

GREGORY OF NYSSA'S USE OF THE EXPRESSION ΑΠΑΥΓΑΣΜΑ

MAGDALENA MARUNOVÁ

ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of the term *ἀπαύγασμα* in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, with particular attention to its semantic flexibility and theological function across different doctrinal contexts. Focusing on Gregory's exegetical, ascetical, Trinitarian, and Christological texts, the article aims to show how the imagery of radiance and reflection serves to articulate the relation between divine transcendence and manifestation while safeguarding the incomprehensibility of the divine essence. Special emphasis is placed on Gregory's polemical use of *ἀπαύγασμα* in his anti-Eunomian and anti-Apollinarian writings, where the term becomes a precise conceptual tool for defending the co-eternity and consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, as well as the integrity of Christ's two natures. The study argues that Gregory's disciplined interpretation of this biblical metaphor exemplifies the pro-Nicene integration of scriptural exegesis and systematic theological reasoning.

Keywords

Gregory of Nyssa; *ἀπαύγασμα*; radiance and reflection; Trinitarian theology; pro-Nicene theology; divine causality; incomprehensibility of God; Christology

DOI: 10.14712/23363398.2026.18

In the Christological-Trinitarian controversies of the fourth century, the Cappadocian theologian Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395 A.D.) defended the same essence of the three divine hypostases against the Neo-Arian claims and also opposed the docetic views of Apollinarianism. To this are devoted his works *Contra Eunomium* I–III, *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii*, *De deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti*, and *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium*. Gregory also provided a kind of guide to

how human beings can know God, who is unknowable, and how they can testify of God, who is ineffable. The patristic texts often speak of the image of God and the mirror. I will focus on the radiance or reflection of God that Gregory of Nyssa mentions in connection with the relationship of the Son and the Father. Although the Father remains transcendent and unknowable in his essence, He is made known through the radiance of the Son and the action of the Holy Spirit. The Son makes the divine presence known to creation, He is the visible radiance of the Father, mediating God's presence and revealing God's glory to the world. Then Gregory gives terms, based primarily on biblical texts, that people use to speak of God and to somehow know God with the help of these terms. In the world He created, God can be observed and known also from his creation. He is also 'visible' within the souls of people, if they are purified and illuminated by Him.

This will be seen in one of the many expressions, one of the many names which, with reference to the biblical texts Heb. 1:3 and Wis. 7:26,¹ Gregory uses in the above context, namely, the expression ἀπαύγασμα, which means 'radiance,' 'brightness,' 'reflection,' 'effulgence' or 'emanation.'²

Before turning to Gregory's use of the term ἀπαύγασμα in his various writings, a brief clarification of its semantic scope is in order. The term, drawn from the Wisdom tradition (Wis. 7:26) and taken up in Heb. 1:3, is inherently ambivalent in Greek usage. It can denote either the radiant light proceeding from a luminous source,³ or the brightness of the illuminated medium⁴ – that is, light as a manifested state of space. This ambivalence is grounded in the broader semantics of αὐγή, which may signify both emission and brightness, and is already attested in ancient philosophical and lexicographical sources.⁵

¹ Heb. 1:3: ὁς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτῆρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, καθαρισμόν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς. Wis. 7:25–26: ἀτιμὶς γάρ ἐστιν τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ δυνάμεως καὶ ἀπόρροια τῆς τοῦ παντοκράτορος δόξης εἰλικρινῆς· διὰ τοῦτο οὐδὲν μεμιαιμένον εἰς αὐτὴν παρεμπίπτει. ἀπαύγασμα γάρ ἐστιν φωτὸς αἰδίου καὶ ἔσσωπρον ἀκηλίδωτον τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνεργείας καὶ εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ.

² Cf. *Lexicon Gregorianum*, s. v. ἀπαύγασμα, ed. Friedhelm Mann (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

³ Cf. e.g. Plato, *Phdr.* 250c4 (*Platonis opera*, II, ed. Ioannes Burnet, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901, reprinted 1964).

⁴ Cf. e.g. Aristotle, *Sens.* 439B2 (*Parva naturalia*, ed. William David Ross, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955, reprinted 1970).

⁵ Cf. Hesychius, *Lexicon*, 192–3 (*Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, ed. Kurt Latte, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1953).

From a physical point of view, both meanings describe the same reality, namely the activity of light within the medium. From the perspective of metaphysical causality, however, they represent two different modes of predication: radiant light describes the causal process from source to effect, while ambient brightness describes the same process from effect to source. As will become clear, Gregory's use of the term ἀπαύγασμα is not uniform across contexts but is carefully adapted to the theological purpose at hand, a fact of particular importance in his Trinitarian polemics against Eunomius.⁶

Let us first break down the types of texts in which the term ἀπαύγασμα occurs, then briefly introduce these writings of Gregory, and look at the context in which the term is used.

1. When describing God who is indescribable

1.1 In *Canticum canticorum*⁷

In Canticum canticorum, addressed to the young widow and deaconess Olympias, is perhaps the most accomplished of Gregory of Nyssa's works (together with *The Life of Moses*) on the mystical life. It is usually dated to the final period of his life, approximately to the years 391–394, and is often regarded as his last extant work. The text takes the form of fifteen homilies in which Gregory offers a detailed, verse-by-verse exposition of the Old Testament book *The Song of Songs*, employing a consistently allegorical method in continuity with the earlier Alexandrian tradition, especially that of Origen, yet marked distinctly by his own theological profile. The love dialogue between the bridegroom and the bride is interpreted as a symbolic image of the relationship between Christ and the human soul (or the Church), and as a description of the dynamic path of spiritual growth, in which the soul, through desire, purification, and an ever-deepening love, draws nearer to God without ever fully comprehending Him. A characteristic feature of the interpretation is his emphasis on endless progress in the knowledge and love of God.⁸

⁶ Cf. Isidoros C. Katsos, *The Metaphysics of Light in the Hexaemeral Literature. From Philo of Alexandria to Gregory of Nyssa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 192f.

⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *In Canticum canticorum*, ed. Hermann Langerbeck (*GNO* VI, Leiden: Brill, 1986).

