that it is a necessary means and aid to ascent of the "ladder"; and thus unlike Cassian and the Master, he inserts *amor Dei* already at the third step, insisting that Christian obedience be undertaken "for the love of God" [35] And whereas for Cassian and the Master, the ladder or signs of humility culminate in love "of virtue for its own sake," [36] Benedict insists that it is not simply "love", but rather "love of God", and indeed "love of Christ" that casts out the fear that had characterized the lower rungs of the ladder.[37]

How this love of Christ is practically manifested is the subject of Chapter 72. Here in the penultimate chapter of his Rule Benedict describes the characteristics of a community that "runs together" towards God with" hearts expanded in love". Chapter 72 offers clear examples of what it means to honor, even to venerate, the presence of Christ in other members of the community through mundane acts of compassion and obedience. Benedict begins with the traditional and ancient contrast between two ways or paths, one leading towards, the other away from God. He describes two kinds of "zeal" (*zelus*): "an evil zeal of bitterness which separates from God and leads to hell", and "a good zeal which separates from vices and leads to God and to life everlasting." The exercise of this good zeal has at its core Paul's injunction in Romans 12.10 (= RB 72.4): "Let them outdo one another in showing honor" (*ut honore se invicem praeveniant*). Thus the only permissible competition in the monastery is to become the best at perceiving and honoring Christ in one's confreres. This takes concrete form in ordinary encounters throughout the day, especially encounters that reveal limitations and brokenness, and tempt the monk to imagine that the "other" is the problem: "Let them most patiently endure one another's infirmities, whether of body or of character" (*sive corporum, sive morum patientissime tolerent*).[38] The motif of competition in revering the God who is contemplated in the confrere is echoed in the injunctions: "Let them compete in showing obedience to one another (*oboedientiam sibi certatim impendant*). None should follow what he judges useful for himself, but rather what is better for another. "[39] (RB 72.6-7)

By doing this the community is to grow in every imaginable form of love; and Benedict rings the changes of the Latin words for "love" (*caritas*, *amor*, *diligere*) as he continues:

> They should practice fraternal charity (*caritas*) with purity; offering to God reverence of love (*amor*), loving (*diligere*) their abbot with sincere and humble affection (*caritas*).[40]

His conclusion echoes the imagery he employed at the end of the Prologue: namely, that of a community, now transformed by acquiring the practical skills of loving one another, moving

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[34] Aquinata Böckmann,. *Perspectives on the Rule of St. Benedict* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), 52-53. Kardong discusses Böckmann's observations on the relationship between RB 7 and RB 72 together with those of André Borias and other commentators. Kardong, *Benedict's Rule* ,600-601.

[35] RB 7.34: *Tertius humilitatis gradus est, ut quis pro Dei amore omni obedientia se subdat majori.* Fry, *RB 80*,196.

[36] Cassian (*Institutes*.4.39.3) has: *sed amore ipsius boni et delectatione uirtutum* John Cassian, *De institutis coenobiorum et de octo principalium vitiorum remediis*), Jean-Claude Guy, ed. & trans, *Jean Cassien Institutions Cénobitiques*, SC 109 (Paris: Cerf, 1965) 180. In the *Rule of the Master* (10.90) the ladder of humility culminates *sed amore ipsius consuetudinis bonae et delectatione uirtutum. La Règle du Maître*, de Vogüé et al., ed., SC 105 (Paris: Cerf 1965) 438.

[37] RB 7.67-69: *monachus mox ad caritatem Dei perveniet* […] *non iam timore gehennae sed amore Christi, et consuetudine ipsa bona et delectatione virtutum*. Fry, *RB 80*, 200-202.

[38] RB 72.5. Fry, RB 80, 294.

[39] RB 72.6-7. Fry, RB 80, 294.

[40] RB 72.8-10. Fry, RB 80, 294.

together towards their heavenly goal: "preferring nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together (*pariter*) to life everlasting."[41]

This penultimate phrase, "preferring nothing whatever to Christ" appears to be a deliberate echo of both the earliest Latin version of the *Life of Antony* and the *Treatise on the Lord's Prayer* by Cyprian of Carthage.[42] The final sentence is a reminder of Benedict's emphasis on the significance of the community in monastic observance. It is precisely within the community that the brethren learn to honor, to venerate, Christ. And none goes alone to God: rather, the monks are brought together – *pariter* – to everlasting life.

