



The Doctrine of the Infinity of God and Its Implications: Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa

DAMIAN MRUGALSKI 

The Catholic Academy in Warsaw – Collegium Bobolanum, mnichop@gmail.com

Abstract: This article aims to demonstrate that the concept of God's infinity, as developed by Gregory of Nyssa in many of his works, may have been influenced by earlier Christian theology, rather than solely by Plotinus' philosophy, as many contemporary scholars believe. One of the theologians who introduced this concept before Plotinus was Clement of Alexandria, who not only defined God as the infinite One, but also, like Gregory, drew important anthropological conclusions from the notion of infinity. After an introduction describing the history of research on the presence of a positively understood concept of the infinity of God in Christian theology before Plotinus, the article compares the doctrine of Clement of Alexandria with that of Gregory of Nyssa in the following three thematic sections: (1) the infinity of the incorporeal being; (2) the infinity of the Good; and (3) the infinity of the process of human assimilation to God. The method adopted in the article is a comparative analysis of ancient texts. The research carried out leads to the conclusion that both Clement and Gregory understand the nature of the infinite God similarly, use similar metaphors and argumentation, and believe that the process of human assimilation to God extends into infinity.

Keywords: God, infinity, infinity of God, assimilation to God, negative theology, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Plotinus, Origen

1. Introduction: A Brief History of Some Misunderstandings

Charles Bigg, a 19th-century English scholar, in his lectures held at Oxford University, stated:

What an absurd yet mischievous word is “infinite,” purely material in all its associations, and as unmeaning when applied to spirit as “colourless” or “imponderable” would be. Yet it is habitually used as if it were the highest term of reverence. To a Platonist, “infinite” means almost the same as “evil.” Limitation is of the essence of truth and of beauty. (Bigg 1913, 198)

The Platonist to whom the Oxford scholar refers was Origen, who in his work *De principiis* was to state that the power and wisdom of God are finite (see *Princ.* 2.9.1; cf. *Princ.* 3.5.2; 4.4.8; *Comm. Matt.* 13.1).¹ I report Bigg's opinion here because in 1978

¹ Although in the passages indicated, Origen speaks only of the finite number of creatures created by God and of the fact that the infinite cannot be comprehended, Bigg unjustifiably applies these theses to God. For, in fact, he states: “The God of Origen is no longer the Unconditioned. He is not Absolute but Perfect,

Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti, two eminent scholars of Origen's thought, alluded to it in their commentary incorporated into the critical edition of the *De principiis* (see Crouzel and Simonetti 1978, 213). These researchers agree with the thesis of the 19th-century scholar and state that it was only Plotinus who introduced the positively understood concept of infinity into philosophical discourse, whereas "Origen remained in the Hellenistic view: the finitude of God's power is required by his very perfection." (Crouzel and Simonetti 1978, 213) Indeed, according to many Greek philosophers before Plotinus, what is infinite is incomplete, indeterminate, and therefore imperfect.² This opinion and the passages from *De principiis* quoted by the above scholars have been reproduced in numerous encyclopedias and dictionaries of theology and philosophy. In the same vein, numerous authors of patristic handbooks and monographs, echoing the opinion of Crouzel and Simonetti, claim that Gregory of Nyssa was the first Judeo-Christian author to develop a positively understood concept of the infinity of God based on Plotinus' philosophy.³

I do not wish to develop this thread here because some of my previous articles have already demonstrated that the passages referred to by Crouzel and Simonetti do not actually represent Origen's view, but that of the emperor Justinian.⁴ I would only point out that in the Latin translation of the work *De principiis* by Rufinus, the statement on the finite power of God does not appear,⁵ whereas in Origen's texts preserved in Greek, the term ἀπέτρον is used in reference to God (see *Philoc.* 23.20; *Or.* 27.16; *Cels.* 3.77). Moreover, Origen explicitly states that God's wisdom and knowledge have no limits and that man's pursuit of the inscrutable riches of God's wisdom and knowledge can have no end (see *Hom. Num.* 17.4.2; cf. *Philoc.* 23.20; *Sel. Ps.* 144 [PG 12, 1673a]; *Princ.* 4.3.14). This is because the infinite can neither be embraced nor comprehended by a finite intellect. Nevertheless, Origen's predecessors, namely Philo of Alexandria and Clement of Alexandria, also frequently spoke

and perfection is itself a condition. He is perfectly wise, perfectly just, perfectly mighty, but the perfection of these attributes consists precisely in the fact that they are limited by one another." (Bigg 1913, 198)

² See Gilson 1955, 38; Owen 2006, 668; Reale 2018, 2332–33.

³ See Sweeney 1998, 6–9; Meredith 1999, 13–14; Simonetti 2000, 120; Moore 2001, 43–47; Moreschini 2005, 136; 2008, 171; Neidhart 2008, 533–37; Reale 2018, 2025–27; Young 2010, 165–69; Meredith 2010, 477–80; Achtnner 2011, 27; Lilla 2014, 231; Moran 2014, 512; Krainer 2019, 21–36.

⁴ See Mrugalski 2017, 437–75; 2018, 493–526; 2022, 69–84; 2024, 467–78.

⁵ It should be made clear at this point that many scholars of Origen's thought have no confidence in the Latin translation of the work *De principiis* made by Rufinus. In fact, the ancient translator repeatedly attempted to correct the Master so that his statements would sound orthodox from the perspective of post-Nicene theology. In this vein, Paul Koetschau, author of the critical edition of *De principiis*, decided to paste parallel passages preserved in Greek into the Latin text of the work. Unfortunately, some fragments come from Origen's accusers, who might also have altered the original sense of the Alexandrian thinker's statements. Thus, in the case of the statement on the finite power of God, Koetschau quotes a passage from the Emperor Justinian's *Letter to Mennas* (see Koetschau 1913, 164). Although Crouzel and Simonetti hold that this passage is not an exact quotation from the *De principiis*, they believe that the idea contained in it reflects the thought of Origen (see Crouzel and Simonetti 1978, 211–13).

