

SUPPLEMENTS TO
VIGILIAE CHRISTIANAE



Gregory of Nyssa:
The Minor Treatises
on Trinitarian Theology
and Apollinarism

*Proceedings of the 11th International
Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa
(Tübingen, 17-20 September 2008)*



Edited by
VOLKER HENNING DRECOLL
AND MARGITTA BERGHAUS

BRILL

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Trinitarian Theology and Apollinarism

Supplements
to
Vigiliae Christianae

Texts and Studies of
Early Christian Life and Language

Editors

J. den Boeft – B.D. Ehrman – J. van Oort –
D.T. Runia – C. Scholten – J.C.M. van Winden

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ST GREGORY'S ARGUMENT CONCERNING THE LACK OF
ΔΙΑΣΤΗΜΑ IN THE DIVINE ACTIVITIES FROM *AD ABLABIUM*

VLADIMIR CVETKOVIC

This paper intends to shed new light on Gregory's usage of the dialectal pair διάστημα—ἀδιάστατος, specifically in the Trinitarian context of *Ad Ablabium*. The bold expression in the title of this paper referring to Gregory's argument concerning the lack of διάστημα in the divine activities from *Ad Ablabium* requires an explanation. My intention is not to add a new argument to the list of the already existing argumentation, but to demonstrate that Gregory's arguments were developed in the debate with Anomeans over the question whether temporal διάστημα exists in divine being or not. By rejecting Anomean claims, Gregory develops a completely new Trinitarian doctrine, based on the "adiastemic" nature of God and on the "hypostatic" distinctions between the divine persons.

1. *Historical development of the term διάστημα*

The term διάστημα had had its historical development before Gregory made of it one of the essential notions of his theology. Gregory might have received the term from a few different sources. One might have been Origen and Methodius of Olympus, who borrowed this term from Philo and the Stoics. Balthasar is the first who in his pioneering work on Gregory from 1942 (*Présence et pensée*) suggests that the Stoics are the possible source of Gregory's διάστημα.¹ Stoics were among the first philosophers who used the term διάστημα in order to define extension in time or time in general,² unsatisfied with both

¹ Hans U. von Balthasar: *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, translated by Marc Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 32, note 46.

² Simplicius, *In Aristotelis Categoriae commentarium* (CAG 8, 350,15f. Kalbfleisch). Simplicius also testifies that the first who used the term διάστημα to define movement is the Pythagorean Archytas (see Simplicius, *In Aristotelis Physicorum libros octo commentari* [CAG 9/1, 786,12f. Diels]), although Sambursky finds that Simplicius'

Plato's definition of time as the moving image of eternity³ and Aristotle's definition as number of motion in respect of "before" and "after".⁴ Chrysippus maintained that, due to the constant change in the sensible world, Plato's conception of time could not offer a fixed point in time to serve as a reference for events.⁵ In order to express better the nature of time as continuum, Zeno replaced Aristotle's "number" (ἀριθμός) with "extension" or "interval" (διάστημα) defining time as the extension of movement.⁶ Chrysippus went further than Zeno defining time as the extension of proper movement of cosmos and stating that everything that moves and exists is in time.⁷ By linking closely time and cosmos, Chrysippus connected the "cosmic" cycles with temporal cycles and thus treated the beginning and end of each "cosmic" cycle as fixed point in time.⁸

Balthasar also states that Philo could also be a source of Gregory's διάστημα. Philo by following Stoics, especially Chrysippus,⁹ defines time as the διάστημα of movement of κόσμος.¹⁰ Plato's teaching about the generation of κόσμος and the Stoic definition of time as διάστημα between two world fires of cosmic cycles served for Philo as philosophical vindication of Moses' account of creation of the world from Genesis.

quotation is from spurious sources. See Samuel Sambursky: *Physics of the Stoics* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 101.

³ Plato, *Timaeus* 37d5–7 (SCBO, Platonis opera 4, 37d Burnet): [...] εἰκόδ' ἐπενόει κινήτόν τινα αἰῶνος ποιῆσαι [...] τοῦτον ὃν δὴ χρόνον ὠνομάκαμεν.

⁴ Aristotle, *Physica* IV 11, 219b1f. (SCBO, 219 Ross): Τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ χρόνος, ἀριθμὸς κινήσεως κατὰ τὸ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον.

⁵ John M. Rist: *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 276.

⁶ Simplicius, *In Aristotelis Categoriae commentarium* (CAG 8, 350,15f. Kalbfleisch): Τῶν δὲ Στωικῶν Ζήνων μὲν πάσης ἀπλῶς κινήσεως διάστημα τὸν χρόνον εἶπεν.

