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### Blended with the Savior: Gregory of Nyssa's Eucharistic Pharmacology in the Catechetical Oration

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## Blended with the Savior

### *Gregory of Nyssa's Eucharistic Pharmacology in the Catechetical Oration*

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**ABSTRACT** Humankind, for Gregory of Nyssa, was poisoned through a primordial act of eating the forbidden fruit from the Garden of Eden. As a result, the toxin of sin and death has been blended into the body and soul of each person, dispersing itself throughout the component parts of their nature. If eating and drinking initiated the spiritual and physical degradation of humanity, Gregory argues, then it must also be through eating and drinking—namely, through the Eucharist—that humanity will be healed. This article proposes that Gregory's instruction on the Eucharist in his *Catechetical Oration* should be understood as more than merely a metaphorical flourish, more than a clever use of medical imagery at the service of a sacramental theology. Rather, his use of technical medical terminology and concepts about dietetics and pharmacology are an example of medical knowledge being applied within the embodied practices of a particular Christian ritual. That is, when read in light of the crucial medical concept of *krasis*—in which health and disease are identified as a delicate blending of hot, cold, wet, and dry—we are better able to discern how Gregory's discussion of ritualized bread-eating functions as a medical intervention into the diseased and dying nature of humanity. In his discussion of food's power to reconfigure the four fundamental qualities of human physiology, Gregory presents the Eucharistic bread as part of a dietary regimen, a method for blending Christ's healing and life-giving power into bodies that are currently bent toward death. In this way, the bread is offered as a singularly potent antidote for sicknesses afflicting body and soul alike. **KEYWORDS** Gregory of Nyssa, Ancient Medicine, Eucharist, Dietetics, Early Christian Ritual, Metaphor, Pharmacology

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“One of the effects of this drawing together of medicine and the care of the self is, I think, that one has to deal with an intertwining of the mental and the physical, which becomes the center of this care.” ~MICHEL FOUCAULT, *THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE SUBJECT*<sup>1</sup>

“If the eaten is to become food, it must be digestible to the out-side it enters. Likewise, if the eater is to be nourished, it must accommodate itself to the internalized out-side. In the eating encounter, all bodies are shown to be but temporary congealments of a materiality that is a process of becoming, is hustle and flow punctuated by sedimentation and substance.” ~JANE BENNETT, *VIBRANT MATTER: A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF THINGS*<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the “material turn” in Late Antiquity, what new histories might be possible if we took seriously the unruly potencies ancient Christians attributed to the drugs they prescribed and digested? Within the material turn there is need for a corollary and equally significant pharmacological turn—a recognition that the temporary congealment of materiality called the human body was, for many early Christian authors, capable of being augmented, developed, and even divinized through the strategic and ritual use of medical substances. We might call this a Christian *materia medica*.

Drug histories provide us with an important narrative frame for understanding how certain substances shaped bodies, social relations, and cultures. One prime example of how drug history and early Christian history coalesce is found in the writings of fourth-century Cappadocian bishop Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–394). In his *Catechetical Oration*, Gregory engages in an elaborate discussion of human physiology in order to explain the power and purpose of the Eucharistic bread. In one passage, his argument seems to reach a rather straightforward and spiritual conclusion: in the ritual act of eating bread the human body is healed of some deadly poison and, in so doing, the participants initiate a process of becoming that culminates in union with God in body as much as soul. He explains: “But it is in a different way that the body becomes united and is blended with its Savior. Those who have been tricked into taking poison

1. Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the Collège de France 1981–1982* (New York: Picador, 2005), 108.

2. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 49.

offset its harmful effect by another drug.”<sup>3</sup> Yet this brief observation about the medicinal effect of eating the Eucharistic bread raises questions about Gregory’s understanding of the ritual. Is Gregory’s pharmacological reasoning merely a rhetorical strategy in the unfolding of a catechetical program? Or does it reflect a deeper commitment to the practical function of medicine in Christian ritual?

For some time, scholars have puzzled over the *Catechetical Oration*, fixated primarily upon Gregory’s reference to the idea of *apokatastasis* (or final restoration of all things in God at the end of time).<sup>4</sup> Far less attention has been paid to his discussion of the Eucharistic ritual as a kind of medical event. Indeed, even those scholars who have noted the medical logic operative within the *Oration* have quickly dismissed its significance. For example, Edward Hardy saw in it more rhetorical flourish than sophisticated medical speculation: “Gregory’s style is that of a rhetorician. The sentences are frequently long, and at times digressions and parentheses interrupt the flow of the argument. Synonyms and similes abound. A number of the latter are taken from medicine, and many of them are elaborated unduly.”<sup>5</sup> Another editor of the *Oration*, taking a different tack, concluded that Gregory’s “one-sided treatment has the effect of seeming to lower

3. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration* 37 in Raymond Winling, ed., *Grégoire de Nysses: Discourse Catéchétique*, Sources Chrétiennes 453 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2000), 314: τὸ δὲ σῶμα ἕτερον τρόπον ἐν μετουσίᾳ τε καὶ ἀνακράσει τοῦ σώζοντος γίνεται. Ὡσπερ γὰρ οἱ δηλητηρίου δι’ ἐπιβουλῆς λαβόντες ἄλλω φαρμάκῳ τὴν φθοροποιὸν δύναμιν ἔσβησαν. This edition follows the Greek text found in Mühlenberg’s 1996 volume in the *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* series. Throughout this essay, I rely on my own translations, though I refer regularly to Edward R. Hardy’s English translation in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1954), and provide page numbers for it in the citations as “Hardy” for ease of reference.

4. For a sampling of scholarship on the *Catechetical Oration*, see Mary Emily Keenan, “Gregory of Nyssa and the Medical Profession,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 15 (1944): 150–61; Georges Barrios, “The Alleged Origenism of St Gregory of Nyssa,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 30.1 (1986): 7–16; Reinhard Jakob Kees, *Die Lehre von der Oikonomia Gottes in der Oratio catechetica Gregors von Nyssa* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); Susan R. Holman, “Healing the Social Leper in Gregory of Nyssa’s and Gregory of Nazianzus’s *Peri philoptichias*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 92.3 (1999): 307; Johannes Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Backgrounds and Theological Significance* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), especially 199; Mario Baghos, “Reconsidering *Apokatastasis* in St Gregory of Nyssa’s *On the Soul and Resurrection* and the *Catechetical Oration*,” *Phronema* 27.2 (2012): 125–62; Martin Wenzel, “Lessons from the Afterlife: Eschatology in Gregory of Nyssa’s *Oratio catechetica*,” *Scrinium* IX (2013): 89–104; Jeffrey Fisher and Kyle Kirchoff, “Even the Enemy Himself Would Not Dispute that the Action was Just: Disguise and Self-Deception in Gregory of Nyssa,” *Heythrop Journal* 57 (2016): 84–98. Even less has been written on Gregory’s approach to the liturgy. On this, see Derek Krueger, “Writing and the Liturgy of Memory in Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of Macrina*,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8.4 (2000): 483–510, later published in Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 110–132.

5. Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers*, 246.

the Eucharistic gift to a mere principle of life for the body.”<sup>6</sup> The first interpreter sees Gregory’s use of medicine, physiology, and pharmacology as a needlessly complex analogy. The second sees an embarrassing strand of physicalism in the Cappadocian’s liturgical theology.

Even more recent scholarship has stumbled over the function of medicine in this literature by minimizing its actual impact. Gary Ferngren, for example, has observed that the “theme of ‘*Christus medicus*’ is a familiar one, appearing very early. . . . One finds it employed through the second century, and it quickly becomes commonplace. It is primarily in its metaphorical sense, and rarely in its literal meaning, that Christian writers describe Jesus as the healer of humankind.”<sup>7</sup> And so Ferngren concludes that, “we find in [the Apostolic Fathers] no specific mention of contemporary healing practices”<sup>8</sup> and that the evidence from early Christianity in general “overwhelmingly indicates that Christianity did *not* promise physical healing.”<sup>9</sup> From these examples, then, the reader is left with the choice of either dismissing Gregory’s account of the Eucharist as an over-wrought metaphor ancillary to a deeper, spiritual reality or as a reductive and unspiritual materialism of the gut that detracts from Gregory’s overall catechetical project. Both options strike me as dead-ends that fail to capture the full force of how medicine, dietetics, and pharmacology function in texts such as Gregory’s *Oration*. I stand with a small but growing group of scholars who argue that there is more at work in the medical matter found in early Christian literature.<sup>10</sup>

One factor contributing to older scholarly approaches, I think, is a tendency to use tidy modern categories for ancient Christian medical reasoning, relegating the health of the body and the health of the soul to two separate spheres of

6. James Herbert Srawley, *The Catechetical Oration of Gregory of Nyssa*, Cambridge Patristic Texts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), xxxvii. For a more robust scholarly approach to Gregory’s Eucharistic materialism, see Reinhard Jakob Kees’s *Die Lehre von der Oikonomia Gottes*, 182–97.