⁸ Cf. Lenka Karfíková, *Řehoř z Nyssy: Boží a lidská nekonečnost* (Praha: OIKOYMENH, 1999), 217 ff.; Richard A. Norris Jr., 'The Homilies on the Song,' in *Gregory of Nyssa:*

In the passage where the term ἀπαύγασμα occurs, Gregory is concerned (as in many other places) with the unknowability and indescribability of God:

Every teaching concerning the ineffable nature of God, even if it seems to reveal the best and highest possible understanding, is the likeness of gold, not gold itself, for the good transcending the human mind cannot be accurately presented. Even if someone like St. Paul was initiated into the ineffable mysteries of paradise and heard words not to be spoken (2Cor 12:4), any understanding of God remains unutterable. Paul himself says that such conceptions are ineffable. Those persons, therefore, who offer us any good thoughts about these mysteries, are unable to state anything regarding the divine nature. Rather, they speak of the splendor of God's glory, the stamp of his nature (Heb. 1:3), the form of God, the Word in the beginning, the Word being God (1 John 1:1).⁹

This passage articulates a fundamental principle of Gregory of Nyssa's theology: the radical disproportion between the divine nature and human cognitive capacities. The existence of God, as Gregory emphasizes, differs fundamentally from the existence of anything created. God is uncreated and unlimited in nature and therefore lies wholly beyond human cognitive powers – not only beyond sense perception, but also beyond thought.¹⁰ Even Moses, despite the many theophanies he experienced, did not attain a vision of the divine essence;¹¹ on the contrary, he learned precisely that it cannot be grasped. The vision of God's 'back'¹² signifies not comprehension, but following – an unending movement along the spiritual path.¹⁵

The same holds true of Paul the Apostle. Although he was elevated 'to the third heaven' and initiated into the inexpressible mysteries of

Homilies on the Song of Songs, eds. Brian E. Daley and John T. Fitzgerald, Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Richard A. Norris Jr. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), xx ff.

⁹ *In Cant.* 5 (GNO VI,85,16–86,6); translated by R. McCambly.

¹⁰ Cf. *In Cant.* 5 (GNO VI,157,15–21); cf. Lenka Karfíková, *Duše zrcadlo* (Praha: Triáda, 2016), 31; Markéta Dudzиковá, 'Šalomounova fysika,' in *Řehoř z Nyssy, Homilie na knihu Kazatel* (Praha: OIKOYMENH, 2022), 37.

¹¹ Cf. *Ex* 3; *De vita Moys.* I,20 f. (GNO VII/1,9,7–24); II,19–26 (GNO VII/1,38,25–41,12); *Ex* 19–31; 35–34:28; *De vita Moys.* I,60 (GNO VII/1,27,6–12); *De vita Moys.* II,219–255 (GNO VII/1,110,6–122,3).

¹² Cf. *Ex* 33:23.

¹⁵ Cf. *In Cant.* 12 (GNO VI, 355,14–356,16); cf. Karfíková, *Duše*, 29.

paradise, he himself insists that what he encountered cannot be rendered in human speech. Having explored, as far as humanly possible, ‘the depth of the riches, wisdom and knowledge of God,’¹⁴ and having been enlightened concerning what is ‘inscrutable and untraceable,’¹⁵ Paul nevertheless affirms that the divine essence remains unattainable and incomprehensible to human understanding.¹⁶

According to Gregory, therefore, the unlimited divinity can never be definitively grasped by human words or concepts; these are merely ‘the likeness of gold, not gold itself,’ as the passage above makes clear. Since we cannot perceive the divine reality itself, but only its manifestation, for this reason, human discourse about God can express no more than intimations, and Scripture itself prefers a plurality of images rather than the formulation of a single concept.¹⁷

1.2 De perfectione¹⁸

In *De perfectione* (which may be one of Gregory’s early writings – the date is disputed¹⁹) Gregory deals with the meanings of the names used in relation to Christ, some of which can be imitated and others can only be worshipped (ἀπαύγασμα δόξης is one of these names),²⁰ drawing mainly on the Pauline epistles. It shows the perfection towards which Christians must aspire. It is the name of Christ by which one is to be led to the Christian way of life. One is a Christian by participation in Christ, and perfection in Christian life means to participate in soul, in words, and in all that one does in life in the terms that mark the name of Christ.²¹

Gregory also emphasizes here that the nature of God is completely incomprehensible and indescribable. We learn that when Paul the Apostle speaks of what can be thought of in connection with the nature of God, he refers to peace, power, life, righteousness, light and

¹⁴ Cf. *Rom* 11:35.

¹⁵ Cf. *Rom* 11:35.

¹⁶ Cf. *De perf.* (*GNO* VIII/1,187,15–188,4).

¹⁷ Cf. *In Cant.* 5 (*GNO* VI, 159,1 ff.); Karfíková, *Duše*, 26.

¹⁸ *De perfectione*, ed. Werner Jaeger (*GNO* VIII/1, Leiden: Brill, 1986).

¹⁹ Cf. Gerhard May, ‘Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregor von Nyssa,’ in *Écriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nysse. Actes du Colloque de Chevetogne (22–26 septembre 1969)*, ed. Marguerite Harl (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 56; Jean Daniélou, ‘La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse,’ *Studia patristica* 7 (1966): 168.

²⁰ Cf. *De perf.* (*GNO* VIII/1,178,11–14).

