

AGNIESZKA WYRĄBKIEWICZ

THE MYSTICISM OF LOVE IN *DE VIRGINITATE* OF ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA

Abstract. Primeval East Church was very careful in the use of classical greek's terms specifying love. The article presents conception breaking above tendency – the idea of ecstatic, ardent eros in St. Gregory's of Nyssa first written tractate – *De virginitate*, and is intended to submit variety of types of love and role of love in virginal life. The bishop of Nyssa, seeing main purpose of all human efforts in assimilation to God, emphasizes the virtue of chastity, which increases with love. Owing to this virtue, soul-bride reflects in itself intertrinitarian relations. Through love man rises his nature, assuming triad assigned to nature of God: holiness, impeccability and chastity, and becoming completely and entirely open to experience of spiritual marriage with God.”

Key words: love, eros, virginity, mystic, assimilation to God.

The mystique of the first centuries of Christianity impresses with the simplicity of the description of God's intimate experience in human life and the originality of images, which in their diversity were supposed to bring even the shadow of this mystery of faith. In the Eastern Church, the expression of this fruitfulness is found above all in the detailed concepts of deification, practical postulates of the imitation of God's nature or in the emerging monastic rules. They were a reflection of the ardent desire of the Church Fathers, directing them to the possibly most precise expression of so subtle and ephemeral reality, that it can not be embraced by the epistemological sum of human efforts.¹ This difficult challenge was also undertaken by

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¹ GREGORIUS NAZIENZENUS, *Oratio* 28, 4, PG 36, 29C-32A.

St. Gregory of Nyssa in his first work entitled *De virginitate*.² He made his mark in the history of the Church as an indisputable pioneer of Christian mysticism, similarly to Origen of Alexandria, Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor.³

His treatise *De virginitate* was probably written in 371, even before Gregory's episcopal consecration.⁴ It contains numerous parallels with the best preserved work of St. Methodius of Olympus entitled *Symposion ton deka parthenon*⁵ written in the second half of the 3rd century.⁶ Both works praise the key triad in the mystical marriage of the human soul and God, that is love, purity and deification, accessible to man in the state of virginity, which is a worldly imitation of Christ-Archvirgin (ἀρχιπαρθένος)⁷ and the life of the soul in God.⁸ The aim of this article is to present the variety of types of love and the role of love in the context of the mysticism of Gregory

² Critical editions: GRÉGOIRE DE NYSSE, *Traité de la virginité*, ed. M. Aubineau, Paris: Cerf, 1966; *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca*, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris 1863, no. 46, card 317-416; *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, no. 8/1, ed. J.P. Cavanaugh, Leiden 1952, pp. 215-343. translations: M. AUBINEAU, *Grégoire de Nysse. Traité de la virginité*, Paris: Cerf, 1966; V. WOODS CALLAHAN, *Gregory of Nyssa. On Virginity*, [in:] GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Ascetical Works*, Washington 1967, pp. 3-75; W. BLUM, *Gregor von Nyssa. Über das Wesen des christlichen Bekenntnisses, Über die Vollkommenheit, Über die Jungfräulichkeit*, Stuttgart 1977, pp. 81-153; S. LILLA, *Gregorio di Nissa. La Virginità*, Rome 1990; L.F. MATEO-SECO, *Grégoire de Nysse. La virginidad*, Madrid 2000.

³ On the mysticism of Gregory of Nyssa, cf. J. DANIELOU, *Platonisme et théologie mystique. Essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de saint Grégoire de Nysse*, Paris 1944, p. 6; F. Drączkowski, Grzegorz z Nyssy, [in:] *Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. IV, Lublin: Learned Society of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, 1983, pp. 316-320; R. Tichy, Tajemnicza natura Grzegorza z Nyssy, „Fronda” 1998, no. 13/14, pp. 441-459; E. Kotkowska, Pomyśleć świat jako całość według św. Grzegorza z Nyssy, Poznań 2003, p. 13; P. Szczur, „Święć się Imię Twoje” w wykładzie św. Grzegorza z Nyssy, [in:] *Modlitwa uwielbienia*, ed. J. Misiurek, J.M. Popławski, K. Burski, Lublin: KUL Publishing House 2004, p. 296; A. Wyrąbkiewicz, Mistyczna teoria odkupienia w pismach św. Grzegorza z Nyssy, „Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia” 2014, no. 7, p. 128.