7. Gary B. Ferngren, *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 30.

8. Ferngren, *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity*, 68.

9. Ferngren, *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity*, 146 (emphasis in original).

10. Wendy Mayer has recently offered two important interventions into this theme, noting the extent to which most scholarship has failed “to appreciate just how blurred the boundaries were in the classical and late antique Greco-Roman world between moral philosophy and the strand of natural philosophy identified as medicine.” See her “Medicine in Transition: Christian Adaption in the Later Fourth-Century East,” in *Shifting Genres in Late Antiquity*, ed. Geoffrey Greatrex et al. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 13–14 and “The Persistence in Late Antiquity of Medico-Philosophical Psychic Therapy,” *Journal of Late Antiquity* 8.2 (2015): 337–351.

knowledge that require two separate, if analogically similar, modes of care. Medical references in early Christian discourse are thereby categorized either as mere metaphor, and so unconcerned with the body, or directed toward “real” healing, and so not concerned with the soul. Heidi Marx has recently called this approach into question, emphasizing instead the “transdisciplinary” nature of ancient medical knowledge.<sup>11</sup> She suggests that, while medical writers “may at times identify distinctions between medical and philosophical modes of thinking, [they] do not in practice observe or enforce such boundaries.”<sup>12</sup>

In this way, Marx builds upon an intervention previously put forth by Michel Foucault in *The Care of the Self*, the third volume in *The History of Sexuality* trilogy. There, Foucault explores how this relationship between medicine and metaphor provided authors in Greco-Roman antiquity a potent register in which to discuss the soul’s relationship to the body:

A whole series of medical metaphors is regularly employed to designate the operations necessary for the care of the soul: put the scalpel to the wound; open an abscess; amputate; evacuate the superfluities; give medications; prescribe bitter, soothing or bracing potions. . . .the focus of attention in these practices of the self is the point where ills of the body and those of the soul can communicate with one another and exchange their distresses: where the bad habits of the soul can entail physical miseries, while the excesses of the body manifest and maintain the failings of the soul.<sup>13</sup>

The analogizing of health care and soul care was prompted, in part, by the notion that the afflictions could traverse the physical and the spiritual. Symptoms were potent symbols indicating the malleability of human nature and the powerful ways in which disease could insinuate itself across that nature.

This helps explain the medicalizing of Christian thought and practice from the earliest literature of the tradition. The burgeoning of medical knowledge as

11. Heidi Marx-Wolf, “Medicine,” in *Late Ancient Knowing: Explorations in Intellectual History*, eds. Catherine Chin and Moulie Vidas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 81. See also Joel Warren Lidz, “Medicine as Metaphor in Plato,” *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 20 (1995): 527–41.

12. Marx-Wolf, “Medicine,” 81. Marx continues: “Medical knowing is the process of recognizing the correct order into which the body and its parts and environments must be placed but it is also the process of recognizing the correct order into which sets of prior knowledge about the body must be placed both in relation to each other and in relation to the experiences of everyday life.”

13. Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: Volume 3 of The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 55–56. More recently, see also Deborah Lupton, *Medicine as Culture: Illness, Disease, and the Body*, third edition (London: Sage, 2012), 78: “The metaphoric systems describing illness, disease, and the body are important linguistic choices which are revealing of deeper societal anxieties about the control and health of the body politic as well as that of the body corporeal.”

an institution, for Foucault, was related to the rise of spiritual direction and pastoral care.<sup>14</sup> The office of the pastor, often likened to that of a physician in antiquity, entailed highly specific strategies that were informed by and mimicked medical methods of knowing and treating the body. These strategies offered “a way of living, a reflective mode of relation to oneself, to one’s body, to food, to wakefulness and sleep, to the various activities and to the environment. Medicine was expected to propose, in the form of regimen, a voluntary and rational structure of conduct.”<sup>15</sup> Which is to say, the regimens of bodily care and the regimens of soul care were not easily distinguishable forms of therapy, the former pursued by physicians and the latter by clerics. Indeed, medical and religious practitioners shared in the belief that dietetics and other strategies concerning nutrition, digestion, and pharmacology could be leveraged for the benefit of body and soul alike.

This intertwining of the mental and the physical, the metaphoric and literal, is evident across the work of Gregory of Nyssa. In *On Virginity* 23, for instance, Gregory describes philosophy as “the healing art of the soul” (τῆς τῶν ψυχῶν ἰατρικῆς), comparing it to the art of medicine in which physicians learn how best to treat physical ailments.<sup>16</sup> Here, the diagnostic methodology is identical, but the diseases and their locations appear to be distinct. Yet, in the previous section of *On Virginity*, this distinction folds in on itself. In chapter 22, Gregory explicitly refers to the ancient understanding of the body’s mixtures—a medical method he says he learned from “a certain physician”—in order to demonstrate that close attention to diet is crucial for the soul’s proper balance and pursuit of perfection.<sup>17</sup> My contention is that, in analogical moments like this, Gregory

14. This point is developed at length in Foucault’s *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 199–200: “In its modern forms, the pastorate is deployed to a great extent through medical knowledge, institutions, and practices. We can say that medicine has been one of the great powers that have been heirs to the pastorate.”

15. Foucault, *Care of the Self*, 100.

16. See Michel Aubineau, *Grégoire de Nyssse: Traité de la virginité*, Sources Chrétiennes 119 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2011), 526–28. Many thanks to Michael Motia for pointing me to these passages.

17. See Virginia Woods Callahan, *St. Gregory: Ascetical Works*, Fathers of the Church 58 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 66–67. Though it is beyond the scope of this essay, the reference to “a certain physician” raises interesting questions. Gregory makes this reference three times in his extant writings (the other two times being the fourth sermon *On the Lord’s Prayer* and his *Epistle* 13). I am convinced that this unnamed physician is neither a generic reference to received medical wisdom nor does it collapse several different physicians in one persona. Rather, I believe this to be a reference to the physician-turned-theologian who wielded considerable influence for a brief time in the mid-300s before having his views called into question during the unpredictable tides of fourth-century doctrinal debates: namely, Basil of Ancyra. Basil

does not reflect a strict partitioning of bodily and spiritual healing, but rather relies on the pervasive understanding within medical reasoning that the health and disease of body and soul were intimately interconnected. Moreover, passages like this reveal Gregory's tendency to return regularly to the crucial insight that the potency of ingestible matter can be leveraged to heal and transform and even bring to perfection the sickly souls of human creatures.

From this premise, I want to reconsider the ritual of Eucharistic eating as a medical regimen of dietetics—a mode of gastronomic therapy premised on the belief that health care was, in fact, a form of soul care, and that the transformation of the physical body into a spiritual one required the ingestion of an edible matter imbued with spiritual power.<sup>18</sup> Following Foucault, I want to take seriously the medical methodologies, knowledges, and practices embedded within Gregory of Nyssa's approach to the Eucharistic bread. I am proposing a more robust materialist framework in which to analyze the healing effects Gregory ascribes to the Eucharist—an approach that places in tension the spiritual or theological meaning ascribed to the ritual with the highly theorized physiological processes upon which the efficacy of the ritual depended. Such an approach seeks not to prioritize the literal over the metaphoric when it comes to the medical reasoning Gregory uses to describe this ritualized eating. Rather I aim to show how, for many ancient authors including Gregory, interest in the pharmacological effects of ritual substances indicates an important point of slippage between metaphoric and literal medical language. The Eucharistic bread, in this way, becomes a ritualized remedy with the goal of healing and transforming the whole of human nature.

Texts such as Gregory's *On Virginit*y and the *Catechetical Oration* draw deeply on medical concepts, vocabulary, and methods of treatment not simply because they were "good to think with," but more emphatically because medicine was a comprehensive system in which to speak of the human condition and to understand the care (physical, spiritual, whatever) required for the well-being of embodied souls. In the case of the ritual system of the *Catechetical Oration*, this medical reasoning takes on greater practical urgency. That is, when linked

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wrote his own treatise on virginity, which seems to have inspired Gregory's own writing, and which also reflects a similar emphasis on the body's *krasis*. For more on Basil and this issue, see Teresa M. Shaw, "Creation, Virginity and Diet in Fourth-Century Christianity: Basil of Ancyra's *On the True Purity of Virginity*," *Gender and History* 9.3 (1997): 579–96.

18. For a similar discussion of early Christian ritual in its medical context, see also John David Penniman, "The Health-Giving Cup: Cyprian's *Ep.* 63 and the Medicinal Power of Eucharistic Wine," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 23:2 (2015): 189–211.



to medical knowledge, the ritual consumption of bread enacts this comprehensive system, plotting the initiate within a journey from the precipice of sickness, sin, and death to the flourishing of health, salvation, and life.

My argument here hinges not simply on pharmacological effects attributed to bread, but more specifically on the crucial concept of “mixture” or “blending”—referred to as *krasis* in Greek discourse about the body.<sup>19</sup> This is what Gregory refers to in passing in *On Virginity* and develops at length in his *Catechetical Oration*. In the first section of this paper, I explore how this concept appears regularly in philosophical and medical treatises as an explanation for the proper ordering of the material, sensible world. But mixture was also crucial (most notably in Galen) in assessing and treating the psychosomatic health of the human person. Within these ancient theories about the body’s balance, food functioned as a potent resource that could sustain or debilitate the health of body and soul. This is because food was thought to contain its own unique mixture (a particular balance of hot, cold, wet, and dry) that could impact the internal balance of the one eating it. With an understanding of *krasis* as a cosmology, a condition of material existence, and as a dietetic therapy for achieving individual well-being, we turn in the second section of the paper to how this broader medical epistemology underwrites Gregory’s thinking throughout the *Oration*. Finally, as I argue in section three, it is in relation to this concept of *krasis* that we must situate Gregory’s discussion of the Eucharistic bread as a healing drug in section 37 of the *Oration*: not, as some scholars have suggested, as an overwrought and ultimately disposable medical analogy at the service of a more important theological or spiritual truth, but rather as an edible means for the working out of God’s salvation and the first, physical ingestion of that final, eschatological blending of all things into the life of God.