⁷ Joannes Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I 8,42 (Ioannis Stobaei Anthologium 1, 106,5–106,9 Hense/Wachsmuth): Ὁ δὲ Χρῦσιππος χρόνον εἶναι κινήσεως διάστημα, καθ' ὃ ποτὲ λέγεται μέτρον τάχους τε καὶ βραδύτητος· ἢ τὸ παρακολουθοῦν διάστημα τῆ τοῦ κόσμου κινήσει, καὶ κατὰ μὲν τὸν χρόνον κινεῖσθαι τε ἕκαστα καὶ εἶναι· See also Stobaeus, *Eclogae* I (SVF II, fragm. 509, 164,15–18 von Arnim).

⁸ Rist: *Stoic Philosophy* (see note 5), 276f.

⁹ Emile Bréhier: "La Théorie des Incorporels dans l'ancien Stoïcisme," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 22 (1909), (114–125) 119.

¹⁰ Philo, *De opificio mundi* 26,4 (Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt 1, 8,8 Cohn): Ἐπεὶ γὰρ διάστημα τῆς τοῦ κόσμου κινήσεώς ἐστὶν ὁ χρόνος. Philo, *De aeternitate mundi* 6,4 (Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt 6, 73,14–74,1 Cohn/Reiter); 52,5–7 (Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt 6, 89,5–7 Cohn/Reiter): Ὡστ' εὐθυβόλως ἀποδεδοσθαι πρὸς τῶν εἰωθῶτων τὰ πράγματα ὀρίζεσθαι χρόνον διάστημα τῆς τοῦ κόσμου κινήσεως.

Otis went a step further claiming that Gregory's usage of διάστημα resembled that of Methodius of Olympus who adopted this term from Stoic and Philonic sources and adapted it to the Christian perspective on time.¹¹ In his early work the *Symposium*, in his interpretation of the biblical parable on wise and foolish virgins (Mt 25:1–13), Methodius is using the term διάστημα to refer to the period before Christ's final coming.¹² In his later work *De resurrectione*, Methodius elaborates the notion further, comparing the whale (from the parable of John 1:4–17) with the "time, which never stands still, but is always going on, and consumes the things which are made by longer and shorter intervals".¹³ For Methodius everything exists in time and it is determined by certain διάστημα. By describing time as a container of all existence Methodius influenced Gregory to coin the term χόρημα δεκτικόν.¹⁴

In his recent work on Origen, the Greek scholar Tzamalikos considers that Origen also left his mark on Gregory in relation to the concept of διάστημα and ἀδιάστατος.¹⁵ Tzamalikos claims that the distinction between διάστημα, which is creaturely characteristic because "the bodies are created in intervals"¹⁶ and ἀδιάστατος (dimensionless),¹⁷ which is divine characteristic because God is beyond alteration, change and time, established by Origen is followed by Gregory. Thus is obvious according to Tzamalikos in Gregory's differentiation between τῆς σωματικῆς καὶ διαστηματικῆς (ἔστι) φύσεως and νοερά τε καὶ

¹¹ Brooks Otis: "Gregory of Nyssa and the Cappadocian Conception of Time," *Studia Patristica* 14 (1976), (336–357), 332–336.

¹² Methodius, *Symposium* 6,4 (GCS 27, 68,20f. Bonwetsch): Ὁ γάρ τοι χρόνισμός ἐστι τὸ πρὸ τῆς παρουσίας διάστημα τοῦ Χριστοῦ. The English translation in *St Methodius, The Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity*, translated and annotated by Herbert Musurillo. Ancient Christian Writers 27 (Westminster [Maryland]: Newman, 1958), 94.

¹³ Methodius, *De resurrectione* II 25,2 (GCS 27, 380,19–381,5 Bonwetsch): Ἔοικε γὰρ τὸ μὲν κῆτος νοεῖσθαι ὁ χρόνος, ἅτε μηδέποτε ἐστὼς, ἀλλὰ πορευόμενος ἀεὶ καὶ καταδανῶν τὰ γεννώμενα μακροῖς τε καὶ βραχυτέροις διαστήμασιν. The English translation is taken from Philip Schaff: *Fathers of Third Century: Gregory Thaumaturgus, Dionysius the Great, Julius Africanus, Anatolius and Minor Writer, Methodiu, Arnobius*. The Ante-Nicene Fathers 6 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 378.

¹⁴ *Eun.* I 370 (GNO I, 136,10 Jaeger).

¹⁵ Panayiotis Tzamalikos: *Origen Cosmology and Ontology of Time*. Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 77 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 223 note 197; 261f. note 365.

