



**HAL**  
open science

# Liturgical Celebration and Theological Exegesis: the Easter Homilies of Gregory of Nyssa

Matthieu Cassin

► **To cite this version:**

Matthieu Cassin. Liturgical Celebration and Theological Exegesis: the Easter Homilies of Gregory of Nyssa. "If Christ has not been raised..." Studies on the Reception of the Resurrection Stories and the Belief in the Resurrection in the Early Church, 115, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, pp.149-165, 2016, Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus/ Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments, 9783525593745. halshs-01409064

**HAL Id: halshs-01409064**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01409064>**

Submitted on 5 Dec 2016

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

V&R Academic

# Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus/ Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments

In cooperation with the “Bibel und Orient” foundation,  
University of Fribourg/Switzerland.

Edited by Martin Ebner (Bonn), Peter Lampe (Heidelberg),  
Stefan Schreiber (Augsburg) and Jürgen Zangenberg (Leiden)

## Advisory Board

Helen K. Bond (Edinburgh), Raimo Hakola (Helsinki),  
Thomas Schumacher (Fribourg), John Barclay (Durham),  
Armand Puig i Tàrrach (Barcelona), Ronny Reich (Haifa),  
Edmondo F. Lupieri (Chicago), Stefan Mürger (Bern)

Volume 115

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

Joseph Verheyden/Andreas Merkt/Tobias Nicklas  
(eds.)

# “If Christ has not been raised ...”

Studies on the Reception of the Resurrection Stories  
and the Belief in the Resurrection in the Early Church

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek  
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;  
detailed bibliographic data available online: <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

ISSN 1420-4592  
ISBN 978-3-647-59374-6

You can find alternative editions of this book and additional material on our Website:  
[www.v-r.de](http://www.v-r.de)

© 2016, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht GmbH & Co. KG, Theaterstraße 13, D-37073 Göttingen/  
Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht LLC, Bristol, CT, U.S.A.  
[www.v-r.de](http://www.v-r.de)

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or utilized in any form  
or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any  
information storage and retrieval system, without prior written permission from the publisher.

# Inhalt

Introduction . . . . .	7
<i>Meinolf Vielberg</i>	
Tod und Jenseits in der spätrepublikanischen und augusteischen Literatur der Römer . . . . .	11
<i>Riemer Roukema</i>	
The Resurrection according to 1 Corinthians 15:35–55 as Understood and Debated in Ancient Christianity . . . . .	33
<i>Hagit Amirav/Emiliano Fiori</i>	
Early Interpretations of Ephesians 5:14: Patristic Concepts of the Resurrection in Literal and Allegorical Circles . . . . .	61
<i>Martin Meiser</i>	
Die patristische Exegese von Apg 1,3–11 . . . . .	73
<i>Tobias Nicklas</i>	
Auferstehung zu Tod und Strafe: Unpaulinische Auferstehungsvorstellungen im frühen Christentum . . . . .	105
<i>Mark Edwards</i>	
Markus Vinzent on the Resurrection . . . . .	123
<i>Cornelis Hoogerwerf</i>	
Proving the Resurrection of the Flesh The Use of Natural Philosophy and Galenic Epistemology in Pseudo-Justin's <i>De Resurrectione</i> . . . . .	135
<i>Matthieu Cassin</i>	
Liturgical Celebration and Theological Exegesis: the Easter Homilies of Gregory of Nyssa . . . . .	149

*Harald Buchinger*

Die Bedeutung der Auferstehung für Termin, Gestalt und Gehalt der  
ältesten Osterfeier . . . . . 167

*Andreas Merkt*

Writing Over the Dead Body  
Ancient Christian Grave Inscriptions and the Idea of Resurrection . . . 199

List of Abbreviations . . . . . 217

Index . . . . . 221

# Introduction

The present volume contains the proceedings of the fourth symposium of the *Novum Testamentum Patristicum* project (NTP), an international research project on the reception history of the New Testament in the early Church. The symposium was held in October 2012 at the University of Leuven. It was organised by Joseph Verheyden, Tobias Nicklas, and Andreas Merkt, the coordinators of NTP. The topic of the meeting was the reception of the resurrection and empty tomb stories and the development of the belief in resurrection in the early Church.

The belief in the resurrection constitutes the core issue of Christianity and of Christian tradition. The earliest references to the resurrection and witnesses to such a belief are found in the canonical gospels and in the letters of Paul, but the topic obviously remained of the utmost importance all through the early Church. It would be impossible to try and cover the full evidence for the reception of the resurrection stories in the early Church in just one volume, and this was never the intention of the organisers of the conference. As a consequence, what this volume offers is not “the story” of this reception, but rather “studies” on the topic, as indicated in the title of the book. The selection was guided by two principles. As was the case also in previous NTP conference volumes, the editors wished to give a forum to colleagues who are writing a commentary on a particular New Testament book to show the results of their work so far to a larger readership. In addition, the editors also wished to give a place to such contributions that open a broader perspective, be it the Roman world, or other aspects of Christian life and praxis than the writings of homilists and commentators. That said, it should be noted that the volume contains contributions on at least some of the more important texts on the topic and has tried to pay attention to aspects that are perhaps not always immediately put in the picture when dealing with the resurrection accounts.

Overall, the material can be divided into three parts:

- (1) the reception history of particular passages. The two crucial passages in Paul’s letters are studied by R. Roukema (1 Cor 15) and by H. Amirav and E. Fiori (Eph 5). Roukema is the author of the commentary on the reception of 1 Corinthians for NTP. Amirav co-authors the commentary on Ephesians. The opening verses of Acts are dealt with by M. Meiser, who is responsible for the NTP commentary on Acts. Roukema focuses on the



controversy that was raised by the ambiguities in Paul's representation of the status of the resurrected body. Amirav and Fiori note that the early Christian authors were rather more interested in the moral dimension of the call in Eph 5:14 than in its eschatological potential. The same concern for bringing out the ethical dimension can be seen in the commentaries on Acts 1:3–11, though in this instance not infrequently combined with or alongside a more spiritual reading of the ascension and its significance for the salvation of the Christian. Taking his clue from two passages in the Book of Revelation (Rev 2:11 and 20:6, 14), T. Nicklas, responsible for the NTP commentary on Revelation, shows how the prime interest in these passages and in later authors is not with salvation, but with how the resurrection prepares the way for the final judgement that is to come. This connection between liberation from the death and facing judgement may surprise, but shows that a number of Christian groups and traditions thought rather differently about the resurrection and its aim and effects than what can be read in Paul's Letter to the Corinthians.

- (2) the way the theme of resurrection was dealt with in early Christian authors and praxis. M. Edwards offers a critical reading of M. Vinzent's 2011 monograph on the resurrection, in which it is argued that Paul had been largely forgotten about in first decades of the second century and, perhaps even more controversial, that Marcion authored the first real gospel. C. Hoogerwerf contributes an essay on Pseudo-Justin's *De resurrectione* that was not read at the conference, but adds a nice example of how early Christian authors looked for arguments and evidence for their position in Hellenistic philosophy and, more particularly, epistemology to make a case in defence of the Christian view on resurrection. M. Cassin studies the Easter homilies of Gregory of Nyssa and comes to the slightly surprising conclusion that the homilist's main interest is not in the resurrection accounts as such, but that he develops his thought with an eye on the liturgical praxis and on the exegetical tradition that linked the significance of the stories primarily with the salvation of the believer and less with rescuing Jesus from death. The liturgy is also the focus of H. Buchinger who offers a superb survey of the Easter homilies material and the way these have incorporated or inform about liturgical praxis in Easter time.
- (3) the broader context, including the non-Christian background. The latter issue is dealt with in the opening essay by M. Vielberg, who compares Christian Easter expectations with similar but more politically oriented expectations that were fabricated and promoted under the reign of Augustus. A. Merkt focuses on another aspect of Christian life when studying evidence from tomb inscriptions reflecting on the Christians' belief in the afterlife and its connection with this life and the ethical requirements or expectations it involves.