in their works of the infinity of God and the infinite process of man's assimilation to God.⁶ This fact, however, has been overlooked by many scholars, including those of Gregory of Nyssa, who believed that Gregory, in his doctrine of the infinity of God, either relied on Plotinus or developed his own approach to arrive at the concept of the infinity of God positively understood. One of these scholars was Ekkehard Mühlenberg, who wrote the now-classic monograph *Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa*. In this work, Mühlenberg argues that Gregory of Nyssa is the first thinker, contrary to the Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy, who describes God's essence using the term infinite (Mühlenberg 1966, 27). The basis for this assertion is precisely the thesis he states at the beginning of his monograph, namely that Origen was still the heir of Greek philosophy on the negative understanding of the concept of infinity. Gregory, on the contrary, in his works "consciously wants to refute classical philosophy, because he rightly suspects that it lies behind Origen's position." (Mühlenberg 1966, 27) In the chapter dedicated to Origen, the researcher refers to the passage from *Princ.* 2.9.1, mentioned above, and more specifically to its Greek version derived from the Emperor Justinian's *Letter to Mennas*, and uncritically finds this version reliable. Afterwards, by citing numerous texts which demonstrate a negative understanding of infinity in Greek philosophers and at the same time failing to analyze other texts by Origen in which a positively understood concept of infinity appears, Mühlenberg arbitrarily concludes that the Alexandrian thinker was the heir of Greek thought (Mühlenberg 1966, 78–80). The scholar takes a similar approach to the doctrine of Clement of Alexandria, the predecessor of Origen. Although in the chapter devoted to him, he cites a passage in which the infinity of God is stated, he underestimates its importance. He does not mention or analyze other texts by Clement that refer to the infinite process of man's assimilation to God. In fact, he states outright that Gregory's dependence on Clement cannot be established, as Clement does not know the positive concept of the infinite and does not speak of the assimilation of man to God that extends *ad infinitum* (Mühlenberg 1966, 75–76).

The lack of in-depth research into the concept of infinity in the doctrines of Christian thinkers before Plotinus, or the repetition of common and unexamined theses claiming that Plotinus was the first thinker to introduce a positively understood concept of the infinity of God into philosophical discourse, leads scholars dealing with theology developed after Plotinus to come to erroneous conclusions. In fact, many of them uncritically assert that either Gregory of Nyssa was the first theologian to incorporate Neoplatonism into Christianity, and with it the positively understood concept of the infinity of the Absolute, or that Gregory of Nyssa was the first theologian to develop the positively understood concept of the infinity of God in Christian theology, but arrived at it independently of Plotinus. Meanwhile, neither

⁶ For example, see Philo, *Opif.* 23; *Sacr.* 59, 124; *Conf.* 171–72; *Post.* 151, 174; *Somn.* 1.12; *Her.* 31–32. For Clement of Alexandria's statements on the infinity of God, see below.

thesis is accurate. The concept of the positively understood infinity of God was present in Christianity from its very beginnings. Furthermore, it had already appeared in Hellenistic Judaism, that is, at the time of the encounter between the Bible and Greek philosophy.⁷ In turn, Gregory of Nyssa was the heir to this ancient theology and significantly developed the themes raised by Jewish and Christian thinkers over the first four centuries of the Common Era.

This article attempts to demonstrate that Gregory of Nyssa may have been inspired by Clement of Alexandria's doctrine of the infinity of God, but also by the implications that the Alexandrian thinker draws from this doctrine. This study is divided into three parts: (1) the infinity of the incorporeal being; (2) the infinity of the Good; and (3) the infinity of the process of human assimilation to God. Each part compares the statements of Gregory of Nyssa and those of Clement of Alexandria on the concept of infinity, including those that Mühlberg, as well as many other scholars after him, have overlooked in their research.

2. The Infinity of the Incorporeal Being

Before examining the concept of the infinity of incorporeal being, a few remarks must be made about certain ontological premises present in both the doctrine of Clement of Alexandria and that of Gregory of Nyssa.⁸ Both thinkers adopt the Platonic division of all reality, namely, they distinguish between the level of intelligible being (*νοητός*) and the level of perceptible being (*αἰσθητός*). The former is incorporeal and knowable by means of the intellect, while the latter is corporeal and knowable by means of the senses (Plato, *Tim.* 27d–28a; *Phaed.* 65c–66a; *Resp.* 477a, 509d; *Phaedr.* 247c–e). According to Plato, the intelligible beings are the Ideas and God, i.e., the Demiurge, as discussed in the *Timaeus*, as well as the Idea of the Good, described, for instance, in the *Republic*. Plato does not consider the latter as being, but as existing beyond being (*ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας*) (*Resp.* 509b). However, the Idea of the

⁷ It is worth noting on this occasion, however, that a number of works have recently been published whose authors have begun to notice the presence of a positively understood notion of infinity in theological thought before Plotinus (see Geljon 2005, 152–77; Tzamalikos 2006, 245–59; Ramelli 2017a, 194–98; 2018, 326–39). These publications, however, contain only a few exemplary quotations demonstrating the positively understood concept of infinity in Philo of Alexandria or Origen. They do not discuss the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical concepts that the doctrine of God's infinity implies. Unfortunately, many scholars have failed to notice these publications and continue to repeat the common theses I wrote about above.

⁸ I will merely touch here on some general aspects of the philosophy of Clement and Gregory, which will serve as a basis for further analysis. For more on the philosophy of both authors, see Völker 1955, 23–48; Lilla 1971; Wyrwa 1983; Peroli 1993; Osborn 2005, 81–131; Hägg 2006, 71–206; Moreschini 2013, 315–59, 747–821; 2005, 100–127, 571–616; 2008, 160–236; Zachhuber 2020, 15–71; Havrda 2021, 357–71.

