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ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ AND ΜΕΤΟΥΣΙΑ IN GREGORY  
OF NYSSA'S *ORATIO CATECHETICA MAGNA*.  
TERMINOLOGICAL CONTEXT AND RELEVANCE  
TO TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY, CHRISTOLOGY  
AND SACRAMENTOLOGY

This article presents a comparative analysis of the use of the terms *κοινωνία* and *μετουσία* in Trinitarian, Christological and soteriological as well as sacramental contexts in Gregory of Nyssa's *Oratio catechetica magna*. As a result, we discover that Gregory consciously and precisely distinguishes between the concepts under discussion and treats the term *κοινωνία* as a bridge connecting the disputed topics of dogmatic theology. Moreover, the analysis shows that the Bishop of Nyssa's use of the term *κοινωνία* betrays his desire to transcend the dialectical understanding of the relationship between unity and difference. Instead of this concept that originated in Platonism, Gregory seeks a synthetic account that preserves the autonomy and independence and, simultaneously, the possibility of true unity between God and man. The conclusion of the analysis is the need for further research into the use of the concept of *κοινωνία* in the works of the youngest of the Cappadocian Fathers.

Gregory of Nyssa's *Great Catechism* is a manual for catechists preaching the gospel to converts to Christianity. In recent decades, there have been many discrepancies in attempts to date the *Oratio Catechetica*. According to some, the work was already written before 381; on the other hand, it has also been dated to around 387.<sup>1</sup> Johannes Zacchuber, in his most recent monograph, claims that

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<sup>1</sup> See detailed analysis in: R.J. Kees, *Die Lehre Von Der Oikonomia Gottes in Der Oratio Catechetica Gregors Von Nyssa*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 30, Leiden–New York–Köln 1995, p. 201–208.

it reached its final form up to three years after the *Refutatio Confessiones Eunomii*, and therefore between 383 and 386,<sup>2</sup> so it should be regarded in many aspects as a summary of Gregory's thought. Moreover, the *Great Catechism* can be considered as the second compendium of Christian doctrine, with great significance, after Origen's *De principiis*.<sup>3</sup> *Oratio catechetica magna* is also a treatise in which Gregory seems to express his ideas more freely than in works in which he refutes his opponents' claims point by point, such as *Contra Eunomium* or *Ad Ablabium*.<sup>4</sup> Particularly noteworthy is the Christology presented in the central section of the *Great Catechism*, considered by some to be the most complete and mature synthesis of the theological teaching on Christ of the youngest of the Great Cappadocian Fathers.<sup>5</sup> For its purpose, Gregory's work has a relatively simple form and little exegetical support<sup>6</sup> while at the same time possessing an apologetic trait<sup>7</sup> since the treatise was indirectly addressed to non-Christians in addition to catechists. In this connection, the Bishop of Nyssa frequently references Neoplatonism, which severely threatened fourth-century Christianity.<sup>8</sup> In the *Great Catechism*, therefore, the Cappadocian does not shy away from philosophical references, which he treats only as a useful auxiliary tool for defending the truths of faith given by Revelation.<sup>9</sup> An example of a concept, on the one hand, important in the history of ancient philosophy and, on the other, widely used in the New Testament, which Gregory uses with great precision and awareness, is κοινωμία.

<sup>2</sup> J. Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa. Philosophical Background and Theological Significance*, Leiden–Boston 2014, p. 206–207.

<sup>3</sup> See L.F. Mateo-Seco, *Estudios sobre la Cristología de san Gregorio de Nisa*, Pamplona 1978, p. 79; see also J. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 3: *The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature*, Westminster, Maryland 1983, p. 262. Cf. R.J. Kees, *Die Lehre...*, p. 69–77.

<sup>4</sup> R. Willing, *Oratio Catechetica Magna*, in: *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, eds. L.F. Mateo-Seco, G. Maspero, trans. S. Cherney, Leiden–Boston 2010, p. 548.

<sup>5</sup> A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 1: *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. J. Bowden, Atlanta 1975; see also L.F. Mateo-Seco, *Christology*, in: *The Brill Dictionary...*, p. 140.

<sup>6</sup> C. Moreschini, *Introduzione*, in: *Gregorio di Nissa. Opere Dogmatiche*, ed. idem, Milano 2014, p. 115–116.

<sup>7</sup> U. Pękala, *Apologia chrześcijańskiej nauki o zbawieniu w „Wielkiej katechezie” św. Grzegorza z Nyssy*, „Vox Patrum” 46–47 (2004), p. 499; cf. J. Zachhuber, *Human nature...*, p. 228; Also J.H. Srawley, *Introduction*, in: *The Catechetical Oration of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. idem, Cambridge 1956, p. xii.