#### “FROM THIS GOOD MIXTURE”: KRASIS, DIET, AND HEALTH IN ANCIENT MEDICINE

In his treatise *Parts of Animals*, Aristotle observes: “It is perhaps obvious that these four principles are the causes of life and death. . .sickness and health.”<sup>20</sup>

19. For a helpful overview on *krasis* (with particular emphasis on pre-Roman history), see G. E. R. Lloyd, “The Hot and the Cold, the Dry and the Wet in Greek Philosophy,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 84 (1964): 92–106.

20. Aristotle, *Parts of Animals* 2.2 in A. L. Peck, ed., *Aristotle: Volume XII*, Loeb Classical Library 323 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), 123.

He is referring to heat (θερμός), cold (ψυχρός), wet (ύγρόν), and dry (ξηρός). These four principles or qualities were often found in close proximity to ancient medical and philosophical speculation about the four elements (fire, air, water, earth) and the four humors (yellow bile, blood, phlegm, black bile). Cosmic matter, ethnic groups, individuals, non-human animals, geographical regions, seasons of the year, drugs, as well as food and drink were thought to contain a unique combination of these four qualities. Indeed, the qualities were so pervasive in ancient theories of material reality that they are often referred to simply as a “mixture,” “blending,” or “temperament” (κράσις in Greek, *temperamentum* in Latin). As we will see, it is this concept of mixture that structures Gregory’s physiological and medical reflections on the efficacy of Eucharistic bread.

Mixture appears widely in Hippocratic treatises as a method for thinking about an individual’s health and the conditions that impinge upon it.<sup>21</sup> In *Airs, Waters, Places*, traveling physicians who have recently arrived in a new town are urged to survey the conditions of the region—its climate and habitability—prior to seeing any patients. The doctor is, in this text, a part-time ethnographer who must make deductions about the character and physiology of a people based on the effects of their surroundings.<sup>22</sup> Geographical survey helps the physician to correlate the mixtures produced by a particular environment with the inhabitants’ internal (im)balance of the humoral compositions. In this way, the mixtures of a region’s climate help to explain, at least in part, the mixtures of individual humans in that region and the unique expression of health or illness endemic to them.<sup>23</sup>

Although assuming a two- (rather than four-) element model for the material world, the Hippocratic author of *Regimen* likewise employs a view of the human and cosmos as bound together by parallel structures, what Jacques Jouanna has

21. Jacques Jouanna has suggested that *krasis* was the chief innovation of the Hippocratic tradition, and that this innovation remained “the classical definition in Greek medicine.” See his *Hippocrates*, trans., M. B. DeBevoise (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 328. It is worth noting that, even within the Hippocratic tradition, *krasis* was not universally accepted as a causal explanation for disease. On this, see especially the Hippocratic treatise on *Ancient Medicine* 13–14 in W. H. S. Jones, ed., *Hippocrates: Volume 1*, Loeb Classical Library (LCL) 147 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923), 35–37.

22. For an important consideration of *Airs, Waters, Places* and its construction of a people’s character based on its environmental conditions, see Benjamin Isaac’s *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 60–69. Thanks to Todd Berzon for pointing me to the relevance of this work.

23. *Airs, Waters, Places* 1–2 (LCL 147:71–73).

referred to as a “cosmological anthropology.”<sup>24</sup> *Regimen* describes how “all animals, including humans, are composed of two things, different in power but working together in their use, namely, fire and water.”<sup>25</sup> These two fundamental elements contain the four qualities (fire containing hot and dry, water containing cold and wet). The human person, then, is a microcosm of this interaction between fire and water that takes place in all material things throughout the cosmos. The soul, too, is a product of such a mixture: “Into the human person there enters a soul, a blend of fire and water, a portion of a human body. These. . . are nourished and increased by human diet.”<sup>26</sup> And so ancient medical wisdom about the material composition of the body and the blending of its constitutive elements readily engaged in philosophical speculation about the relationship between cosmology and anthropology.

In the *Timaeus*, medical knowledge provides a robust grammar for describing the cosmological contingencies of being an embodied soul.<sup>27</sup> For Plato, the four elements and their attendant qualities structure the human body in the same way as the body of the cosmos, what Aristotle later calls the fundamental “principles of the physical elements” (ἀρχαὶ τῶν φυσικῶν στοιχείων).<sup>28</sup> Cosmology and anthropology mirror one another because all bodies contain a unique mixture of these physical elements: the *stoicheia* (στοιχεῖα).<sup>29</sup> Disease,

24. Jacques Jouanna, *Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen: Selected Papers* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 195.

25. *Regimen* 1 3 in Jeffrey Henderson, ed., *Hippocrates: Volume IV*, Loeb Classical Library 150 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), 231.

26. *Regimen* 1 7 (LCL 150:241).

27. Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, second edition (New York: Routledge, 2013), 119: “The medical sections of the *Timaeus*, then, are far from lacking in interest. They show a non-medical man, Plato, utilizing ideas that, as we know from both the Hippocratic Corpus and Anonymus Londinensis, were at the forefront of medical debate at the time in order to write his own account of the creation of the human body and to explain some of its mental or psychic defects.”

28. *Parts of Animals* 2.2 (LCL 323:123). Aristotle observes that, as they are the structural forces undergirding the material elements, these four principles contain the power over life and death, sickness and health. Aristotle’s approach is developed at length in later Stoic physics. Alexander of Aphrodisias, for example, writes an entire treatise *On Blending and Growth* in which he distinguishes various kinds of mixtures, of which blending (*krasis*) is a subset. See Robert B. Todd, *Alexander of Aphrodisias on Stoic Physics: A Study of the De mixtione with Preliminary Essays, Text, Translation and Commentary*, Philosophia Antiqua: A Series of Monographs on Ancient Philosophy (Leiden: Brill, 1976). Chrysippus, too, argued that an individual’s health was a good mixture and proportion of the four principle qualities (see Jouanna, *Hippocrates*, 328).

29. *Timaeus* 31–33 in Jeffrey Henderson, ed., *Plato: Volume IX*, Loeb Classical Library 234 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), 59–61. See also *Timaeus* 88c-d (LCL 234:241): “The various parts [of the body], likewise, must be treated in the same manner, in imitation of the form of the universe. For as the body is inflamed or chilled within by the particles that enter it, and again is

in this framework, is an imbalanced mixture of hot, cold, wet, dry in a given body.<sup>30</sup> But the *Timaeus* pushes this point even further, observing that a “sickness of the soul” (νόσος ψυχῆς), often due to excessive wetness, is therefore symptomatic of these fluctuating essences within the body:

...the wicked man becomes wicked by reason of some evil condition of body and unskilled nurture, and these are experiences which are hateful to everyone and involuntary. And again, in respect of pains likewise the soul acquires much evil because of the body (καὶ πάλιν δὴ τὸ περὶ τὰς λύπας ἢ ψυχῆ κατὰ ταῦτὰ διὰ σώμα πολλὴν ἴσχει κακίαν). For whenever the humors which arise from acid and saline phlegms, and all humors that are bitter and bilious wander through the body and find no external vent but are confined within and mingle their vapor with the movement of the soul and are blended therewith, they implant diseases of the soul of all kinds, varying in intensity and extent.<sup>31</sup>

The sick body and the sick soul communicate to one another by means of the elemental mixtures which bind them together. When left unchecked, the humors build up in certain portions of the body causing an imbalance of hot, cold, wetness, and dryness. These, in turn, are blended with the soul and transmit sickness to the higher rational functioning of the intellect. The verb for “blend” used here is *anakerannumi* (ἀνακεράννυμι), a cognate of our central theme *krasis* (κράσις). As Vivian Nutton has explained, the “physicalist strain” within Plato’s approach to disease requires that sicknesses of mind and soul involve “treatment of the underlying physical condition.”<sup>32</sup> Mixture, then, is not only a crucial component linking the structure of cosmic bodies to that of human bodies. It also represents a mode of understanding the sicknesses that afflict body and soul alike, offering an etiological system for diagnosing and treating disease.

Drawing upon aspects of all these traditions, Galen too presents the mixtures of the body as a holistic explanation for the human condition and its ailments.<sup>33</sup> His medical system at times de-emphasizes the humors in order to accentuate

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dried or moistened by those without, and suffers the affections consequent on both these motions, whenever a man delivers his body, in a state of rest, to these motions, it is overpowered and utterly perishes. . .”

30. *Timaeus* 82 (LCL 234:219).

31. *Timaeus* 86d-87a (LCL 234:235).

32. Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 118.