²¹ Cf. *De perf.* (*GNO* VIII/1,212,17–20).

truth – but when he looks for names for that which cannot be grasped by thought, he finds no apt name. Therefore that which transcends every good, which can neither be properly thought of nor spoken of, he calls ‘glory’ (δόξα) and ‘being’ (ὑπόστασις). On the one hand, then, he leaves the being which transcends all that exists unnamed; however, when he interprets the indissoluble (τὸ συναφές) relation of the Son to the Father, he calls the Son ‘the reflection of glory’ (ἀπαύγασμα δόξης) and ‘the exact imprint of being’ (χαρακτήρ ὑποστάσεως). By the word ‘reflection’ he denotes the equal nature (τὸ συμφυές), and by the word ‘exact imprint’ the equal status of both (τὸ ἰσοστάσιον).²²

For neither is any difference conceived between the ray and the nature that shares its radiance, nor is there any diminishment of the exact imprint with the hypostasis imprinting it. Moreover, whoever has understood the nature that sheds brilliance has certainly by this also understood the reflection (ἀπαύγασμα); and whoever has received in his mind the greatness of the hypostasis will certainly also measure the hypostasis by the exact imprint that has appeared.²³

There is a synthesis of the terms ἀπαύγασμα and χαρακτήρ in μορφή (form), a term used by Gregory on the basis of Paul’s words in Phil 2:6. Christ is here called ‘the form of God’ (μορφή θεοῦ). The term ‘form’ suggests the greatness of God; it is contemplated as ‘the Father’s majesty, which in no way surpasses its own form (μορφή) nor is found outside the exact imprint (χαρακτήρ) which points to it.’²⁴ Which, according to Gregory, is also evident in the words of the Gospel, ‘Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.’²⁵ Thus, according to Gregory, it is expressed that there is nothing extra, nor is anything lacking.²⁶

In *De perfectione*, Gregory uses the term ἀπαύγασμα to convey the meaning of Christ’s name and to express the inseparable relationship

²² Cf. *De perf.* (GNO VIII/1,188,6–189,1).

²³ *De perf.* (GNO VIII/1,189,1–7): οὔτε γὰρ ἀγῆς πρὸς τὴν ἀπαυγάζουσαν φύσιν ἐπινοεῖται τι μέσον οὔτε τις τοῦ χαρακτήρος ἐλάττωσις πρὸς τὴν ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ χαρακτηριζομένην ὑπόστασιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ τὴν ἀπαυγάζουσαν φύσιν νοήσας καὶ τὸ ἀπαύγασμα ταύτη πάντως συγκατενόησε καὶ ὁ τὸ μέγεθος τῆς ὑποστάσεως ἐν νῷ λαβὼν τῷ ἐπιφανομένῳ χαρακτήρι πάντως ἔμμετρει καὶ τὴν ὑπόστασιν (translated by Rowan A. Greer, in: *One Path for All: Gregory of Nyssa on the Christian Life and Human Destiny*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books 2015, 32).

²⁴ *De perf.* (GNO VIII/1,189,10–12; transl. by R. A. Greer).

²⁵ *John* 14:9.

²⁶ Cf. *De perf.* (GNO VIII/1,189,14–16).

of the Son with the Father and to emphasize the equal essence of the Father and the Son.

1.3 In sanctum Stephanum²⁷

This speech was given on Christmas Day, December 26, probably in 386. Gregory first returns to the feast of the previous day and speaks of Christ, setting beside him his imitator Stephen. Then, based on the Biblical narrative in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 6–7), he recounts the life and deeds of Stephen, who was full of the Spirit of God and devoted to Christ, which is also reflected in his speech (in Acts 7), crowned by Stephen's martyrdom. This is preceded by the vision of the glory of God and the Son as described in Acts.²⁸ Gregory explains that Stephen ascended from his nature, and before he left the body he gazed with clear eyes on the glory of God (θειαν δόξαν) and on the reflection or brightness of glory (τὸ τῆς δόξης ἀπαύγασμα).²⁹ Here Gregory warns that this biblical verse must not be interpreted in the sense of subordination, that is, it emphasizes the equal nature of the Father and the Son and the Spirit.³⁰

2. On the radiance of God's nature – the reflection on people

*De beatitudinibus*³¹

In *On the Beatitudes*, one of the early works,³² Gregory presents a spiritual ascent similar to the sermons on the Lord's Prayer, using a New Testament parallel to Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai (Moses is then the subject of Gregory's masterpiece, *The Life of Moses*).³³

²⁷ *In sanctum Stephanum* I, ed. Otto Lendle (*GNO* X/1, Leiden: Brill, 1990).

²⁸ *Acts* 7:55–56: ὑπάρχων δὲ πλήρης πνεύματος ἁγίου ἀτενίσας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εἶδεν δόξαν θεοῦ καὶ Ἰησοῦν ἐστῶτα ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ εἶπεν· ἰδοὺ θεωρῶ τοὺς οὐρανοὺς διηνοημένους καὶ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκ δεξιῶν ἐστῶτα τοῦ θεοῦ.

²⁹ *In Steph.* I (*GNO* 87,4–87,8) ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἐκβάς τὴν φύσιν καὶ πρὶν ἐκβῆναι τοῦ σώματος βλέπει τοῖς καθαροῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ... τὸ ἐντὸς τῶν ἀδύτων διαφανόμενον, αὐτὴν τε τὴν θείαν δόξαν καὶ τὸ τῆς δόξης ἀπαύγασμα· καὶ τῆς μὲν πατρικῆς δόξης οὐδεὶς ὑπογράφεται χαρακτήρ διὰ τοῦ λόγου, τὸ δὲ ἀπαύγασμα ἐν τῷ ὀφθέντι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις εἶδει τῷ ἀθλητῇ καθοράται, ὡς ἦν χωρητὸν τῇ ἀνθρωπίνῃ φύσει, οὕτω φαινόμενον.

³⁰ Cf. Johan Leemans, s. v. *In sanctum Stephanum* I, in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, eds. Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco and Giulio Maspero (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2010), 709 f.

³¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *De beatitudinibus*, ed. John F. Callahan (*GNO* VII/2, Leiden: Brill, 1992).

³² Cf. Daniélou, *La chronologie*, 159–162; May, 'Die Chronologie,' 56; Karffková, *Řehoř z Nyssy*, 68.

³³ Cf. *De oratione dominica*, ed. John F. Callahan (*GNO* VII/2, Leiden: Brill, 1992); *De vita Moysis*, ed. Herbert Musurillo (*GNO* VII/1, Leiden: Brill, 1991).