<sup>8</sup> R. Willing, *Introduction*, in: *Grégoire de Nyse Discours catéchétique*, Sources chrétiennes 453, ed. idem, Paris 2000, p. 120–121.

<sup>9</sup> L.F. Mateo-Seco, *Estudios...*, p. 84.

## STATUS QUAESTIONIS

Plato uses the term μέθεξις to express temporal diversity, derived from eternal unity, the structural dependence of the many on the one through participation, and the dialectical tension between unity and multiplicity.<sup>10</sup> When speaking of the participation of many individual, sensuous entities in one idea, he often uses synonyms, including μετέχειν.<sup>11</sup> Plato also uses the word κοινωνία closely with μέθεξις, among other things, treating it as a bridge between the sensual world and the ideal world.<sup>12</sup> The Sophists use the word κοινωνία to represent not only the participation of the sensory world in ideas, but also the participation of ideas among themselves. The concept of κοινωνία finds particular use in Stoic thought, which develops the idea of participation. In this regard, special attention should be paid to Arius Didymus who defined κοινωνία as a community between God and humans based on participation (μετέχειν) in the λόγος.<sup>13</sup> In the New Testament, κοινωνία occurs particularly frequently as a term of participation including Trinitarian<sup>14</sup> and Christological-soteriological aspects,<sup>15</sup> in which we also find examples of the use of the terms μετέχειν,<sup>16</sup> “sacramental”<sup>17</sup> and “ecclesial.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>10</sup> F. Fronterotta, *Metousia. La Teoria Platonica delle Idee e La Partecipazione delle cose empiriche dai Dialoghi Giovanili al Parmenide*, Pisa 2001, p. 115–117, 295–314; see also: D.C. Schindler, *What's the difference? On the Metaphysics of Participation in Plato, Plotinus, and Aquinas*, „Nova et Vetera” 5 (2007) 3, p. 583–618. On the relationship of the language of Platonic monism expressed, among other things, by μέθεξις to the tension between unity and multiplicity in Trinitarian theology in Gregory of Nyssa, see H.F. Chereniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa*, New York 1971, p. 37–38.

<sup>11</sup> D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, Oxford, 1966, p. 225–245.

<sup>12</sup> J. Yu, *On Plato's theory of metheksis of ideas*, „Philosophical Inquiry” 13 (1991), p. 25. For a broader list of terms for participation in the Platonic tradition cf. G. Söhngé, *Die neuplatonische Scholastik und Mystik der Teilhabe bei Plotin*, „Philos” 49 (1936), p. 100.

<sup>13</sup> Arius Didymus, *Fragmenta*, XXVIII, in: *Doxographi Graeci*, ed. H. Diels, Berlin 1976, p. 464; cf. H. Hanse, „Gott haben”. *In der Antike und im frühen Christentum eine religions- und begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Berlin 1939, p. 42.

<sup>14</sup> Both in St. Paul, who speaks of the κοινωνία πνεύματος – 2 Cor. 13,13 and Phil. 2:1 and in St. John – see 1 John 1,3.6–7.

<sup>15</sup> In St. Paul's case, it is the idea of participation in Christ – 1 Cor. 1,9, especially in his suffering, in order to share in his glory: Phil. 3,10; 2 Cor. 1,7; this aspect is also evident in St. Peter: 1 Pet. 4,13; 1 Pet. 5,1.

<sup>16</sup> Especially in the letter to the Hebrews – see Heb. 2,14; 3,1.14.

<sup>17</sup> In the sacrament of the Eucharist, we receive a share in the Blood and Body of Christ through the chalice and bread (1 Cor. 10,16–17).

<sup>18</sup> Κοινωνία as mutual help among Christians – see Acts 2:42 and especially St. Paul's letters: Gal. 2,9; 2 Cor. 8,4; 9,13; Rom. 15,26. Also, communion in faith: Phlm. 6 and preaching the gospel: Phil. 1,5.

In the thought of Gregory of Nyssa, the idea of participation plays an important role.<sup>19</sup> The most characteristic expression for participation in his theology is μετουσία. This word occurs relatively rarely in other contemporary authors: in Basil the Great 19 times and in Gregory of Nazianzus 10 times, for example. Gregory uses it as many as 179 times, which, according to the latest version of the TLG (in which the word occurs 1996 times), makes him the author who uses the term most frequently. It does not mean that the Bishop of Nyssa replaces the classical μετέχειν, which occurs 232 times in his treatises. However, he makes an important distinction that betrays a strongly apophatic feature of his theology. Μετέχειν, derived from “to have,” emphasises the active aspect of participation. Μετουσία, derived from “to be,” points out that, although grammatically God is the object of participation, in essence He is the sustaining subject of the existence of every created being that is dependent on God, receiving participation in goodness, existence, life<sup>20</sup> and the other Divine names.<sup>21</sup> Μετουσία is a fundamental concept in Gregory’s anthropology, emphasising the radical difference occurring in man’s union with God. Both recent<sup>22</sup> and older<sup>23</sup> studies evidence this. Furthermore, in the fifth of his *Sermons on the Beatitudes*, Gregory identified the terms κοινωνία and μετουσία as synonymous in the anthropological context.<sup>24</sup> Finally, μετουσία is a term much more firmly established in the history of philosophical thought dedicated to the relationship of unity and multiplicity as it is closely re-

<sup>19</sup> See especially: D.L. Balás, *Metousia Theou. Man’s Participation in God’s Perfections according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa*, Roma 1966.