The conference brought together biblical scholars and specialists of early Christian studies for a dialogue that was meant to widening the perspectives. Several of the contributors have pointed out the complexity of the issue at stake because the resurrection stories and the belief they wish to raise or express bring forth a number of dogmatic and historical questions that many later on had great difficulties to harmonise.

The editors wish to thank the Flemish Research Foundation (FWO) for a generous grant, the editorial board of “Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus” for accepting also this conference volume in the series, as they did with previous ones, and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht publishing house for a fruitful cooperation in getting the manuscript published.

Joseph Verheyden



Matthieu Cassin

# Liturgical Celebration and Theological Exegesis: the Easter Homilies of Gregory of Nyssa

## General Background and Setting

Gregory, bishop of Nyssa (around 335 – after 394) and one of the Cappadocian Fathers, is the author of an important corpus dealing with various aspects of Christian literature: theology, exegesis, spirituality. He used various literary genres: biblical commentaries, polemical treatises, letters, spiritual tracts, but also homilies.<sup>1</sup> We currently know about his preaching activity thanks to 27 authentic sermons, published in three volumes of the *Gregorii Nysseni opera* series.<sup>2</sup> We should add to this total four series of exegetical homilies, respectively on Ecclesiastes, Song of Song, Beatitudes and Lord's Prayer.<sup>3</sup> The non-exegetical homilies fall into the following categories: moral and social, funeral, hagiographic, liturgical. In the last category, there are seven homilies,<sup>4</sup> three of which are directly linked to the celebration of Easter and authentic;<sup>5</sup> the homily *In luciferam sanctam Domini resurrectionem* (CPG 3177) is generally thought to be inauthentic.<sup>6</sup>

The present paper will, therefore, mainly deal with the three authentic homilies for Easter: *In sanctum Pascha*, *De tridui spatio*, *In sanctum et salutare Pascha*.<sup>7</sup> I will first offer some background information before addressing the question of the place and usage of the Resurrection stories in them.

1 On Gregory's life, see P. Maraval, "Biography of Gregory of Nyssa", in G. Maspero/L.F. Mateo-Seco (ed.), *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa* (Sup.VigChr 99; Leiden/Boston, MA, 2010) 103–16. For the abbreviations of Gregory's works, see F. Mann (ed.), *Lexicon Gregorianum* (Leiden, 1999–2014).

2 CPG 3147, 3156, 3168–3176, 3178–3192, 3194; *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, vol. IX (Leiden, 1967), vol. X.1 (Leiden/New York, 1990), vol. X.2 (Leiden/New York/Köln, 1996). I do not take into account the pseudepigraphic homilies (CPG 3177, 3193, 3195).

3 CPG 3157 (8 homilies), 3158 (15 homilies), 3161 (8 homilies), 3160 (5 homilies).

4 CPG 3173–3176, 3178, 3191, 3194.

5 CPG 3174–3176.

6 See J. Daniélou, "Bulletin d'histoire des origines chrétiennes", *Recherches de science religieuse* 55 (1967) 88–151, on p. 151; G.C. Stead, "Introduction", in A. Spira/C. Klock (ed.), *The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa, Translation and Commentary. Proceedings of the Fourth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa, Cambridge, England: 11–15 September, 1978* (Patristic Monograph Series 9; Cambridge, MA, 1981) VII–VIII, on p. VIII. This text deserves a new and full examination.

7 On these homilies, see the proceedings of the 4th Gregory of Nyssa colloquium: Spira/Klock (ed.), *The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa*; see also E. Moutsoulas, "Les sermons pascaux de Gré-

We have no definite and general chronology for Gregory's literary production, except for some of his works,<sup>8</sup> such as the *Contra Eunomium*. Although scholars have regularly dealt with dating different works, there is currently no consensus on this matter.<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that in 1978, at the Fourth Gregory of Nyssa International Colloquium on Easter homilies, Gerhard May proposed a paper on the chronology of these homilies, but did not publish it since he considered it as "too tentative".<sup>10</sup> Since then, one should mention P. Maraval's contribution to the Dictionary on Gregory, but this is mainly a partial synthesis of previous works.<sup>11</sup> In the present context, the difficult question of dating the three homilies is perhaps less crucial. The majority of scholars dates them sometime between 375 and 394.

Hubertus Drobner has suggested dating *De tridui spatio* and the correlative *In sanctum et salutare Pascha* to the last years of Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>12</sup> Taking into account the development of Gregory's thought on the topic of Christ's state in death, the earliest possible date would be 386. The *Antirrheticus adversus Apolinarium* could be a point of reference, but its date is not firmly established and nothing more can be said than that it is posterior to *Contra Eunomium* III (382–383). The other point of reference is the *Oratio catechetica magna*, but its date is hotly debated and varies from a little before 381 to

goire de Nysse", *Theologia* 51 (1980) 333–47; J. Rexer, *Die Festtheologie Gregors von Nyssa. Ein Beispiel der reichskirchlichen Heortologie* (Patrologia 8; Frankfurt/Berlin/Bern, 2002); D.A. Giulea, "The Cappadocian Paschal Christology: Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa and the Divine Paschal Image of Christ", *ZAC* 12 (2008) 477–503. See also the Italian translation with full introduction by E. Petrella, *Gregorio di Nissa, Omelie del tempo pasquale* (Storie e testi 18; Napoli, 2009).

8 J. Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse", *RSR* 29 (1955) 346–72; idem., "La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse", *StPatr* 7 (1966) 159–69; G. May, "Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregor von Nyssa", in M. Harl (ed.), *Écriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nysse. Actes du colloque de Chevetogne (22–26 septembre 1969)* (Leiden, 1971) 51–67.

9 For the date of *De s. Theodoro* (CPG 3183), see C. Zuckerman, "The Cappadocians and the Goths", *Travaux et mémoires* 11 (1991) 473–87, on pp. 480–6; the author emends the dating proposed by Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons", 355–6, and suggests 17 February 380. For another attempt about *Mart. I*, see J. Leemans, "On the Date of Gregory of Nyssa's First *Homilies on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste* (Ia and Ib)", *JTS* 52 (2001) 92–7, who proposed to date these homilies to 375, but see also an inverse movement in J. Reynard, *Grégoire de Nysse, Sur les titres des Psaumes, introduction, édition et traduction* (SC 466; Paris, 2002), 14–15; this double movement is characteristic of the instability of the general chronology of Gregory's works in general and his homilies in particular. See also the remarks of P. Maraval, "Chronology of Works", in Maspero/Mateo-Seco (ed.), *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, 153–69, on p. 165.

10 Stead, "Introduction", viii.

11 Maraval, "Chronology of Works"; first publication in Spanish in 2006, in Italian in 2007.

12 H. R. Drobner, *Die drei Tage zwischen Tod und Auferstehung unseres Herrn Jesus Christus, eingeleitet, übersetzt und kommentiert* (Philosophia Patrum 5; Leiden, 1982); for the date, see Exkurs 2, "Die Datierung von *De tridui spatio*", 190–8.

386–387 or later.<sup>13</sup> It seems reasonable, then, to consider a later date in Gregory’s ecclesiastical career, but nothing is settled. We will see that a new parallel with the *Homilies on the Song* also supports a later date.

Dating *In sanctum Pascha* is even harder. In fact, we have no concrete evidence for this homily. Jean Daniélou argued that “this homily can be set with certitude to Easter 379”;<sup>14</sup> but his only argument is the thematic affinities with *De hominis opificio*. In fact, this is a rather weak argument, since such affinities exist in works of Gregory of Nyssa that have been written at some ten or fifteen years of distance, such as *Contra Eunomium* and *In Canticum canticorum*.<sup>15</sup> G. Misago, proposed to date *In sanctum Pascha* at the same time as *De anima et resurrectione*, a work that he situated in 382.<sup>16</sup> But again, the arguments are only based on thematic convergence and, worse, the date of *De anima et resurrectione* is not firmly established.<sup>17</sup> It seems then that there is no firm ground to settle a date for this homily, except that it is perhaps posterior to *De hominis opificio*, so later than 379.

