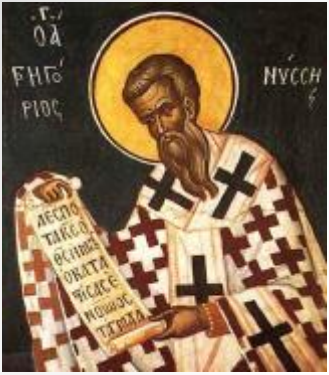




● **Hot air balloons over Cappadocia** ●



St Andrew's Patristic Symposium 2011: St Gregory of Nyssa

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Approaching St Gregory of Nyssa's *Apology of the Hexaemeron*

Further Insights into the Cappadocian
Views on Creation

Introduction

- The treatise under consideration:
 - *Ἀπολογητικὸς περὶ τῆς Ἑξαήμερου*, (An Apology of the Hexaemeron), or
 - *Εἰς τὴν Ἑξαήμερον* (On the Hexaemeron)
- Challenging the consensus:
 - An intended continuity with St Basil's *Homilies on the Hexaemeron*
 - Its character as an exegetical treatise

An Apology of the Hexaemeron: Presentation

- The oath of silence
- Breaking the oath
 - Bouteneff, Peter. *Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.
 - Köckert, Charlotte. 'The Concept of Seed in Christian Cosmology: Gregory of Nyssa, *Apologia in Hexaemeron*.' *Studia Patristica* 47. Leuven – Paris – Walpole: Peeters, 2010: 27-32.

An Apology of the Hexaemeron: Presentation

- Chronology, a challenging issue
- Two treatises on creation
 - Apology
 - On the Making of Man

An Apology of the Hexaemeron: Presentation

- Criticisms
 - No solution for day and night before the fourth day of creation
 - The third heaven
 - Inadvertences within Genesis 1 and the need for an ordered account, harmonious (συμφωνούσαν) with the Scriptures
 - Finding out “the necessary order of creation” (τὴν ἀναγκαίαν τῆς κτίσεως τάξιν)
 - Exploring “the darkness of vision of the ineffable things” (εἰς τὸν γνόφον τῆς τῶν ἀπορρήτων θεωρίας)

An Apology of the Hexaemeron: Presentation

- Nyssen's answers
 - St Basil's scope was pastoral; no intention to elucidate all the blank spots of Genesis
 - St Peter was supposed to pray more and ask for illumination from above
 - A connection with the *Hexaemeron*: spiritual presuppositions

An Apology of the Hexaemeron: Presentation

- The provisional character of the *Apology*
- Lack of structure, conjectural scholarly gymnastic (ὡς ἐν γυμνασίῳ ... στοχαστικῶς) – could this be a sign that it was not meant for publication?

An Apology of the Hexaemeron: Presentation

- Heavy scientific method and jargon
- Emulating St Basil's method?
- The *Hexaemeron* aimed at spiritual formation and to inspire a doxological mindset – this is not the case of the *Apology*

An Apology of the Hexaemeron: Presentation

- Metaphysical speculations (Johannes Quasten)?
- Panayiotis Chrestou's conviction that whilst St Basil's *Hexaemeron* illustrated the "historical and ethical side of the interpretive approach to cosmogony" (τὴν ἱστορικὴ καὶ ἠθικὴ πλευρὰ τῆς ἐρμηνείας τῆς κοσμογονίας), also a practical way of tackling the matters, St Gregory presented the spiritual side (πνευματικὴ) as perceived by way of contemplation (θεωρία).
- No mere literalism (Bouteneff) either.

Continuity or Discontinuity?

- More on chronology
- Soon after St Basil's death (379?). This might explain a few things...
- So, continuity (Anthony Meredith, Anna Silvas, Juan Antonio Gil-Tamayo)?
- Not quite (Ronald Heine):
 - Self-accreditation as a respectable scholar
 - Scarce and critical references to the Hexaemeron

Concerning the Method of the *Apology*

- Is the Apology an exegetical treatise?
- One piece of exegesis: the first two verses of Genesis
- Comparative approach (Septuagint, Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion)
 - Genesis 1:1 - ἐν κεφαλαίῳ (“in general” or “in summary”) instead of ἐν ἀρχῇ (“in the beginning”)
 - Genesis 1:2 - ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατασκεύαστος (“invisible and unstructured”) - ἀργὸν καὶ ἀδιάκριτον (“void and unspecified”) - κένωμα καὶ οὐθέν (“deserted and nothing”) - θὲν καὶ οὐθέν (“utter nothingness”)

Concerning the Method of the *Apology*

- The method: not exegetical, but apologetic
- Prologue: an exercise (ἐγγυμνάζειν) aiming at making sense of things, its content has to be taken not as authoritative (δόγμα) or an “exegetical teaching” (διδασκαλίαν ἐξηγητικὴν)
- The method, quite Basilian: “[T]he prophet wrote the book of Genesis as an introduction to the divine knowledge (εἰσαγωγικὸν πρὸς θεογνωσίαν), the intention (σκοπός) of Moses being to lead by hand (χειραγωγήσει) those enslaved by the senses – through the visible things – to the perception of the things that transcend (τὰ ὑπερκείμενα) the senses.”

How do things function?