<sup>20</sup> See: D.L. Balás, *Christian Transformation of Greek Philosophy Illustrated by Gregory of Nyssa’s Use of the Notion of Participation*, „Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association” 40 (1966), p. 152–157.

<sup>21</sup> On the divine names in Gregory of Nyssa, see, e.g.: G.D. Panagopoulos, *The Divine Names and Their Use in Gregory of Nyssa’s In Canticum Cantorum*, w: *Gregory of Nyssa: In Canticum Cantorum Analytical and Supporting Studies. Proceedings of the 13th International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Rome, 17–20 September 2014)*, eds. G. Maspero, M. Brugarolas, I. Vigorelli, Leiden–Boston 2018, p. 479–480.

<sup>22</sup> M. Gavrilovic, *Dynamis and Metousia: Theological Anthropology According to Gregory of Nyssa in De hominis opificio*, Ph.D. diss., Trinity College in the University of Toronto 2023.

<sup>23</sup> D.L. Balás, *Metousia...*; idem, *Christian Transformation...*

<sup>24</sup> Gregorius Nyssenus, *De Beatitudinibus*, ed. J.F. Callhan, GNO 7/2, Leiden–New York–Köln 1992, 124, 13–14. S.G. Hall excludes the possibility of dating the homilies *On the Beatitudes* with complete certainty, but argues for an early period of Gregory’s episcopate even before his exile (376–378), thus before the creation of the vast majority of his works. Cf. idem, *Gregory of Nyssa, On the Beatitudes. An Introduction to the Text and Translation*, w: *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes. An English version with Commentary and Supporting Studies. Proceedings of the Eighth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Paderborn) 14–18 September 1998*, eds. H.R. Drobner, A. Viciano, Leiden–Boston–Köln 2000, p. 15. Therefore, Gregory’s development and refinement of concepts in later works cannot be ruled out.

lated to μετέχειν and μέθεξις. The question of the connection between unity and multiplicity in the Platonic idea of participation is also the subject of contemporary research.<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, the following analysis will indicate that the concept of κοινωνία finds a broader application than μετουσία in defining the tension between unity and difference in Gregory's Trinitology and Christology and, consequently, is relevant to his sacramentology and theological anthropology. This article aims to outline how the author of the *Oratio catechetica magna* uses the expression κοινωνία to describe the relationship between unity and difference in dogmatic issues. The presented research gap will make it possible to justify further research on this concept, which has not been explored so far in detail in the theology of the Bishop of Nyssa. This article also addresses the potential to deepen the issue of unity and difference in Gregory of Nyssa's thought, which is the subject of contemporary discourse on his theology.<sup>26</sup>

The choice of the work in question is not coincidental since the relationship between the unity of the divine nature and the difference of persons is the issue with which Gregory begins the *Great Catechism*. In addition to trinitarian theology (chapters 1–4), the issue also recurs in the other two thematic sections of the treatise under discussion: the Incarnation of Christ (chapters 5–32) and the New Life received through the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist (chapters 33–40). After outlining the context and introductory issues, the three sections of the present article treat the concept of κοινωνία in the context of the three consecutive sections of the *Oratio catechetica magna*.

## THE TRINITARIAN ASPECT

Basil the Great uses the term μετουσία only once in the context of Trinitarian theology in his entire work, when he criticises the denial of participation (μετουσία) of the only begotten Son in the substance of the Father, which he notes in Eunomius.<sup>27</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, on the other hand, already at the beginning of the first chapter of the *Great Catechism*, notes that we cannot speak of μετουσία in the case of the Logos' relationship with the Divine Life. Since the substance of

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g. D.C. Schindler, *What's the difference?...*, p. 583–593.

<sup>26</sup> F. Battista Harriet, *Human Communion and Difference in Gregory of Nyssa: from Trinitarian Theology to the Philosophy of Human Person and Free Decision*, in: *Gregory of Nyssa: The Minor Treatises on Trinitarian Theology and Apollinarism. Proceedings of the 11th International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Tübingen, 17–20 September 2008)*, eds. V.H. Drecoll, M. Berghaus, p. 337–349.