The geographical setting of the three homilies is not any clearer. In fact, as the bishop of Nyssa, we may suppose that Gregory has preached regularly in his town. But we also know that he delivered sermons elsewhere in Cappadocia for Martyr’s feasts (*panegyreis*), mainly in the sanctuary of the martyrs.<sup>18</sup> He surely preached in Constantinople during councils,<sup>19</sup> but also for funeral orations of the imperial family.<sup>20</sup> His moral, social and festal homilies are more difficult to locate. In fact, since Gregory travelled quite often in different regions, there is no clear geographical setting for his Easter homilies. Previous scholars have suggested various options for *De tridui spatio*. Some have proposed to locate it in Jerusalem, mainly because of the mention of the ‘door of the resurrection’ (ἡ θύρα τῆς ἀναστάσεως: 304,9), but other have thought of Constantinople, because of the high intellectual standard of the text, or of Nyssa, or of somewhere else in Asia Minor.<sup>21</sup> We have in fact no evidence for locating any of these homilies. The last point to settle will be the liturgical background of the three homilies, but it has no meaning to speak of it without giving some hints of the content of these texts.

13 See for example R. Winling, *Grégoire de Nyse, Discours catéchétique* (SC 453; Paris, 2000), 125–30; see also Maraval, “Chronology of Works”, 156.

14 Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons”, 350.

15 M. Cassin, *L’écriture de la controverse chez Grégoire de Nyse. Polémique littéraire et exégèse dans le Contre Eunome* (Études augustinienne, série Antiquité 193; Paris, 2012), 291–2.

16 Cited by Maraval, “Chronology of Works”, 162.

17 The only secure element is that the book is later than Macrina’s death (July 379).

18 See for example *De sancto Theodoro*, In *XL Martyres* Ia–b.

19 *De deitate adversus Evagrium*, *De deitate Filii et Spiritus sancti*, *Oratio funebris in Meletium*.

20 *Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam*; *Oratio funebris in Flacillam*.

21 Drobner, *Die drei Tage*, 7.

### Three Easter Homilies: Overall Description

At first glance, the three homilies are very different one from another. *In sanctum Pascha*<sup>22</sup> begins with a rather long and strongly articulated prologue in four parts: the first one starts from Ps 116:1, “Praise the Lord, all you nations, give him praise all you peoples”.<sup>23</sup> The second has its starting point in a liturgical acclamation, “Today, Christ rose”. The third one begins with Ps 117:24, “This day that the Lord made, let us rejoice and be glad in it”. The last part re-uses elements of 1 Cor 15; it opens on a *parenesis* and leads the listener to the main theme of the homily, the resurrection. The main body of the text, which is a bit longer than the prologue, proposes various arguments about the resurrection, in particular in connection with the Last Judgement; I will not deal with it in detail. The global trend of this part is not biblical. The epilogue opens on a double quotation, one from 1 Cor 15:52, “The trumpet shall sound and the dead shall rise up”, and the other from John 5:28–29, “There come the hour when all those in the tombs shall hear his voice, and they shall come out, those who have done good things for the resurrection of life, and those who have practised bad things for the resurrection of judgement”. This opening paves the way for a conclusion that goes back to the resurrection question, without a proper biblical or liturgical ending.

*De tridui spatio* has already been investigated in great detail at the 1978 Colloquium and then by Drobner in 1982.<sup>24</sup> I only give the general structure of the text, even if there are still some uncertainties on its exact structure.<sup>25</sup> As for *In sanctum Pascha*, there is first a long prologue, divided in two parts: the first one proposes a series of Old Testament testimonies, that is *typoi* of the Christian Easter feast. The second part presents the essential themes of the homily, mainly death and resurrection and the new creation. The main part of the speech deals with a set of questions that Drobner has divided, perhaps a bit

22 See the analysis of the text in M. Harl, “L’*éloge de la fête de Pâques dans le Prologue du Sermon In Sanctum Pascha* de Grégoire de Nysse (*In Sanctum Pascha* p. 245, 4–253, 18)”, in Spira/Klock (ed.), *The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa*, 81–99, on pp. 83–5, accepted by A. Spira, “*Der Descensus ad inferos* in der Osterpredigt Gregors von Nyssa *De tridui spatio* (*De tridui spatio* p. 280, 14–286, 12)”, in *ibid.*, 195–261, on p. 201, against J.C.M. van Winden, “In Defense of the Resurrection (*In Sanctum Pascha* p. 253, 19–270, 7)”, in *ibid.*, 101–21, who stops the prologue at 245,15.

23 For the anti-heretic and anti-Jewish reading of this verse, see J. Leemans, “Preaching and the Arian Controversy: Orthodoxy and Heresy in Gregory of Nyssa’s Sermons”, in J. Verheyden/H.G.B. Teule (ed.), *Heretics and Heresies in the Ancient Church and in Eastern Christianity. Studies in Honour of Adelbert Davids* (Eastern Christian Studies 10; Leuven, 2011) 127–42, on p. 132.

24 Drobner, *Die drei Tage*. See also J. Reynard, “L’utilisation de l’Écriture dans le *De tridui spatio*”, in M. Cassin/H. Grelier (ed.), *Grégoire de Nysse: la Bible dans la construction de son discours. Actes du colloque de Paris, 9–10 février 2007* (Études augustiniennes, série Antiquité 184; Paris, 2008) 212–25.

25 See mainly Drobner, *Die drei Tage*, 13–14; 80 n. 238.

artificially, between ζιτήματα and νοήματα.<sup>26</sup> The theme of this part is the interval between the death and resurrection of Jesus, its modalities and time. I will only give a list of these topics, without laying stress on this twofold division. First, Gregory describes the *descensus* proper, when Christ descended into hell;<sup>27</sup> then, the author speculates on the duration of Jesus' death, which he counts as three days; thirdly, he offers a justification for this count, which is not obvious, as it is well known. Lastly, he proposes a solution for the state of Christ during these three days: the situation of his body and soul and his divinity. It is this theological point that has allowed scholars to speculate on the chronology of some of Gregory's works, mainly *Contra Eunomium*, Letter 3, *Antirrheticus adversus Apolinarium* and *Oratio catechetica magna*.<sup>28</sup> Then, in what Drobner has isolated as a second part, Gregory discusses the relation between the Old Testament Passover narratives and rules (unleavened bread, bitter herbs and date of Passover according to the moon) and the Christian observance and the symbolic meaning of the cross. The epilogue goes back to the resurrection stories in a theatrical way, since the orator suddenly turns his speech toward a vivid and actualised description of the resurrection events and interprets them in order to actualize these actions in the Eucharist. We will come back later to this part of the speech, which is of direct interest for our purpose.

The last of the authentic homilies on Easter, *In sanctum et salutare Pascha*,<sup>29</sup> may be read as a concluding speech coming from the same Easter celebration as *De tridui spatio*.<sup>30</sup> Even if this point can be discussed, the general tone of the text is clear and in immediate contrast with the two other homilies. *In sanctum et salutare Pascha* is written like a liturgical hymn. Gregory focuses on the novelty of Easter, in a large series of antitheses about the ancient and the new condition. The biblical basis of the text is important, coming from both Old and New Testament, but there is no formal exegesis as in the two other homilies. We find again Ps 117:24, "This day that the Lord made", a classical Easter verse, but also a range of New Testament allusions in order to describe the new life after Christ's resurrection. This short homily ends on a series of quotations from the Psalms; it's a confirmation of the liturgical tone of the whole text.

26 Drobner, *Die drei Tage*, 127–8.

27 On this theme, see R. Gounelle, *La descente du Christ aux enfers: institutionnalisation d'une croyance* (Études augustinienes, série Antiquité 162; Paris, 2000).

28 See Drobner, *Die drei Tage*, and previously J. Lebourlier, "À propos de l'état du Christ dans la mort", *RSPT* 46 (1962) 629–49 and 47 (1963) 161–80; see also J. Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa, Philosophical Background and Theological Significance* (Sup.VigChr 46; Leiden/Boston, MA/Köln, 2000), 204–7.