⁴ J. QUASTEN, *Patrology*, vol. III: *The Golden Age of Greek patristic literature from the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon*, Utrecht 1960, pp. 269-270; J. NAUMOWICZ, *Wstęp*, [in:] *Pierwsze pisma greckie o dziewictwie*, Cracow 1997, p. 31. According to some researchers, the dating of the work should be linked to the publication of the books *De instituto Christiano* and *De Deitate filii et spiritus sancti et in Abraham*, written between 375 and 378, because of similar references to Mesalianism; see P. MARAVAL, *Chronology of works*, [in:] *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. L.F. Mateo-Seco, G. Maspero, transl. S. Cherney, Leiden-Boston 2010, p. 160.

⁵ METHODIUS, *Symposion ton deka parthenon*, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris 1857, pp. 27-217; Polish translation: *Metody z Olimpu. Uczta*, transl. S. Kalinkowski, [in:] *Pierwsze pisma greckie o dziewictwie*, Cracow 1997, pp. 127-253.

⁶ Cf. J. NAUMOWICZ, *Wstęp*, p. 115.

⁷ METHODIUS, *Symposion ton deka parthenon* I, 4, PG 18, 44C.

⁸ GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *De virginitate* 14, PG 46, 381C.

of Nyssa based on an extremely subtle distinction in the terminology of love, outlined in the combination of two contrasting expressions of classical Greek – ἀγάπη and ἔρωσ, used in *De virginitate*.

“ONLY LOVE IS THE LIFE OF GOD”
MODELS OF LOVE IN *DE VIRGINITATE*

Gregory of Nyssa is one of the narrow circle of Church Fathers, who appreciate the pagan term ἔρωσ in the face of the spiritual desire to unite with God.⁹ The richness of the terminology of love is characteristic of almost all important writings of Gregory, first of all the philosophical treatise *Dialogus de anima et resurrectione*,¹⁰ the biography of his sister *Vita sanctae Marcrinae*¹¹ and the exegetical work *In Canticum canticorum*.¹² These writings came into being much later than the aforementioned ascetic treatise, but undoubtedly it can be said that the most important ideas shaping Gregory’s mature concept of love originate from *De virginitate*. As the eulogist of pure and heavenly *eros*,¹³ Gregory willingly puts together different types of love, efficiently using the richness of ancient Greek, to outline the shape that a man should reflect in his nature during the process of deification, conforming to God – the infinite and unsurpassed Ἀγάπη. The multiple types of love are clearly seen in the treatise on virginity, in which Gregory compiles all the basic nominal terms: the term ἀγάπη is mentioned two times,¹⁴ ἔρωσ – seven times,¹⁵ ἐρωτικός – once,¹⁶ φίλτρον – two times,¹⁷ φιλανθρωπία – once,¹⁸ τοργή – once¹⁹ and verbs: ἀγαπάω is mentioned six times,²⁰ ἐράω –

⁹ These Church Fathers include Ignatius, Origen, Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor, see *A patristic Greek lexicon*, ed. C.W.H. Lampe, Oxford 1961, p. 550.

¹⁰ In: *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca*, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris 1863, no. 46, card 12-160.

¹¹ In: *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca*, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris 1863, no. 46, card 959-1000; *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, ed. V.W. Callahan, Leiden 1952, no. 8/1, pp. 370-414.

¹² In: *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca*, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris 1863, no. 44, card 756-1120; *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, ed. H. Langerbeck, Leiden 1960, no. 6.

¹³ Cf. GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *De virginitate* 20, PG 46, card 400D.

¹⁴ PG 46, card 325D, 360B.

¹⁵ PG 46, card 340D; 364D; 400D (x2); 412B (x2); 412C.

¹⁶ PG 46, card 348D.

¹⁷ PG 46, card 325D; 329D.

¹⁸ PG 46, card 324A

¹⁹ PG 46, card 349C.

four times²¹ and φιλέω – once.²² These terms describe the unspoiled marital relationship and being faithful to the commandments of God, giving them a common denominator – their implementation is the temporal entry into God's life.