<sup>27</sup> Basiliius Caesariensis, *Adversus Eunomium* II 22, *Sources chrétiennes* 305, 88, transl. M. DelCogliano; A. Radde-Gallwitz, *St. Basil of Caesarea, Against Eunomius...*, p. 162–163.

the Word is living, and its nature is simple, we cannot speak of the participation of the Logos in Life.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in the *Adversus Macedonianos*, Gregory argues that the concept of μετουσία should not be used to describe participation in the divine attributes in the case of the Holy Spirit as this would undermine His true Deity.<sup>29</sup> In both cases, Gregory refers to the Platonic tradition, adopted from Origen by all three Cappadocian Fathers: God as a simple substance has nothing to do with multiplicity.<sup>30</sup> Thus, one can see the development of the conceptual apparatus of the Cappadocian Fathers and Gregory's concern for linguistic precision.

On the other hand, in the *Oratio catechetica magna* itself, the use of the term κοινωνία in the context of Trinitarian theology is nowhere to be found. However, in other works, especially in the context of a defence of the deity of the Holy Spirit, the Bishop of Nyssa uses the term to describe the relationship between the divine persons. These are works edited in close temporal proximity to the *Oratio catechetica magna* or even in the period between the initial and final editions of the *Great Catechism*. These include the third volume of *Contra Eunomium*, written between 381 and 383,<sup>31</sup> as well as the *Adversus Macedonianos*, the dating of which is problematic, but it is assumed with high probability that it was written shortly after the Council of Constantinople (381).<sup>32</sup> In a Trinitarian context, κοινωνία also appears somewhat earlier, in *Ad Eustadium de Sancta Trinitate*, dated just before the Council of Constantinople, i.e., 380<sup>33</sup>, and in a work whose dating depends on the still disputed question of authorship, such as *Ad Pertum fratrem de differentia essentiae et hypostaseos*.<sup>34</sup> Gregory refers not only to the

<sup>28</sup> Gregorius Nyssenus, *Oratio Catechetica Magna*, ed. E. Mühlenberg, Leiden–New York–Köln 1996, GNO 3/4 [hereinafter: GNO 3/4], 9, 11–26.

<sup>29</sup> Gregorius Nyssenus, *Adversus Macedonianos de Spiritu Sancto*, ed. F. Mueller, GNO 3/1, Leiden 1958, 92, 10–19; cf. G. Maspero, *Different strategies of the Greek Fathers against the Pneumatomachians*, „Vox Patrum” 68 (2017), p. 207.

<sup>30</sup> C. Moreschini, *Filosofia e letteratura in Gregorio Nazianzo*, Milan 1997, p. 47–48; cf. *Introduction in: The Catechetical Oratio...*, p. xi.

<sup>31</sup> C. Moreschini, *Introduzione...*, p. 163.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 173.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 185–186.

<sup>34</sup> The work survives among the letters of Basil the Great (now known as his 38th letter), but nowadays the authorship of Gregory of Nyssa is frequently postulated. See: R.M. Hübner, *Gregor von Nyssa als Verfasser der sog. Ep. 38 des Basilius. Zum unterschiedlichen Verständnis der ousia bei den kappadozischen Brüdern*, in: *Epektasis. Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou*, eds. J. Fontaine, Ch. Kannengiesser, Paris 1972, p. 463–490; cf.: V.H. Drecoll, *Die Entwicklung der Trinitätslehre des Basilius von Cäsarea. Sein Weg vom Homöusianer zum Neonizäner*, *Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte*, 66 (1996); J. Zachhuber *Nochmals: Der „38. Brief“ des Basilius von Cäsarea als Werk des Gregor von Nyssa*, „Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum” 7 (2003), p. 73–90; A.M. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 38, Leiden 2007, p. 247–249.

linguistic level – to the Trinitarian communion of names (ονομάων κοινωνία),<sup>35</sup> but also to the plane of being, speaking of the communion of nature (φυσική κοινωνία), which signifies the equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son in terms of all divine attributes such as power (δύναμις), glory (δόξα) and dignity (ἀξίωμα).<sup>36</sup> Also, in the context of the equality of the nature of the Father and the Son of God, Gregory speaks of the communion of nature (φύσεως κοινωνία)<sup>37</sup> of the Father with the Son. Moreover, he uses the verb κοινωνέω to show the communion of the Father with the Son as to the Divine essence (κοινωνεῖν τῆς θείας οὐσίας),<sup>38</sup> which the Second Person did not lose through the Incarnation. Finally, Gregory speaks of κοινωνία in terms of the communion of the three Persons in which the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is manifested. This communion is characterised by temporal-spatial limitlessness, continuity and uninterruptedness (συνεχῆ καὶ ἀδιάσπαστα κοινωνία) and is called the vivifying nature (ζωοποιός φύσις).<sup>39</sup> In summary, we can see that κοινωνία, more than μετουσία, corresponds to the expression of the unity of nature and the difference of persons in the holy Trinity.