4. Gregory the Great

In the writings of Gregory the Great there are several instances, chiefly in his *Homilies on the Gospels*, where he employs vocabulary redolent of a theology of divinization. However it would be fair to say that in these texts the imagery of *theosis* tantalizes rather than satisfying the reader. His purpose is to exhort and illustrate by way of contrast, to highlight the gulf between God and humankind by emphasizing the divine condescension in raising up fallen humanity, rather than to describe the nature of the transformed soul. Thus in a homily for the Feast of Pentecost he contrasts the Incarnation when "God became human by nature (*naturaliter*) with the Feast of the Holy Spirit, when "human beings become gods by adoption (*per adoptionem dii*)."[43] A few sentences later in the same homily he makes an almost Palamite distinction between our utter incapacity to see God in Himself (*in se videre*) and the contrasting possibility of seeing God in his servants (*in servis suis*). In a homily on the healing of the blind man near Jericho Gregory explains: "When divinity upholds our broken human flesh, the human race receives back light that it had lost. And so from God's human suffering comes human elevation to divinity."[44] This reference to light lost by the human race suggests where we must look for a fuller explication of Gregory's theology of *theosis*: namely, in his doctrine of contemplation. As Bernard McGinn has noted, for Gregory "the fall, first and foremost, was loss of the ability to contemplate".[45] According to Gregory, Adam

> fell into the misery of that blindness and banishment we all endure to this very day: for his sin resulted in the inability to see those joys of heaven which he had previously contemplated. […] after his fall he lost that [inner] light of the mind (*lumen mentis*), which he had abundantly enjoyed before. [46]

[41] RB 72.11-12. Fry, RB 80, 294.

[42] Cyprian, *On the Lord's Prayer* 15.11: "Prefer nothing whatever to Christ, because He did not prefer anything to us" (*Christo nihil omnino praeponere,quia nec nobis quicquam ille praeposuit*). *De Dominica oratione*, William Hartel, ed., CSEL 3.1 (Vienna, 1868) 277-278..Benedict appears to have used chapters 4-5 of the same treatise in composing chapters 19 and 20 of his Rule. The Latin *Vita Prima* of the *Life of Antony* has: *omnibus dicens nihil debere praeponere ipsos horum quae sunt in mundo dilectionis Christi*. *Vita Prima* 14.21-23. Hoppenbrouwers, *La plus ancienne version latine*, 198.

[43] Gregory, *Homily 30 on the Gospels* (on Jn 14:23-27): *In illa Deus naturaliter factus est homo,in ista homines facti sunt per adoptionem dii*. Raymond Étaix, ed., *Gregorius Magnus Homiliae in Evangelia,* CCSL 151 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999)266, li. 266-268.

[44] Gregory, *Homily 2 on the Gospels* (on Lk 18.31-43): *quia dum divinitas defectum nostrae carnis suscepit,humanum genus lumen, quod amiserat, recepit. Unde enim Deus humana patitur,inde homo ad divina sublevatur*. Étaix, ed., *Gregorius Magnus Homiliae,*13, li.25-27

[45] McGinn, 51.

[46] Gregory, *Dialogues* 4.1.1: *in hujus caecitatis atque exsilii quam patimur venit aerumnam, quia peccando extra semetipsum fusus, jam illa coelestis patriae gaudia, quae prius contemplabatur, videre non potuit.* […] *postquam huc cecidit, ab illo quo implebatur mentis lumine recessit.* Adalbert De Vogüé, & Paul Antin, ed. *Les Dialogues de Grégoire le Grand* vol. 3, SC 265 (Paris: Cerf, 1980)18, li.3-8.

Gregory considered the restoration of this capacity for contemplation to be a foretaste of our eschatological destiny. This restored power enables us to contemplate and to be transformed by the divine light that renews and strengthens us, widening our hearts so that we can perceive others, ourselves and indeed the whole creation as refulgent with God's glory.