In the sixth sermon, dedicated to the verse ‘Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God,’⁵⁴ Gregory focuses on the incomprehensibility of God and tries to reveal how it is possible for humans to see God, who ‘no one has seen or can see.’⁵⁵ And yet, to see God means eternal life. Moreover, as Gregory points out, to see, according to Scripture, means ‘to have.’ It seems, then, that something is promised in Scripture that is unattainable for humans.⁵⁶ But God cannot ask people to do something that goes beyond their nature. God, whose nature transcends all nature, and who is invisible and incomprehensible, can be known by human beings in another way – from what God has created, from his action. As from a work of art, humans can perceive the artist who has imprinted his skill on the work. It is not the nature of the artist that is visible, but the skill he has imprinted on the work. Looking at the created universe, we can get an idea not of the essence (οὐσία) but of the wisdom of the one who created it all. And if one reflects on the cause of one’s life, one can understand not the essence of God, but the goodness of God.⁵⁷ People can even have God in themselves, they can see Him – but they must have their hearts purified from all created things and from the passions or affections. People who have their hearts thus purified see the image of the divine nature in their own beauty.⁵⁸ When a person hears of God’s incomprehensibility, ineffability and inaccessibility, they should not despair of never attaining their desire for God. When God created humans, He endowed them at the same time by impressing upon their nature the imitation of the goodness of His own nature.⁵⁹ But this likeness to God is hidden beneath a coating of sin – so if a human being cleanses their heart (heart meaning the inner human)⁴⁰ from filth, the divine beauty can shine forth again⁴¹ and the person will be restored to the likeness of God and become good again.⁴²

⁵⁴ *Matt* 5:8; Gregory of Nyssa, *De beat.* 6 (GNO VII/2,136,25–148,22).

⁵⁵ *1Tim* 6:16: ὃν εἶδεν οὐδεὶς ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ ἰδεῖν δύναται; *John* 1,18: Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε· μονογενὴς θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκείνου ἐξηγήσατο. *Ex* 33:20: καὶ εἶπεν Οὐ δύνησι ἰδεῖν μου τὸ πρόσωπον· οὐ γὰρ μὴ ἴδῃ ἄνθρωπος τὸ πρόσωπόν μου καὶ ζήσεται.

⁵⁶ Cf. *De beat.* 6 (GNO VII/2,137–139).

⁵⁷ Cf. *De beat.* 6 (GNO VII/2,141,6–15).

⁵⁸ Cf. *De beat.* 6 (GNO VII/2,142,12–22).

⁵⁹ Cf. *De beat.* 6 (GNO VII/2,143,6–8).

⁴⁰ Cf. *De beat.* 6 (GNO VII/2,143,16).

⁴¹ Cf. *De beat.* 6 (GNO VII/2,143,13).

⁴² Cf. *De beat.* 6 (GNO VII/2,142,23–143,20).

For what is like to the Good is certainly itself good. Hence, if a man who is pure of heart sees himself, he sees in himself what he desires; and thus he becomes blessed, because when he looks at his own purity, he sees the archetype in the image ... Though men who see the sun in a mirror do not gaze at the sky itself, yet they see the sun in the reflection of the mirror no less than those who look at its very orb. So, He says, it is also with you. Even though you are too weak to perceive the Light itself, yet, if you but return to the grace of the Image with which you were informed from the beginning, you will have all you seek in yourselves. For the Godhead is purity, freedom from passion, and separation from all evil. If therefore these things be in you, God is indeed in you. Hence, if your thought is without any alloy of evil, free from passion, and alien from all stain, you are blessed because you are clear of sight. You are able to perceive what is invisible to those who are not purified, because you have been cleansed; the darkness caused by material entanglements has been removed from the eyes of your soul, and so you see the blessed vision radiant in the pure heaven of your heart. But what is this vision? It is purity, sanctity, simplicity, and other such luminous reflections (*ἀπανγίσματα*) of the Divine Nature, in which God is contemplated.⁴⁵

In the sixth homily *On the Beatitudes*, Gregory resolves the paradox of the promised vision of God by distinguishing between the unknowability of the divine essence and the possibility of participation in God through likeness. The 'luminous reflections' (*ἀπανγίσματα*) of the divine nature do not denote any direct apprehension of God's essence, which remains inaccessible, but rather the radiance of divine goodness as it is communicated and reflected in the purified human soul. Purity, sanctity, simplicity, and freedom from passion are not attributes of the divine nature as such, but participable manifestations of God's goodness, which become visible where the image of God in humanity is cleansed and restored. To see God, therefore, is not an epistemological act but an existential state: the contemplation of God in and through the renewed likeness, where the divine light shines forth not as its source, but as its reflected radiance.

⁴⁵ *De beat.* 6 (*GNO* VII/2,143,20–144,13), transl. by Hilda C. Graef; cf. Athanasios, *Contra gentes* 34,15–51 (ed. Robert W. Thomson, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). Cf. also Gregory of Nyssa, *In Cant.* 3 (*GNO* VI,90,10–16).

3. In the Trinitarian texts

3.1 *Contra Eunomium*⁴⁴ and *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii*⁴⁵

Gregory of Nyssa took up the Christological and Trinitarian controversy with the Neo-Arian bishop Eunomius of Cyzicus after the death of his elder brother Basil. Eunomius advocated a hierarchical conception of the Trinity, influenced by Neoplatonic patterns of causality, according to which the three divine hypostases are ordered in a descending sequence, with the Son ontologically and temporally posterior to the Father. In response, Gregory composed three books *Against Eunomius* (*Contra Eunomium*) as well as the *Refutation of the Confession of Eunomius* (*Refutatio confessionis Eunomii*), in which he defended – following Basil’s theological line – the full divinity and consubstantiality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The first two books of *Contra Eunomium* were written between 380 and the spring of 381, that is, prior to the Council of Constantinople (May–July 381); the third book likely dates from 381–383, while the *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii* was probably composed around 383.⁴⁶

Within these anti-Eunomian writings, the semantic potential of the term ἀπαύγασμα acquires a sharply defined polemical function. Against Eunomius’ claim that the Son came into being and therefore stands in a temporal and ontological sequence after the Father, Gregory consistently interprets ἀπαύγασμα in an active sense, as radiant light proceeding from its source. The image presupposes the simultaneity and inseparability of glory and its radiance: light is never prior to its radiance, nor can radiance exist apart from the light from which it proceeds.