## THE CHRISTOLOGICAL AND SOTERIOLOGICAL ASPECTS

In the case of Christology, it should be noted that the word μετουσία, which occurs nine times in *Oratio catechetica magna*, does not once refer to the relationship between the deity and humanity united in the person of Christ. Moreover, in the *Great Catechism*, μετουσία always expresses the participation of a lower being in a higher one, the participation of a human being (or spiritual being)<sup>40</sup> in God, which, according to Gregory's apophaticism, is represented above all by the concept of Goodness (ἀγαθός),<sup>41</sup> as well as Life (ζωή)<sup>42</sup> or Purity (καθάρτης).<sup>43</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Gregorius Nyssenus, *Ad Eustadium de sancta trinitate*, ed. F. Mueller, GNO 3/1, Leiden 1958, 8, 6; ibidem, GNO 3/1, 8, 18; ibidem, GNO 3/1, 10, 17.

<sup>36</sup> Gregorius Nyssenus, *Adversus Macedonianos de Spiritu Sancto*, ed. F. Mueller, GNO 3/1, Leiden 1958, 90, 6–10.

<sup>37</sup> Gregorius Nyssenus, *Contra Eunomium* III 1, 91–92, ed. W. Jaeger, GNO 2, Leiden 1960, 35, 1–8, also: ibidem, III 2, 71, GNO 2, 75, 20.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, III, 1. 93, GNO 2, 35, 19–22.

<sup>39</sup> Basilii Caesariensis, *Epistula 38*, PG 32, 332, trans. A.M. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa, The Letters...*, p. 254.

<sup>40</sup> GNO 3/4, 24, 21–25, 11.

<sup>41</sup> GNO 3/4, 17, 10–11; GNO 3/4, 20, 5; GNO 3/4, 43, 22. It is also about sharing in the specific goods of the Creator (μετουσία τῶν ἰδίων ἀγαθῶν ποιήσας). GNO 3/4, 19, 15–21.

<sup>42</sup> GNO 3/4, 9, 11–26. In this case, only in a negative form – it is not possible to speak of the participation of the Logos in Life, as this would imply a lower ontological status of the Logos.

<sup>43</sup> In the context of the sacrament of baptism. GNO 3/4, 92, 20.

The term μετέχειν functions in the opposite way in Gregory's terminology. This verb occurs in Christology exclusively to denote the participation of the Son of God in human life and suffering. It never denotes the participation of human nature in the divine in order to avoid Apollinarian monophysitism due to its Platonic and Aristotelic connotations.<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, of the 13 uses of the term κοινωνία in the *Great Catechism*, as many as six occur concerning Christology,<sup>45</sup> referring to the divine-human community of united natures in the person of the Saviour. The κοινωνία in Gregory's usage transcends this Platonic scheme of participation associated with the concept of μετουσία. This phenomenon occurs on an anthropological level – when referring to man's entry into communion with evil (τοῦ κακοῦ κοινωνία) and sin (κοινωνία κατὰ ἁμαρτίαν).<sup>46</sup> Even more explicitly, Gregory goes beyond Platonism in the context of Christology. He points to Christ who, in order to save man in the mystery of the Incarnation, humbles himself by becoming a partaker of the passions (κοινωνία πάθους)<sup>47</sup> and of all the properties of our nature (τῶν τῆς φύσεως ἡμῶν ιδιωμάτων τὴν κοινωνία),<sup>48</sup> which have been stained by sin, and life on the biological level (τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου βίου κοινωνία).<sup>49</sup> In other words, the Saviour submits Himself to communion with man (τὸν ἄνθρωπον ὑποστὰς κοινωνία).<sup>50</sup> In the case of the Son of God, participation becomes an act of love, the entry of a more perfect being into communion with a less perfect being, the entry of God into communion with man. Moreover, comparing the use of the word κοινωνία in the context of Trinitology and Christology, we can see that in the former case, the community of participation occurs at the level of nature (φυσικὴ κοινωνία) while concerning Christology it is a community of participation between the divine and human natures.

Moreover, Gregory in the *Great Catechism* also speaks of κοινωνία in the second sense – as man's participation in God. Nevertheless, the Son of God was the first to enter into the communion of participation with our fallen nature. It made possible the participation of the human soul in life (ζωή κοινωνία)<sup>51</sup> effected by faith, the immortal communion of the human body (ἀθάνατη κοινωνία)<sup>52</sup> with

<sup>44</sup> J.R. Bouchet, *Vocabulaire de l'union chez Grégoire de Nysse*, „Revue Thomiste” 68 (1968), p. 576.