These themes of divinizing light and the heart expanded by love are depicted most clearly towards the end of Gregory's biography of St. Benedict, which comprises the whole second book of his *Dialogues*. This biography dates from more than fifty years after Benedict's Rule, and was based according to Gregory on the reminiscences of refugee-monks who fled from Benedict's monastery of Monte Casino to Rome when their abbey was destroyed by the Lombards around the year 580. It should be borne in mind that although Gregory praises Benedict's Rule for its *discretio*, it cannot be demonstrated from Gregory's writings that he knew or had ever read Benedict's Rule closely, since he never quotes from it; nor do Gregory's descriptions of his own monastic foundations suggest any uniquely "Benedictine" influence. Nevertheless, it is in the second Book of the *Dialogues*, in his description of the last months of Benedict's life, that Gregory provides his most vivid description of how the innermost self, the human *mens* or *nous* can be transformed, widened, so as to contemplate divine light illuminating the whole of creation.

In his critical edition and commentary on the *Dialogues*, as well as in subsequent articles, Adalbert deVogüé emphasized the careful, intentional literary construction of the whole of Book 2 of the *Dialogues*, but especially of chapters 33-38 which conclude the book.[47] These chapters take the form of a literary "triptych" with three progressively-illuminating "panels" that depict the transformation of Benedict from a spiritually powerful ascetic and miracle-worker into a contemplative whose "widened heart" can behold both the ascent of saints into heaven and the whole universe scintillating within in a ray of divine light. Before describing each panel in detail, it will be helpful to summarize the content of the whole triptych. The first panel, chapters 33 and 34, describes the meeting of Benedict and his sister Scholastica, who by means of "holy conversation" and prayer is able to demonstrate to her reluctant and increasingly-indignant brother that love is superior to ascetical legalism. Benedict's chastened heart is thus enabled to behold in vision the ascent of his sister's soul into heaven. The second panel, chapter 35, parallels the first. This time Benedict meets and shares "sweet words of life" with a fellow abbot, and afterwards contemplates not only the ascent of another soul into heaven, but the whole of creation scintillating in a ray of divine light. The final panel, chapters 36 and 37 includes a brief encomium of Benedict and a description of his death, followed by a vision seen by two of his monks, of the shining path on which Benedict's soul had ascended into heaven.

Vogüé has emphasized that these chapters offer a hagiographic portrait of conversion and transformation. Throughout the first 32 chapters of the *Dialogues Benedict* is depicted as a powerful spiritual warrior, fighting and overcoming vices within and demonic powers without. His ascetic rigor culminates in the powers of prophecy and miracles: these early chapters present him as the archetypal monastic practitioner and lawgiver. But chapter 36 marks an abrupt change. Gregory begins by reminding his readers that St. Paul once "willed something he was powerless to obtain" (*quod voluit obtinere non valuit*), and then he applies the *quod voluit … non valuit* to Benedict, describing the final meeting between him and his sister, the nun Scholastica.[48] Following their festive meal and "sacred conversation (*sacra conloquia*) on the spiritual life," [49] Benedict's almost frenzied desire to obey monastic custom by returning to the monastery before nightfall is frustrated by his sister, whose prayers summon a thunderstorm and force Benedict to remain.[50] Gregory explains that she proved the "more powerful" (*plus potuit*) because "hers was

[47] Adalbert deVogüé: (1) *Les Dialogues* vol. 2, SC 260 (Paris: Cerf, 1979) 230-249; (2) "The Meeting of Benedict and Scholastica: An Interpretation", J.B. Hasbrouck, trans., *Cistercian Studies* 18, (1983): 167-183.
[48] Gregory, *Dialogues* 2.33.1-2. deVogüé, *Les Dialogues* (SC 260), 230, li. 3, 5-6.
[49] Gregory, *Dialogues* 2.33.2-4. deVogüé, *Les Dialogues* (SC 260), 230, li. 13, 15, 19; 232 li. 46-47.
[50] Gregory, *Dialogues* 2.33.3-4.