¹⁶ Origen, *De principiis* II 3,2 (GCS 22, 114,21f. Koetschau); English translation from: Origen, *On the first principles*. Being Koetschau's text of the *De principiis*, translation into English, together with an introduction and notes by G.W. Butterworth, introduction to the Torchbook ed. by Henri de Lubac (New York: Harper and Row, 1966) 84.

¹⁷ Origen, *Expositio in Proverbia* 2 (PG 17, 168A).

ἀδιάστατος φύσις.¹⁸ Tzamalikos¹⁹ also maintains that Gregory is indebted to Origen for the psychological perception of time, i.e. conception that time comprises past, present and future, but it seems to me that a more likely direct source of this idea could be Methodius.²⁰

It is worthy to note that one of the likely sources for the cosmological διάστημα is Plotinus. Balthasar²¹ and Plass²² argue that the Neoplatonists influence Gregory in his teaching on διάστημα. In *Enneades* 3,7,6 Plotinus extensively elaborates the definition of time as διάστημα of movement, together with the definitions of time as number and measure of movement. However, he disagrees that time is διάστημα of movement, because διάστημα is not something external to movement, but it is placed in movement itself.²³ Plotinus also uses the term ἀδιάστατος in describing the eternity as “the life, which belongs to that which exists and is in being, all together and full, completely without extension or interval”.²⁴

The term διάστημα appears with the cosmological meaning specific for Origen and Methodius in the earliest works of Gregory, such as *De virginitate*, where Gregory states that the life in chastity transcends time, while the marriage and procreation introduce distance between us and the second coming of God by an intervening posterity.²⁵

Finally, a highly likely source of Gregory’s διάστημα is represented by the anti-Arian polemics. The term διάστημα is mentioned for the first time in the Trinitarian context by Alexander of Alexandria in the letter to his namesake Alexander the bishop of Thessalonica. Bishop Alexander accuses Arius of introducing time or temporal extension in the divine being by the phrase “it was when the Son was not”.²⁶

¹⁸ *An. et res.* 48B (BKV I 1, 40,23f. Oehler).

¹⁹ Tzamalikos: *Origen Cosmology and Ontology* (see note 15), 231 note 235.

²⁰ Methodius, *De resurrectione* II 25,8 (GCS 27, 382,1–6 Bonwetsch); Schaff: *Fathers of Third Century* (see note 13), 378.

²¹ Von Balthasar: *Presence and Thought* (see note 1), 32f. note 46.

²² Paul Plass: “Transcendent Time and Eternity in Gregory of Nyssa,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 34 (1980), (180–192) 187.

²³ Plotinus, *Enneades* 3,7,7f. (SCBO, Plotini opera 1, 346,1–350,69 Henry/Schwyzler).

²⁴ Plotinus, *Enneades* 3,7,3 (SCBO, Plotini opera 1, 340,36–38 Henry/Schwyzler): Τὸ ὄν ἐν τῷ εἶναι ζωῇ ὁμοῦ πάσα καὶ πλήρης ἀδιάστατος πανταχῆ τοῦτο, ὃ δὴ ζητοῦμεν αἰών.

²⁵ *Virg.* (GNO VIII/1, 309,6–8 Cavarnos): Οὐδὲν διάστημα μεταξύ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ τῶν διὰ μέσου γενεῶν ἐργαζόμενος.

²⁶ Theodoret, *Historia ecclesiastica* I 3,3f. (GCS N.F. 5, 7,24–8,11 Parmentier/Hansen); cf. Theodoret, Jerome, Gennadius, & Rufinus: *Historical Writings*, ed. by Philip Schaff. The Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd series, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 37.

In order to vindicate the divinity of the Son, the Alexandrine bishop rejects any kind of temporal διάστημα between the Father and the Son, maintaining that they are coeternal. The term διάστημα was also used by Athanasius the Great, who claims that it is impossible to think of any spatial distance or temporal extension between the Father and the Son, because the Son, being born from the Father, exists in the same way like the Father.²⁷

Therefore, by Gregory's time διάστημα became a terminus technicus of the anti-Arian and anti-Anomean debates.

2. Gregory's διάστημα

While Gregory synthesizes two distinct meanings of the term διάστημα, derived from two different milieus, one cosmological and the other Trinitarian, his doctrine of διάστημα can hardly be reduced to the existing sources. Διάστημα has a twofold meaning, which determines the character of every created being. Firstly, διάστημα has its temporal component and represents the extension in time. Everything that exists in time is created and it has its place in the temporal order, because the "creation comes into existence according to a sequence of order, and is commensurate with the duration of the ages".²⁸ Gregory shows this by the terms τάξις and ἀκολουθία, broadly analyzed by Daniélou.²⁹ Thus, every being has its place in time,³⁰ either in relation to the beginning of time, other beings and events in time, or in relation to the end of time and the second coming of Christ. According to Gregory, we are separated from God by time or temporal διάστημα. Secondly, Gregory introduces physical or natural διάστημα as an ontological gulf between the creator and us. Whatever the degree in deification we gain, διάστημα between God and us as well as our

See also *Epistula ad Alexandrum Constantinopolitanum* = *Urkunde* 14 22,3 (Athanasius Werke 3/1, 23,14 Opitz): "Ἡ γὰρ χρόνοις ἐμπολιτεύεσθαι δεῖ τὸ οὐκ ἦν, ἢ αἰώνος τινι διάστηματι.