33. For a good summary of Galen’s approach to *krasis*, see Susan Mattern, *Galen and the Rhetoric of Healing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 102–5. See also Mattern, *The Prince of Medicine: Galen in the Roman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 233–34.

the four principle qualities as the primary factor determining health.<sup>34</sup> Each individual contains a distinct mixture of hot, cold, wet, and dry. The skilled physician, according to Galen, must begin with their patients' unique mixture as the primary site at which to diagnose disease and the primary indicator of treatments required. The importance of mixture in Galenic thought is evident in the use of the term throughout his corpus: the root word *krasis* appears pervasively, some 1,500 hits on the TLG before even searching for cognates, and it is even used as the title for one important work.<sup>35</sup> Health is often described as a well-balanced, or eukratic, state (εὐκρασία) while disease is equated with an imbalanced, or dyskratic, state (δυσκρασία). Galen's system so hinges on *krasis* that, according to one scholar, it seems to provide "a full causal explanation for everything in the human body," including even the character and health of one's soul.<sup>36</sup>

In his treatise *On Mixtures*, Galen explicitly develops this connection between physiological mixture and moral quality, observing specific combinations of the four qualities to a particular character of the soul (ψυχῆς ἦθος): "If the individual is cold and dry from the start, the constitution of this individual's body is white, soft, hairless, without visible vessels and joints, slim and cold to the touch; and the character of his soul is retiring, cowardly, and depressed; yet his residues are not melancholic."<sup>37</sup> Galen's primary concern here is on the

34. Jouanna, *Greek Medicine*, 339. The first-century Roman physician Celsus also highlights the role of the four qualities as a preliminary guide to assessing a person's health: "For what matters is this: whether fatigue or thirst, whether heat or cold (*an frigus an calor*), whether wakefulness or hunger, whether abundance in food or wine, whether intemperance in venery, has produced the disease. Nor should there be ignorance of the sick man's temperament; whether his body is rather humid or rather dry (*umidum magis an magis sicum corpus eius sit*), whether his sinews are strong or weak, whether he is frequently or rarely ill; and when ill whether so severely or slightly, for a short or long while; the kind of life he has lived, laborious or quiet, accompanied by luxury or frugality. From such and similar data, one may often deduce a novel mode of treatment." See Celsus, *On Medicine Proem* 52–53 in W. G. Spencer, ed., *Celsus, On Medicine: Books 1–4*, Loeb Classical Library 292 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), 29.

35. See *On Mixtures* in Peter Singer, ed., *Galen: Selected Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 202–289.

36. See P. N. Singer *Galen: Psychological Writings*, Cambridge Galen Translations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 338–39. Galen contrasts his own medical method rather starkly from that of the so-called "Methodists" who follow (according to Galen's polemics) the foolish idea that "there is some common treatment for all people." See *Method on Medicine* 3.7 in Ian Johnston and G. H. R. Horsley, eds., *Galen: Method on Medicine: Books 1–4*, Loeb Classical Library 516 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 315.

37. As quoted in Jouanna, *Greek Medicine*, 339. On this point, see also Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 240: "The mixture determined not only one's physical well-being and susceptibility to certain illnesses but also one's mental state."

residues (*peritomata*/περιττώματα) produced by the humors, which are symptomatic of the particular proportion of hot, cold, wet, and dry found in the body. According to Galen, residues are naturally occurring in human physiology. But the proper balance of the body's *krasis*—and so the achievement and maintenance of good health—depends upon the regular “hustle and flow” of the body's material excess out of its system. Left unattended, these residues become dangerous congealments, inevitably leading to disease and even death. Medical treatment must be aimed first and foremost at maintaining the balance of these principle qualities in order to prevent harmful residue buildup.

Mixture and moral character are drawn even closer together when Galen prescribes treatments using food, drink, and drugs in order to address dyskratic states of the body. In *The Capacities of the Soul Depend on the Mixtures of the Body*, Galen argues that “we bring about good mixture in the body through what we eat and drink, and also through our daily practices, and from this good mixture (*eukrasia*) we will produce virtue in the soul.”<sup>38</sup> Strategic modification of the mixtures, then, is not simply a first step toward bodily health but also a crucial foundation for the health of the soul and a person's subsequent cultivation of virtue. Toward the end of the treatise, Galen concludes that a proper diet will enable a person to “make progress in the capacities of their rational souls, becoming more intelligent in virtue and increasing their power of memory.” He encourages anyone interested to take his advice not only on the “winds, mixtures of the ambient air, and even about which countries are to be chosen and which avoided” but also, more specifically, which types of food and drink will be most beneficial as a dietetic therapy for body and soul alike.<sup>39</sup>

For Galen, the path to a healthy body and a healthy soul begins in the stomach. It is there that effective remedies must first be directed. Through the stomach, food's healing power accesses the whole system of the body, eventually working its way into the soul. Specifically, Galen urges doctors to consider “the condition of the [patient's] stomach” prior to seeking a suitable remedy.<sup>40</sup> If the stomach is cold, heat it up. If moist, dry it. If some unhealthy combination, treat it with the opposite combination. Such modifications of the patient's condition

38. Galen, *The Capacities of the Soul Depend on the Mixtures of the Body* 1 in C. G. Kühn, ed., *Claudii Galeni Opera omnia* 4 (Hildesheim, Germany: Georg Olms, 1964–1965), 767–768; translation in Singer, *Galen: Psychological Writings*, 374–75.

39. *Capacities of the Soul* 9 (Kuhn 4:808; trans. Singer, *Galen: Psychological Writings*, 401–402). See Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 246–47 and, more generally, Mark Grant, *Galen on Food and Diet* (London: Routledge, 2000).

40. Galen, *Method on Medicine* 2.4 (LCL 516:161).

are achieved through the use of food and drug, both of which effected changes in the mixture of the body. As a result of this regimented ingestion aimed at balancing the imbalanced patient, the line between what constitutes food and what constitutes drug is intentionally blurred.<sup>41</sup> Different foods contain different potencies. Digestion, for Galen, converts the unique potency of edible matter into a technology for fine-tuning the body's inner system.<sup>42</sup> Drugs and drug-like foods enact other combinations of the principle qualities when applied to the body or consumed within it. And so foods and drugs provide the physician a range of potencies with which to modulate and calibrate the qualities that impinge upon the health of body and soul. And this constant modulation of hot, cold, wet, and dry through dietary and pharmacological intervention is the best strategy for achieving Galen's eukratic ideal.

This sprawling and complex set of concerns surrounding the concept of *krasis* in ancient medicine should prompt a more thorough reconsideration of its function in early Christian authors such as Gregory of Nyssa. Scholars have tended to focus upon the fraught legacy of "mixture" in later Christological debates, often noting its resonance in Aristotelian or Stoic philosophy with less attention to the ways in which these relate to ancient medical knowledge.<sup>43</sup>

41. In *On Mixtures* 3.2–4, Galen explains the ambiguity between what counts as food and what counts as a drug, noting particularly the medical uses of both in trying to regulate the body's mixture: "Let us therefore have the confidence to assert, in quite general terms regarding all foods, that their nature is not only to be affected by our body, but also to act upon it; and furthermore, regarding certain of them, the active effect of which is abundantly clear, that they are not only foods but also drugs. Lettuce is both a food and a cold drug. . . . In general terms, a food substance once converted to blood increases the internal heat in exactly the same way whether it is hot or cold in potential; but while the process of conversion is taking place, and the substance is not yet completely blood, it cools or heats the body in the manner of a drug" (Singer, *Galen: Selected Writings*, 283). This is slightly different from what we find in *On the Properties of Foodstuffs*, where Galen is a bit more cautious about linking food and drugs too closely. See Owen Powell, *On the Properties of Foodstuffs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 34–5. For more on Galen's approach to pharmacology and the power of foods, see Philip J. Van Der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health, and Disease* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 279–298.

42. *Method on Medicine* 7.6 in Ian Johnston and G. H. R. Horsley, eds., *Galen: Method on Medicine: Books 5–9*, Loeb Classical Library 517 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 275.

43. Or. *Catech.* 11 (Sources Chrétiennes 453:208; trans., Hardy, 288). For classic studies on the term *anakrasis* (ἀνάκρασις) in early Christological discussions, see especially Henry Chadwick, "Origen, Celsus, and the Stoa," *Journal of Theological Studies* 48 (1947): 39–40; Chadwick, "Eucharist and Christology in the Nestorian Controversy," *Journal of Theological Studies* 2 (1951): 145–64; Annewies van den Hoek, "Origen's Role in Formulating Later Christological Language: The Case of ἀνάκρασις," *Origeniana septima* (1999): 39–50; Andrew P. Hofer O.P., *Christ in the Life and Teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 91–122. For a brief

Although ideas like “blending,” “commingling,” and “mixture” became troublesome in later doctrinal disputes, *krasis* was at the very heart of how Gregory understood the human condition as well as the power of Eucharistic bread to address the intractable infirmities of that condition.<sup>44</sup> Even among Gregory’s closest conversation partners—his brother Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus—both medicine in general and *krasis* in particular provide structuring logic to their ascetic, pastoral, and theological programs.<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, in his *Homilies on the Lord’s Prayer*, Gregory is so committed to this epistemological orientation that he refers to *krasis* as the “law of medicine.”<sup>46</sup>

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summary of *anakrasis* in Gregory’s writing (without reference to any medical context), see Anthony Meredith S.J., *Gregory of Nyssa* (London: Routledge, 1999), 148 n. 52. Gregory’s use of *anakrasis* here is guided more by his anthropological and medical considerations than by a well-developed Christological position from which “blending” or “mixture” are then theorized. Put another way, Gregory seems to view *krasis* as a central and uncontroversial concept within which to plot human health and salvation; this in turn provides the conceptual scaffolding for a Christology premised on vocabulary and ideas drawn from physiological knowledge.