<sup>45</sup> GNO 3/4, 45, 22–46, 2; GNO 3/4, 69, 9–23; GNO 3/4, 70, 20–71, 7; GNO 3/4, 86, 6–19; GNO 3/4, 94, 5–16; GNO 3/4, 97, 20–98, 7.

<sup>46</sup> GNO 3/4, 31, 25–32, 7.

<sup>47</sup> GNO 3/4, 46, 1.

<sup>48</sup> GNO 3/4, 69, 16–17.

<sup>49</sup> In the context of the mode of birth. GNO 3/4, 70, 23.

<sup>50</sup> GNO 3/4, 86, 10–11.

<sup>51</sup> GNO 3/4, 93, 6.

<sup>52</sup> GNO 3/4, 94, 11–12.



the body of Christ and man's participation in the Godhead (θεότητα κοινωνία).<sup>53</sup> Moreover, even the human response to the divine initiative – the receipt of God by man – is accomplished in the first instance by the Saviour. A kind of soteriological axis around which the tension of the kenotic participation of the Son of God in our nature and the divinising communion of man with God is organised is the corporeality of Christ.<sup>54</sup> To express this mystery, Gregory uses the expression θεοδόχος, formed by the compound of Θεός and δέχομαι, translated as “receiving God.”<sup>55</sup> In the School of Antioch, this term is used regarding the Virgin Mary. Gregory, in the *Great Catechism*, uses it as many as four times, but in a completely different sense, each time referring to Christ, especially to his body which receives God.<sup>56</sup> Twice he speaks of θεοδόχος σῶμα,<sup>57</sup> once of θεοδόχος σάρξ.<sup>58</sup> One time, he refers to humanity (θεοδόχος ἄνθρωπος).<sup>59</sup> In this case, one can notice the anti-Apollinarianistic approach.<sup>60</sup> In this way, Christ's human corporeity, through the unity of human nature,<sup>61</sup> becomes for the whole human race a place of encounter with God, and matter is sanctified so that it can mediate the encounter with the Creator. In conclusion, κοινωνία, in the context of Christology, has a broader semantic range than μετουσία and μετέχειν, transcending Platonic and Aristotelian limitations.

## THE SACRAMENTAL ASPECT

The sacramental aspect of the divine-human communion is closely linked to Christology so that specific uses of the word κοινωνία often have both Christological and soteriological aspects on the one hand and a sacramental aspect on

<sup>53</sup> GNO 3/4, 97, 23.

<sup>54</sup> L.F. Mateo-Seco, *Estudios...*, p. 243–244; cf. E. Moutsoulas, *The Incarnation of the Word and the Theosis of Man according to the Teaching of Gregory of Nyssa*, Atene 2000, p. 119–128.

<sup>55</sup> G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford 1961, p. 625.

<sup>56</sup> M. Starowieyski, *Tytuł theotokos w świadectwach przedefeskich*, „*Analecta Cracoviensia*” XVI (1984), p. 434.

<sup>57</sup> GNO 3/4, 94, 9; GNO 3/4, 96, 16.

<sup>58</sup> GNO 3/4, 97, 20–21.

<sup>59</sup> GNO 3/4, 78, 10.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. S. Longosz, *Chrytologia Ojców Kapadockich*, „*Vox Patrum*” 32–33 (1997), p. 166–168, 170–171.

<sup>61</sup> D.L. Balás, *Plenitudo Humanitatis: The Unity of Human Nature in Thought of Gregory of Nyssa*, in: *Disciplina nostra: essays in memory of Robert F. Evans*, ed. D.F. Winslow, Cambridge 1979, p. 123–126; M. Przyszychowska, *Wszyscy byliśmy w Adamie. Jedność ludzkości w Adamie w nauczaniu ojców Kościoła*, Poznań 2013, p. 60–83. On the unity of the human nature in *Oratio Catechetica Magna*: R.M. Hübner, *Die Einheit des Leibes Christi bei Gregor Von Nyssa. Untersuchungen zum Ursprung der „Physischen” Erlösungslehre*, *Philosophia Patrum* 2, Leiden 1974, p. 148–155; J. Zachhuber, *Human nature...*, p. 228–232.

the other. An important concept demonstrating the possibility of divine-human communion at the sacramental level is θεοδόχος. It is used in the *Oratio catechetica magna* to emphasise the material aspect of the human encounter with God accomplished in Christ. In other words, that corporeality makes possible the deifying participation of all humanity in the work of salvation. This is linked to the sacramental reality, the condition of which is matter: water in the case of baptism and bread and wine when it comes to the Eucharist. It is no coincidence that the term θεοδόχος first appears at the end of the section on the Incarnation, providing a bridge between Christology and the lecture on sacramentology, where it is consistently used in the first of the chapters on the Eucharist.<sup>62</sup> In contrast, it does not once appear in the context of baptism. This functioning of the term serves the distinction Gregory makes concerning the sacraments of initiation. While with the former the soul is united to Christ through faith, the body is united to the Saviour<sup>63</sup> in a particular way through the Eucharist.<sup>64</sup>