²⁷ Athanasius, *De synodis Arimini in Italia et Seleucia in Isauria* 26,9,1f. (Athanasius Werke 2/1, 253,34–39 Opitz).

²⁸ *Eun.* I 362 (GNO I, 134,8–11 Jaeger): "Ἡ μὲν γὰρ κτίσις πᾶσα, καθὼς εἴρηται, κατὰ τινὰ τάξεως ἀκολουθίαν γεγεννημένη τῷ τῶν αἰώνων διαστήματι παραμετρεῖται.

²⁹ Jean Daniélou: "Akolouthia chez saint Grégoire de Nysse," *Revue de science religieuse* 27 (1956), 219–249; Jean Daniélou: *L'être et le temps chez Grégoire de Nysse* (Leiden: Brill, 1970).

³⁰ *Eun.* I 369f. (GNO I, 136,1–13 Jaeger).

deep quest and desire to become one with the divine, remain as the natural mark of creation. Examples of ontological διάστημα may be found in Gregory's works such as *De vita Moysis*, *In Ecclesiasten* and *In canticum canticorum*.

In his seminal article on διάστημα, Verghese lists the possible usages that this Greek word can have in Gregory, from Trinitarian and christological to cosmological and ontological.³¹ Unfortunately, pointing to some apparent contradictions in Gregory's usage of this term seems that Verghese does feel the subtlety of Gregory's teaching of διάστημα. The Verghese problem how to reconcile the paragraph from *In canticum canticorum*³² where Gregory claims that at the beginning of creation the ἀρχή of created beings was co-perfected with the πέρας without διάστημα with his position that διάστημα is an inseparable characteristic of created beings, could be solved by reading this paragraph against the passages from *De perfectione*³³ and *De vita Moysis*.³⁴ Gregory's teaching about perfection not as a state but as a constant effort to attain the attainable is a key to distinguish between ontological διάστημα and the διάστημα caused by the fall.

It should be also mentioned the original reading of Gregory's διάστημα offered by Scot Douglass. Scot Douglass claims that the lack of διάστημα between the persons in the Trinity causes the lack of the communication among them,³⁵ because according to Gregory what is totally conjoined is not mediated by speech.³⁶ Douglass has also given significant contributions to Gregory's teaching on divine energies that bridge the "diastemic" gap between God and creation.³⁷

³¹ Paul Verghese: "Διάστημα and διάστασις in Gregory of Nyssa," in: *Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie: Zweites internationales Kolloquium über Gregor von Nyssa, Freckenhorst bei Münster. 18.-23. September 1972*, ed. by Heinrich Dörrie, Margarete Altenburger and Uta Schramm (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 243–260.

³² *Cant.* XV 6,8 (GNO VI, 457,21–458,3 Langerbeck).

³³ *Perf.* (GNO VIII/1, 214,4–6 Jaeger).

³⁴ *Vit. Moys.* II (GNO VII/1, 115,8–119,6 Musurillo).

³⁵ Scot Douglass: *Theology of the Gap: Cappadocian Language Theory and the Trinitarian Controversy*. American University Studies 7/235 (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 64.

³⁶ *Eun.* II 214 (GNO I, 287,22–288,3 Jaeger).

³⁷ Douglass: *Theology of the Gap* (see note 35), 9.

3. *Triune God*—ἀδιάστατος or διάστατος

The notion of διάστημα as an ontological characteristic of man helps Gregory to coin the opposite notion ἀγέννητος, which he attributes to God. As διάστημα has a twofold nature, one as temporal extension and the other as ontological gulf between the creator and creation, the term ἀγέννητος can have at least two different meanings, one in the temporal, and another in the ontological realm. The lack of temporal διάστημα in the divine Being implies that God cannot be in any sense subsumed under the category of time and any other category in which exists change in relation to the subsequent state. This is evident in the attitude of the Cappadocians who do not allow any temporal extension between the Father and the generation of the Son.³⁸

However, the Anomean party claims that their own teaching also admits the lack of temporal extension in God, accusing their opponents, probably the orthodox party, that they are those who introduce time in God, even calling them “temporists” (χρονῖται).³⁹ Aetius and his disciple Eunomius maintain that by the claim that the eternal Father begets the eternal Son their opponents introduce time in God. According to the Anomean teaching, every generation must be in time because it implies some temporal extension between the begetter and the begotten.