44. For one example of how terms like “mixture” and “mingling” (especially the Greek word *synkrasis*) come to function in later Christological polemics, see Cyril of Alexandria’s *Ep.* 55.14 in Lionel Wickham, *Cyril of Alexandria: Select Letters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 110–11. In that later period, Eucharistic speculation became wedded more closely to rivaling ascetic and Christological systems. On this point see Phil Booth, *Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 7–43. However, among the Cappadocians there was less anxiety about drawing upon the concept of mixture. Gregory of Nazianzus appealed pervasively to it, leading one interpreter to conclude that “the idea of mixture has the greatest significance for understanding Gregory’s Christology.” See Hofer, *Christ in the Life and Teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus*, 119. So, despite the suspicion with which mixture and mingling were viewed in later theological speculation, Gregory of Nyssa was not so radical in his appreciation for such terms in his own time. He was working with a concept that was common among his primary conversation partners and even deepening its function within his speculative theology.

45. In an important passage of the Longer Responses from Basil’s *Asketikon*, he considers “whether the use of medical remedies accords with the goal of piety.” Basil observes that God permits the medical art because of the body’s vulnerability, so that “we may be advised to remove what is in excess or to make up what is lacking.” Basil, too, presumes that medicine was a necessary intervention that was provided after the Fall—an event that introduced infirmity and disease—and depicts medicine’s aim as the restoration of balance. See Anna M. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St Basil the Great* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 265. Gregory of Nazianzus summarizes the power of the Incarnation by way of *krasis* as well: “Man and God blended (*συνανεκράθη*). They became a single whole, the stronger side predominating, in order that I might be made God to the same extent he was made man.” See *Oration* 29.19 (in Williams and Wickham, *On God and Christ: St Gregory of Nazianzus: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius* [Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002], 86).

46. See Hilda C. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer and The Beatitudes*, *Ancient Christian Writers* 18 (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1954), 58. In passages such as this, in which sin is given the power to poison human nature such that Christ must heal that nature through a rebalancing of



Analyzing the mechanics of Gregory's commitment to the "law of medicine" helps us better understand his consistent use of the terminology in doctrinal speculation—as, for example, in his anti-Apollinarian writings where he suggests that, "God. . . mixed himself with human nature in order to destroy sin. . . It is as in medicine."<sup>47</sup> But it also forces us to pay closer attention to how this notion of medicine and mixture functions in his speculation on Eucharistic ritual as well. My contention, then, is that we must retain the force of *krasis* in its full medico-philosophical framework in order to better situate the structuring role of medical reasoning in Gregory's writing. Reframing his appeal to *krasis* in its particular pre-Chalcedonian moment, not tinged (at least as much as possible) by the post-Chalcedonian arguments that would color its use in later polemic, enables us to see the dynamic relationship between medical knowledge and theological speculation without immediately assuming that the latter always guides the former.

In the context of the *Catechetical Oration*, Gregory's thoroughgoing use of *krasis*—whether at the service of a general theological anthropology or a specific account of Eucharistic efficacy—indicates the suffusing reach of medical reasoning within his program for the formation of new Christians. As we have seen, in Hippocratic, Platonic, and Galenic formulations of human health and physiology, *krasis* was a system of knowledge through which other systems of knowing the human person were refracted. Gregory draws on *krasis* (on the role of mixture in the environment, in the human constitution, in dietetics and drugs) in order to diagnose the *dyskrasia* of the human person resulting from Eden's poison and to prescribe the Eucharist as an antidote with the power to induce a divine *eukrasia*.

#### **"A POOR NATURE IN NEED OF SUPPLIES": MEDICAL REASONING IN THE CATECHETICAL ORATION**

Mixture is fundamental to Gregory's anthropological system, enabling an account of humans' capacity for transformation. Gregory presents human nature as a fleshy-spiritual congealment of becoming. Human nature is plastic, porous, liable to shaping and reshaping. This malleability necessarily involves the risk of

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its mixtures, Gregory seems to ascribe an ontological status to sin. Akin to the residues left untreated, sin seems here to have the power to build up, to congeal into cancerous flesh, causing disease and death.

47. See Robin Orton, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: Anti-Apollinarian Writings*, Fathers of the Church 131 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015): 156. See also Orton's discussion of mixture in the introduction, pp. 79–81.

imbalance, but it also allows for healing matter to be delivered from the outermost parts to the innermost. Nutrition and dietetics are, in this way, critical modes of medical intervention and ground Gregory's notion of the salvific role of eating.

The anthropological framework Gregory develops in the *Catechetical Oration* is similar to his consideration of the human person "from a medical point of view" found in *On the Making of Man* where he observes:

But since our nature is poor and in need of supplies for its own maintenance from all quarters, it not only lacks air of its own, and the breath which excites heat, which it imports from outside for the preservation of the living being, but the nourishment it finds to fill out the proportions of the body is an importation. Accordingly, it supplies the deficiency by food and drink, implanting in the body a certain faculty for appropriating that which it requires, and rejecting that which is superfluous, and for this purpose too the fire of the heart gives nature no small assistance.<sup>48</sup>

To sustain life, the human body requires balance and balance requires constant care. The four qualities that structure human life are not sustainable internally, and so food and drink must be regularly consumed to preserve that life and help it to flourish. The proper ordering of the human person, even in the sight of God, necessitates regular medical intervention and treatment. Gregory's program of catechesis found in the *Catechetical Oration*—his outline for the formation of embodied souls—is not merely a blueprint of spiritual direction for the newly initiated. It is also a diagnostic regimen: illnesses must be identified, the body's diseased viscera probed, and remedies prescribed. Gregory's catechetical program addresses the initiate as a sick person on the precipice of a great change, whether into deeper disrepair if the program is ignored or, if followed, into the promised health of salvation. Union with God requires, first and foremost, the healing regimen of medical care—a re-balancing of vital mixtures currently thrown off-kilter.

The medical framework of this text is flagged from the outset when, in the prologue, Gregory contends that "the method of healing must be adapted to the form of the sickness."<sup>49</sup> To be sure, by "form of the sickness"

48. *On the Making of Man* 30.18 (Patrologia Graeca 44:248b). Translation in William More and Henry Austin Wilson, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.5, 424. For more on Gregory's appeal to scientific and medical knowledge in *On the Making of Man*, see especially Susan Wessel, "The Reception of Greek Science in Gregory's *De hominis opificio*," *Vigiliae Christianae* 63 (2009): 24–46.

49. *Or. Catech.* Pr. (Sources Chrétiennes 453:138; trans., Hardy, 268).

Gregory is identifying errant teachings, like those of Marcion and Valentinus, but this diagnosis also situates the fundamental relationship between proper doctrinal formation and physical well-being—the nexus of religious belief and medical physiology that is articulated throughout the *Oration*. Humanity was created to participate in divine goodness, he says a little later, and so human nature had to be constructed in such a way that it could contain that goodness. The image of God is located deep inside each person, a place where divinity and humanity are blended together (ἐγκεράννυμι, a cognate of κρᾶσις).<sup>50</sup>

But something went wrong. This balanced mixture of human nature and divine goodness did not hold. Death entered into the system, dissolving life's structuring elements in the process. In an early section, Gregory describes death's entry as the result of an act of poisoning, linking it to his insistence that the fruit of Eden poisoned humanity in perpetuity. He diagnoses the sickness: humanity swallowed death in a honey-sweetened drug (δηλητήριον μέλιτι) and so mingled (καταμείγνυμι) evil into that sentient part of our nature.<sup>51</sup> By this venom, mortality took root within the human frame, clothing it with death, and dissolving the cosmic elements within humanity that are meant for harmonious mixture.<sup>52</sup> It is through the senses that the sickness of sin gained entry, separating life from body and goodness from the soul. Both body and soul, then, are wounded, imbalanced—each having been made ill by the toxin of evil.<sup>53</sup>

Gregory next describes the different ways in which the soul and the body are affected by the poison. He observes a “bond and fellowship” between body and soul, noting the wounds each undergo at the hands of sinful passions. Both require medical treatment: the soul with the medicine of virtue and the body with other therapies. The primary concern for Gregory is that the soul, like the body, is sick even though it cannot be dissolved and destroyed like the elements of the body. Nevertheless, there are a range of symptoms (παθήματα) that reveal the brokenness of both body and soul. Sickness impinges upon the composite creature's twofold nature, and so its symptoms are found everywhere.

In the same section of the *Oration*, Gregory clearly pushes the language beyond the limits of metaphor as he diagnoses the sin-induced illness of the soul. The disease of sin, he observes, results in “material excrescences that have

50. *Or. Catech.* 5 (Sources Chrétiennes 453:164; trans., Hardy, 276): In this section, Gregory uses the verb ἐγκεράννυμι, a cognate of κρᾶσις, to describe the space in human nature where divine goodness dwells.

51. *Or. Catech.* 8 (Sources Chrétiennes 453:188; trans., Hardy, 282).

52. *Or. Catech.* 8 (Sources Chrétiennes 453:190; trans., Hardy, 283).

53. *Or. Catech.* 8 (Sources Chrétiennes 453:194; trans., Hardy, 284).

hardened upon the surface of the soul, which itself has become fleshy through association with the passions.”<sup>54</sup> Drawing upon the Pauline distinction of spiritual and fleshy, Gregory in fact suggests here that the distinction between soul and body breaks down in the case of those untreated people still suffering Eden’s poison and its myriad symptoms: their soul becomes fleshy (*ἀποσαρκόομαι*) when mired in the passions, resulting in cancerous growths upon its surface (*ὕλῳδη περιττώματα ἐπιπωροῦται*). Now pocked by lumps, the soul requires medical intervention.