Good is also of an intelligible nature, since it is knowable by means of the intellect (see *Resp.* 508e, 516b, 517b–c, 518c, 532a–b). The perceptible beings, on the other hand, are the material things of the visible world. A similar distinction is also made by Plato's later interpreters, known as the Middle Platonists, with the difference, however, that in their doctrines the Platonic Ideas become thoughts of the transcendent God.⁹ This doctrine was first formulated by Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish thinker also numbered among the Middle Platonists.¹⁰ The influence of Philo's doctrine on the thought of later Christian thinkers, including Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa, is evident and has been described by many scholars.¹¹

Having said that, we can now move on to the question of infinity that interests us. As already mentioned, many scholars believe Gregory of Nyssa to be the first Judeo-Christian thinker who, in opposition to Platonic-Aristotelian metaphysics, developed a doctrine of a positively understood infinity of God. In fact, Plato, while defining Ideas as simple and incorporeal, does not pronounce on their infiniteness. On the contrary, he defines Ideas as measures of things, and since they are measures, they cannot be infinite (see *Phileb.* 16c–e; 26c–27b). In fact, they indicate what a thing is; they define it, that is, they impose certain limits on things. An Idea, therefore, is not and cannot be unlimited, otherwise it could not be the measure of finite things. Aristotle, on the other hand, maintains that there cannot exist an infinity in act. Since everything that has a form and is actualized also has definite limits. According to Aristotle, the infinite can be said to exist only in potency, for instance, as a process of addition or division (see *Phys.* 206a–207b). Gregory of Nyssa disagrees with the theses of Plato and Aristotle, since in his *Homilies on the Song of Songs* he states (*Cant.* 6: GNO 6, 173,9–174,1):

Hence we reckon something to fall into the category of the perceptible (*αἰσθητόν*) to the extent that it is grasped by sense perception, but we reckon as intelligible (*νοητόν*) that which falls beyond the observation of the senses. Of these two, the intelligible has neither limit (*ἄπειρον*) nor bound (*άόριστον*), while the other is entirely contained by particular limits. For since matter in its totality is grasped in terms of quantity and quality, which determine its bulk and form and surface and shape, what one sees of it constitutes, in its case, a limit to what is known about it, so that the person who is investigating materiality has nothing apart from some one of these characteristics to lay hold of in the imagination. Contrariwise, that which is intelligible and immaterial, being released from such confines, escapes limit and is bounded by nothing.

⁹ For more on the concept of Ideas as God's thoughts in the various Middle Platonists, see Dillon 1996; Ferrari 2005, 233–46; Tarrant 2010, 63–99; Ferrari 2015, 321–37; 2020, 239–61.

¹⁰ See Runia 1999, 154–58. A different view is presented by John Dillon, who sees the doctrine of the Ideas as thoughts of God as far back as the Old Academy (see Dillon 2019, 35–49; cf. Mrugalski 2020, 159–70).

¹¹ See Hoek 1988; Runia 1993, 132–56, 243–61; Ramelli 2017b, 80–110; Geljon 2002; Mira 2010, 601–3.

Later in the work cited, Gregory makes another distinction. Thus, intelligible nature is divided into two kinds: the first is uncreated and creates other beings, and the second is created. The former is, by nature, immutable and infinite, while the latter is mutable; yet, precisely because of this mutability, it is also infinite. For it can continually grow in and assimilate to the Good in which it participates from the very moment of creation. Since the uncreated Good is infinite, the assimilation to it by rational created natures will continue into infinity (see *Cant.* 6: GNO 6, 174,1–20). We will return to the latter topic in the last section of this paper, where we will analyze the concept of *homoiosis theo*, that is, the infinite process of man's assimilation to God. Meanwhile, in the text quoted above, Gregory derives the concept of the infinite from the very notion of incorporeality. Thus, that which is not corporeal has no boundaries set by form, appearance, figure, or any other kind of property confining material beings.

Is it possible that this thesis was borrowed in some way from Clement of Alexandria? Well, as already noted, Clement, following Philo of Alexandria and ultimately Plato, also makes a distinction between intelligible nature, which he terms κόσμος νοητός, and perceptible nature, which he calls κόσμος αἰσθητός (*Strom.* 5.93.4). Unlike Plato, and as Gregory will later do, Clement divides intelligible nature into two kinds: uncreated and created. This distinction is made by Clement while interpreting the first chapters of Genesis allegorically, which describe God's work of creation. What was created on the first day, according to Clement, was the world of Ideas, and at the same time the archetype of the perceptible world (see *Strom.* 5.93.4–94.6). As for God, Clement refers to him by the term “uncreated” (ἀγένητος) (*Strom.* 5.68.2) and, in many places in his writings, emphasizes the Divine radical transcendence. Thus, God does not have physical qualities such as form, appearance, depth, width, length, or any other such characteristics (see *Strom.* 5.71.2–5; 6.114.4; 7.30.1). Since he is invisible and infinite (ἀόρατος καὶ ἀπερίγραφος), he cannot be represented in any image, nor can any temple enclose him (see *Strom.* 5.74.4–6; 7.28.1; 7.30.1). Moreover, not only the temple, but as Clement writes elsewhere, no place can contain God, because “He is beyond space and time and anything belonging to created beings. Similarly, He is not found in any section. He is never in a part or by delimitation or separation, as he contains everything in Himself, but is not contained by anything.” (*Strom.* 2.6.1–2) However, there is one statement in which Clement derives the notion of God's infinity directly from the concept of incorporeality (*Strom.* 5.81.5–82.2; translation by the author):

This discourse concerning God is the most difficult to handle. For since it is difficult to find the principle of everything, it is by all means hard to indicate the absolutely first and oldest principle that is the cause of the origin of all other beings, as well as those that have come into being. For how can that be expressed which is neither genus, nor difference, nor species, nor an individual, nor a number, nor an attribute, nor something to which an attribute can be attributed? No one can adequately name him as a whole. For the whole

is a category of magnitude, whereas he is the Father of the whole (of the universe). Nor, finally, can one speak of parts in Him. For the One is indivisible (ἀδιαιρέτον); therefore also he is infinite (ἀπειρον), not in the meaning of being non-traversable (οὐ κατὰ τὸ ἀδιεξίτητον), but in relation to his being without dimensions (ἀδιάστατον) and having no limits (πέρας). Therefore, he has no form or name. And if, by all means, we name him (albeit not in the proper sense), either the One, or the Good, or Mind, or Being itself, or God, or Creator, or Lord, we speak not as if we were pronouncing his name; rather we use noble names as auxiliaries, so that the mind may have them as points of support and not err in other respects. For each of them by itself does not express God, but all of them together point to the power of the Omnipotent.