By applying the analogy of light and radiance to the relation between cause and effect, Gregory excludes any temporal priority of the Father over the Son. The Son, as the radiance of divine glory, is co-eternal with the Father in the same way that the shining of light is coexistent with its luminous source. In this context, ἀπαύγασμα does not denote a second-

⁴⁴ *Contra Eunomium libri I et II (vulgo I et XII B)*, ed. Werner Jaeger (*GNO I*, Leiden: Brill, 1960); *Contra Eunomium liber III (vulgo III–XII)*, ed. Werner Jaeger (*GNO II*, Leiden: Brill, 1960).

⁴⁵ *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii (vulgo C. Eun. liber II)*, ed. Werner Jaeger (*GNO II*, Leiden: Brill, 1960).

⁴⁶ Cf. Johannes Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa. Philosophical Background and Theological Significance* (Leiden – Boston – Köln: Brill, 2000), 206f.; Karfiková, *Řehoř z Nyssy*, 169, 172f.; 40.

ary brightness or a reflected quality, but rather the very manifestation of the source's power and glory. The polemical force of the image lies precisely in this top-down predication, which renders Eunomius' assertion that 'the Son once was not' conceptually incoherent.⁴⁷

Referring explicitly to Wisdom 7:26, Gregory emphasizes that the Son is eternal with the Father and that the Father cannot be described as 'elder.' He rejects Eunomius' claim that there could ever have been a time when the Son did not exist. The radiance (ἀπαύγασμα) is perceived simultaneously with the light from which it proceeds; the cause of the radiance cannot be temporally prior to it, since both are eternal together.⁴⁸ The Son is the Word who is 'in the beginning,'⁴⁹ and glory and radiance are so closely bound that neither can exist without the other. To deny the existence of one is necessarily to deny the existence of the other.⁵⁰ If there were no radiance, there could be no glory.⁵¹ Gregory therefore concludes:

So if the Only-begotten God did not exist before he came to be, as Eunomius says, and Christ is Power of God, and Wisdom of God, and Stamp, and Radiance, neither surely did the Father exist, whose Power and Wisdom and Stamp and Radiance the Son is.⁵²

3.2 De deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti et in Abraham⁵³

Gregory makes similar arguments in *De deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti*,⁵⁴ which he wrote in 383 on the occasion of the Synod of Con-

⁴⁷ Cf. Katsos, *The Metaphysics*, 193 f.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Contra Eun.* I (GNO I,132,28–133,4): ἀπαύγασμα γὰρ αἰδίου φωτὸς παρὰ τῆς σοφίας ἀκούσαντες συνεπιθεωροῦμεν τῇ αἰδιότητι τοῦ πρωτοτύπου φωτὸς τὸ ἀπαύγασμα, καὶ τὸ αἴτιον τοῦ ἀπαυγίσματος ἐννοοῦντες καὶ τὸ πρεσβύτερον οὐ δεχόμενοι. Cf. *Contra Eun.* I (GNO I,209,19–26); *Contra Eun.* III (GNO II,8,20–25; 190,21–27); *Contra Eun.* III (GNO II,100,18).

⁴⁹ Cf. *Ref. Eun.* (GNO II, 380, 15–26); cf. *John* 1:1.18.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Contra Eun.* III (GNO II, 202,22–24; 203,23–204,2).

⁵¹ Cf. *Contra Eun.* III (GNO II, 202,10 f.; 203,15–18; 204,2 f.; 204,18–22); *Contra Eun.* I (GNO I, 209,16).

⁵² Cf. *Contra Eun.* III (GNO II, 204,7–12; transl. by Stuart G. Hall, in *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium III, An English Translation with Commentary and Supporting Studies*, eds. Johan Leemans and Matthieu Cassin, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2014).

⁵³ *De deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti et in Abraham*, ed. Ernest Rhein (GNO X/2, Leiden: Brill, 1996).

⁵⁴ *De deit.* (GNO X/2,123,22–124,9): ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης εἶπε τὸν υἱὸν ὁ ἀπόστολος καὶ χαρακτῆρα τῆς ὑποστάσεως ... ὃν ἕκαστον καθάπερ ἐν συζυγαίαις τιςιν ἀναγκαίαις οὐδὲν ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ καταμόνας νοεῖται, ἀλλὰ συνημμένως ἀμφοτέρω καὶ μετ' ἀλλήλων καταλαμβάνεται, τὸ γὰρ ἀπαύγασμα πάντως τινός ἐστιν ἀπαύγασμα ... ὥσπερ τοίνυν οὐκ ἂν ἀπαύγασμα εἶη τὸ φῶς

stantinople,⁵⁵ at which he delivered his speech and to which the representatives of Arians, Anhomoians (Neo-Arians, Eunomians) and Pneumatomachians (Macedonians) were invited. He sharply criticizes them for denying the doctrine of the equal nature of the divine persons, and compares them, with reference to Mark 2:22 (parr.), to ‘old wineskins’ into which ‘new wine’ cannot be poured – in consequence of their disbelief, they cannot accept the divine doctrine.⁵⁶ This simile, then, according to Gregory, expresses the relation of the Holy Spirit to the human soul. Gregory describes the disturbing situation in Constantinople, where they hold to a doctrine denying the same nature of divine persons, which reminds him of the situation in Athens at the time of Paul the Apostle’s appearance at the Areopagus, where Paul debated with the Stoics and Epicureans, among others.⁵⁷ The Anhomoians, according to Gregory, are close to the Stoics in claiming that the Only-begotten God is created. The Stoics, after all, hold that the divinity is material. And according to the Epicureans, there is nothing that transcends existing things and their ordering, no providence, but everything happens of itself. Thus their views tend towards atheism, as Gregory summarizes.⁵⁸ The Anhomoians, according to Gregory, are their imitators – they claim to know the Father, yet deny the Son. Those who do not acknowledge the Son do not believe in the Father either, so they deny the Divinity as such, and are therefore in the same position as Epicurus.⁵⁹

And it is in this context that Gregory uses the expression ἀπαύγασμα:

The apostle called the Son ‘the radiance of glory,’ ‘the exact imprint of a person,’ ‘the power of God,’ ‘the wisdom of God,’ and the like. Neither part of these, as it were, inseparable pairs is conceivable in itself, separately, but we understand the two parts as dependent on each other. A radiance is, of course, a radiance of something, and an imprint is, of course, an imprint of something. Just as light would not be a radiance if there were no shining cause, just so the shining nature would not be conceivable in itself if the

μη οὐσης τῆς ἀπαναζούσης αἰτίας, οὕτως ἡ ἀπαναζούσα φύσις οὐκ ἂν καθ’ ἑαυτὴν νοηθεῖη μὴ συνεπινοουμένου τοῦ ἀπανάσματος.