Stating that “only love is the life of God (μόνης δὲ τῆς θείας ζωῆς ἔχων τὸν ἔρωτα),”²³ Gregory refers to the term *eros* and its basic meaning in the Hellenic culture: love that is desiring, ascending, sublimated and ecstatic in its raptures, as described by Anders Nygren in his monumental work *Agape und Eros. Gestaltwandlungen der christlichen Liebe*.²⁴ As Nygren rightly observes, Gregory's adaptation of the pagan term is a kind of compromise – despite the fact that Gregory retains the essence of *eros* (which is the ardent desire), the term is used exclusively for spiritual reality. This is particularly apparent in the descriptions contained in his later work *In Canticum canticorum*:

the love of God (τὸν θεῖον ἔρωτα) is born of what is contrary to carnal desire, so if that precedes weakness, relaxation and lazy softening, here God's love (τοῦ θείου ἔρωτος) is born of frightening and extraordinary bravery.²⁵

or, given in the further passage, the only definition of *eros* that can be found in his whole output:

It is said that love (ὁ ἔρωσις) is kindness (ἀγάπη) in increased intensity (ἐπιτεταμένη), which no one is ashamed of (as long as its arrow does not pierce his body), but rather boast of the wound when the blade of intangible desire penetrates deeply into his heart.²⁶

²⁰ PG 46, card 328D; 360A (x2); 381C; 389A; 392B.

²¹ PG 46, card 357C; 384D; 400C (x2).

²² PG 46, card 373C.

²³ GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *De virginitate* 4, PG 46, card 340D – Translation mine.

²⁴ Anders Nygren, *Agape und Eros. Gestaltwandlungen der christlichen Liebe*, Berlin 1955, pp. 345-346. Nygren lists the characteristics of *Eros*: *Eros* is a desire, a longing. *Eros* is a physical attraction. *Eros* is the way of man to God. *Eros* is a guide, based on human self-salvation; *Eros* is ego-centric love, the supreme, noble and sublime kind of self-determination. *Eros* wants to win his life, become divine, immortal. *Eros* is first of all the love of man: God is the object of *Eros*. Although *eros* is associated with God, he is created in the image of human love. *Eros* is determined by the quality, beauty and value of its object; he is not spontaneous, but «recovered,» «motivated.» *Eros* constitutes the value of his subject and loves it.”

²⁵ GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *In Canticum canticorum, hom. 6. GNO 6*, p. 192 – *Homilie do Pieśni nad Pieśniami*, transl. M. Przyszychowska, Cracow 2007, pp. 107-108.

²⁶ GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *In Canticum canticorum, hom. 6. GNO 6*, p. 192 – *Homilie do Pieśni nad Pieśniami*, transl. M. Przyszychowska, Cracow 2007, p. 199.

This peculiar virgin or ascetic motif resonates in *De Virginitate*. It can be seen especially in references to mystical vocabulary, expressing the unity (ἀνάκρasis) between man and God which is the real goal of mystical life. In this way, Gregory uses both ἔρωσ and ἀγάπη.²⁷ It is easy to see that ὁ θεῖος ἔρωσ refers to passionate and non-carnal love of man towards God, which Gregory describes in *De virginitate* as pure and heavenly (καθαρός τε καὶ οὐράνιος ἔρωσ). It is a binder of the spiritual marriage (ὁ πνευματικὸς γάμος) of a creature and his Creator.²⁸ Therefore, such a way of presenting the eros in the entire legacy of Gregory points to its fundamental role in the process of deification of man, and virginity appears as one of the main catalysts of imitating the Divine nature in itself.²⁹

Virginity has priority over marriage. It is explained by man's need of indivisibility in loving God with all his heart and strength (ἐξ ὅλης καρδίας καὶ δυνάμεως τὸν θεὸν ἀγαπᾶν),³⁰ which for Gregory is an objective impossible to attain when "human feelings are out of love."³¹ This does not mean a total depreciation of marriage, which should be characterized by a state of "deep kindness and striving for the greatest good of the other, in a sweet competition, to surpass it in love (φίλτρον πολὺ, καὶ οἷον ἐν ἐκατέρῳ ὑπὲρ τὸν ἄλλον ὑπονοεῖσθαι, ἢ γλυκεῖα ἐκείνη φιλονεικία τὸ ἑαυτὸν βούλεσθαι νικᾶν ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐκάτερον)."³² At the same time, marriage is associated with many difficulties and worries, separating thought from the contemplation of divine beauty, and ultimately and inevitably leads to the loss of a loved one.³³

However, it is significant that in *De virginitate*, Gregory uses the term ἔρωσ only twice in the context of corporal love,³⁴ understood as: man's love

²⁷ G. MASPERO, *Love. ἀγάπη, ἔρωσ*, w: *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. L.F. Mateo-Seco, G. Maspero, transl. S. Cherney, Leiden–Boston 2010, p. 458.