In 1968 Wickham listed three main Anomean arguments, which deal with introducing time in the divine being. Firstly, the claim of the orthodox party that ἀγέννητος and γέννημα share the same essence means, according to the Anomeans, that divine essence is divided by generation.⁴⁰ Moreover, the Anomeans state that the generation implies change and the change introduces time to the divine being.⁴¹ Secondly, the Anomeans accuse their opponents that, by the teaching that the Son is of one substance with the Father, but that he is second in order after the Father, they introduce time in the divine being, because the

³⁸ *Eun.* I 362 (GNO I, 134,8–11 Jaeger); Basil of Caesarea, *Adversus Eunomium* II 13 (SC 305, 46,1–50,38 Sesbouïé).

³⁹ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 76,11,3 (GCS 37², 352,15 Holl/Dummer). The English translation of Aetius' *Syntagmation* in Lionel R. Wickham: “The Syntagmation of Aetius the Anomean,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968), (540–549) 540.544. See also Eunomius, *Apologia* 10,1–17; 22,1–15 (OECT, 44.62 Vaggione).

⁴⁰ Lionel R. Wickham: “The Syntagmation of Aetius the Anomean,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968), (532–569) 550.

⁴¹ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 12,8 (GCS 37², 353,22–354,4 Holl/Dummer).

Son can be only second in time after the Father.⁴² The third Anomean argument relates to the attitude that ἀγέννητος is completely equal to γέννημα (“save generation”). By this claim the orthodox party, according to the Anomeans elevates γέννημα at the same level with ἀγέννητος, which implies change and consequently time.⁴³ Gregory’s reasoning is similar regarding the matter that every extension introduced between the Father and the generation of the Son is subsumed under the objective criterion of measurement, which can only be in time. This leads to the conclusion that every διάστημα or extension in the created world necessarily implies the existence of change and consequently time.⁴⁴ On the contrary, the lack of temporal extension and the change from one state to another should imply the eternal existence. However, Gregory changes the perspective by looking at eternity as objective category. While time is the medium in which history happens, eternity is not the medium in which divine being exists. The divine eternity is the attribute of God and for this reason Gregory applies the adjective ἰδίος only to God.⁴⁵ Therefore, eternity is one among other divine attributes such as incomprehensibility, infinity, perfection, goodness and it is one of the divine uncreated energies and in no way the objective container of divine life.

If the lack of temporal διάστημα in God leads us to divine eternity, what would involve then the lack of ontological διάστημα? The ontological διάστημα as a gulf between created and uncreated nature ensures the constant desire from the side of created nature to find stability in uncreated nature and the consequent movement toward divine being. Therefore, the adjective ἀδιάστατος denies not only the existence of διάστημα as a temporal category, but also the lack of any desire, which refers to the deprivation (στέρησις) of a certain quality in the divine being. The divine being is perfect by itself and its perfection is not the consequence of participation in something perfect or the result of constant movement toward a goal, which gives the basis for perfection. There are more meanings of the term ἀδιάστατος, but we will focus on the context in which this term appears in *Ad Ablabium*.

⁴² Eunomius, *Apologia* 10,4–12 (OECT, 44 Vaggione).

⁴³ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 76,12,8 (GCS 37², 353,22–354,4 Holl/Dummer).

⁴⁴ *Eun.* I 363 (GNO I, 134,13–17 Jaeger).

⁴⁵ *Eun.* I 371 (GNO I, 136,14–22 Jaeger).

4. *Gregory's Ad Ablabium*

The term ἀδιάστατος appears only once in the work dedicated to Ablabius, but inspires Gregory's argumentation more than any other of the divine attributes. Almost all arguments from *Ad Ablabium* echo the debate with the Anomean party. Moreover, all these arguments could be seen as replies to the accusation of the Anomeans that the orthodox party introduces time or temporal διάστημα in God. The scholarly consensus has been formed over the attitude that cosmological interest shaped the thought of both sides (Rowan Williams,⁴⁶ Maurice Wiles).⁴⁷ I would like to go further and to demonstrate that both, the Anomeans and the Orthodox, agreed regarding the point that there is no temporal διάστημα in God. Therefore, I will analyze Gregory's arguments in *Ad Ablabium* as the refutation of the Anomean accusation of the orthodox party of introducing time in God. Moreover, I attempt to demonstrate that Gregory's arguments follow and reject the Anomean arguments listed by Wickham, one by one.