⁵⁵ Cf. Tina Dolidze, s. v. *De deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti et in Abraham*, in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, 216.

⁵⁶ Cf. *De deit.* (GNO X/2,119).

⁵⁷ Cf. *De deit.* (GNO X/2,120 ff).

⁵⁸ Cf. *De deit.* (GNO X/2,125).

⁵⁹ Cf. *De deit.* (GNO X/2,125; 125,4–8).

radiance were not thought at the same time with it. Similarly, the exact imprint shows the person, and the person is recognized by the imprint. Just so God's power cannot be without God, and God in his nature cannot be thought without power. So whoever says of one of the parts that make sense as in this pair that it does not, surely thereby potentially invalidates the remaining part. Of course the advocates of godlessness declare that the Son once was not. If there were no Son, then surely there were no Father. If there were no radiance, then there were not even that which emanates it. If there were no imprint, surely there were no person. If there were no power, if there were no wisdom, without which God does not exist (for it is through these attributes that it is possible to think of God's existence), how could there be a God who is above all?⁶⁰

Later in the text Gregory refutes the objections of these contemporary 'Epicureans,' namely, that the Father is 'greater' and the Son 'lesser,' the Father sends and the Son is sent, by adding words from the Gospel: 'The one who sent me is with me,' (John 8:29), and explains the conflicting statements in the New Testament by saying that one statement refers to human nature ('the Father is greater than I,' John 14:28; 'The one who sent me,' John 8:29) and others to the divine nature ('I am in the Father, and the Father is in me,' John 14:10; 'I and the Father are one,' John 10:30; 'equality with God,' Phlp 2:6).⁶¹

Then, through the story of Abraham and his sacrifice, Gregory shows that the highest form of knowing God is faith.⁶² The last part of the writing is devoted to a defense of the Divinity of the Holy Spirit against the Macedonians who denied that the Holy Spirit was divine.⁶³

3.3 *Ad Simplicium*⁶⁴

In his writing *Ad Simplicium* (the date of which is uncertain) Gregory polemicises with the Eunomians and gathers, in defence of the faith for a certain tribune Simplicius, arguments from his works *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii* and *Ad Graecos*. Here, too, he points out by means of the image of light and its radiance or brightness, which lasts as long

⁶⁰ *De deit.* (GNO X/2,123,22–125,1).

⁶¹ Cf. *De deit.* (GNO X/2,125–130).

⁶² Cf. *De deit.* (GNO X/2,131–140).

⁶³ Cf. *De deit.* (GNO X/2,141–144); cf. also Dolidze, 217 f.

⁶⁴ *Ad Simplicium De fide*, ed. Friedrich Müller (GNO III/1, Leiden: Brill, 1958).

as light itself, that the divine nature of the Son is eternal.⁶⁵ The only thing that can be created is the body of Jesus – Gregory distinguishes between divine and human nature.⁶⁶ Moreover, as the beginning of John’s Gospel (1:1) indicates, the Word (Λόγος) was in the beginning, not after the beginning.⁶⁷

In this text, Gregory argues against applying attributes of physical generation to the Divine nature. He emphasizes that the Son is the ‘brightness of the Father’s glory,’ illustrating the inseparable relationship between the two – just as light is inseparable from its source. The Apostle Paul’s analogy shows that the Son and Father are co-eternal: it is as impossible for glory to exist without radiance as for the lamp to exist without light. Therefore, the claim that ‘the Son once was not’ is invalid, as it would imply the Father’s glory also ‘once was not.’

Gregory further uses the example of Adam and Abel to refute the idea that being begotten or unbegotten creates a difference in nature. Adam was created directly by God (unbegotten), while Abel was born through natural generation (begotten), yet both shared the same human nature. Similarly, the Father and Son share the same divine nature despite one being unbegotten and the other begotten.

Finally, the text rejects the idea that the Holy Spirit could be a created being and asserts that there is no hierarchy or gradation within the Trinity. All three persons – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – share the same divine nature.⁶⁸

Gregory’s deployment of the term ἀπαύγασμα in his anti-Eunomian writings reveals a carefully constructed theological strategy aimed at safeguarding the co-eternity and consubstantiality of the Son with the Father. By interpreting radiance not as a derivative or secondary property, but as the necessary and simultaneous manifestation of its source, Gregory articulates a model of divine causality that excludes all forms of temporal succession within the Trinity. The light–radiance analogy

⁶⁵ Cf. *Ad Simpl.* (GNO III/1,65,22–64,15): ὁ Παῦλος ἀπαύγασμα δόξης αὐτὸν ὀνομάζει, ἵνα διδαχθῶμεν ὅτι ... ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ὁ υἱὸς καὶ οὐδέποτε χωρὶς τοῦ υἱοῦ ὁ πατήρ· οὐκ ἐγχωρεῖ... ἄνευ ἁ. εἶναι τὸν λόγον... ὡςπερ τὸ εἶναι ἁ. μαρτυρία ἐστὶ τοῦ καὶ τὴν δόξαν εἶναι ... οὕτω τὸ λέγειν μὴ εἶναι ποτε ἁ. ἀπόδειξις ἐστὶ τοῦ μηδὲ τὴν δόξαν εἶναι, ὅτε οὐκ ἦν τὸ ἁ. τὴν γὰρ δόξαν ἄνευ ἁ. εἶναι ἀμήχανον. ὡςπερ οὖν οὐκ ἔστιν ἐπὶ τοῦ ἁ. λέγειν ὅτι εἰ ἦν, οὐκ ἐγένετο, καὶ εἰ ἐγένετο οὐκ ἦν, οὕτω μάταιόν ἐστι περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ ταῦτα λέγειν, διότι ὁ υἱὸς ἐστὶ τὸ ἀπαύγασμα.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Ad Simpl.* (GNO III/1,62–63).