Gregory uses the term *perittoma* (*περίττωμα*) to describe the harmful buildup that turns the soul to flesh. As we have seen in the ancient medical traditions explored earlier, *perittoma* referred to the residue left by partially digested food and drink that could result in humoral imbalance.<sup>55</sup> This excess of residue was thought to instigate bad mixture within the body. When not treated properly and flushed from the body, residues leach toxin into the system leading to pain, disease, and death. In using this term, Gregory collapses his distinction between sicknesses of body and soul when he suggests that the soul, through sin, grows deadly lumps of flesh due to the untreated poison of Eden. For Gregory, as for Galen and other medical writers, the essences churning inside the body directly impact the psychosomatic balance of a person’s nature. The relationship between bodies and souls, then, is one of diagnostic and not simply analogic significance. The theory of preventive medicine described here requires that one monitor and treat the mixtures of the body so as to avoid a harmful buildup of these residues within the soul.<sup>56</sup>

In this infirm state, the imbalanced mixture of human nature requires a treatment that can first bring it back to its intended harmony—a state of *eukrasia* that preceded the primordial poisoning. Just as humans cannot sustain bodily life on their own but must rely also on external elements, neither can they achieve true health through any ordinary medical treatment. It makes

54. *Or. Catech. 8* (Sources Chrétiennes 453:194; trans., Hardy, 284): οὕτω καὶ ὅσα ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἡμῶν διὰ τῆς τῶν παθημάτων κοινωνίας ἀποσαρκωθείσαις ὑλῳδη περιττώματα ἐπιπωροῦται.

55. For other discussions of *perittoma*, see also Daniela Mantti, “‘Aristotle’ and the Role of Doxography in the Anonymus Londiniensis (PBrLibr Inv. 137),” in *Ancient Histories of Medicine: Essays in Medical Doxography and Historiography in Classical Antiquity*, ed. Philip J. van der Eijk (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 101–2; Michael Boylan, *The Origins of Ancient Greek Science: Blood—A Philosophical Study* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 63.

56. For more on this point, see also John M. Wilkins, “Treatment of the Man: Galen’s Preventive Medicine in the *De sanitate tuenda*,” in *Homo Patiens: Approaches to the Patient in the Ancient World*, eds. Georgia Petridou and Chiara Thumiger, *Studies in Ancient Medicine* 45 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 425–26.

sense, then, that Gregory proposes a solution for humanity's sickened condition by appealing to the Incarnation. The healing of dyskratic embodied souls requires a remedy that can flush the system of its toxic residues, rebalancing divine and human nature into its proper mixture. The perfectly balanced presence of divinity and humanity in one person suggested itself as an eukratic ideal for the possibility of harmony between spirit and flesh for all humanity.

Yet, about midway through the *Oration*, Gregory's section on the Incarnation does not seem principally concerned with disclosing in technical detail how this mixture took place in the person of Jesus. Instead, the guiding assumption of Gregory's medical anthropology seems to be that we can learn about God's nature, God's purpose, only if we first look inward and realize that "our nature was sick and in need of medical treatment."<sup>57</sup> In short, God's healing, and so God's divinity, is made most tangible by means of proper medical diagnosis. Throughout much of the *Oration*, *krasis* functions as a way to diagnose the particular quality of human frailty in light of the ideal blend of human and divine in Christ. Yet Gregory leaves hints in these earlier sections that *krasis* will also serve as a mechanism for healing sick humans and in so doing making them more like Christ. Anticipating his concluding discussion concerning the Eucharistic bread as precisely this remedy, Gregory notes in section 27: "Certainly it was in keeping with Christ's intimate union (*ἀνακίρναμαι*) with our nature that he should be united (*συνανάκρασις*) with us in all our characteristics. . . .The cleansing power (*τὴν ἐκπλύνουσαν δύναμιν*) had to penetrate it entirely. One part could not be healed by cleansing while another was overlooked and left uncured."<sup>58</sup> He does not unpack here how the cleansing power is delivered and how it functions (this will come in the final section), but Gregory does imagine the catechumen as a medicalized Christian subject in need of an extraordinary remedy. What the Incarnation does for the healing and re-balancing of human nature writ large, the Eucharist does for each individual person.

The anthropological framework that opens the *Catechetical Oration* anticipates the elaborate system of medical knowledge through which Gregory imagines catechetical formation and describes the efficacy of the Eucharistic bread—a topic he considers at length in the chapter 37. And it is this remedying ritual of dietetics that serves as the climax of Gregory's presentation of humanity's

57. *Or. Catech.* 15 (Sources Chrétiennes 453:216; trans., Hardy, 290): Ἐδείτο γὰρ τοῦ ἱατρούοντος ἡ φύσις ἡμῶν ἀσθενήσασα.

58. *Or. Catech.* 27 (Sources Chrétiennes 453:266; trans., Hardy, 304).

diseased condition. Indeed, he refers to humanity as “the sick creature upon the earth,” one that requires a curative drug strong enough to traverse the catastrophic rupture between body and soul, humanity and divinity caused by Eden’s poison.<sup>59</sup> This sick creature needed a remedy that could cleanse its decaying twofold nature, binding its physical and spiritual elements back together. The ritual substances of water, bread, and wine—imbued with pharmacological significance—provide this “cleansing power.” As we will see, then, the healing remedy of the Incarnation is materialized in the Eucharistic bread. Through this food, the ritual participant consumes an antidote. The matter of bread becomes a medical treatment that flushes out harmful residues, restores human nature to its proper balance and mixture, and prepares its temporary bodily congealment for the ongoing work of spiritual perfection. Gregory offers the bread as a physical remedy for spiritual ailments and a spiritual salve for the body’s decay. If Eden’s fruit has resulted in deadly residues—the undigested *perittoma* corroding humanity’s elemental nature—then it is through divine dietetics that these dissolving elements are healed and bound back together.

#### HEALED BY ANOTHER DRUG: A DIVINE ANTIDOTE FOR HUMAN DISEASE IN THE *CATECHETICAL ORATION 37*

Gregory’s discussion of the Eucharist in chapter 37 of the *Catechetical Oration* combines the previous physiological, pharmacological, and dietetic considerations in its use of *krasis* to describe the medicinal function of the bread. Indeed, this section serves as the culmination and practical resolution of the anthropological reflections that preceded it. Gregory opens his consideration of the bread with terms relating to *krasis* to explain why this death-destroying bread is the only suitable remedy for the human condition:

Owing to man’s twofold nature, composed (συγκεράννυμι = *to mix or blend*) as it is of soul and body, those who come to salvation must be united (ἐφάπτω = *to bind*) with the author of their life by means of both. In consequence, the soul, which has union (ἀνακεράννυμι = *to mix up*) with him by faith derives from this means of salvation; for being united (ἔνωσις = *union*) with life implies having a share in it. But it is in a different way that the body comes into intimate union (ἀνακεράννυμι)

59. *Or. Catech. 27* (Sources Chrétiennes 453:268; trans., Hardy, 305): “For how could our nature be restored if it was some heavenly being, and not this sick creature of the earth (τὸ μὲν κάμνον ἐπὶ γῆς), which was united with the Divine? For a sick man cannot be healed unless the ailing part of him in particular receives the cure.”

with its Savior. Those who have been tricked into taking poison offset its harmful effect by another drug (οἱ δηλητήριον δι' ἐπιβουλῆς λαβόντες ἄλλω φαρμάκῳ τὴν φθοροποιὸν δύναμιν ἔσβεσαν). The remedy, moreover, just like the poison, has to enter the system so that its remedial effect may thereby spread to the whole system. Similarly, having tasted the poison that dissolved (διαλύω = *dissolve into its elements*) our nature, we were necessarily in need of something to reunite (συνάγω = *bring/draw together*) it. Such a remedy had to enter into us, so that it might, by its counteraction, undo the harm the body had already encountered from the poison. And what is this remedy? Nothing else than the body which proved itself superior to death and became the source of our life.<sup>60</sup>

A composite body requires a composite remedy. And the Eucharistic bread provides exactly that: healing divinity buried in mortal matter. The dissolution of the elements that hold human nature together was caused by a poison ingested through the mouth.<sup>61</sup> The harmful and undigested residues produced by this poison have been corroding human nature ever since. And so, according to Gregory, the antidote for diseased bodies and their sick souls had to be an edible body untainted by that primordial poison. The edible body and the eating body communicate with one another and are transformed. The bread (this “other drug”) mixes its potency inside the body of the believer, beginning the process of becoming in which that body will one day attain its perfected spiritual form, blended in union with God.

I have used the translation above to indicate the ambiguity of meaning that occurs when modern interpreters attempt to fit Gregory’s language neatly within English vocabulary that reflects the development of later Christological doctrine. “Union” appears pervasively here. But the Greek is not so easy to pin down. Terms linked to *krasis* open the passage and are found throughout the whole section, indicating a physiological chain reaction of blended essences that is initiated when one swallows the Eucharistic bread. Mixture is crucial to Gregory’s anthropology as well as to his understanding of the Eucharistic bread’s medicinal role. And it seems—at least in this important section—that medical reasoning precedes and structures Christological or theological speculation.

60. *Or. Catech.* 37 (Sources Chrétiennes 453:314–316; trans., Hardy, 318).

61. Hardy suggests that the phrase “having tasted the poison that dissolved our nature” at the opening of section 37 is a reference to Genesis 3 and the eating of the fruit. See Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers*, 318 n.40.