29 On its structure, see Drobner, *Die drei Tage*, 168–9.

30 See E. Gebhardt, *GNO IX* (Leiden, 1967), 178; Spira, "Der *Descensus ad inferos*", 213, n. 44, on the basis of an unpublished work by H. Hörner; H.R. Drobner, *Die drei Tage*, 168.



## The Resurrection Stories: Where, Why and How

The first point to settle is that these Easter homilies do not tell the resurrection story itself. Gregory does not speak of the story of the resurrection or of the apparitions of Jesus after his resurrection, except, in a very peculiar way, at the end of *De tridui spatio*. There is neither a proper story of the Passion. We might have expected one, even if at the end of the 4th century, the distinction and particularization of each feast day of the Holy Week is in process.<sup>31</sup> Even if *De tridui spatio* deals precisely with the three days between Maundy Thursday and Easter Sunday, there is no storytelling of the events; the story itself is always integrated in theological argumentation, and supposed to be evident to the listeners.

I will take as a starting point for my inquiry into Gregory's usage of the New Testament resurrection stories an element that draws us back into the narrative. In *In sanctum Pascha*, 247,26–248,27, the author gives a short sketch of the economy of the Incarnation and concentrates his attention on the Passion itself.

ἔχων ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς τῆς θεότητος τῶν προκειμένων τὴν γνῶσιν καὶ πρὶν ἐξ οὐρανῶν κατελθεῖν βλέπων καὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν τὴν ταραχὴν καὶ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ τὴν σκληρότητα καὶ Πιλάτον προκαθήμενον καὶ Καϊάφαν ἑαυτῷ τὴν ἐσθῆτα περισπαράσσοντα καὶ τὸν στασιώδη δῆμον φλεγμαίνοντα καὶ Ἰούδαν προδιδόντα καὶ Πέτρον ὑπερμαχόμενον καὶ μετ' ὀλίγον ἑαυτὸν τῇ ἀναστάσει εἰς δόξαν ἀφθαρσίας μεταμορφούμενον ...

With eyes of godhead he had knowledge of what lay ahead, and saw, before his descent from heaven, the uproar of nations, the stubbornness of Israel, Pilate seated before him, Caiaphas tearing his clothes apart, the rebellious mob seething, Judas betraying, Peter fighting for him, and himself soon after transfigured by the resurrection into the glory of incorruption ... (*Sanct. Pasch.* 248,6–13).<sup>32</sup>

This summary looks like a cento of New Testament verses, but it is not a proper cento. There are thematic and narrative echoes from the New Testament, but very few verbal similarities. Here are some examples. The stubbornness of Israel (248,8, τὴν σκληρότητα), a common biblical theme, has no exact parallel in the text of the Passion; the nearest parallel is Matt 19:8 about divorce. “Pilate seated before him” reminds us of a well-known scene, but the verb προκαθήμενον (248,9) is absent from the New Testament;<sup>33</sup> Matt 27:19 reads the simple form of κάθημαι. Caiaphas “tearing his clothes apart” is a well-known motif but strangely enough, it comes before the trial with Pilate in the

31 See for example the indications in Rexer, *Die Festtheologie*, 29–36.

32 All the translations of the three Easter homilies are from S. Hall, as published in Spira/Klock (ed.), *The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa*, 5–53.

33 And not frequent in the Old Testament, since it appears only four times (1 Esd 1:30; 5:60; 9:4, 45).

New Testament narrative, not after (Matt 26:65 and 27:1, 11–26 and parallels), and the words used are not the same; *περισπαράσσοντα* (248,10) is extremely rare.<sup>34</sup> The “rebellious mob” does not look strange, but Gregory’s *τὸν στασιώδη δῆμον φλεγμαίνοντα* is not found as such in the Passion narratives; the phrase *δῆμος στασιώδης* is used in Greek literature only by Gregory of Nyssa, here and in *Castig.* 316,19, and by Gregory of Nazianzus (*Or.* 4,86,14). In the same way, Judas’ betrayal is described with *προδίδωμι*, when the New Testament generally prefers *παραδίδωμι*.<sup>35</sup> We only find a word on the *προδίδωμι* root in Luke: *προδότης* about Judas (6:16).<sup>36</sup> Again, Gregory does not follow the narrative structure of the gospels account, since Judas’ betrayal and Peter’s fight for Jesus are out of place. For this last example, Gregory uses the verb *ὑπερμάχομαι* that is not used at all in the Old or the New Testament.

This first example, therefore, suggests that Gregory heavily relies on the Passion narrative and does not extrapolate or add any element. But at the same time, he freely recomposes these narratives and does not necessarily use the proper words of the Gospels. He takes the scenes and stories, but not the words; moreover, he does not stick to the chronology of his sources. In this first example, it seems that this rewriting of the Passion has no precise aim or motivation.

The situation is quite different in the following lines. Gregory goes on with a brief mention of the resurrection: “and soon after transfigured by the resurrection into the glory of incorruption” (*καὶ μετ’ ὀλίγον ἑαυτὸν τῇ ἀναστάσει εἰς δόξαν ἀφθαρσίας μεταμορφούμενον*: 248,11–13). If it is not an exact quotation of the Gospel, one can at least identify two Pauline verses behind the phrase “*εἰς δόξαν ἀφθαρσίας μεταμορφούμενον*”. In 2 Cor 3:18, Paul says: “*ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντες ἀνακεκαλυμμένοι προσώπων τὴν δόξαν κυρίου κατοπτριζόμενοι τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν, καθάπερ ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος.*” In 1 Cor 15:42–43, we read: “*οὕτως καὶ ἡ ἀνάστασις τῶν νεκρῶν. σπείρεται ἐν φθορῇ, ἐγείρεται ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ· σπείρεται ἐν ἀτιμίᾳ, ἐγείρεται ἐν δόξῃ.*” Both verses deal with the resurrection of man, not that of Christ, as this is the case in Gregory. So the rewriting is probably a conscious one: Gregory is already preparing his transition from the resurrection of Christ to that of the faithful, hence to move from the Gospel account to its application to the audience.

At the very end of this section, Gregory evokes the descent of Christ in our human condition and his resurrection according to a simile that is typical of him but not really biblical: the danger one faces when plunging in a torrent in order to save someone who risks to sink. Again, even if the theme of the

34 John Philoponus, *De aeternitate mundi*, 106,9; Hesychius, *Lexicon*, A, 3998.

35 In Rom 11:35, the verb means “give before”, with a temporal meaning of *προ-*. See 2 Macc 7:37; 4 Macc 4:1; 6:11.

36 See also Acts 7:52; Rom 3:4. Cf. 2 Macc 5:15; 10:13, 22; 3 Macc 3:24.

descent of Christ is, of course, a New Testament theme, there is no clear verbal echo of any Pauline or Gospel text, at least in the form of quotation or allusion.

This first example clearly shows that Gregory employs the passion and resurrection stories in a larger theological frame. There is no proper storytelling, but rather a purposeful rewriting of New Testament materials. This method supposes that the audience already knows the stories – or, at least, that the preacher supposes this to be the case. It also offers a confirmation of Gregory’s method of preaching. It is not so much about the stories and emotions, but about their theological message.

Here is a second example from the core section of *De tridui spatio* (280,14–294,13), in which Gregory investigates a series of questions, ζητήματα, about Jesus’ passion and resurrection. The justification for the beginning of the three days interval offers a first hint of how he builds up his homily. The author locates the beginning of the three days of the prophecy in Matt 12:40 at the last supper without telling the story itself or providing any sort of setting.