⁶⁷ Cf. *Ad Simpl.* (GNO III/1,64–65).

⁶⁸ Cf. *Ad Simpl.* (GNO III/1,63,22–65,24); translation is taken from NPNF (V2–05); cf. Drecoll, s. v. *Ad Simplicium, de fide*, in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, 678 ff.

thus functions not merely as a rhetorical image, but as a precise conceptual instrument: it renders Eunomius' claim that 'the Son once was not' logically untenable, since the negation of the radiance would imply the negation of the source itself.

Across *Contra Eunomium*, *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii*, *De deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti*, and *Ad Simplicium*, Gregory consistently integrates this imagery into a broader theological framework in which divine generation does not entail ontological subordination. The Son's status as ἀπαύγασμα secures both his distinction from the Father and his full participation in the one divine nature. In this way, Gregory's exegesis contributes decisively to the pro-Nicene articulation of Trinitarian doctrine, demonstrating how scriptural metaphors, when carefully interpreted, can bear substantial dogmatic weight.

4. In Christological Texts

*Antirreticus adversus Apollinarium*⁶⁹

Among the Christological texts are the writings of the *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium*, i.e. the answer to Apollinarius' *Proof* (Ἀπόδειξις) of the incarnation of God in human form, against which Gregory argues in a similar way as against Eunomius, quoting passages from Apollinarius' writings and refuting these claims.⁷⁰ The text was written after the polemic with Eunomius, in the 80s of the 4th century.

Apollinaris of Laodicea (in Syria) was one of the bishops who held the Nicene formulation of the Divinity of Christ, and he himself was for many years friends with Athanasius of Alexandria, and in 361–364 with Gregory's brother Basil, who was quite reserved about Apollinaris until 376. Basil distanced himself from his teachings only in 377, when at the same time Apollinarios and his followers distanced themselves

⁶⁹ *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium*, ed. Friedrich Müller (*GNO* III/1, Leiden: Brill, 1958). It was probably written in 387; cf. Pierre Maraval, s. v. *Chronology of Works*, in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, 155.

⁷⁰ Cf. Drecoll, s. v. *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium*, in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, 48; according to Georgios Lekkas, 'Gregory of Nyssa's Refutation of the Pre-Ensoulement of God the Word in His Antirrheticus Adversus Apollinarium,' in *Gregory of Nyssa: The Minor Treatises on Trinitarian Theology and Apollinarism*, eds. Volker Henning Drecoll and Margitta Berghaus (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2011), 557, Gregory seems to have rejected the opinions of Apollinarius' disciples rather than his own.

from the bishops of the Nicene Creed and formed their own church, as is clear from Basil's letters.⁷¹

Apollinaris, in his Christological doctrine,⁷² asserted that the only begotten Son of God had a human body and a human soul, in the leading part of which dwelt the divine mind (νοῦς), inseparable from the body, and as such existed before the creation of the world. Christ cannot be regarded as a human, but only as resembling a human.⁷³

In response, Gregory describes the incarnation as the union of God with man, which consists of body and soul. He thus rejects the very formulation of the title, i.e., that the incarnation took place in human form. Assuming that in the human there is a soul taken on by the Word (Logos), it must be a human soul, including the intellect.⁷⁴ Against Apollinarius' assumption that the humanity taken on by Christ had his origin before all time, Gregory notes that this would then have to be true of the Virgin Mary, who would thus be older than Adam.⁷⁵ This is hardly compatible with Christ's growth from infancy to adulthood.⁷⁶ Also, from a soteriological point of view, it is crucial to admit that the soul in man was a soul that belonged to human nature (and did not have a heavenly origin before the world began), because only in this way can the significance of Christ's death for the universal redemption of human nature be expressed.⁷⁷ It must be assumed, therefore, that the divine nature, which is simple, remained simple in Him who became incarnate, because only thus could redemption be efficacious.⁷⁸ The exaltation of humans is conceivable only through the conception of the incarnation as self-humiliation, as taking the form of a servant.⁷⁹

⁷¹ Cf. Silke-Petra Bergjan, 'Anti-arianische Argumente gegen Apollinarios. Gregor von Nyssa in der Auseinandersetzung mit Apollinarios in *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium*,' in *Gregory of Nyssa: The Minor Treatises on Trinitarian Theology and Apollinarism*, eds. Volker Henning Drecoll and Margitta Berghaus (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2011), 481f.; Karfíková, *Řehoř z Nyssy*, 171.

⁷² His teachings were condemned at the 1st Council of Constantinople in 381.

⁷³ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 186–187; 151; 154); cf. Lekkas, 'Gregory of Nyssa's Refutation,' 557.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 140,23–141,6; 144,27).

⁷⁵ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 148,14–22).

⁷⁶ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 149,17–150,6).

⁷⁷ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 153,11–14).

⁷⁸ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 153,26–154,6).

⁷⁹ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 160,13–29; 161,9–13).

Apollinarius' understanding of the incarnate Christ as the divine intellect in the flesh (νοῦς ἔνσαρκος) leads to his being regarded not as a human, but as something like a human (καθάπερ ἄνθρωπος).⁸⁰ This conception of Christ's incarnation, in which they are not two different realities, is also reflected in Apollinarius' conception of the divinity – for Christ is the imprint and reflection of the Father's hypostasis. It follows, according to Gregory, that if he shares the same essence (ὁμοούσιος) with the Father, it would follow that the Father must also be corporeal.⁸¹

Let us now turn our attention to the passages in which the term ἀπαύγασμα occurs, and in which Gregory introduces the Apollinarian supposition that God the Father must be corporeal; it is the understanding of the words of *Hebrews* (1:1–2⁸²):

The words 'In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,'⁸⁵ are, as stated by Gregory, Apollinarius' proof that the humanity of God, who has revealed Himself to people, existed before the ages (προαιώνιον εἶναι). This is how Apollinarius claims to interpret the Apostle literally, as Gregory informs us:

From this it is evident that the very man who spoke the Father's words to us is God, the Creator of the ages (ποιητὴς τῶν αἰώνων), the reflection of glory (ἀπαύγασμα δόξης), the exact imprint of his person (χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ). Since He is God in respect of his own spirit, and has no other God in himself besides, he is the one who through himself, through the flesh, has cleansed the world from sins.

