



THE GREAT CATECHISM



GREGORY OF NYSSA

THE GREAT CATECHISM

*Translated from the Greek by William Moore and
Henry Austin Wilson
From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 5,
edited by Philip Schaff, D.D., LL.D.*

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note apparatus is retained where it serves the text; we have set aside those notes that pertain only to the nineteenth-century volume context, and any commentary at variance with the Orthodox confession of the Fathers themselves. We add a scripture index for the text in hand.

The texts are typeset in IM Fell English, a face cut by John Fell in seventeenth-century Oxford and freely available again through the work of Igino Marini. The Greek is set in Philokalia, designed for the Athonite tradition.

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THE GREAT CATECHISM

SUMMARY

The Trinity.

Prologue and Chapter I.—The belief in God rests on the art and wisdom displayed in the order of the world: the belief in the *Unity* of God, on the *perfection* that must belong to Him in respect of power, goodness, wisdom, etc. Still, the Christian who combats polytheism has need of care lest in contending against Hellenism he should fall unconsciously into Judaism. For God has a Logos: else He would be without reason. And this Logos cannot be merely an attribute of God. We are led to a more exalted conception of the Logos by the consideration that in the measure in which God is greater than we, all His predicates must also be higher than those which belong to us. Our logos is limited and transient; but the

subsistence (ὑπόστασις) of the Divine Logos must be indestructible; and at the same time living, since the rational cannot be lifeless, like a stone. It must also have an independent life, not a participated life, else it would lose its simplicity; and, as living, it must also have the faculty of will. This will of the Logos must be equalled by his power: for a mixture of choice and impotence would, again, destroy the simplicity. His will, as being Divine, must be also good. From this ability and will to work there follows the realization of the good; hence the bringing into existence of the wisely and artfully adjusted world. But since, still further, the logical conception of the Word is in a certain sense a relative one, it follows that together with the Word He Who speaks it, *i.e.* the Father of the Word, must be recognized as existing. Thus the mystery of the faith avoids equally the absurdity of Jewish monotheism, and that of heathen polytheism. On the one hand, we say that the Word has *life and activity*; on the other, we affirm that we find in the Λόγος, whose existence is derived from the Father, *all* the attributes of the Father's nature.

Chapter II.—By the analogy of human breath, which is nothing but inhaled and exhaled fire, *i.e.* an

object foreign to us, is demonstrated the community of the Divine Spirit with the essence of God, and yet the independence of Its existence.

Chapter III.—From the Jewish doctrine, then, the unity of the Divine nature has been retained: from Hellenism the distinction into hypostases.

Chapter IV.—The Jew convicted from Scripture.

Reasonableness of the Incarnation.

Chapters V. and VI.—God created the world by His reason and wisdom; for He cannot have proceeded irrationally in that work; but His reason and wisdom are, as above shown, not to be conceived as a spoken word, or as the mere possession of knowledge, but as a personal and willing potency. If the entire world was created by this second Divine hypostasis, then certainly was man also thus created; yet not in view of any necessity, but *from superabounding love*, that there might exist a being who should participate in the Divine perfections. If man was to be receptive of these, it was necessary that his nature should contain an element akin to God; and, in particular, that he should be immortal. Thus, then, man was created in the image of God. He could not therefore

be without the gifts of freedom, independence, self-determination; and his participation in the Divine gifts was consequently made dependent on his virtue. Owing to this *freedom* he could decide in favour of evil, which cannot have its origin in the Divine will, but only in our inner selves, where it arises in the form of a deviation from good, and so a privation of it. Vice is opposed to virtue only as the absence of the better. Since, then, all that is created is subject to change, it was possible that, in the first instance, one of the created spirits should turn his eye away from the good, and become envious, and that from this envy should arise a leaning towards badness, which should, in natural sequence, prepare the way for all other evil. He seduced the first men into the folly of turning away from goodness, *by disturbing the Divinely ordered harmony between their sensuous and intellectual natures*; and guilefully tainting their wills with evil.

Chapters VII. and VIII.—God did not, on account of His foreknowledge of the evil that would result from man's creation, leave man uncreated; for it was better to bring back sinners to original grace by the way of repentance and physical suffering than not to create man at all. The raising up of the fallen