It is not that the bread unites the soul with the body, the human with the divine, in some generic spiritual sense. Rather, this doughy drug delivers the power of a healing antidote (ἡ τοῦ βοηθοῦντος δύναμις) into the body through the digestive tract, blending itself into the diseased elements of each person, knitting them back together, and thereby counteracting the Edenic poison that so sickened human nature. Gregory says that those who are made sick by Eden's fruit seek an antidote that can "offset" its harmful effects. For this healing power of the bread, Gregory uses the verb σβέννυμι that is most properly translated as "quench." Yet it carries with it connotations of the bread's effect upon the body's *krasis*, as it can also refer to a cooling or drying power. All of these senses indicate that the bread's salutary effect is in its capacity to rebalance the internal essences previously put in disarray by the toxic fruit of Eden. In other words, the target of the bread's power is specifically the body's mixture: its dyskratic state.

The effect of this highly technical discussion of bread as a medical intervention is that, in the absence of a more robust Christology, Gregory here plays with ideas common to pre-Chalcedonian Christological speculation—blending, union, mixture—by way of an elaborate physiological reflection on the drug effects of food.<sup>62</sup> As Christ ate human food, indicating his full participating in the material existence of humanity, so too do humans eat a spiritual food, enabling their progress from mortality to divinity. The divinization of human nature, like the humanizing of divine nature, involves a proper mixture that begins in the digestive tract with the ingestion of a potent matter that will produce an eukratic state.<sup>63</sup> The Pauline movement from fleshy to spiritual, in Gregory's catechetical program, requires as a dietetic regimen.

Leveraging the power of food through dietetics is precisely the focus a few lines later as Gregory unfurls an elaborate theory of ritual bread-eating and its effects. This is premised on the logic, found elsewhere in Gregory's writing, that humans are formed by and identified with the particular food that they eat.<sup>64</sup>

62. It is worth noting here that, even in the brief section on the Incarnation within the *Catechetical Orations*, Gregory explicitly uses verbs related to *krasis* in order to describe the mystery of how divinity and humanity are blended in the person of Jesus. See *Or. Catech.* 11.

63. As Johannes Zachhuber observes, "[*Or. Catech.* 37] has often been seen as the climax of Gregory's physical soteriology. Yet it seems evident that it is not physical in that it would imply the transmission of salvation on the basis of universal humanity. It certainly is physical in the sense in which Athanasius's and Apollinarius's thought was, prior to Gregory: the human body (which later in the text is equated with human phusis) can only be saved by an injection of divine phusis." See his *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*, 199.

64. On this point, see John David Penniman, "Fed to Perfection: Mother's Milk, Roman Family Values, and the Transformation of the Soul in Gregory of Nyssa," *Church History* 84.3 (2015): 495–530.



The same logic is at work as he describes why the spiritual healing of broken bodies must be delivered through the mouth, by means of a physical act of eating. Mortal bodies could not overcome death without first consuming something immortal, and so the body “must receive the life-giving power in the natural way.”<sup>65</sup> By eating the immortal food of God’s body, the human body blends immortality within its mortal frame. The therapeutic system here is identical to the emphasis on *krasis* in Galenic method: doctors must treat the quality of a particular disease with a substance of the opposite quality.

Perhaps sensitive to the emphatic materialism structuring this line of argument, Gregory then pauses in order “to discuss the physiology of the body, so that our faith, in its concern for what is reasonable, may entertain no doubts on this question.”<sup>66</sup> The brief excursus into the body’s physiology is Gregory’s way of explaining the fundamental role of digestion in human formation, and that life cannot be sustained without “a power that enters it from the outside. This power is called food.”<sup>67</sup> Gregory’s language about the power of food here reflects ancient traditions about the transformative effect of nourishment, found as far back as the Hippocratic treatise *On Nutriment*.<sup>68</sup> While each species is given its own particular diet by God in accordance with what it needs to sustain life, humanity is nourished first and foremost on bread.<sup>69</sup> The power supplied by bread’s nourishment is not simply energy but rather the essential raw materials—the elements or particles (ἄγκοι)—that build bodies. When a person consumes the bread, Gregory argues, these nutritive food particles are transformed into blood and flesh and, through the power of digestion, give

65. *Or. Catech.* 37 (Sources Chrétiennes 453:316; trans., Hardy, 319): Οὐκοῦν ἐπάναγκες κατὰ τὸν δυνατὸν τῇ φύσει τρόπον τὴν ζωοποιὸν δύναμιν τῷ σώματι δέξασθαι.

66. *Or. Catech.* 37 (Sources Chrétiennes 453:318; trans., Hardy, 319): Οὐκοῦν ὡς ἂν πρὸς τὸ ἀκόλουθον ἡμῖν ἢ πίστις βλέπουσα μηδεμίαν ἀμφιβολίαν περὶ τοῦ προκειμένου νοήματος ἔχοι, μικρὸν τι προσήκει παρασχολῆσαι τὸν λόγον εἰς τὴν φυσιολογίαν τοῦ σώματος.

67. *Or. Catech.* 37 (Sources Chrétiennes 453:318; trans., Hardy, 319).

68. “From the outside, nourishment travels through the external surface to the innermost parts.” See *On Nutriment* 22 in W.H.S. Jones, ed., *Hippocrates Vol. 1*, Loeb Classical Library 147 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 348. *On Nutriment* explains how the penetrative power of food is such that it can reach through flesh, bone, and sinew—pushing its way into the body’s humoral system, its heat and moisture and breath. For more on this, see John David Penniman, *Raised on Christian Milk: Food and the Formation of the Soul in Early Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 25–28.

69. *Or. Catech.* 37 (Sources Chrétiennes 453:320; trans., Hardy, 319): Τὰ μὲν γὰρ τῶν ζώων ῥιζωρυχόντα τρέφεται, ἑτέροις ἐστὶν ἢ πόα τρόφιμος, τινῶν δὲ ἡ τροφή σάρκες εἰσὶν, ἀνθρώπων δὲ κατὰ τὸ προηγούμενον ἄρτος.

shape to the physical form.<sup>70</sup> For Gregory as well as medical writers stretching back to the Hippocratic tradition, the essential potency of food is that it enters the human body from the outside, reaches deep through the elements of human nature, and transforms the eater as it is itself transformed by digestion. Bread becomes body and body becomes bread.<sup>71</sup>

The Greek word Gregory uses for this digestive transformation, *alloiotikos* (ἀλλοιωτικός), is also found in medical texts discussing the power of food. It refers to the process of “becoming like another” that happens when we eat.<sup>72</sup> In Gregory’s physiological system we become the stuff of what we eat and that stuff becomes us. This framework takes on greater theological force when he turns back to an explanation of the Incarnation and how God and the Word were blended within human nature. He observes that

when we see bread we see, in a way, the human body, for that is what bread, by passing into it, becomes. It was the same in his [the Incarnate Word’s] case. The body in which God dwelt, by receiving bread as nourishment, was in a sense identical with it. For as we have said, the food was changed into the nature of the body. What is recognized as a universal characteristic applied to his flesh too, i.e., that his body was maintained by bread. But by the indwelling of God the Word, that body was raised to divine dignity.<sup>73</sup>

The blending of divinity and humanity in flesh requires that the material food digested within the Incarnate body be necessarily transformed as well. The Word of God is humanized through human food while humanity’s food is divinized through a divine digestive tract. By eating bread, Christ’s body becomes bread. By passing through Christ’s body, bread itself is capable of becoming the body of Christ.<sup>74</sup>

70. *Or. Catech.* 37 (Sources Chrétiennes 453:320; trans., Hardy, 319).

71. Reinhard Jakob Kees observes how, for Gregory, the digestion of the Eucharistic bread is a repetition of the same bodily processes undertaken by the Incarnate Christ. See *Die Lehre von der Oikonomia Gottes*, 191.

72. See Galen, *On the Use of Parts* 4.7 in Kuhn 3:275. Translation in Margaret Tallmadge May, *Galen: On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 208: “The stomach has the faculty of attracting material having the quality appropriate to it, as I have shown in my commentaries *On the Natural Faculties*. It also has the faculties of retaining what it has received, of expelling the residues, and above all of altering (ἀλλοιωτικός) material; it is for the sake of the alterative faculty that the stomach needs its other powers.”

73. *Or. Catech.* 37 (Sources Chrétiennes 453:320; trans., Hardy, 320).

74. *Or. Catech.* 37 (Sources Chrétiennes 453:322; trans., Hardy, 320): “We have good reason, then, to believe that now too the bread which is consecrated by God’s Word is changed into the body of God the Word. For that body was also virtually (τῆ δυνάμει) bread, though it was sanctified by the indwelling

This, then, is the logic structuring Gregory's argument for the healing power of the ritual. Bread becomes the material manifestation of God's Word through the prayer of consecration and, as a result, it is the very means by which humanity ingests the healing power of divinity.<sup>75</sup> Yet in order to reach this conclusion, Gregory has constructed an elaborate medical and physiological system concerning blended natures: divinity and humanity in the person of Christ; body and soul in human nature; material food and divine remedy in the consecrated bread. The effects of this healing food upon human physiology draws Gregory's discussion of the bread to a close, bringing it back to the core concept that has guided it from the outset. He returns to the notion of *krasis*, suggesting that bread and wine supply the vital qualities of moisture and heat.<sup>76</sup> Flesh requires moisture (ὕγρός) to stave off its tendency toward desiccation, since it is dry and earthy (γεώδης) when left alone. Likewise, flesh requires heat to counteract the deathly chill that is characteristic of old age and declining health.<sup>77</sup> Even the flesh in which God dwelt possessed these elements and, in so doing, transformed bread and wine into a divine antidote for humans. This, Gregory explains, is how God provides healing to humans in the "natural way."