According to Gregory, these are the exact, untwisted words of Apollinarius. If the one who spoke, is a man, he is the Creator of the ages, the body (σάρξ) is said to be the reflection (ἀπαύγασμα), and the form of the servant (ἡ τοῦ δούλου μορφή) the characteristic feature of the divine hypostasis.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 187,2–3).

⁸¹ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 157,13–158,5; 200,15–20).

⁸² *Heb.* 1:1–2: Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάλαι ὁ θεὸς λαλήσας τοῖς πατέρας ἐν τοῖς προφήταις ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ, ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων, δι' οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας.

Gregory: ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐν υἱῷ ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ὁ θεὸς ὁ πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως ἐν τοῖς προφήταις λαλήσας τοῖς πατέρας τὸ πρότερον.

⁸⁵ *Heb.* 1:1.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 155,13–30).

He argues that man is a reflection of God's glory, and that the characteristics of God's hypostasis are reflected in the fleshly God he (Apolinaris) created in his idle speculations and inventions. As the ray is consubstantial with the sun, and the lamp in turn with the light that emanates from it, and the characteristic features of man show the human person, so also if He who has appeared to us is a reflection of the glory of the Father, and if the characteristic feature of His person is flesh, then surely in consequence of this the nature of the Father is understood to be fleshly. Surely he would not say that the incorporeal is characterized by the flesh, and that the visible is a reflection of the invisible. Such as the glory is, such of course is its reflection, and such as the exact imprint is, such surely is the person. If in the one case it is the body, one cannot naturally think that in the other case it is the incorporeal.⁸⁵

Apollinaris also says that if we imagine that the perfect human and the perfect God met in the one who became incarnate, there would be a quartet instead of a trinity, and the incarnate man should be understood as a 'human-god' (ἄνθρωπόθεος).⁸⁶ Gregory answers that in Christ there are both natures, Divine and human, as two aspects, the only-begotten God remaining still Christ, but man only for the time of the Divine economy, when he took upon himself the whole man, with body and soul, including intellect.⁸⁷ On this assumption, that in Christ the whole man is endowed with intellect, the conception of the Trinity of God is in no way disturbed.⁸⁸

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis has shown that Gregory of Nyssa's use of the term ἀπαύγασμα is neither incidental nor semantically uniform, but forms part of a carefully differentiated theological language adapted to distinct doctrinal contexts. Across his exegetical, ascetical, Trinitarian, and Christological writings, Gregory consistently employs the imagery of radiance and reflection to articulate the relation between divine

⁸⁵ *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 157,12–27).

⁸⁶ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 214,19–21).

⁸⁷ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 183; 221–222; 164; 173; 177; 195).

⁸⁸ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 222); cf. G. Lekkas, 'Gregory of Nyssa's Refutation,' 563; Drecoll, *Antirrheticus*, 48f.

transcendence and manifestation, while rigorously safeguarding the incomprehensibility of the divine essence.

In texts concerned with the unknowability of God (*In Canticum canticorum, De perfectione*), ἀπαύγασμα functions within an apophatic framework. Here, it designates not the divine nature itself, which remains beyond all conceptual grasp, but the manifested splendor of divine glory as it becomes accessible through scriptural images and names. Human discourse about God thus remains indirect and analogical, expressing not what God is in himself, but how he is made known. The radiance does not disclose the source exhaustively; it signals presence without abolishing transcendence.

A further shift occurs in texts addressing the transformation of the human person (*De beatitudinibus*). In this participatory context, ἀπαύγασμα no longer refers to the intra-divine relation, but to the reflection of divine goodness in the purified soul. The luminous 'reflections' of the divine nature denote ethical and spiritual qualities – purity, simplicity, freedom from passion – through which the image of God in humanity is restored. To 'see God' is therefore not an act of intellectual apprehension, but an existential participation in divine likeness, where the divine light shines forth as reflected radiance rather than as its uncreated source.

The polemical sharpness of the term comes most clearly into view in Gregory's Trinitarian writings against Eunomius. Here ἀπαύγασμα is interpreted in an active, causal sense: as radiant light proceeding inseparably and simultaneously from its source. This interpretation is deliberately chosen to counter Eunomius' claim of the Son's temporal and ontological posteriority. By insisting that glory and its radiance are co-eternal and mutually implicative, Gregory articulates a model of divine causality that excludes any temporal succession within the Trinity. The Son's status as ἀπαύγασμα thus secures both his distinction from the Father and his full consubstantiality with him, rendering the assertion that 'the Son once was not' conceptually incoherent.

Finally, in his Christological polemic against Apollinarius, Gregory again mobilizes the semantics of radiance to expose the internal contradictions of a doctrine that collapses the distinction between divine and human natures. By showing that Apollinarius' application of ἀπαύγασμα to the fleshly Christ would entail a corporeal conception of the Father, Gregory demonstrates that the same metaphor, if misapplied, undermines the very doctrine it is meant to support. Here, the

term serves as a critical tool for preserving both the simplicity of the divine nature and the integrity of Christ's full humanity.

Taken together, these analyses reveal that *ἀπαύγασμα* functions in Gregory of Nyssa's texts as a genuinely theological concept rather than a merely decorative metaphor. Its semantic flexibility allows Gregory to articulate, within a single field of imagery, the paradoxes of Christian doctrine: transcendence and presence; unity and distinction; unknowability and revelation; divine simplicity and historical economy. Gregory's use of *ἀπαύγασμα* demonstrates how scriptural imagery, when subjected to disciplined theological reflection, can bear significant dogmatic weight without lapsing into either subordinationism or materialization, and offers a paradigmatic example of pro-Nicene theological reasoning at its most conceptually precise and spiritually resonant.

Acknowledgements

This article is a result of research conducted at the Sts Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology, Palacký University Olomouc.

*Sts Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology
Department of Biblical Studies
Palacký University
Univerzitní 244/22
779 00 Olomouc
Czechia
E-mail: magdalena.marunova@seznam.cz*