the greater love" (*quae amplius amavit*).[51] De Vogüé considers this an allusion to Luke 7:44, where Jesus rebukes Simon the Pharisee, comparing him unfavorably with the sinful woman "who loved much" (*dilexit multum*). This, of course, casts Benedict in the role of the pharisee; but Gregory suggests that this frustration of Benedict's will was also an occasion of conversion and spiritual growth, since after being forced to stay they both enjoyed "sharing with each other to their hearts' content holy conversation on the spiritual life." Gregory implies that this forced *sacra spiritalis vitae conloquia* facilitated Benedict's transformation into a contemplative. For Gregory the experience of looking inward and enduring painful self-discovery, the act of going into and "abiding with one's self" (*habitare secum*) is an essential preparation for contemplation;[52] and, indeed, Gregory had already described this as part of Benedict's earlier ascesis in chapter 3 of Book 2.[53]

The result of this encounter between brother and sister is Benedict's first celestial vision: that of his sister Scholastica's soul "penetrating the secret recesses of heaven".[54] In pagan hagiography the vision of a revered figure's heavenly ascent had become a traditional feature of the imperial cult, providing either a pretext or a later confirmation of the Senate's declaration of a not-unexpected imperial apotheosis.[55] In Christian literature this tradition, modeled perhaps on Elisha's vision of Elijah's ascent (2Ki 2.11-12) or on the pseudepigraphal Book of Enoch (ch.14-18) appears in the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity* (1.3, 4.7) and, more relevant here, in the Life of Antony (60). In these cherished accounts the vision confirms both the holiness of the ascending saint and the spiritual authority of the seer. Another well-known Christian text with strong parallels to this narrative is the conversation of Augustine and his mother Monica in Ostia, described in Book 9 of Augustine's Confessions. [56] As in Gregory's narrative, Augustine's conversation concludes with the contemplation of heavenly mysteries and the suggestion of an imminent death. And in Gregory's account Benedict's vision not only confirms his sister's holiness, it is a sign of his own ongoing transformation that will shortly be explored by Gregory using the image of the "widened heart". It is significant that this vision follows, not the solitary ascetical struggle frequent in monastic hagiography and apophthegmata, but what can only be described as a communal interaction, an event less typical of the hermitage than of the cenobium: namely, an extended spiritual conversation during a meal attended by a variety of individuals from different monastic communities. In both the *Institutes* and *Conferences* John Cassian had praised such gatherings as he experienced them in late fourth century Egypt, thus subtly encouraging their implementation in the communities he helped form in early fifth-century Gaul. Benedict's own Rule and the monastic sources on which he depends specifically describe and legislate for such gatherings.

The meeting of Benedict and Abbot Servandus in chapter 35 introduces the second, central panel of Gregory's literary triptych, containing what Bernard McGinn has called "perhaps the most famous nonbiblical vision of the early Middle Ages".[57] This vision is reminiscent of both Cicero's famous Dream of Scipio (10-16) [58] and, to a lesser extent, Augustine's Neo-Platonic ecstasy during his meeting with Monica in Ostia. Gregory's description of the setting and events preceding the vision closely parallel the meeting with Scholastica in the preceding chapter, however the cenobitic

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[51] Gregory, *Dialogues* 2.33.5. deVogüé, *Les Dialogues* (SC 260), 234, li. 51-56.
[52] Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, (New York: Crossroad. 1994), 48-50, 56-57;
[53] Gregory, *Dialogues* 2.3.5-9. deVogüé, *Les Dialogues* (SC 260), 143; footnote 5 contains a detailed bibliography of Gregory's use of *habitare secum*.
[54] Gregory, *Dialogues* 2.34.1.
[55] Seutonius describes both Julius Caesar's own prophetic vision (*De Vita Caesarum* 1.81.3) and the celestial omen seen by many and interpreted as "the soul of Caesar which had been taken up to heaven," (1.88). Seutonius, *De Vita Caesarum*, Bk. I, " Divus Iulius," John Rolf, trans. *The Lives of the Caesars, The Loeb Classical Library, Seutonius vol. 1*, (London: Loeb, Macmillan, 1914), 108-109.
[56] Augustine *Confessions* 9.8-11. de Vogüé discusses the parallels in detail in *Gregory the Great: The Life of Saint Benedict*, Hilary Costello & Eoin De Bhaldraithe, trans., (Petersham,: St. Bede Publ., 1993), 157-162.
[57] Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 71
[58] Cicero *Republic*, 6.9-26, (esp. 6.10-16).