παντὶ γὰρ τοῦτο δῆλόν ἐστι, ὅτι οὐκ ἂν βρωθεῖη παρὰ ἀνθρώπου πρόβατον, εἰ μὴ τῆς βρώσεως ἢ σφαγῆ προηγήσαιο. ὁ τοίνυν δοὺς τοῖς μαθηταῖς τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σῶμα εἰς βρώσιν σαφῶς ἐνδείκνυται τὸ ἦδη τοῦ ἄμνοῦ τὴν θυσίαν ἐντελῆ γεγενῆσθαι· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἦν τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἱερείου πρὸς ἐδωδὴν ἐπιτήδειον εἴπερ ἔμψυχον ἦν. οὐκοῦν ὅτε παρέσχε τοῖς μαθηταῖς ἐμφαγεῖν τοῦ σώματος καὶ τοῦ αἵματος ἐμπιεῖν, ἦδη κατὰ τὸ λεληθὸς τῆ ἐξουσία τοῦ τὸ μυστήριον οἰκονομοῦντος ἀρρήτως τε καὶ ἀοράτως τὸ σῶμα ἐτέθητο καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ ἐν ἐκείνοις ἦν, ἐν οἷς αὐτὴν ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ οἰκονομοῦντος ἐναπέθετο, μετὰ τῆς ἐγκεκραμένης αὐτῇ θείας δυνάμεως τὸν ἐν καρδίᾳ ἐκείνον χώρον περιπολοῦσα. οὐκοῦν ἄφ’ οὗ προσήχθη τῷ θεῷ ἡ θυσία παρὰ τοῦ μεγάλου ἀρχιερέως τοῦ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ ἄμνον ὑπὲρ τῆς κοινῆς ἁμαρτίας ἀρρήτως τε καὶ ἀοράτως ἱεουργήσαντος, ἀπὸ τότε τις ἀριθμῶν τὸν χρόνον τῆς ἐν καρδίᾳ διατριβῆς τῆς ἀληθείας οὐχ ἁμαρτήσεται·

For it is clear to everyone that a sheep could not be eaten by a man unless the slaughter had preceded the eating. He then, who gave his own body to the disciples as food, plainly indicates that the sacrifice of the lamb is already complete. For the body of the victim would not be suitable for eating if it were still alive. So when he made his disciples share in eating his body and drinking his blood, already in secret by the power of the one who ordained the mystery his body had been ineffably and invisibly sacrificed and his soul was in those regions in which the authority of the ordainer had stored it, traversing that place in the “Heart” along with the divine power infusing it. Thus from the time when the sacrifice was offered to God by the Great Priest who ineffably and invisibly consecrated his own lamb for the general sin, if one counts from that point the period of the sojourn in the “Heart”, one will not be far from the truth (*Trid. spat.* 287,17–288,13).

The Last Supper is interpreted through the frame of the Epistle to the Hebrews, as is testified by the mention of the High Priest (288,9–11).

Another example of this theological and hermeneutical use of the New

Testament is found in the section in which Gregory argues about the time of the resurrection. Already before Gregory it was a debated question how to define the three days interval before the resurrection. H. Drobner offered a good *status quaestionis* and investigated the sources of Gregory on this topic.<sup>37</sup> I just want to stress how the bishop of Nyssa presents this point: Severus of Antioch, whose homily on the discrepancies between the resurrection stories has been transmitted among Gregory's Easter homilies,<sup>38</sup> chooses a radically different method. He starts from a possible contradiction, at least from discrepancies between the four Gospels, and then manages to solve the difficulty. Gregory, on the contrary, immediately offers his solution by selecting one Gospel, Matthew's, and forgoing the others:

ζητησόν μοι λοιπόν τὴν ἀναστάσιμον ὥραν καὶ εὐρήσεις τὴν ἐν τοῖς εἰρημένους ἀλήθειαν. πότε οὖν τοῦτο ἐγένετο; Ὅψε σαββάτων, ὁ Ματθαῖος βοᾷ. αὐτὴ σοι ἡ ὥρα τῆς ἀναστάσεως κατὰ τὴν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου σαφήνειαν, οὗτος ὁ ὅρος τῆς ἐν καρδίᾳ διαγωγῆς τοῦ κυρίου· ἐσπέρας γὰρ ἦδη βαθείας γεγενημένης (ἀρχὴ δὲ ἦν τῆς νυκτὸς ἐκείνης ἢ ἐσπέρα, ἣν διαδέχεται ἡ μία τῶν σαββάτων ἡμέρα) τότε ὁ σεισμός γίνεται, τότε ὁ καταστράπτων τοῖς ἐνδύμασιν ἄγγελος ἀποκυλίνει τὸν λίθον τοῦ μνημείου. αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες μικρὸν ἐπορθρίσασαι ὑποφαινούσης ἤδη τῆς ἡμέρας τὸ φέγγος ὡς καὶ τινα ἡλιακὴν αὐγὴν τῆς ἀνατολῆς ὑπερφαίνεσθαι, τότε ἱστοροῦσι τὴν ἤδη γεγενημένην ἀνάστασιν, αἱ τὸ μὲν θαῦμα ἔγνωσαν τὴν δὲ ὥραν οὐκ ἐδιδάχθησαν· ὅτι μὲν γὰρ ἠγέρθη εἶπε πρὸς αὐτὰς ὁ ἄγγελος, τὸ δὲ πότε τῷ ῥήματι οὐ προσέθηκεν. ἀλλ' ὁ μέγας Ματθαῖος μόνος τῶν εὐαγγελιστῶν πάντων τὸν καιρὸν δι' ἀκριβείας παρεσημίηνατο εἰπὼν τὴν ἐσπέραν εἶναι τοῦ σαββάτου ὥραν τῆς ἀναστάσεως.

Now, look up the resurrection hour, and you will find the truth in what has been said. When did it occur? 'Late on the sabbath' (Matt 28:1), asserts Matthew. This is your hour of resurrection, according to the precise statement of the Gospel, this is the end of the Lord's stay in the "Heart". For when it was already well into the evening – and the evening was the beginning of that night, which is followed by the first day of the week – then the earthquake occurs, then the angel in brilliant raiment rolls away the stone from the tomb. And the women, getting up early when day was already beginning to show a little light so that a ray of sunrise was appearing, then recount the resurrection which has already happened. They knew the miracle, but had not been taught the time of it; for the angel told them that he had risen, but did not go on to say when. Great Matthew is alone among all the evangelists in indicating the time exactly, saying that the evening of the Sabbath was the hour of resurrection (*Trid. spat.* 289,4–19).

The adjective μέγας to refer to Matthew is rather unusual, even if it is found in the poems of Gregory of Nazianzus, especially when dealing with the

37 Drobner, *Die drei Tage*, 106–8.

38 *Homilia cathedralis 77* (CPG 7035); M.A. Kugener/E. Triffaux, *Les Homiliae cathedrales de Sévère d'Antioche (suite): homélie LXXVII. Texte grec édité et traduit en français; versions syriaques publiées pour la première fois* (Patrologia Orientalis 16.5; Paris, 1922).

genealogy of Matt 1. Its use here gives a hint of the process of legitimation:<sup>39</sup> Gregory needs to support his solution by enhancing the value of the testimony he has chosen. But once again, he uses the resurrection stories without telling them again. He just supposes that his audience already knows the different elements from the four versions of the Gospels. He rather focuses on finding a solution that suits his own interpretation of the three days between death and resurrection.

To sum up: the resurrection stories proper do not have a central place in the Easter homilies; they are an important part of his Easter preaching, but they are neither his main theme nor his structuring thread. Gregory uses them as part of his preaching; he rewrites and interprets them, but they seem to be scriptural proofs for a theological aim, or at least evidence for an exegetical demonstration, rather than stories that need and merit to be told again. Scripture is then used to solve the problem, not to tell the story once again.

### From Paul to Gregory: Rewriting and Theology

*In sanctum Pascha* deals with the resurrection of the faithful and introduces another core text: 1 Cor 15. The central part of this homily offers a general presentation of the resurrection. It is not the only work in which Gregory deals with this topic: *De anima et resurrectione* and a large section of *De hominis opificio* (chap. 21–27) also deal with it. The latter work should be dated after the death of Basil of Caesarea (autumn 378) and before Gregory's brother Peter became the bishop of Sebasteia; so the work is generally dated from 379. *De anima et resurrectione* is much more difficult to date.<sup>40</sup> But as T.J. Dennis has shown,<sup>41</sup> it is almost impossible to establish a chronology between *In sanctum Pascha* and the two other works, since the author does not handle the theme in similar ways. Dennis argued that the sermon has nothing new to offer for apologetics; it is a simple work that does not go deep in philosophical questions, contrary to *De hominis opificio* and *De anima et resurrectione*; even if this last position is probably too radical, the first point is convincing: the literary genres are too different to allow precise comparisons and relative date.