The term κοινωνία occurs to denote the communion of man with God guaranteed by the sacraments as a term for both the corporal and spiritual aspects of the union. In the context of baptism, the word κοινωνία is used twice, the first time to express the saving power of the divine-human communion in the person of Christ, who has submitted himself to communion with man (τὸν ἄνθρωπον ὑποστάς κοινωνία).<sup>65</sup> The second time, at the transition between the theme of baptism and the Eucharist, Gregory shows the community of life (ζωῆς κοινωνία) as the result of union with life (ζωῆν ἔνωσις):

But since the human being is a twofold creature, compounded of soul and body, it is necessary that the saved should lay hold of the Author of the new life through both their component parts. Accordingly, the soul being focused into Him through faith derives from that the means and occasion of salvation; for the act of union with the life (ζωῆν ἔνωσις) implies a fellowship with life (ζωῆς κοινωνία). But the body comes into a fellowship and blending (μετουσίᾳ τε καὶ ἀνακράσει) with the Author of our salvation in another way.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>62</sup> GNO 3/4, 78, 10; GNO 3/4, 94, 9; GNO 3/4, 96, 16; GNO 3/4, 97, 20–21.

<sup>63</sup> On the clearly Christological background of man's participation in the divinity, linked to Christ's corporeality, in the *Great Catechism*, cf. R.J. Kees, *Die Lehre...*, p. 182–184.

<sup>64</sup> See *Introduction in: The Catechetical Oration...*, p. xxxvii. Cf. R.J. Kees, *Die Lehre...*, p. 182–183. The author points out that, thanks to his holistic anthropology, Gregory does not in fact reduce the effects of baptism exclusively to the spiritual dimension.

<sup>65</sup> GNO 3/4, 86, 10–11.

<sup>66</sup> GNO 3/4, 93, 1–8. English Translation: *Select Writings and Letters of Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated with Prolegomena, notes and Indices*, eds. W. Moore, H.-A. Wilson, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Second Series, vol. 5, New York–Oxford–London 1893, p. 504.

According to the Cappadocian apophatic, life is, in this case, the term for God. This time κοινωνία denotes man's communion with God in the spiritual aspect. Moreover, Gregory defines a causal relationship between two crucial concepts denoting union in an anthropological context in the above sentence. In the case of the life of the human soul with God, ἔνωσις turns out to be the foundation of κοινωνία. Moreover, the clear distinction between the concept of κοινωνία and the expression ἔνωσις, which is understood as the effect of the soul's striving for union (ἀνακεράννυμι) with salvation, indicates that κοινωνία, in addition to emphasising unity, contains, more clearly than ἔνωσις, the idea of diversity. This conclusion corresponds with the uses of the concept in the context of Trinitology and Christology examined above. Once again, we can see Gregory's distinction between the terms κοινωνία and μετουσία. The former here signifies spiritual union, while the latter signifies another corporeal mode of participation with the Saviour.

In the context of the Eucharist, the expression κοινωνία occurs twice in both cases in the context of the body of Christ, defined by the term θεοδόχος. The first refers to the divinisation of the human body accomplished by consuming the Eucharist. The God-receiving body of Christ (θεοδόχος σῶμα) is the only way of human union with God, which appears as participation in indestructibility (μετουσία τῆς ἀφθαρσίας) achieved through communion with immortality (τὸ ἀθάνατον κοινωνία).<sup>67</sup>

The word κοινωνία here refers to the community of participation between God and man that we have in the person of the Saviour. In contrast, the word μετουσία describes the effect of the divine-human community of human participation in God associated with baptism and the Eucharist. It is another clear distinction between the modes of participation expressed by κοινωνία and μετουσία.

In the second case, there is an even more evident emphasis on the material aspect of divinisation in the sacramental economy of grace.<sup>68</sup> The body of Christ receiving God (θεοδόχος σὰρξ) proves to be the condition for the possibility of human encounter with God. In this case, Gregory also emphasises the soteriological dimension of the divine-human communion (θεότητος κοινωνία), which becomes a way for humanity to be "co-deified" (συναποθεωθῆ). It is another usage in which the term κοινωνία refers to the hypostatic union. As in the first case, Gregory distinguishes the term κοινωνία from verbs denoting the act of unifica-

<sup>67</sup> GNO 3/4, 94, 8–16.