²⁸ GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *De virginitate* 20, PG 46, card 400CD.

²⁹ N. RUSSELL, *The doctrine of deification in the Greek patristic tradition*, Oxford 2006, p. 226; A. WYRĄBKIEWICZ, "Z człowieka powstaje bóg". *Terminologia przebóstwienia w pismach św. Grzegorza z Nyssy*, „Vox Patrum” 34(2014), fasc. 64, p. 437.

³⁰ GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *De virginitate* 9, PG 46, card 360A.

³¹ *De virginitate* 9, PG 46, card 360AB: "Πῶς γὰρ ἀγαπήσει τις ἐξ ὅλης καρδίας καὶ δυνάμεως τὸν Θεόν, ὅταν καταμερίση τὴν καρδίαν ἑαυτοῦ πρὸς Θεὸν καὶ κόσμον, καὶ κλέπτων τρόπον τινὰ τὴν ἐκείνῳ μόνῳ χρεωστούμενην ἀγάπην, ἀνθρωπίνους αὐτὴν πάθει προσαναλίσκη."

³² *De virginitate* 3, PG 46, card 325D-328A, translation mine.

³³ *De virginitate* 3. PG 46 card 328D.

³⁴ Erotic love: ἔρωτασαρκῶν (PG 46 k. 364D) and love typical of young people: ἔρωτας τῆς ἡλικίας (PG 46 card 412B). See also: *Lexicon Gregorianum*. vol. III, pp. 521-522.

for God or wisdom.³⁵ This principle is also emphasized by the definition of conjugal love as ἀγάπη (according to Gregory, it is a less ardent love in the human world, which is perfect and supreme only in God)³⁶ or φίλτρον (understood both as kindness and improper, dirty desire for youthful love, a term describing newlyweds, which in *In Ecclesiasten* is defined as an “innate attitude towards something desirable, which works through pleasure and passion”).³⁷ The meaning of ἔρωσ is thus related to what is perpetual and worth the greatest effort of man, which Gregory describes further in the 20th chapter of *De virginitate* on spiritual marriage with God:

the enthusiasm for this kind of marriage is common for men, and women alike. For the Apostle says: “There is neither male nor female,³⁸ but Christ is all and is in all,”³⁹ the true lover of wisdom (ὁ τῆς σοφίας ἐρασθεὶς), [whose] divine purpose of pleasure is true wisdom, and the soul attached to the immaculate Spouse has love for true wisdom, which is God (τὸν ἔρωτα, ἣτις ἐστὶν ὁ θεός). But this spiritual marriage is aimed at pure and heavenly love (ὁ πνευματικός ἐστι γάμος καὶ πρὸς τίνα βλέπει σκοπὸν ὁ καθαρὸς τε καὶ οὐράνιος ἔρωσ).⁴⁰

“PURITY OF HEART AS THE MASTERY OF HUMAN LOVE” REFLECTION OF TRINITARY RELATIONSHIPS IN MAN

The basic modulation of love in *De virginitate* is ἔρωσ, which prepares the soul for the ardent desire of the greatest goods, so that through their contemplation it recognizes their sacred source. Paying much attention to contemplation and the desire for true beauty in virginal life, Gregory makes eros the basic dynamism of ascent to higher realities, the dynamism which is defined as the forces of love turned towards the contemplation of spiritual

³⁵ ἔρωσ is the love of wisdom, see PG 46, card 412B; 412C; 400D; and its derivatives, see PG 46, card 400C (x2).

³⁶ G. MASPERO, *Love. ἀγάπη, ἔρωσ*, p. 457. “The opposition between ἔρωσ and ἀγάπη was overcome by defining the former as the intensification of the latter. The verb used has a broader scope. It is a desire that has encountered an infinite object of longing, which determines finding its fulfillment in the paradox of being satisfied and insatiable at the same time. In this desire, man discovers that his being is directed to the infinite God, of Whom he is the image” (Genesis 1:26) (ibid., p. 461).

³⁷ GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *In Ecclesiasten*, homily 8, GNO 5, p. 417.

³⁸ Galatians 3:28.

³⁹ Colossians 3:11.