The central section of *In sanctum Pascha* has nothing to do with the resurrection stories in the gospels: no mention of the women, of the tomb or of the apparitions. The focus is clearly on the resurrection of the human being,

39 In late Antiquity the phrase is only found here and in Gregory of Nazianzus, *Poems*, I.1.18, v. 89; II.1.19, v. 92; Pseudo-Caesarius, *Quaestiones et responsiones*, 198,42. There are a few more occurrences in Byzantine texts. On the use of qualifying adjectives for the names of biblical authors in Gregory, see Cassin, *L'écriture de la controverse*, 209–12.

40 See above n. 16–17.

41 T.J. Dennis, "Gregory on the Resurrection of the Body", in Spira/Klock (ed.), *The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa*, 55–80, on p. 74.

hence on the Last Judgement and not on Easter. The best parallels are with 1 Cor 15 that is both quoted (see *Sanct. Pasch.* 259,18–22) and used as a direct inspiration (examples of the wheat grain and of the potter).

A little later in the homily (264,3–266,8), Gregory develops another point, arguing from the link between resurrection, and reward and retribution. The last part of the central development deals with the necessity of resurrection for the Last Judgment and universal justice. This theme has no direct support in 1 Cor 15, and Gregory in fact slightly alters Paul's aim when he quotes 1 Cor 15:32, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die". In Paul's letter, this quotation from Isaiah (Is 22:13) is cited as an argument in favour of the resurrection, of faith in Christ's resurrection; Gregory uses the verse in a larger demonstration on the immorality of life without resurrection. For Paul, it is a question of personal faith and of the validity of present life (and death); for Gregory, it is a matter of moral life and the Last Judgment. Perhaps more than 1 Cor, it is Matthew's parable of the Last Judgment (Matt 25:31–46) that is in the background of the last part of this homily. These texts are familiar to Gregory, who also uses them in his homilies on poverty (*De beneficentia* and *In illud, quatenus uni ex his fecisti*).<sup>42</sup>

So even when Gregory has at hand a New Testament text that offers him a framework for his homily, such as 1 Cor 15, he does not directly use it and rather builds a separate and coherent argumentation, where he of course quotes some verses from the biblical substrate, but without using it as his guide and structure. Previous theological discussions on resurrection, such as the debate between Origen and Methodius of Olympus, influenced him more directly, it seems, than New Testament texts, as far as the composition of his homily is concerned. But the New Testament model is in the background and pops up here and there.

## Liturgical Celebration of the Resurrection

After theology, what about liturgy? *In sanctum Pascha* offers a place where the audience – or reader – touches immediately the discrepancies between Gregory's presentation of Easter and the biblical content of the feast, both in the Old and the New Testament. The last part of the prologue starts from a psalm verse (Ps 117:24), and develops into a description of the earth and human beings totally transformed by the feast (249,1–250,2)<sup>43</sup>. There is not one New Testament element in this description. The only biblical support comes from Gen 40:20–21, the episode of the baker and the cupbearer in Joseph's story, which is not at all an Easter text.

42 *Benef.* 99,12–101,17; *Quat. uni* 111,5–112,7; 121,11–122,8.

43 See Harl, "L'éloge de la fête", 88–91.

But elsewhere, Gregory directly bases his liturgical and exhortative purpose on New Testament materials that have a link with Easter. At the end of *De tridui spatio*, the author all of a sudden introduces the resurrection.

ἀλλὰ γὰρ μεταξὺ λέγων αἰσθάνομαι τῇ φωτεινῇ στολῇ τοῦ ἀγγέλου καταστραπτόμενος καί μου διασειεῖ ὑφ' ἡδονῆς τὴν καρδίαν ὁ γλυκὺς ἐκεῖνος σεισμός ὁ τὸν βαρὺν λίθον τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου μνήματος ἀποκυλίων, δι' οὗ ἀνοίγεται πᾶσιν ἡ θύρα τῆς ἀναστάσεως. δράμωμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐπὶ τὴν θεάν τοῦ παραδόξου θαύματος (διαγέγονε γὰρ ἤδη τὸ σάββατον), μὴ κατόπιν τῶν γυναικῶν ἀπαντήσωμεν. ἔστω καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμετέραις χερσὶ τὰ ἀρώματα ἢ πίστις καὶ ἡ συνείδησις· αὕτη γὰρ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐστὶν ἡ εὐωδία. μηκέτι μετὰ τῶν νεκρῶν τὸν ζῶντα ζητήσωμεν· τὸν γὰρ οὕτως αὐτὸν ζητοῦντα ἀπωθεῖται ὁ κύριος λέγων· Μὴ μου ἅπτου, ἀλλ' ὅταν ἀναβῶ πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, τότε σοι ἔξεστιν ἅπτεσθαι, τουτέστιν μηκέτι τὴν σωματώδη καὶ δουλικὴν μορφήν ἐν τῇ σεαυτοῦ πίστει ἀνατυπῶση, ἀλλὰ τὸν ἐν τῇ δόξῃ τοῦ πατρὸς ὄντα καὶ ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχοντα καὶ θεοῦ ὄντα λόγον τοῦτον προσκύνει, μὴ τὴν τοῦ δούλου μορφήν. ἀκούσωμεν, τί εὐαγγελίζεται ἡμῖν καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἢ προλαβούσα τὸν ἄνδρα διὰ τῆς πίστεως καλῶς τοῦτο ποιήσασα, ἵνα διὰ τοῦ κατάρξαι πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθὸν περὶ τῆς τοῦ κακοῦ αἰτίας ἀπολογησῆται. τί οὖν ἐστὶ τὸ τῆς γυναικὸς εὐαγγέλιον; ὄντως Οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι' ἀνθρώπων, ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. ἄκουε, γὰρ φησιν, ὃ ἐντέταλται ἡμῖν ὁ κύριος πρὸς ὑμᾶς εἰπεῖν, ὑμᾶς οὐδὲ καὶ ἀδελφοὺς αὐτοῦ κατονομάζει, ὅτι Πορεύομαι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν καὶ θεὸν μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν. ὃ καλῶν τε καὶ ἀγαθῶν εὐαγγελίων. ὁ δι' ἡμᾶς γενόμενος καθ' ἡμᾶς, ἵνα διὰ τοῦ γενέσθαι ἡμῖν ὁμογενὴς ἀδελφοὺς ἡμᾶς ἑαυτοῦ ποιήσῃ, προσάγει τὸν ἑαυτοῦ ἄνθρωπον τῷ ἀληθινῷ πατρί, ἵνα δι' αὐτοῦ ἅπαν τὸ ὁμογενὲς ἐφέλκῃσθαι, ὡς μηκέτι ὄνειδος εἶναι τοῖς δουλεύουσι τοῖς φύσει μὴ οὐσί θεοῖς. διὰ τοῦ προσαχθῆναι πάλιν τῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ θεῷ μηδ' ἀποβλήτους καὶ ἀποκηρύκτους τῆς πατρῴας κληρονομίας γενέσθαι τοὺς τῷ υἱῷ διὰ τῆς υἰοθεσίας ἀκολουθήσαντας ὃ ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς πρωτότοκον τῆς ἀγαθῆς κτίσεως ἑαυτὸν διὰ τῆς σαρκὸς ποιήσας πᾶσαν τὴν φύσιν, ἧς ἐκοινώνησε, διὰ τῆς ἀνακραθείσης αὐτῷ σαρκὸς ἐπεσπάσατο. ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ ὁ πρὸ τοῦ Πάσχα ἄρτος ὁ ἄζυμος ὄψον τὴν πικρίδα ἔχει, ἴδωμεν τίνι ἡδύσματι ὁ μετὰ τὴν ἀνάστασιν ἄρτος ἡδύνεται. ὁρᾶς τοῦ Πέτρου ἀλιεύοντος ἐν ταῖς χερσὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἄρτον καὶ κηρίον μέλιτος· νόησον, εἰς τί σοι ἡ πικρία τοῦ βίου μετασκευάζεται. οὐκοῦν ἀναστάντες καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐκ τῆς τῶν λόγων ἀλείας ἤδη τῷ ἄρτῳ προσδράμωμεν, ὃν καταγλυκαίνει τὸ κηρίον τῆς ἀγαθῆς ἐλπίδος ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν, ὃ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος σὺν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ τῷ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι νῦν καὶ αἰεὶ καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων, ἀμήν.