<sup>68</sup> GNO 3/4, 97, 20–21.

tion (in this case *καταμίγνυμι*) to denote a state of union between man and God that preserves the difference and autonomy of the two sides.<sup>69</sup>

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, Gregory of Nyssa employs the New Testament and ancient philosophical concepts while making them more specific. In Trinitarian theology, he develops the idea of the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, noting that it cannot be understood as participation. In Christology, what is new concerning both Greek philosophy and the New Testament is that *κοινωνία* is used to show divine initiative. This word in the *Great Catechism* primarily denotes the divine-human communion into which the Son of God enters. Through the Saviour's corporeality, through the sacramental order, man becomes a participant in the divine-human community. Moreover, the first man to receive God (*θεοδόχος*) and to respond to the Creator is Christ himself. Thus, on the one hand, the Neoplatonic scheme of emanation is transcended, and, on the other hand, the New Testament understanding is refined and deepened. Gregory of Nyssa develops the notion of *κοινωνία* using the achievements of Greek philosophy while at the same time not abandoning the originality of Christianity given by Revelation, consciously clarifying and distinguishing the terms used. It is also noteworthy that within the broad semantic range of the term *κοινωνία*, there is also an anthropological thread: the word refers to man's communion with God in both the spiritual and physical dimensions. Having analysed the line drawn in this article with which the concept of *κοινωνία* links the three most essential sections of theology presented in the *Great Catechism*, one can better understand one of the critical concepts synthetically permeating, in a multidimensional manner, the universe of thought of the dogmatics of the youngest of the Cappadocian Fathers. It seems reasonable to verify the above hypothesis in further research on other texts by Gregory.

Moreover, *κοινωνία* is used by Gregory to describe the union of the radically different natures – divine and human – contained in the divine person of Christ. Nyssen deliberately chooses this term as the one that best exposes the role of the difference between the Creator and the creature,<sup>70</sup> thus allowing the autonomy and identity of man and the world to be preserved while pointing to the reality and intimacy of

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<sup>69</sup> J.R. Bouchet observes a similar relationship between the nouns *σύνοδος*, meaning the act of uniting, and *μίξις*, meaning the state, also referred to by the author as *κοινωνία*. Idem, *Vocabulaire de l'union...*, p. 54.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. H. Urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought. Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, trans. M. Sebanc, San Francisco 1988, p. 18–19; see also: A.A. Mosshammer, *The Created and the Uncreated in Gregory of Nyssa*, in: *El contra Eunomium I' en la producción literaria de Gregorio di Nissa*, ed. L.F. Mateo-Seco, J.L. Bastero, Navarra 1988, p. 353–379.

divinisation. In this way, Gregory of Nyssa, referring to the Mystery of the Incarnation, transcends the dialectical account of unity and multiplicity characteristic of Platonism.<sup>71</sup> This issue occupies a prominent place in contemporary theological discourse.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the briefly outlined characterisation of the concept of κοινωνία in the *Great Catechism* reveals the possibility for further study of this concept, which has not yet been developed in detail in the context of Gregory of Nyssa's Christology.

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<sup>71</sup> J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique. Doctrine Spirituelle de saint Grégoire de Nysse*, Paris 1944, p. 39–45.

<sup>72</sup> See R.J. Woźniak, *Różnica i Tajemnica. Objawienie jako teologiczne źródło ludzkiej sobości*, Poznań 2012.

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**Keywords:** Gregory of Nyssa, κοινωνία, μετουσία, trinitology, chrystology, sacramentology, unity and difference

## KOINΩNIA I METΟΥΣΙΑ W ORATIO CATECHETICA MAGNA GRZEGORZA Z NYSSY. KONTEKST TERMINOLOGICZNY I ZNACZENIE DLA TEOLOGII TRYNITARNEJ, CHRYSSTOLOGII I SAKRAMENTOLOGII

### Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia analizę porównawczą użycia terminów *κοινωνία* i *μετουσία* w kontekstach trynitarnym, chrystologicznym i soteriologicznym, a także sakramentalnym w *Oratio catechetica magna* Grzegorza z Nyssy. W rezultacie możemy zauważyć, że Grzegorz świadomie i precyzyjnie rozróżnia omawiane pojęcia i traktuje termin *κοινωνία* jako pomost łączący sporne tematy teologii dogmatycznej. Co więcej, analiza pokazuje, że użycie przez biskupa Nyssy terminu *κοινωνία* zdradza jego pragnienie przekroczenia dialektycznego rozumienia relacji między jednością a różnicą. Zamiast tej koncepcji wywodzącej się z platonizmu Grzegorz poszukuje syntetycznego ujęcia, które zachowuje autonomię i niezależność, a jednocześnie możliwość prawdziwej jedności między Bogiem a człowiekiem. Konkluzją analizy jest potrzeba dalszych badań nad wykorzystaniem pojęcia *κοινωνία* w dziełach najmłodszego z ojców kapadockich.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Grzegorz z Nyssy, *κοινωνία*, *μετουσία*, trynitologia, chrystologia, sakramentologia, jedność i różnica