In the above text, Clement clearly refers to the theses put forward by Plato and Aristotle regarding the notion of infinity. In stating that the One is indivisible (ἀδιαιρέτον) and therefore infinite (ἀπειρον), he alludes to one of the hypotheses put forward in Plato's *Parmenides* (see 137c-d). On the other hand, by specifying what he means, namely by claiming that infinity, in the case of God, does not consist in being non-traversable (ἀδιεξίτητον), he dissociates himself from Aristotle's thesis. In fact, the latter, in one of the definitions of infinity provided in *Physics*, states that infinity, understood as something that cannot be traversed, does not exist either in act or in potency (see *Phys.* 206b 22 ff.). Clement, however, does not stop at these two allusions to ancient philosophers. However, in his definition of infinity, he explains that when thinking of God's infinity, the absolute absence of dimension (διάστασις) and limit (πέρας) must be taken into account.¹² The term ἀδιάστατον, which he uses here, does not seem to appear in any context concerning infinity before Clement (see Choufrine 2002, 167). After Clement, however, it also occurs in Plotinus and Gregory of Nyssa. The latter, in his *Contra Eunomium*, states (*Eun.* 3.7.33: GNO 2, 226,25–227,2):

Or how can one encompass infinity (τὸ ἀόριστον) with beginning and end? “Beginning” and “end” are words for dimensional limits (διαστηματικῶν περάντων). When there is no dimension (διαστάσεως) there are no limits, either. But of course the divine nature

¹² For a more detailed analysis of the passages of *Strom.* 5.81.5–82.2, see Osborn 1957, 27–31; Mühlenberg 1966, 29–76; Whittaker 1976, 155–72. Meanwhile, Arkadi Choufrine, while criticizing the analyses of the aforementioned scholars, notes (Choufrine 2002, 165–66): “Unfortunately, neither Mühlenberg nor Osborn notices the difference in the subject matter between the *Parmenides* and the Hellenistic interpretations. It is only natural then that they fail to notice the uniqueness of Clement's interpretation of 'the One.' For Osborn, Clement has just 'expressed the idea of the First Hypothesis in the Christian context' (Osborn 1957, 27). What makes Clement's departure from Plato radical, I believe, is that the notion of 'the One' in *Parmenides* is the object of reflection on the paradoxes of language only; whereas with Clement, it first becomes the tool of reflection on the paradoxes of God. The first (and perhaps, so far, the only) scholar to have noticed the priority of Clement was Whittaker. His interest, however, was not so much in Clement as it was in the evidence one can draw from Clement's text for the 'pre-Plotinian theological interpretation of the First Hypothesis' (Whittaker 1976, 159).”

is unextended (ἀδιάστατος), and being unextended, has no limit; it is, and the unlimited (ἀπεράτωτον) is called infinite (ἄπειρον). So it is futile to circumscribe (περιγράφειν) the infinite with beginning and end: the circumscribed cannot be infinite.

In the above passage, we can easily find references to the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*. However, in addition to these references, Gregory's statement also contains clarifications that we find precisely in the works of Clement of Alexandria regarding the concept of the infinite. Both thinkers agree that what is absolutely without extension or dimension (ἀδιάστατος) cannot have any limits (πέρας).¹³ Therefore, the infinity of God is due to his incorporeality and simplicity. What is incorporeal cannot be completely traversed in the physical sense, as Clement stresses, nor encompassed by anything, as Gregory emphasizes.¹⁴ It is not, therefore, a question of infinity in the sense of being non-traversable (οὐ κατὰ τὸ ἀδιεξίτητον), such as Aristotle reflected upon when thinking of beings composed of form and matter. According to Clement and Gregory, it is possible to speak of the infinity of an immaterial and therefore dimensionless being. Such a being is God, who, having neither parts nor beginning nor end, nor any other limit, can rightly be termed unlimited (ἀπέραντος)¹⁵ and consequently infinite (ἄπειρος) and thus uncircumscribed (ἀπερίγραφος).

Finally, it is worth noting that both authors also similarly link the question of the infinity of the Divine nature to the issue of its unknowability and ineffability. Mentions of the issue occur in the texts cited above. Since this theme is related to the intellectual-ethical process of man's assimilation to God, we will develop it in the last part of this article. Here, we merely aimed to illustrate that both Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa employ a similar argumentation that links the notion of God's infinity to the question of the incorporeality of his nature, and that on this occasion, both authors make use of the same technical terms related to the issue of infinity, such as πέρας, ἀπέραντος, ἀδιάστατος, ἀπερίγραφος.

¹³ For the notion of διάστημα and the concept of the being διαστηματικός and ἀδιάστατος in Gregory of Nyssa, see *Eccl.* 7: GNO 5, 412–13; Völker 1955, 28–35; Peroli 1993, 43–51; Douglass 2010, 227–28.

¹⁴ It should be noted, however, that it is not only Gregory who emphasizes that God cannot be encompassed by anything. Clement, too, in a number of places in his writings, notes that God and his Logos, due to the incorporeality and infinity of the divine nature, are not encompassable. In doing so, he employs the term ἀπερίγραφος, or the formula περιέχων οὐ περιεχόμενος. The latter also occurs repeatedly in Philo of Alexandria, but also in Gnostic texts (cf. Clem., *Strom.* 2.6.2; 5.74.4; 7.5.5; Philo, *Conf.* 136; *Post.* 7; *Somm.* 1.63–64; Epiph., *Pan.* 31.5.3).

¹⁵ The term ἀπέραντος occurs in the *Strom.* 5.81.3, and is employed by Clement to describe the “womb of God,” which is the divine Logos. Like the “womb” such a Logos is impenetrable and impassable. The theme, however, is connected to the unknowability of the Divine essence and the infinite process of man's cognition of God, which will be discussed below. I now mention this text to draw attention to similar technical terms related to the issue of infinity that appear in Clement and Gregory.