But even as I speak I sense myself lit up by the luminous robe of the angel, and that sweet earthquake shakes my heart with pleasure, rolling away the heavy stone of the human tomb, through which the door of resurrection is opened to all. Let us also run to see the amazing sight (for already the Sabbath is passed), or we may arrive after the women. Let the spices in our hands be faith and conscience; for this is the sweet savour of Christ. Let us no longer seek the living among the dead. The one who seeks him like that the Lord rejects, and says, “touch me not, but when I have ascended to the Father, then you will be able to touch me” (John 20:17). That means, “Do not imagine any more in your faith the bodily and servile form, but the one that is in the

glory of the Father and exists in the form of God and is God's Word, him you must worship, not the form of the servant". Let us hear what good news is told us by the woman who anticipated the man, doing this surely through faith, in order that by initiating the movement toward goods she might make amends for the causing of evil. What then is the woman's news? Truly "not from men nor through men, but through Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:1). For "Listen", she says, "to what the Lord has commanded us to tell you, you whom he also calls his brothers; 'I am going to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God'" (John 20:17). O happy good news! He who for us became one of us, so that by becoming our kin he might make us his own brothers, he brings his own Man to the true Father, in order through him to attract all that is akin, so that there is no more reproach against those who have been slaves to the truly unreal gods. Because those who through adoption have followed the Son have been brought near again to the living and true God and have not become rejects and exiles from the paternal inheritance, he who through the flesh made himself firstborn of the good creation among many brothers (Col 1:15; Rom 8:29) has drawn upon him the whole nature in which he has shared through the flesh commingled with him. But since the pre-paschal unleavened bread has bitter herb for relish, let us see the sweetening with which the post-resurrection bread is sweetened. As Peter fishes, you see bread and honeycomb in the Lord's hand; consider what the bitterness of your life is transformed into. So let us also rise up from the fishing of words and make haste now to the bread, which is sweetened with the honeycomb of good hope in Christ Jesus our Lord; to whom be glory and power with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and ever and to the eternal ages. Amen (*Trid. spat.* 304,5–306,10).

The epilogue is explicitly presented as an interruption of the on-going speech (μεταξὺ λέγων, 304,5). Gregory describes this event with words that are directly borrowed from the Resurrection stories: the angel (τοῦ ἀγγέλου), the earthquake (ὁ... σεισμός), the heavy stone (τὸν βαρὸν λίθον). It seems there is only one discrepancy: it is the earthquake that rolled away the stone (304,7–8: ὁ γλυκὸς ἐκεῖνος σεισμὸς ὁ τὸν βαρὸν λίθον τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου μνήματος ἀποκυλίων), and not the angel, contrary to Matt 28:2.<sup>44</sup> These five first lines (304,5–9) give the general tone of the epilogue: the resurrection stories are rewritten in order to introduce the audience instead of the women and apostles; the orator tries to actualize in the liturgy the very process of the resurrection stories.

Drobner has already shown that Gregory changes his expression in this last part of the speech by moving to the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural.<sup>45</sup> This change is consistent evidence in favour of my interpretation, since it offers an indication that Gregory tries to integrate his audience in the story. He also shifts to the subjunctive mood in 1<sup>st</sup> person plural, as a collective exhortation: see δράμωμεν (304,10), μὴ ἀπαντήσωμεν (304,11–12), μηκέτι ζητήσωμεν (304,14), ἀκού-

44 It's this gospel form that is also used earlier in the same homily: *Trid. spat.* 289,10–11. Other Gospels do not give any hint on the origin of the movement of the stone.

45 Drobner, *Die drei Tage*, 159.



σωμεν (304,21). This entire paragraph is written as a paraphrase of the Gospels' accounts on the morning of resurrection, with a few Pauline additions. The verb δράμωμεν (304,10) comes from Luke 24:12 (ὁ δὲ Πέτρος ἀναστὰς ἔδραμεν ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον) and John 20:4 (ἔτρεχον δὲ οἱ δύο ὁμοῦ· καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μαθητὴς προέδραμεν τάχιον τοῦ Πέτρου); διαγέγονε γὰρ ἤδη τὸ σάββατον (304,11) echoes Matt 28:1 (ὁπὲ δὲ σαββάτων). The section is a real patchwork of New Testament texts about the Easter Sunday morning, but in a form of cento: it seems that the author has no particular Gospel in mind. Gregory freely composes his epilogue picking up bits and pieces from all of the Gospels.

Moreover, he also inserts directly in the story Pauline interpretations, for example with regard to the spices, which are read as faith and clear conscience (304,12–13: καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμετέραις χερσὶ τὰ ἀρώματα ἢ πίστις καὶ ἡ συνειδησις), a phrase that recalls 1 Tim 1:19 (ἔχων πίστιν καὶ ἀγαθὴν συνείδησιν), and sweet savour of Christ (304,13–14: αὕτη γὰρ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐστὶν ἡ εὐωδία), which refers to 2 Cor 2:15 (ὅτι Χριστοῦ εὐωδία ἐσμὲν τῷ θεῷ; see also Eph 5:2). The answer to Maria Magdalena (John 20:17, μὴ μου ἅπτου, οὕτω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα) is also rewritten and explained through Phil 2:6–7 (ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐκ ἀρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ, ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφῇ δούλου λαβῶν, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος):

μὴ μου ἅπτου, ἀλλ' ὅταν ἀναβῶ πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, τότε σοι ἔξεστιν ἅπτεσθαι, τουτέστιν μηκέτι τὴν σωματώδη καὶ δουλικὴν μορφὴν ἐν τῇ σεαυτοῦ πίστει ἀνατυπῶσι, ἀλλὰ τὸν ἐν τῇ δόξῃ τοῦ πατρὸς ὄντα καὶ ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχοντα καὶ θεοῦ ὄντα λόγον (cf. John 1:1) τοῦτον προσκύνει, μὴ τὴν τοῦ δούλου μορφὴν (304,15–20).

The last paragraph introduces the audience to the Eucharist proper. Gregory builds a careful transition from the discussion on unleavened bread and bitter herb from the last part of speech to the new Easter bread. He intertwines two apparition stories. One comes from John 21 (Peter is fishing and Jesus has fish in his hands), the other is a variant of Luke 24:42, which adds to the traditional text a mention of honey (κηρίον μέλιτος in Gregory's text, ἀπὸ μελλισσίου κηρίον in Luke's variant reading).<sup>46</sup> It seems to be a testimony of a baptismal