The first argument of the Anomeans noted by Wickham accuses the orthodox party of dividing the common essence by claiming that the ingenerate and the only begotten share a common essence, and as a result of this change time or temporal διάστημα in God appears.

After warning against speaking of God in plural in order to avoid any resemblance to the polytheism of pagans, Gregory launches the first theological argument, which meets the Anomean accusation. He argues that while the idea of persons admits separation, the idea of nature is inseparable and the divine "nature is one, at union in itself and an absolutely indivisible unit".⁴⁸ For Gregory the essence is always one, "inseparable even though it appear(s) in plurality, continuous, complete, and not divided with the individuals who participate in it".⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Rowan Williams: *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 181–214.

⁴⁷ Maurice Wiles: "The Philosophy of Christianity. Arius and Athanasius," in: *The Philosophy in Christianity*, ed. by Godfrey Vesey. Royal Institute of Philosophy supplement 25 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 41–52.

⁴⁸ *Abl.* (GNO III/1, 41,2f. Müller): Ἡ δὲ φύσις μία ἐστίν, αὐτὴ πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ἠνωμένη καὶ ἀδιάτμητος ἀκριβῶς μονάς. The English translation: "On 'Not Three Gods'. To Ablabius," in: *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, select writings and letters*, ed. by Philip Schaff. The Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1892), (331–336) 332.

⁴⁹ *Abl.* (GNO III/1, 41,5–7 Müller): Κἂν ἐν πλήθει φαίνεται, ἄσχιστος καὶ συνεχῆς καὶ ὁλόκληρος καὶ τοῖς μετέχουσιν αὐτῆς τοῖς καθ' ἕκαστον οὐ συνδιαιρουμένη.

Claiming that the divine essence is not divided by the participation of the ingenerate and only begotten, Gregory rejects the possibility that any change is introduced in the common essence. The common essence or nature of God is not “capable of increase by addition or of diminution by subtraction”.⁵⁰ Therefore, one cannot speak of any change and appearance of time or temporal διάστημα in the divine being. It is easy to conclude after Gregory’s arguing that there is no διάστημα in divine essence and that God is ἀδιαστάτος.

The second Anomean argument for introducing time to God is based on the claim that while the essence is common to all divine persons, they differentiate by order. For Eunomius the order, which presupposes superiority or inferiority, has to be in time.⁵¹ Therefore, according to Anomeans there must be temporal extension between the unbegotten and the only begotten if there is precedence. What kind of precedence has the orthodox party in mind if not precedence in time? Gregory is quite clear when he claims that there is no divisibility and separability in divine nature⁵² or essence that can imply precedence in order. While Gregory denies any order in common substance, he affirms the specific order in divine operation. Thus, he claims that “every operation which extends from the God to the Creation, [...] has its origin from the Father, and proceeds through the Son, and it is perfected in Holy Spirit”.⁵³

It is obvious that there is a certain order in divine operation, because the Father is the origin of it and the first in order, the Son is second in order and the intermediary between the Father and the Holy Spirit, while the Holy Spirit is the third and the last in order and every operation is perfected in him. However, Gregory does not stop here, but aware of the possible Anomean charge proceeds further, denying that divine operation is a separate action according to the number of the persons, and describing it as “one motion and disposition of the good

⁵⁰ *Abl.* (GNO III/1, 41,3f. Müller): Οὐκ ἀύξανομένη διὰ προσθήκης, οὐ μειομένη δι’ ὑφαίρεσεως. English translation from Schaff: “On ‘Not Three Gods’. To Ablabius” (see note 48), 332.

⁵¹ See Eunomius, *The Extant Works*, text and translation by Richard P. Vaggione. Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 45.

⁵² *Abl.* (GNO III/1, 46,15f. Müller). English translation from Schaff: “On ‘Not Three Gods’. To Ablabius” (see note 48), 333.

⁵³ *Abl.* (GNO III/1, 47,24–48,2 Müller): Ἀλλὰ πάντα ἐνέργεια ἢ θεόθεν ἐπὶ τὴν κτίσιν διήκουσα καὶ κατὰ τὰς πολυτρόπους ἐννοίας ὀνομαζομένη ἐκ πατρὸς ἀφορμάται καὶ διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ πρόεισι καὶ ἐν τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ τελειοῦται. Translation from Schaff: “On ‘Not Three Gods’. To Ablabius” (see note 48), 334.

will".⁵⁴ All good things and all good names are the result of this motion of good. Gregory finally rejects Eunomius' stance that superiority or precedence is based in time, by claiming that God's operation is "without mark of time or distinction since there is no delay, existent or conceived, in the motion of the Divine will from the Father, through the Son to the Spirit".⁵⁵

Here, Gregory for the first and last time in *Ad Ablabium* uses the term ἀδιάστατος and he pairs it with the term ἄχρονος, showing that the order in divine operation has nothing to do with temporal or other kind of extension. By using the term ἄχρονος, Gregory rejects any possibility that time or temporal extension divides the process of operation between the Father and the Son or the Son and the Holy Spirit. The process of divine operation is based on "the unity of actions, which prevents plural enumeration".⁵⁶ The second adjective ἀδιάστατος denies not only the existence of the temporal διάστημα in divine essence and energies, but also abolishes any kind of distinction between the three divine persons.