3. The Infinity of the Good

Gregory of Nyssa emphasizes in several places in his works that the Good, which is God, has no limits. The limit of Good should be some evil or vice. This, however, is not attributable to God. Such a reasoning emerges in the aforementioned *Homilies on the Song of Songs* (see *Cant.* 5: GNO 6, 157–58), in the *Contra Eunomium* (see *Eun.* 1.168–169: GNO 1, 77; 1.236–237: GNO 1, 95–96), and in the *Life of Moses* (see *Vit. Moys.* 1.5–7: GNO 7/1, 4). Of course, in each of these writings, the line of argumentation varies somewhat, either because it is an elaboration of themes appearing in particular texts of Scripture or because it is a response to Eunomius' theses.¹⁶ However, it is worth dwelling on the basic framework of Gregory's argumentation on the infinity of the Good. Thus, in the *Life of Moses*, our author states the following (*Vit. Moys.* 1.5–7: GNO 7/1, 3,17–4,10):

No Good has a limit in its own nature but is limited by the presence of its opposite, as life is limited by death and light by darkness. And every good thing generally ends with all those things which are perceived to be contrary to the good. Just as the end of life is the beginning of death, so also stopping in the race of virtue marks the beginning of the race of evil....

The Divine One is himself the Good (in the primary and proper sense of the word), whose very nature is goodness. This he is and he is so named, and is known by this nature. Since, then, it has not been demonstrated that there is any limit to virtue except evil, and since the Divine does not admit of an opposite, we hold the divine nature to be unlimited and infinite (ἀόριστος ἄρα καὶ ἀπεράνωτος).

Can we find these kinds of arguments in Clement's writings? There are many examples where Clement emphasizes that doing good is a property of God's nature. God is, and has always been, good, even before the foundation of the world. If God stopped doing good, Clement argues, he would cease to be God (see *Strom.* 4.141.7–142.1), which is, of course, impossible. Although the theologian does not use the term "infinite" in these cases, he somehow assumes that God's power is inexhaustible and boundless. He says, e.g., that "God, being a good Father and becoming so in constant beneficence, remains inviolable in the identity of his goodness. For what is the use of good that does not act and do good?" (*Strom.* 6.104.3) The terms ἀναλλοίωτος and ἀπαράβατος, used in this context, indicate the immutability, perpetuity, and therefore eternity of God's benevolent activity.

All the statements of Clement quoted here, however, are only part of the argument presented by Gregory. For the latter not only argues that it is an attribute of

¹⁶ For a more detailed analysis of Gregory's passages containing different types of argumentation for the infinity of the Good, see Mühlenberg 1966, 100–147; Böhm 1996, 108–49; Geljon 2005, 152–68; Ramelli 2010, 623–26.

God's nature to do good continually and that in this beneficent activity God is immutable,¹⁷ but also that the good can only be limited by its opposite, that is, by evil or vice. Nevertheless, there is a passage in which Clement, rejecting the view that pagan philosophy might have been the work of the devil and proving that it is the work of a good God, mentions opposites, which also occur in Gregory's text given above (*Strom. 6.159.4–7*):

For as the lyre is only for the harper, and the flute for the flute-player; so good things are the possessions of good men. As the nature of the beneficent is to do good, as it is of the fire to warm, and the light to give light, and a good man will not do evil, or light produce darkness, or fire cold; so, again, vice cannot do aught virtuous. For its activity is to do evil, as that of darkness to dim the eyes. Philosophy is not, then, the product of vice, since it makes men virtuous; it follows, then, that it is the work of God, whose work it is solely to do good. And all things given by God are given and received well.

What links the above text of Clement with that of Gregory is the statement that realities such as good or light cannot be the cause of that which is opposite to them, namely evil and darkness. Since it is a property of the Divine nature to do only good, God cannot be the cause of evil or vice. However, can evil done by others put an end to God's beneficent activity? The answer to this question is found elsewhere in the *Stromateis*, where Clement explicitly states that there is no such possibility (*Strom. 1.85.6–86.3*):

Nothing can oppose God (τῷ θεῷ δὲ οὐδὲν ἀντίκειται); nothing can stand in his path (οὐδὲ ἐναντιοῦται τι αὐτῷ); he is Lord and ruler of all. But the plans and actions of the rebel angels are partial only, and spring from a rotten disposition, like bodily diseases. But the Providence who directs the universe directs them to a healthy conclusion even if the original cause is disease ridden. At any rate, the supreme example of God's Providence lies in his not allowing the evil which springs from that freely chosen rebellion to lie in unprofitable uselessness, still less to become totally baneful. It is the work of divine wisdom, excellence, and power not only to create good (this is, so to speak, God's nature, as it is the nature of fire to warm, and light to illuminate) but above all to bring a course of action devised through some evil intentions to a good, valuable conclusion, and to make beneficial use of things which seem bad.

Let us first note that the above text again advances the thesis that God's nature is solely to do good (τὸ ἀγαθοποιεῖν), just as the nature of fire is to warm and of light to illuminate. Nothing can put an end to this beneficent activity of God, and nothing

¹⁷ It is worth noting, however, that Gregory, similarly to Clement, introduces the premise of God's immutability into his argument for the infinity of the Good. Although it does not appear in the passage from the *Life of Moses* quoted above, it occurs in other writings (see *Eun. 1.169*: GNO 1, 77; *Cant. 6*: GNO 6, 174).

can oppose it (τῷ θεῷ δὲ οὐδὲν ἀντίκειται οὐδὲ ἐναντιοῦται τι αὐτῷ), not even the rebel angels who have consciously chosen evil. After all, God's beneficent activity can transform even evil chosen by others into good. Elsewhere, Clement asks why a good God could ever cease to do good. For incapacity? For lack of will? In answering, he states that neither the one nor the other can characterize an omnipotent and intrinsically good being (see *Strom.* 7.6.5).¹⁸ It follows that God's eternal beneficent activity has no limits, neither internal nor external.