context is even more distinctly highlighted. Abbot Servandus brought with him members of his monastery in Campania, and during the night the two abbots stay in a tower above their monks, as if symbolically standing guard or keeping watch. Through their holy conversation the two abbots "mutually imbue one another with the sweet words of life",[59] permitting them a hint of eschatological fulfillment: "at least [a] taste of the joys of the heavenly banquet - the delightful banquet of their heavenly homeland which they were not yet able to enjoy perfectly, but for which they longed."[60] Following this mutually sanctifying exchange the abbots retire to their separate tower rooms, and Benedict keeps vigil, praying at the tower window above his sleeping community.

In the vision that follows Gregory creates a verbal portrait of the flowering, the opening out of the human capacity for contemplation. As Benedict prays he beholds "an outpouring of light from above which swept away the darkness of night, shining with such splendor that it surpassed the light of day, illuminating the darkness as it shined." It is thus a vision of light triumphant over darkness; but it is more than that: "the whole world was gathered beneath a single sunbeam (*omnis mundus…sub uno solis radio collectus*) and brought before his eyes." And finally, as in his earlier vision of Scholastica's ascent, Benedict beholds "the soul of Germanus the bishop of Capua in a sphere of fire, being carried by the angels to heaven."[61]

Gregory explains the significance of this vision in some detail. When the soul beholds "even a little" of God's light the deepest part of the self is unbound and expands. He employs different nouns and verbs to describe this divine expansion of the innermost self. The interior place that opens out in contemplation is, alternately, the soul (*anima*), the mind (*mens*), the bosom (*sinus*). To describe the effect upon it of the divine light Gregory says that it is unbound (*laxatur*) it expands (*ampliator*), it opens wide, dilates (*dilatatus*).[62] Thus transformed by contemplation it "stands above the world" rising "even above itself" and in looking out or down on the world, perceives how narrow (*angusta*) all created things are in comparison with the divine light. This vision entails awareness not only of the divine radiance, but also of the soul's own luminescence: "Corresponding to the light gleaming before his exterior eyes was an interior light within the mind". Thus the heart unbound by contemplation perceives not only creation in the light of God, but also the nature of the transformed heart, an "interior light within" (*lux interior in mente*) causing the contemplative's own mind to shine with reflected glory. [63] The *lumen mentis* lost through Adam's fall has been, at least temporarily, restored. [64]

In the third panel of his literary triptych Gregory praises Benedict using the language and imagery of light, portraying both Benedict's life and Rule of as worthy objects of contemplation. Benedict "shone (*claruit*) in the world by his many miracles, and was no less than brilliant (*fulsit*) in his words of teaching" His Rule for monks is "remarkable in discretion and brilliant (*luculentam*) in language"[65] Shining lights are again seen in the vision that accompanies

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[59] Gregory, *Dialogues*, 2.35,1: *dulcia sibi invicem vitae verba transfunderent.* deVogüé, *Dialogues* (SC 260), 236, li. 6-7.

[60] Gregory, *Dialogues*, 2.35,1: *et suavem cibum caelestis patriae, quia adhuc perfecte gaudendo non poterant, saltem suspirando gustarent.* deVogüé, *Dialogues* (SC 260), 236, li. 8-9.

[61] Gregory, *Dialogues*, 2.35, 2-3.

[62] Gregory, *Dialogues*, 2.35, 6.

[63] Gregory, *Dialogues*, 2.35, 7: *In illa ergo luce, quae exterioribus oculis fulsit, lux interior in mente fuit.* deVogüé, *Dialogues* (SC 260), 240, li. 70-71.