⁴⁰ *De virginitate* 20, PG 46, card 400CD, translation mine.

beauty (ἀλλὰ μεταθήσει τὴν ἐρωτικὴν δύναμιν ἀπὸ τῶν σωματικῶν ἐπὶ τὴν νοητὴν τε καὶ ἄυλον τοῦ καλοῦ θεωρίαν).⁴¹ It is a special role that determines progress in the process of *epektasis* and deification. Hence virginity as a state of contemplating God's things becomes the most optimal environment of God's likeness, a return to the original state of human nature.⁴²

Gregory sees the source of all purity in the bosom of the Holy Trinity and is amazed by the paradox of faith: the virginity of the Father having the pure-born Son and the Spirit whose essence is an uncontaminated purity.⁴³ The triad constituting virginal life – chastity, holiness and impeccability – belongs first and foremost to God, and a man, who acquires them in the way of cooperation with grace, acquires the possibility of entering into a relationship with Him. This is the proper way of deification,⁴⁴ described by Norman Russell as analogous deification, based on human participation in divine attributes.⁴⁵ As the goal of human life, according to Gregory, is becoming conformed to God, reflecting the divine qualities in man is emphasized⁴⁶ that are perfectly modeled in man by the love (φιλανθρωπία).⁴⁷ Love with the power of God

⁴¹ *De virginitate* 5, PG 46, card 348D.

⁴² J. NAUMOWICZ, *Wstęp*, p. 32.

⁴³ *De virginitate* 2, PG 46, card 321C: “Συνέσεως γὰρ ἡμῖν χρεια πολλῆς, δι’ ἧς ἔστι γνῶναι τὴν ὑπερβολὴν τῆς χάριτος ταύτης, ἧτις συνεπινοεῖται μὲν τῷ ἀφθάρτῳ Πατρὶ. ὁ δὲ καὶ παράδοξον, ἐν Πατρὶ παρθενίαν εὐρίσκεσθαι, τῷ καὶ Υἱὸν ἔχοντι, καὶ δίχα πάθους γεννήσαντι. Τῷ δὲ Μονογενεῖ Θεῷ τῷ τῆς ἀφθαρσίας χορηγῷ συγκαταλαμβάνεται, ὁμοῦ τῷ καθαρῷ καὶ ἀπαθεῖ τῆς γεννήσεως αὐτοῦ συνεκλάμψασα. Πάλιν τὸ ἴσον παράδοξον, Υἱὸς διὰ παρθενίας νοούμενος. Ἐνθεωρεῖται δὲ ὡσαύτως καὶ τῇ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος φυσικῇ καὶ ἀφθάρτῳ καθαρότητι. Τὸ γὰρ καθαρὸν καὶ ἄφθαρτον ὀνομάσας.”

⁴⁴ *De virginitate* 1, PG 46, card 320D.

⁴⁵ For more information, see N. RUSSELL, *The doctrine of deification*, pp. 225-229.

⁴⁶ Gregory follows the teachings of St. Methodius, who in the incarnation and the virginal life of the Son of God saw the model to reflect the original state of man: „the Word that was sent down to the earth to make this reality first took on a human form stigmatized with many sins. Christ did this to make us, for whom he took on human form, able to take on God's form. Then, we can be an exact image of God, when learning to go along the way which He revealed, we will fully model in ourselves, like painters, the same hallmarks of the human way of life. To this end, He, though He was God, decided to clothe himself in the human body, so that seeing the modeled divine image we could imitate the Creator of this image.” (METHODIUS, *Symposion ton deka parthenon I, 4, PG 18, card 44C-45A*, [in:] *Pierwsze Pisma*, transl. S. Kalinkowski, p. 136).

⁴⁷ Gregory uses the term φιλανθρωπία, indicating God's love for man, which became the reason for the salvific history. In addition to the creation of man, incarnation and redemption, this love also causes man's conformity to God through the power of His love. See *Lexicon Gregorianum. Wörterbuch zu den Schriften Gregors von Nyssa*, ed. F. Mann, vol. IX, pp. 457-460.

raises the human nature based on the tendency to yield to temptations, through chastity, as if raising it from a fall through an outstretched hand, and inclines it to look towards the sky (καταβληθεῖσαν τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν ὑπὸ τῆς ἐμπαθοῦς διαθέσεως, ὡσπερ τινὰ χεῖρα τὴν τῆς καθαρότητος μετουσίαν ὀρέξασα, πάλιν ὀρθώση, καὶ πρὸς τὰ ἄνω βλέπειν χειραγωγήση).⁴⁸