The next and the last Anomean accusation is that the Orthodox attempt to elevate the second to the status of the first and thus make Father and Son equal. Therefore, Aetius claims that "making generate to become ingenerate"⁵⁷ introduces change again and consequently time.

However, this is not the only problem which Gregory faced. By abolishing every distinction or διάστημα in the divine being, Gregory finds himself in the difficulty how to distinguish three divine persons one from the other. The same problem seen from the Anomean perspective would be how to distinguish three equally divine persons, and not to disturb their divinity either on the level of οὐσία or on the level of ἐνέργεια. Gregory offered a very original solution, using the same rationale as the Anomeans. While the Anomeans used the distinction between ingenerated and generated to claim the difference

⁵⁴ *Abl.* (GNO III/1, 48,22f. Müller): Τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ θελήματος κινήσις τε καὶ διάδοσις. Translation from Schaff: "On 'Not Three Gods'. To Ablabius" (see note 48), 334.

⁵⁵ *Abl.* (GNO III/1, 51,18–21 Müller): Ἀχρόνως καὶ ἀδιαστάτως εἰς τελείωσιν ἄγεται, οὐδεμιᾶς παρατάσεως ἐν τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ βουλήματος κινήσει ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ πνεῦμα γινομένης ἢ νοουμένης. Translation from Schaff: "On 'Not Three Gods'. To Ablabius" (see note 48), 335.

⁵⁶ *Abl.* (GNO III/1, 52,1f. Müller): Τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἐνότητος κωλυούσης τὴν πληθυντικὴν ἀπαρίθμησιν. Translation from Schaff: "On 'Not Three Gods'. To Ablabius" (see note 48), 335.

⁵⁷ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 76,11,6 (GCS 37², 353,16f. Holl/Dummer): Τί κωλύει τὸ γεννητὸν ἀγέννητον γεγονέναι;

in substance between the two, Gregory, preserving the unity of divine substance and operation, used the same distinction to show the difference between persons. Michel René Barnes correctly pointed out that, while Athanasius and his contemporaries used the doctrine of divine generation to prove that the Father and the Son have the same nature or essence, for Gregory the same doctrine served as a basis for distinguishing persons.⁵⁸ It is easy to agree with Barnes that Gregory's move represents the major development in Trinitarian theology from the time of early Arian controversy.

However, the language "ingenerate—generated" needed some adaptation in order to be applicable to the new Trinitarian context, which respects the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Gregory introduced a new language of causality by securing the invariable character of nature denying any distinction in it.⁵⁹ Gregory makes the differentiation between the persons on the basis of causality. Thus, Gregory introduces double differentiation. The first differentiation is in relation to the cause and to that which is caused. It is possible here to detect the influence of Gregory's older brother Basil, especially at the level of language and reasoning. Firstly, the term "the invariable character of nature" (τὸ ἀπαράλλακτον τῆς φύσεως)⁶⁰ is to be found in the Basilian vocabulary and it is a substitute for ὁμοούσιον.⁶¹ Secondly, the identification of the Father with the cause and source (αἰτία) is also made by Basil in order to establish the unity of God on the μοναρχία of the Father.⁶² However, it does not seem that Gregory follows his brother on this point. The language "cause—caused" circumscribes a larger class of objects, than the language "ingenerated—generated" and thus Gregory subsumes under the term caused both the Son and the Holy Spirit and gives a broader Trinitarian perspective. On this point Gregory makes a new departure from the previous Nicene theology. He preserves the characteristic of the Father to be uncaused, but he transfers this attribute from the level of nature to the level of person. As Barnes noticed, the unqualified use of "uncaused" no longer functions as the criterion for divinity.⁶³ The term "uncaused" applied

⁵⁸ Michel R. Barnes: "Divine Unity and the Divided Self," *Modern Theology* 18 (2002), (475–496) 483.

⁵⁹ *Abl.* (GNO III/1, 57,11f. Müller): θεία φύσις ἀπαράλλακτός τε καὶ ἀδιάρητος.

⁶⁰ *Abl.* (GNO III/1, 55,24 Müller).