To conclude this part of our argument, we must note that Clement, when considering the question of the nature of God as the Good that has no limits, does not employ the term ἄπειρος or its synonyms, as Gregory does. Nevertheless, the argumentation put forward by both authors is remarkably similar. God's beneficent activity is infinite not only temporally but also ontologically. No opposite can put a limit on it.

4. The Infinity of Human Assimilation to God

Gregory of Nyssa links the infinity of God with the doctrine of human assimilation to God (όμοιωσις θεῷ), a concept already present in many other pagan and Christian thinkers before Gregory, with its roots in Plato's famous statement in *Theaetetus*.¹⁹ In Gregory's doctrine, *homoiosis theo* denotes the intellectual-ethical process by which man, through the practice of the virtues and growth in knowledge, becomes more and more similar to God. However, since God is infinite, the process of man getting to know him and the process of man growing in the good must also be infinite. Indeed, a finite being can never fully embrace and thus comprehend the infinite, for this is logically impossible. However, neither can a finite being ever be good and love in the way that God does, because perfect goodness and love have

¹⁸ Also, Gregory of Nyssa, in one of his arguments in favour of the infinity of the Good, speaks of the absurdity of attributing a lesser or greater good to the Divine nature (see *Eun.* 1.169: GNO 1, 77). This argument occurs in the context of a polemic against Eunomius, who belittled the good that is the Logos. It is worth noting here that in *Strom.* 7.6.5 mentioned above, Clement of Alexandria also refers to Christ. And later on, he states that the Son is the activity of the Father and the power of the Father (see *Strom.* 7.8.1; 7.9.1).

¹⁹ See Plato, *Theaet.* 176a–b: “Therefore we ought to try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; and to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible (όμοιωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δύνατόν); and to become like God is to become righteous and holy and wise.” For more on the concept of man's assimilation to God in Gregory of Nyssa's predecessors see Merki 1952; Helleman 1990, 51–71; Annas 1999, 52–71; D. Russell 2004, 241–60; Lavecchia 2007; Osmánski 2007; Ashwin-Siejkowski 2008, 147–87; Reydams-Schils 2017, 142–58; Torri 2019, 228–50; Giardina 2022, 325–52; Torri 2024, 19–57. This issue also arises in various chapters of monographs that chronologically discuss the theological, anthropological, and ethical doctrines of individual ancient thinkers (see especially Dillon 1996; N. Russell 2004; Louth 2007).

no limits.²⁰ What is possible, however, is perpetual progress in the good, in love and in getting to know God, and thus a process that extends *ad infinitum* (*Eun.* 1.364: GNO 1, 134,17–26):

When someone has traversed the ages and all that exists in them, the contemplation of the divine nature displays to his mind a sort of boundless ocean (πέλαγος ἀχανές), and it will give no sign to indicate any beginning for itself, if he tries to extend his conceptual grasp to what lies beyond. So the one who busies himself with what is senior to the ages, and who goes back to the beginning of existent things, will not be able to stop at any point in his reasoning, for his quarry will always slip away ahead and will indicate no place where his curiosity of intellect can stop.

Similar statements referring not only to man's continual pursuit of knowing the Divine nature but also to man's participation in the infinite Good and continual growth in virtue may be found in many of Gregory's works. On these occasions, Gregory refers several times to a passage from St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians,²¹ in which the Apostle tells of his race toward the prize that is still ahead of him: "Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13–14). The same passage, and in a similar context, is also referred to by Clement, who wonders that "some people dare to call themselves perfect and Gnostics, laying claim in their inflated pride to a loftier state than the Apostle." (*Paed.* 1.52.2) In fact, the theologian notes, Paul "considers himself perfect, in the sense he has changed his old way of life and follows a better one, but not in the sense that he is perfect in knowledge (οὐχ ὡς ἐν γνώσει τέλειος). He only desires what is perfect." (*Paed.* 1.52,3) Just as for Gregory as for Clement, Paul is the symbol of the perfect Christian or Gnostic. His perfection, however, consists in a constant race, that is, in growing in the acquisition of knowledge rather than in the possession of it.²²

²⁰ The concept of human assimilation to God is linked to the doctrine of ἐπέκτασις, which stands at the centre of Gregorian spirituality, but also of Gregorian theology in general, since it is also linked to the theme of God's knowability, or rather the question of his unknowability and ineffability, as well as to Gregorian anthropology and eschatology. The term ἐπέκτασις alludes to the Apostle Paul's statement in Phil 3:13–14 and indicates the constant "straining forward" or "exerting oneself" and consequently "transcending oneself" which is present in the intellectual-ethical process aimed at knowing God and uniting with him. However, because of the infinity of God's essence, ἐπέκτασις will accompany man even after death, throughout eternity, and will never end. For more on this subject, see Daniélou 1944, 291–307; Mateo-Seco 2010, 263–68; Ramelli 2018, 326–39; Smith 2018, 340–359.

²¹ See *Cant.* 5: GNO 6, 137–38; *Cant.* 6: GNO 6, 173–74; *Vit. Moys.* 1.5: GNO 7/1, 3; *Vit. Moys.* 2.225: GNO 7/1, 112.

²² Gregory also states that when it comes to virtue, it is difficult to define it as perfection (τελειότης). Because perfection is connected to finite being, that is, to the achievement of the goal (τέλος), whereas perfection, according to the Nyssenus, is a continuous and infinite growth in virtue. Thus, the perfection of virtue is not having an end (see *Vit. Moys.* 1.5–7).