Eucharistic eating, for Gregory, is in this sense a pharmacological intervention with the goal of tilting the human person from *dyskrasia* to *eukrasia*. The poisoned food of Eden resulted in humanity's *dyskratic* state of deteriorating health, a sickly condition due to an imbalanced mixture of hot and cold and dry and moist. The bread and wine of the Eucharist, by contrast, supply the divinely apportioned mixtures and so produce *eukrasia*, rebalancing those sickened elements of mortal life through a drug of immortality. The poison of Eden's fruit turns the soul to flesh. It has seeped deadly toxin into the human frame, accumulating harmful residues, and pulling apart its fibers. The flesh of God, in the form of bread, reverses this process, becoming a divine remedy that is "mixed into the bodies of those who believe" (τοῖς σώμασι τῶν πεπιστευκότων κατακιννάμενος), knitting together their twofold natures, preparing them for the future work of spiritual transformation. By eating the bread of the Eucharist, the material elements of bodily life—these congealments of feeble flesh and

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of the Word in the flesh. Therefore the means whereby the bread was changed in that body, and was converted into divine power, are identical with those which produce a similar result now."

75. *Or. Catech.* 37 (Sources Chrétiennes 453:324; trans., Hardy, 321).

76. While bread often appears to be the primary focus of Gregory's discussion in *Or. Catech.* 37, wine is also central to his argument. Wine directly contributes to the moisture and heat of the body, which sustains it, and through which the human body is acclimated to the body of Christ.

77. *Or. Catech.* 37 (Sources Chrétiennes 453:324; trans., Hardy, 320–21).

diseased soul—are changed (μεταστοιχειόω) from a sick and mortal state into one that is well-balanced and better suited for immortality.<sup>78</sup> This ritual food, for Gregory, is the only possible remedy for the sick creatures of the earth. For it is the only one that has the power to address their composite nature—and in so doing, to bind what was frayed, to blend what was separated, and to heal what had become incurably ill.

## CONCLUSION

Drug lore reminds us that matter has its own peculiar history. Cultures have long theorized and organized themselves in relationship to the potency of certain substances. My hunch is that, because they were embedded within the drug lore of Greco-Roman antiquity, the substances used in early Christian ritual represent just this kind of peculiar history. Late antique Christians famously emphasized the transformability (and deformability) of human nature. The unstable congealment of flesh and spirit that makes the human *human* was a touchstone in ascetic, doctrinal, speculative, practical, and liturgical/ritual writings. It is from this premise that the “material turn” in the study of Late Antiquity has generated such fruitful explorations into the vectors, modalities, risks, and potentialities of so situating the essential malleability of the human in relation to the material world. Food, and more specifically the medical use of food, represents a particularly provocative yet under-appreciated aspect of this material turn. As the writing of Gregory indicates, the material turn in our study of Late Antiquity ought to prompt a pharmacological turn: a burgeoning appreciation for and analysis of medicine’s logic and medicine’s application within Christian programs of human transformation. In this way, we might view the ritual use of medical remedies as a Christian *materia medica* leveraged for the healing, salvation, and divinization of embodied souls.

In the writings of philosophers, moralists, and poets, the physiological implications of dietetics—the precarious relationship between eating well and being well—was a powerful motif throughout Greco-Roman antiquity.<sup>79</sup> But for the

78. *Or. Catech.* 37 (Sources Chrétiennes 453:324; trans., Hardy, 321): “. . .by means of his flesh, which is constituted by bread and wine, he mixes himself into all believers. . . .He unites himself with their bodies so that mankind too, by its union with what is immortal, may share in incorruptibility. And this he confers on us by the power of the blessing, through which he transforms the nature of the visible elements into that immortal body.”

79. See Shadi Bartsch, *Persius: A Study in Food, Philosophy, and the Figural* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

catechist, dietetic regimens took on a particular urgency and a transcendent meaning. The ritualized antidote of the Eucharist situates the Christian within a regimen of health care—a regimen that helps to transform the sickly physical body into a healthy, spiritual, and divinized state. This is what we encounter in Gregory of Nyssa's *Catechetical Oration*. The healing power of consecrated bread, elaborated at length through a program of sacramental dietetics, reveals the intertwining of ritual efficacy and drug efficacy in Gregory's thought. And so the regimens of medical care were readily transferrable to the regimens of pastoral care administered in ritual practice. That the Eucharistic bread might be described as a drug and a cure was no mere literary flourish. It was a means of anchoring spiritual realities in the potencies of the material, sensible world.

Elsewhere, we find these sacramental rituals extended outside the liturgical context and modified to address other ailments. For if we are to take Gregory of Nazianzus at his word, late ancient Christians afflicted with chronic illness, whose physical pain had stretched beyond the limits of a doctor's care, sought healing directly from their God in the substances of bread and wine. Gorgonia, to name only one striking example, mingled her tears with the bread of the Eucharist and rubbed her aching body with it as a poultice. Or, as Virginia Burrus describes it: "a mingling of [Gorgonia's] own bodily fluids with Christ's body."<sup>80</sup> The health of her soul, manifested by her hope in the matter of the bread, combined with the bread's divine power to restore the health of her body.<sup>81</sup> The care of the body through pharmacology and the care of the soul through philosophy were not, in this way, distinct healing technologies. The transformation of the human person into her spiritualized ideal involved regimens combining the full range of medicine's art of healing.

In Gregory of Nyssa's *Catechetical Oration*, however, the reader encounters a more specific presentation of medical knowledge in which *krasis* is leveraged as an explanation for the meaning and efficacy of a ritual practice. This system

80. Virginia Burrus, "Life After Death: The Martyrdom of Gorgonia and the Birth of Female Hagiography," in *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images and Reflections*, eds. Jostein Bortnes and Tomas Hägg (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2006), 163.

81. See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 8.18 (Patrologia Graeca 35:809). Translation in Leo P. McCauley, S. J., *St Gregory Nazianzen and Saint Ambrose: Funeral Orations*, Fathers of the Church 22 (Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1953), 113–14. Of course, one of the earliest and most famous accounts of the Eucharist as a remedy is the tantalizingly brief reference to it as the "drug of immortality" in Ignatius of Antioch's *Epistle to the Ephesians*. In the bigger project of which the current essay is a chapter, the Ignatius passage will be explored in more detail.

provided the structuring logic for his understanding of human health and illness. It also enabled Gregory to reframe the ways in which sin and salvation register within the body. If humans are, by nature, a delicate balance of elemental qualities that are calibrated through dietetic regimens, then the transference of such regimens to the food and drink of the Eucharist must be viewed as an intensification (rather than a diminishment) of the material and medical significance of these substances.

From this vantage, the long-standing dismissal of medical reasoning and physiological digressions in early Christian literature as “mere metaphor” is in dire need of critical reassessment. Such flattened methodologies can only be sustained if the reader has decided from the outset that medicine is ancillary to the outlook of an author like Gregory, serving only as a rhetorical hook for more important theological and spiritual speculations. But I am not persuaded by this. The role of *krasis* in Gregory’s *Catechetical Oratio* reveals just how thoroughly invested some early Christian authors were in the power of medicine as an explanatory model, plotting a Christian subjectivity within a scientific discourse of illness, health, and healing. Indeed, far from a physical analogy for spiritual realities, medicine provided Gregory with a grammar and an epistemology for explaining the fundamental relationship between the spiritual and the material, the conditions of the cosmos and the human condition, and the dramatic encounter between humanity and divinity in the bread of the Eucharist. As a text aimed at “religious instruction,” Gregory embeds explanatory models drawn from medicine deep within the catechetical program of the *Oratio*. These models help him to explain how human sin relates to human sickness. A robust account of the body’s mixture becomes, for Gregory, a mechanism through which knowledge about drug lore and the medical potency of food might be leveraged to heal the poisoned soul.

What happens if we stop presuming that medicine serves only as a buttress for deeper theological commitments? What happens, instead, if we take the preponderance of technical medical knowledge deployed in late ancient literature as evidence of the suffusing reach of medicine within the conceptual categories, vocabulary, and regimens that came to be viewed as “orthodox” Christian belief and practice? In the case of the *Oratio*, we would better discern how the ritual act of eating bread is, for Gregory, tantamount to the physical digestion of a divine remedy into one’s deepest psychosomatic sicknesses. It is the ingestion of a singularly powerful medication that can heal the broken body bent towards death, a drug capable of reviving the sickened soul. The divinization of humanity, in this account, begins with a ritualized dietetic remedy aimed at producing

a healthy mixture in both body and soul. This bread, then, was the only possible antidote for the sick creatures of the earth who still suffer the deadly effects of Eden's poison. In eating the Eucharistic meal, Gregory imagines the initiate beginning a dramatic transformation away from sickness and death, tilting decisively toward the good health of salvation. To eat like Christ ate, to eat what Christ ate, to eat (as it were) Christ himself—Gregory suggests that this is the first and necessary step on the journey from illness to wellness, from human disorder and imbalance to the perfect harmony and future blending of all things in God. ■