The virginity perfected by love is a miracle of reincarnation, and although it is of a spiritual nature, it is only through the purity of the body that the Trinity resides in man⁴⁹ – union with God, who is chastity itself.⁵⁰ Love in this process is therefore the reason for participation, not its effect,⁵¹ and chastity is considered as confirmation of openness to God's action in the soul. Therefore, the purity of the heart illustrates the mastery of human love,⁵² the constant disposition towards the undivided acceptance of God's presence. The ecstatic character of love desiring union with God is supplemented by a description of wounding the soul with an arrow, a familiar motif of Hellenic culture,⁵³ which is used by Gregory to illustrate the community with the Deity itself:

So if a good lover of our souls (ὁ καλὸς ἐραστής τῶν ἡμετέρων ψυχῶν) showed his love (τὴν ἀγάπην), through which *Christ died for us while we were still sinners*, the soul, loved with reciprocity by the One who loved it, shows in itself the deep arrow of love (διὰ βάθους τῆς ἀγάπης τὸ βέλος), that is, the community with His Divinity (τουτέστι τὴν τῆς θεότητος αὐτοῦ κοινωνίαν): as the Apostle says, God is love (ἡ γὰρ ἀγάπη ἐστὶν ὁ θεός) that enters the heart with the cutting edge of faith. If we need to call this arrow somehow, we will say according to what we have learned from Paul that this arrow is *faith that works through love* (ἀγάπης).⁵⁴

The conformity, which is the fundamental experience of lovers, and thus is analyzed by Gregory in one of his most mature exegetical works *In Canticum canticorum*, becomes the source of searching for the proper

⁴⁸ *De virginitate* 2, PG 46, card 324A, translation mine.

⁴⁹ *De virginitate* 2, PG 46, card 324B.

⁵⁰ J. DANÉLOU, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, p. 214

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 203

⁵² *De virginitate* 5, PG 46, card 349A.

⁵³ "If Gregory wanted to describe the way in which the soul accepts love from God and Christ, he includes the ancient image of Eros and being wounded by the arrow of love. It is significant that he uses two different formulations: the «arrow of Eros» and the «arrow of Agape.» Christ is the «archer of Agape,» who targets the soul and His arrows are never missing; but He can also be the only one to be called Eros, piercing the soul with an arrow." See A. NYGREN, *Agape und Eros. Gestaltwandlungen der christlichen Liebe*, Berlin 1955, pp. 345-346.

⁵⁴ GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *In Canticum canticorum*, homily 13, GNO 6, pp. 377-378, *Homilie do Pieśni nad Pieśniami*, transl. M. Przyszychowska, Cracow 2007, pp. 196-197.

ground for unity between the holy, triune God and the creature under His control. In *De virginitate*, Gregory sees this ground in chastity itself, because of the direct participation in the attribute belonging to the nature of God. Unity allows the soul to anticipate the harmonious reconciliation of these two, separated entities (τὸν δὲ ἄνθρωπον ἐν ἑαυτῇ πρὸς τὴν τῶν οὐρανίων ἐπιθυμίαν περοῦσα καὶ οἶονεὶ σύνδεσμός τις γινομένη τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης πρὸς τὸν θεὸν οἰκειώσεως, τὰ τοσοῦτον ἀλλήλων ἀφροστῶτα τῇ φύσει τῇ παρ' ἑαυτῆς μεσιτεία εἰς συμφωνίαν ἄγουσα).⁵⁵ As a result, man is a reflection of inter-trinitarian relations and is indivisibly open to the residence of the Trinity in his soul, metaphorically presented as the spiritual marriage, preparing to which, the soul-bride gets rid of anger, greed, jealousy, revenge, hostility, malice, hatred and all that contradicts sound teaching.⁵⁶ Recovering through the love of wisdom (τῆς σοφίας ἔρωτος), the virgin defeats time, rising above the bodily pleasure and tending toward the sky,⁵⁷ living in a spiritual way, like the angelic entities.⁵⁸

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⁵⁵ *De virginitate 2*, PG 46, card 324BC.

⁵⁶ *De virginitate 14*, PG 46, card 381C.

⁵⁷ *De virginitate 23*, PG 46, card 412BC.

⁵⁸ A good example is Macrina, the older sister of St. Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa. See GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *Epistula 19*, PG 46, card 1076A.

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