However, the question remains as to whether Paul's race will reach its successful end, that is, whether the perfect Christian can comprehend the Divine Essence. If God is infinite, then gaining knowledge of him should also continue infinitely. According to Mühlenberg, such an understanding of infinity will not be found in Clement of Alexandria. Indeed, in his monograph on Gregory's notion of the infinity of God, he concludes the chapter discussing Clement's thought by stating: "A direct dependence of Gregory on Clement does not make sense to me, since Gregory unquestionably assumes that ἄπειρον contentually encompasses ἀδιεξίτητον and thus the *progressus in infinitum!*" (Mühlenberg 1966, 76) Mühlenberg, however, in discussing the theses of the Alexandrian thinker, focused only on the concept of the infinity of incorporeal being. This type of reflection also appears in Gregory of Nyssa, as already shown above. However, he did not examine Clement's assertions regarding the Gnostic process of getting to know God and assimilating to him. Meanwhile, Clement, after having expounded on the method of abstraction, named afterwards as *via negationis*, that is, purifying the notion of God from all physical connotations, adds (*Strom.* 5.71.3–4; translation by the author):

If, then, having abandoned everything that belongs to bodies and things called incorporeal, we throw ourselves into the magnitude of Christ (εἰς τὸ μέγεθος τοῦ Χριστοῦ) and from there we advance by sanctity into the abyss (εἰς τὸ ἀχανές), we would then move somehow towards an understanding of the Omnipotent, having become acquainted not with what he is, but with what he is not. And shape and motion, or state, or a throne, or place, or right side, or left side, are not at all to be conceived as belonging to the Father of the universe, although it is so written.

Having purified the notion of God from all categories proper to physical entities, and having thus achieved a notion of unity devoid of all corporeality, dimension, and position (see *Strom.* 5.71.2), Clement points to another way of getting knowledge of God. It is no longer the *via negationis*, but getting to know the magnitude (μέγεθος) of the Wisdom of God, who is Christ. This process is likened to traversing the abyss (ἀχανές), that is, something boundless. Let us remember that the term ἀχανές also occurs in Gregory's text given above (*Eun.* 1.364: GNO 1, 134,19), where the nature of God is compared to a boundless ocean (πέλαγος ἀχανές). Moreover, the thinker himself resorts to a similar metaphor when he mentions Paul's mystical experience of being raptured to the third heaven. According to Clement, the third heaven was not the end of the Apostle's intellectual journey. The third heaven is only the beginning, because beyond it stretches the inscrutable depths of wisdom and knowledge of God, which is compared precisely to the infinite ocean (ώκεανὸς ἀπέραντος) (*Strom.* 5.80.1–3). It is for this reason, according to Clement, that Paul exclaims: "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Rom 11:33). It should be noted,

however, that his metaphor no longer includes the term ἀχανές, which can also be translated as “vast” or “immense” but ἀπέραντος, which means “boundless” or “infinite.” Furthermore, referring to the passage in the *Prologue* of the Gospel of John that speaks of “the only-begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18), the Alexandrian thinker notes that “some have called this bosom the depth (βυθός), as containing and embosoming all things.” Consequently, Clement terms this Depth as “unreachable and infinite together (ἀνέφικτόν τε καὶ ἀπέραντον).” (*Strom.* 5.81.3–4)

Nevertheless, the infinity of divine wisdom is expressed by Clement not only through the metaphors of the boundless and immeasurable ocean, the abyss, or the depth, but also through specific technical terms that had appeared in Greek philosophy in relation to the notion of the infinite. Well, in one of his definitions, Aristotle states that the infinite is that which can be traversed, although the process of traversing it can never be brought to an end (τὸ διέξοδον ἔχον ἀτελεύτητον) (see *Phys.* 204a 2–7). According to the Stagirite, an infinite being, that is, one the traversing of which never reaches an end, does not exist. According to Clement, such a being is precisely the divine Logos. God, as we have seen above, is infinite because of his incorporeality and simplicity. This kind of infinity Clement connects, not with the issue of being incorporeal, but with the question of the absolute absence of dimension, of parts, and therefore of limits. The divine Logos is also incorporeal and therefore also has no dimension. However, since he is “wisdom, knowledge, truth and everything that has affinity with it,” the Logos has διέξοδον, which means that he is capable of being intellectually traversed (see *Strom.* 6.156.1). But since the Ideas and Powers of God, which exist in Him as a unity, are infinite, getting to know Him, or traversing Him intellectually, can never be brought to an end. “For in Him,” Clement states, “the end becomes a beginning and this in turn ends in a beginning again, never having any interruption (τὸ τέλος ἀρχὴ γίνεται καὶ τελευτὴ πάλιν ἐπὶ τὴν ἄνωθεν ἀρχήν, οὐδαμοῦ διάστασιν λαβών).” (*Strom.* 6.157.1–2)²³

The traversing, and thus the getting to know, of the infinite Wisdom of God by finite creatures is possible only through the grace of God (see *Strom.* 5.82.4). It is interesting to note that this grace, which God grants to souls progressing in

²³ The statement we have quoted here is part of Clement’s more extensive discourse on the Logos, which begins with the following words: “The Son does not become one as one, nor even many as [divided] parts, but one as all [things].” (*Strom.* 6.156.2) In this regard, Choufrine rightly notes that “Here Clement contrasts the ‘one as all [things]’ (which he elsewhere identifies with the monad) with the ‘one as one’ and the ‘many as [divided] parts.’ He does not give any reason for bringing together the three concepts. What might all three have in common? Interestingly, the three notions of infinity one finds in the *Parmenides* are precisely those; the one as one (the First Hypothesis; *Parm.* 137c), the one as many (the Second Hypothesis; *Parm.* 143a), and the many as many (the Fourth; *Parm.* 158c, and the Eighth Hypotheses; *Parm.* 165b–c). Clement thus seems to assume that the audience he addresses knows the *Parmenides* well enough to understand his belief that the infinity of the monad is to be construed in terms not of the First, Fourth or Eighth, but of the Second Hypothesis. Another conclusion one may draw is that for Clement there are two grades of infinity in God (corresponding to the monad and ‘the One’), the difference between which is technical enough for him to inscribe them without reservations into Plato’s scheme.” (Choufrine 2002, 174)