46 For a presentation of this variant and its story, see Drobner, *Die drei Tage*, 165–6 and n. 713 for previous bibliography; G.D. Kilpatrick, "Luke 24:42–43", *NovT* 28 (1986) 306–8; F. Bovon, *L'évangile selon saint Luc (19,28–24,53)* (Commentaire du Nouveau Testament, 2<sup>e</sup> série, III<sup>d</sup>; Genève, 2009), 466. See also B. Cherubini, "Mangiò pesce miele": *un'antica tradizione sul risorto* (Tesi di Laurea, Università Roma Tre, 2006). See E. Nestle, "The Honeycomb in Luke XXIV", *ExpT* 22 (1911) 567–8. This variant is attested in patristic authors from at least the 2nd century: (Justin), *De resurrectione*, 9,7 (for the interpretation of this passage, see M. Heimgartner, *Pseudojustin: Über die Auferstehung, Text und Studie* [PTS 54; Berlin/New York, 2001], 86, 199); Tertullian, *De corona*, 3; Clemens of Alexandria, *Paedagogus*, 2,1,15,2–3; and directly from the 4th century onward: Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat.* 14, 11; Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 66,39,2; Amphilochius of Iconium, *Contra haereticos*, 27, 1055; Pseudo-Athanasius, *Oratio IV contra arianos*, 35,28–29; Cyril of Alexandria, *In Joannem*, III, 150,8–10. This variant reading is largely present in New Testament manuscripts: see K. Aland/ B. Aland/K. Wachtel, *Texte und Textwert*

practice, when newly baptised received at the first Eucharist not only bread and wine, but also milk and honey as a sign of their entering into the promised land.<sup>47</sup> The two accounts are perhaps mixed for a liturgical reason: the community where Gregory preached this homily possibly used to offer milk and honey to the newly baptised; honey can be added up with bread, but not with fish as in Luke's Gospel. But there is also a rhetorical reason: Gregory needs bread in order to close up his speech, reminding his previous part about unleavened bread. He also uses the direct context of John 21, the fishing party of the apostles, since he adds another image to this very end of the prologue, saying:

οὐκοῦν ἀναστάντες καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐκ τῆς τῶν λόγων ἀλείας ἤδη τῷ ἄρτῳ προσδράμωμεν, ὄν καταγλυκαίνει τὸ κηρίον τῆς ἀγαθῆς ἐλπίδος ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν.

So let us also rise up from the fishing of words and make haste now to the bread, which is sweetened with the honeycomb of good hope in Christ Jesus our Lord (*Trid. spat.* 306,5–8).

So John 21 is read as a *typos* of the Eucharist as a whole: first, hear readings from the Ancient and New Testament, and try to understand and interpret them, what Gregory calls 'fishing', and then run to the shore to meet Christ and eat bread with him, which is the Eucharist proper. Moreover, there is an exegetical and theological need for honey here, since Gregory reads this meal as the New Testament counterpart to the paschal meal of unleavened bread and bitter herbs: so to the unleavened bread he opposes the bread of Christ, and to the bitter herbs, the honeycomb. It is a usual opposition between desert and Holy land, between exile and the land of Promise. So the composite citation is a direct counterpart of Gregory's theological exegesis of Easter, in a context of the Eucharist.

We find a similar conflation of John 21 and Luke 24:42 with the variant reading in the *Homilies on the Song of Songs* (X, 306,7–307,8):

τῷ δὲ τὴν τελειότεραν ἐπιζητοῦντι τροφὴν ἄρτος γίνεται οὐκέτι ἐπὶ πικρίδων ἐσθιόμενος, ὡς ὁ νόμος διακελεύεται (πρὸς γὰρ τὸ παρὸν ἐστὶν ἡ πικρία), ἀλλ' ὄψον ἑαυτοῦ τὸ μέλι ποιούμενος, ὅταν ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ καιρῷ ὁ καρπὸς τῆς ἀρετῆς καταγλυκαίνει τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς αἰσθητήρια (οὗ ἀπόδειξις ὁ μετὰ τὴν ἀνάστασιν τοῦ κυρίου προφανεῖς τοῖς μαθηταῖς ἄρτος ἐστὶ) τῷ κηρίῳ τοῦ μέλιτος ἡδυνόμενος.

Then for the one who is seeking more perfect nourishment, they [the plants] become bread, and it is no longer eaten with "bitter herbs" (Exod 12:8) as the law commands

*der griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments. IV, Die synoptischen Evangelien. 3, Das Lukasevangelium. 3.1, Resultate der Kollation und Hauptliste sowie Ergänzungen* (Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung 31; Berlin/New York, 2003), 131–2.

47 Drobner, *Die drei Tage*, 166–7. See also P.M. Gy, "Die Segnung von Milch und Honig in der Osternacht", in B. Fischer/J. Wagner (ed.), *Paschatis solemnia. Studien zu Osterfeier und Osterfrommigkeit* (FS Josef Andreas Jungmann; Basel/Freiburg/Wien, 1959) 206–12.

(since the bitterness is for now) but with honey as its relish, whenever, in its own season, the fruit of virtue conveys a sweetness to the soul's senses, which is demonstrated by the bread that was manifested to the disciples after the Lord's resurrection, sweetened by the honeycomb (John 21:9 and Luke 24:42) (*Cant. X*, 306,17–307,5).<sup>48</sup>

Here, the parallel of bread and honey is required by the very text of the Song of Songs, since Cant 5:1 reads:

Εἰσηλθὼν εἰς κήπὸν μου, ἀδελφή μου νόμφη, ἐτρύγησα σμύρναν μου μετὰ ἀρωμάτων μου, ἔφαγον ἄρτον μου μετὰ μέλιτός μου, ἔπιον οἶνόν μου μετὰ γάλακτός μου· φάγετε, πλησίοι, καὶ πίνετε καὶ μεθύσθητε, ἀδελφοί.

Drobner had already suggested a link between this passage and *De tribui spatio*, but only on the basis of the interpretation of the bitter herbs.<sup>49</sup> He does not indicate that Gregory also uses the conflation of John 21 and the variant of Luke 24:42 in this passage of the *Homily on the Song of Songs*. Since the link between bread and honey is present in the *Song of Songs* text, it seems that the *Homilies* are the proper place to conflate John 21 and the variant of Luke 24:42; if this interpretation is correct, it may indicate that *De tridui spatio* is posterior or contemporaneous to the homilies (so at the very end of Gregory's life).<sup>50</sup> It is at least sure that the two texts are closely linked together, since both homilies have the main tread that leads from bitter herbs to Eucharist and mystical union with Christ.

The whole epilogue of *De tridui spatio* is built upon a transversal reading of the resurrection stories from the four Gospels, or rather a cento reading that picks up bits and pieces from one or the other Gospel according to a general aim even if it means to transform resurrection stories themselves, as we have seen with John 21 and Luke 24. This cento is however interpreted in a liturgical and Eucharist context; the speech is explicitly written in order to bring in the audience in both the story and the liturgy, so as to have them fully take part in liturgical action. The homily is, so to say, a transition from Bible reading to the Eucharist proper.

48 Translation R.A. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs* (Writings from the Greco-Roman World 13; Atlanta, GA, 2012), 323, with modifications. I interpret the text and modify the punctuation of the editor, H. Langerbeck, according to the interpretation and comment of A. Rousseau, *Grégoire de Nyssse, Homélie sur le Cantique des cantiques* (Bruxelles, 2008), 226 and n. 1.

49 Drobner, *Die drei Tage*, 166, n. 705.

50 See F. Dünzl, *Braut und Bräutigam: die Auslegung des Canticum durch Gregor von Nyssa* (BGBE 32; Tübingen, 1993), 30–3.

## Conclusion

I have proposed in this paper a general survey of the usages of resurrection stories from the New Testament in the three authentic homilies on Easter by Gregory of Nyssa. It is no surprise that Gregory quotes and comments on these stories. But they are not the centre and main topic of his homilies. The two main ones, *In sanctum Pascha* and *De tridui spatio*, in different ways, are clearly too elaborated to be simple and linear comments on the Gospel texts. *De tridui spatio* has obvious exegetical aims, but they are inserted in a larger theological frame and in an already elaborated exegetical tradition, for example, about the three days of Christ's death. The case of *In sanctum Pascha* is even clearer: the reflexion on resurrection is largely disconnected from New Testament texts; of course, Easter offers the occasion to speak about resurrection, but Gregory's way of talking about it has little to do with the Gospel accounts and more with an already established tradition, or rather with an on-going debate about resurrection that starts with the Apologists and finds a new starting point in the dispute between Origen and Methodius of Olympus. Resurrection is here seen as resurrection of human beings, and not mainly as resurrection of Christ.

So the resurrection stories are clearly part of these homilies and the preacher was right to suppose his audience already knows them. However, they are not his object and theme when preaching about Easter, at least not in the homilies that have come down to us. But they are used – with modifications and rewriting – in order to conduct the audience from hearing to taking part in liturgical action.