[64] Gregory employs language and imagery identical to this in his explorations of the nature of contemplation in the *Moralia*, and in his *Homilies on the Gospels* and *Homilies on Ezekiel*. Butler notes that in these texts Gregory frequently calls the divine light "uncircumscribed" (*incircumscriptum*), suggesting that divinization consists in the human heart becoming increasingly capable of perceiving God. However the distinction between creator and created remains, and contemplation is always partial and limited. Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism: The Teaching of SS. Augustine,Gregory and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life*, 2nd ed, London: E. P. Button & Co. Inc., 1926), 77-80.

[65] Gregory, *Dialogues*, 2.36, 1: *in mundo claruit, doctrinae quoque uerbo non mediocriter fulsit. Nam scripsit monachorum regulam*

Benedict's heavenly ascent. Benedict dies while praying, fortified by the Eucharist and supported in the arms of his disciples.[66] Shortly thereafter, the third and final vision Gregory relates is seen not by Benedict, but by his monks. Two different members of Benedict's community mystically behold "a path strewn with carpets and innumerable bright lights, stretching towards the East, extending from his cell, reaching into heaven." Although they do not see their master, a heavenly voice assures them that "This is the path on which the Lord's beloved Benedict ascended to heaven." [67] Here, as frequently throughout his Life of Benedict Gregory alludes to the Elijah cycle in the Books of Kings.[68] Elisha, the disciple of Elijah, was confirmed in his status as the prophet's successor by a vision of his master's ascent into heaven in a horse-drawn fiery chariot (2Ki 2:10-12). In Gregory's account Benedict's monks do not see the actual ascent of their abbot: they are informed of it by the heavenly voice. What they behold is, rather the light-strewn path, that road or pathway their abbot had bequeathed to them in the form of the Rule that Gregory had so richly praised in the preceding chapter.

5. Conclusion

In the introduction to this chapter reference was made to the contributions of Gregory Palamas, the great theologian of *theosis* and defender of contemplatives. It is fitting to observe in concluding that this pillar of the Eastern Church particular emphasized in his theological treatise the *Triads*, also known as the *Defense of the Holy Hesychasts*, the significance of St. Benedict's contemplative experience. Palamas writes: "Another saint, one of the most perfect, saw everything that exists as if contained beneath one ray of this noetic sun."[69] There can be no doubt that it is Benedict to whom Palamas refers, known through the Pope Zacharias' Greek translation of the *Dialogues* of "Gregorios Dialogos". The reference to "the whole universe in a single ray of [the] sun" is unique and specific.[70] For Palamas, Benedict is "one of the most perfect" of those who experience *theosis* through *theoria*. Moreover, Palamas interprets Gregory's explication of Benedict's vision as a clear example of his essence/energies distinction.

> By this contemplation and by his supra-intelligible union with this light, he did not learn what it is by nature, but he learned that it really exists, is supernatural and superessential, different from all things; that its being is absolute and unique, and that it mysteriously comprehends all in itself.[71]

While it is thus clear that the Christian East reveres the monks Benedict and "Gregorios Dialogos" as paradigms of *theosis*, the matter is less obvious in the West. In both the *Rule of Benedict* and the writings of Gregory the Great there is a very real but also very understated doctrine of divinization. For both these monks this doctrine is intimately associated with their

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discretione praecipuam, sermone luculentam. deVogüé, *Dialogues* (SC 260), 242, li. 6-7.

[66] Gregory, *Dialogues*, 2.37, 2.

[67] Gregory, *Dialogues*, 2.37, 3: *Viderunt namque quia strata palliis atque innumeris corusca lampadibus uia recto orientis tramite ab eius cella in caelum usque tendebatur… Haec est uia, qua dilectus Domino caelum Benedictus ascendit*. deVogüé, *Dialogues* (SC 260), 244, li. 17-23.

[68] Olivier Rousseau, "Saint Benoît et le prophète Élisée", *Revue Monastique*, 144 (Maredsous:1956-III), 103-114.

[69] Gregory Palamas, *Triads* I.3.22.2-4: Πάντα δὲ τὰ ὄντα, ὥσπερ ὑπὸ μίαν τινὰ περιεχόμενα ἀκτῖνα τοῦ νοητοῦ ἡλίου τούτου, τῶν τελεωτέρων τις ἕτερος ἑώρακεν ἁγίων. Jean Meyendorff, ed. & trans. *Grégoire Palamas, Défense des saints hésychastes*, ser. *Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, études et documents*, fasic. 30, (Louvain: 1959) 157, li. 9-11.