⁶¹ Basil of Caesarea, *Homilia contra Sabellianos, et Arium, et Anomoeos* 4 (PG 31, 608A).

⁶² Basil of Caesarea, *Epistula* 38,4 (CUFr, Lettres 1, 84,1–87,93 Courtonne).

⁶³ Barnes: "Divine Unity and the Divided Self" (see note 58), 484.

to the Father does not refer just to his relationship with the Son, but also to the relationship with the Holy Spirit. While the language “ingenerate—generate”, describes the Father’s relationship to the Son, the language “uncaused—caused” enables to understand the personal distinction of the Father in relation to both the Son and the Holy Spirit. However, the term caused serves as an intermediary term because it is applicable to the class of two objects, namely the Son and the Holy Spirit, and it does not fully describe their personal characteristics of the caused persons. Therefore, Gregory proceeds further distinguishing the Son from the Holy Spirit on the basis of their relations to the Father and also on the basis of the relations between the two of them. Thus, for Gregory the Son is directly from the first cause, and the Holy Spirit is by that which is directly from the first cause, namely by the Son.⁶⁴ Gregory’s claim taken out of the context of the argument can lead to the conclusion that there is subordination in the Holy Trinity. However, Gregory insists on something else here. His intention is to describe the personal characteristic of the Son by the attribute only begotten, which preserves the relationship with both the Father and the Holy Spirit. By being begotten, the Son relates to the Father who is unbegotten and the begetter of the Son. By the prefix “only” added to begotten, the Son also relates to the Holy Spirit, telling us that the Holy Spirit is caused but not begotten. Thus, the Son is the only one who is begotten by the cause and therefore is only begotten, while the Holy Spirit is also from the Father, but he is not begotten. Here Gregory emphasizes that the terms “cause” and “from the cause” have nothing to do with the divine nature, and like the terms “generate” or “ingenerate” refer to the personal attributes of the divine persons. The distinction that Gregory makes between the nature and the persons of the Holy Trinity is based on the differentiation between the existence and the mode of existence or as Gregory puts it between τί ἐστὶ and πῶς ἐστὶ.⁶⁵ At the end of the work, Gregory concludes: “we can no longer be accused of confounding the definition of the Persons by the community of nature”.⁶⁶ The word “we” obviously refers to Gregory, his brother Basil and the entire orthodox party, but the question from

⁶⁴ *Abl.* (GNO III/1, 56,5–10 Müller). Translation from Schaff: “On ‘Not Three Gods’. To Ablabius” (see note 48), 336.

⁶⁵ *Abl.* (GNO III/1, 56,11–22 Müller).

⁶⁶ *Abl.* (GNO III/1, 57,6f. Müller): Οὐκέτ’ ἂν ἐν τῷ κοινῷ τῆς φύσεως τὸν τῶν ὑποστάσεων λόγον συντήκειν αἰτιαθεῖμεν. Translation from Schaff: “On ‘Not Three Gods’. To Ablabius” (see note 48), 336.

which side the accusations originate still remains. It seems to me that the charge for confusing the definition of the Persons with the community of natures comes from the Anomeans, because it hides neo-Arian logic. Therefore, the last of Gregory's arguments can be seen as a reply to the Anomean charge that the elevation of the second to the status of the first or better said making the second equal with the first within the common essence introduces the change and time to God.

Gregory replies to the Anomean charge with the same claim that the ἄγέννητος is in everything equal to γέννημα. However, this is not an elevation in the divine essence and energies because there is no temporal or spatial διάστημα between the persons in divine essence that can be passed on the course of elevation. The distinction between the divine persons does not have a temporal character, it is rather differentiation concerning their personal properties.

Thus, through the course of his argumentation, Gregory refutes all Anomean charges listed by Wickham, which accuse the Orthodox party of introducing change and temporal διάστημα to God. Gregory shows that God is and always remains ἀδιαστάτος.

5. Conclusion

It is evident that the work *Ad Ablabium* is written in a polemical tone. Gregory argues not only against the charges that Christians confess three Gods, but also against some Anomean accusations, which imply temporal distinction in the divine being. Therefore, Gregory's development of the doctrine of the "adiastemic" nature of God, shows that there is no separation or διάστημα in the divine essence and operations. Gregory applied the argumentation developed on the course of refuting Eunomius to the Trinitarian context of the work *Ad Ablabium*. I have tried to demonstrate that by focusing on the Anomean accusations that the Orthodox introduces time in divine being, Gregory not only rejects these charges, but also develops a new Trinitarian doctrine. Thus, the newly developed theory presupposes two things, the "adiastemic" unity of the divine essence and energies, together with the "hypostatic" distinction between the persons.