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The reception and transformation of philosophy in Gregory of Nyssa

Kaori TAKEDOMI

Since the establishment of the early Church, Christian fathers employed Greek philosophy to reinforce and enrich their Christian teachings. Gregory of Nyssa (335–395) exemplifies the Greek fathers who drew from the knowledge of Greek classics to contemplate the perfection of human *physis* (nature). This paper describes how Gregory incorporated the notions of growth and changeability embedded in *physis*, a long-established concept in ancient Greek thought, into his view of humankind.

Gregory assimilated the philosophies of his day, but he introduced them carefully and modified them to accord with his faith in Scripture. Although he successfully incorporated *physis* in his teaching, he displayed an understanding different from that of Aristotle. Gregory understood that man's changeability is not merely ephemeral in the sense expressed in Greek philosophy. Rather, from his reading of the Pentateuch, notably Genesis, Gregory saw the Creator's lasting goodwill in humankind's mutability. Gregory taught that changeable human beings nonetheless possess the enduring possibility of ascending to God. Gregory situated human changeability within the context of *physis*, and in human change, he saw the possibility of human progress toward goodness. He thought humankind's progress in *physis* persists, and he attributed its permanence to enduring action by God, who created *physis*. It was by the eternal action of God the Creator that all creatures are continually created in goodness.