[70] Lanne, Emmanuel. "L'interprétation palamite de la vision de S. Benoit," *Le millénaire du Mont-Athos 963-1963*, ser. *Études et mélanges*, v. 11 (Venice: Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Éditions de Chevtogne, 1964): 21-47.

[71] Gregry Palamas, *Triads* I.3.22.6-9: ἀπὸ τῆς θεωρίας ταύτης καὶ τῆς πρὸς αὐτὸ ὑπὲρ νοῦν ἑνώσεως, οὐχ ὅπερ ἐστὶν αὐτὸ τὴν φύσιν, ἀλλ' ὅτι ἐστὶν ὡς ἀληθῶς, καὶ ὑπερφυὲς καὶ ὑπερούσιόν ἐστιν, ἄλλο τι παρὰ τὰ ὄντα πάντα ὄν, ὃν δὲ κυρίως τε καὶ μόνον καὶ πᾶν ὂν ἀπορρήτως ἐν ἑαυτῷ συνειληφός. Meyendorff, ed. *Grégoire Palamas*, 157, li.13-17

understanding of contemplation. For Benedict the divinizing light and divine voice of scripture envelop the monk throughout the day during the divine office and in private *lectio divina* and prayer. By following Benedict's "little Rule for beginners" (RB 73) the monk learns to honor and venerate Christ in the abbot, in guests, in the sick, and eventually in all of the brethren, who "run with widening hearts in the sweetness of love" not as separate individuals but *pariter* - together - towards the heavenly kingdom. For Gregory the Great the light of divine contemplation encompasses both the vision of the world illuminated by God and the divine light hidden within the depths of the soul. Both were lost in Adam's fall, but are restored to those who undertake the way of *askesis* and learn the "greater love".

Epilogue

In all fairness it should be acknowledged that a question was posed at the very beginning of this discussion that was not directly answered, namely: "What do we mean by deification in early medieval western texts?" Behind it lies a broader and more fundamental question: "What do western Christians mean by 'deification', and why has the West traditionally been reticent in employing this term?" The second part of this question is easier to answer than the first. Western theologians have traditionally had a horror of any doctrine that potentially blurs the absolute and clear distinction between Creator and creature. They have frequently focused (some might say "obsessed") on the effects of original sin and its consequences for embodied human life. The doctrine of *theosis* is therefore most likely to be employed by western theologians when their gaze is diverted furthest from the present experience of struggling as embodied and fallen (albeit redeemed) beings. The language of deification and divinization are most congenial to western Christians in their reflections on protology, eschatology, and contemplation. Thus to cite a modern example, Pope St. John Paul II was able to employ it liberally in his "theology of the body" where he reinvigorated the doctrine of the preternatural gifts of Adam and Eve, and described humanity's eschatological divinization as a final "penetration and permeation of what is essentially human by what is essentially divine."[72] Western authors are most comfortable using the language of *theosis* when describing: first, a primordial gift humanity was offered but has lost; second, a sacramental transformation within the depths of the soul that can occasionally be glimpsed in contemplation; and, finally, a way of describing our future existence in the world to come. Perhaps the final word should be given to that most western of theologians, C.S. Lewis:

> The miracles that have already happened are, of course, as Scripture so often says, the first fruits of that cosmic summer which is presently coming on. Christ has risen, and so we shall rise. St Peter for a few seconds walked on the water; and the day will come when there will be a re-made universe, infinitely obedient to the will of glorified and obedient men, when we can do all things, when we shall be those gods that we are described as being in Scripture.[73]

[72] "The Theology of the Body" 1.1. (§1-23) and 1.3.1, (§64-72). Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them* (Pauline Books and Media, 2006).
[73] C.S. Lewis, "The Grand Miracle", preached in St. Jude on the Hill Church and afterwards published in *The Guardian*, (April 27, 1945) pp 161 & 165. repr. *God in the Dock*, (Eerdmans, 1970) 87.