faith and holiness, is also infinite. However, it is received by them in a finite way, that is to say, according to the measure in which each of them can receive it. This is why Clement asserts that the Holy Spirit spreads in the believing soul in an infinite manner (ἀπεριγράφως), although according to the limit of each (κατὰ τὴν ἐκάστου περιγραφὴν) (see *Strom.* 6.120.2).²⁴ The soul, which is finite by nature, can, however, expand its boundaries as it advances in the assimilation to God. It is for this reason that the Alexandrian theologian states that the perfect Gnostic becomes more and more spiritual (πνευματικός) through a continual growth in faith, virtue, and knowledge, but also through the omnipotent power of God and the infinite love that unites him to the spirit (διὰ τῆς ἀορίστου ἀγάπης ἥνωται τῷ πνεύματι) (see *Strom.* 7.44.5–6). Thus, the intellectual and moral effort of the Gnostic in the spiritual process, but also the action of divine grace and infinite (ἀόριστος) love, expands the boundaries of the human soul, assimilating it (though never completely) to God. The human assimilation to God must never be completed, because God and His Wisdom are infinite. This does not mean, however, that we are dealing with some imperfection, although this is how many Greek philosophers conceived the infinite. Thus, fully aware of this, Clement emphasizes that getting to know God, in which the Gnostic participates, “aims at a goal that is infinite but perfect (πρὸς τέλος ἄγει τὸ ἀτελεύτητον καὶ τέλειον).” (*Strom.* 7.56.3; cf. *Strom.* 2.134.1–2; Choufrine 2002, 178–86) Let us recall that the term ἀτελεύτητος, employed by Clement, is found in one of Aristotle’s definitions of infinity, referred to above (*Phys.* 204a 5). It is also worth noting that, for the Stagirite, “what has no end cannot be perfect; and the end is the limit (τέλειον δ’ οὐδὲν μὴ ἔχον τέλος, τὸ δὲ τέλος πέρας).” (*Phys.* 207a 14) By contrast, according to the Alexandrian thinker, as later for the Nyssean, it is God who is an infinite but perfect being.²⁵ Similarly, human assimilation to God is also infinite but perfect.²⁶

²⁴ We find the same thought in Gregory of Nyssa. He also believes that getting to know the infinite God is possible only through grace, which he compares to spiritual nourishment. This super-abundant nourishment is received according to the measure of the recipient, but at the same time receiving it expands the boundaries of the recipient, so that the latter is able and desires to receive it more and more. The abundance of nourishing food, in turn, increases as the capacity of the recipient expands (see *An. et res.*: GNO 3/3, 77–79; *Beat.* 5: GNO 7/2, 122–23).

²⁵ Let us emphasize here that Gregory of Nyssa very often employs the term ἀτελεύτητος when referring to God. In *Contra Eunomium*, he even explains why God must be referred to, as ἀτελεύτητος (*Eun.* 1.669–670: GNO 1, 218,22–219,7): “Holding such a concept of him as befitting the God of the universe, we proclaim our thought by two titles, using ‘unbegotten’ (τῷ ἀγεννήτῳ) and ‘endless’ (τῷ ἀτελευτήτῳ) to express the infinity, perpetuity and eternity of the life of God. If only one of these were contemplated in the mind alone, and the other not referred to, then the meaning of the one would surely be impaired by the omission of the other. It is not possible to express correctly the meaning of either through just one of them: to say ‘endless’ is to show only the absence of any end, but tells one nothing about the beginning; to use the term ‘unbegotten’ demonstrates that the object denoted is superior to a beginning, but leaves ambiguous the question of the end.”

²⁶ The process of the Gnostic’s assimilation to God and, at the same time, his road to perfection has various stages, which we have not analysed here, and which have been identified and described by Piotr

In concluding this part of our argument, we can claim that Mühlenberg's conviction that Gregory's direct dependence on Clement does not make sense, since Gregory assumes that the notion of infinity includes being non-traversable, and thus the *progressus in infinitum* is not correct. As we have demonstrated in the examples above, Clement utilizes technical terms that originated in Greek philosophy in the discussion of the notion of the infinite. These are terms such as ἀδιεξίτητος, διέξοδος, ἀτελεύτητος, τέλος, or τέλειος. By using them and drawing metaphors comparing the Wisdom of God to the impassable and infinite ocean (a metaphor also used by Gregory), the abyss, and the depth, Clement makes it clear that he also conceives of the infinite as something non-traversable. The implication of God's infinity conceived in such a way is the doctrine of the human assimilation to God. That this is an endless but perfect process, Clement states *expressis verbis*, and his statements constitute an obvious polemic against Aristotle's theses. This very polemic may have been the inspiration for Gregory of Nyssa's theory of *epektasis*. The latter, after all, also states *expressis verbis* that, as far as virtue is concerned, it can hardly be defined as perfection (τελειότης), since what is perfect cannot have an end (τέλος). Although it is true that Clement, in discussing the infinite, rarely uses the term ἄπειρος (perhaps because of its earlier negative connotations), he does use other terms with which to describe the infinity of God's Wisdom or the infinity of man's assimilation to God. Besides the Aristotelian technical terms mentioned above, several others occur in a similar context in Gregory of Nyssa, including ἀπέραντος, ἀόριστος, ἀχανές, ἀπερίγραφος, περιγραφή, ἀδιάστατος, or διάστασις.

Ashwin-Siejkowski (see 2008, 147–232). Furthermore, it is worth noting that Clement incorporates not only elements of Platonic or Middle Platonic philosophy but also Stoic philosophy into his doctrine. After all, the aim of man's assimilation to God is also *apatheia* understood, not only as freedom from all passions, but also as an unshakeable and perpetual abiding in the good and a perpetual contemplation, which even becomes the nature of the Gnostic. In fact, Clement states (*Strom.* 4.136.4–5): “For the exertion of the intellect by exercise is prolonged to a perpetual exertion (νοεῖν ἐκ συνασκήσεως εἰς τὸ ἀεὶ νοεῖν ἐκτείνεται). And the perpetual exertion of the intellect is the essence of an intelligent being, which results from an uninterrupted (ἀδιάστατον) process of admixture, and remains eternal contemplation (αἰδιος θεωρία), a living substance (ζῶσα ὑπόστασις).” A little further on, Clement touches on the issue of the Gnostic's habit of doing good, and thus imitating the nature of the good itself and abiding in it (see *Strom.* 4.137.1–138.4).

Similar Platonic and Stoic elements are found in Gregory of Nyssa's doctrine of human assimilation to God. Although the Nyssian often speaks of continual growth in virtue and at the same time of running towards the goal, which is God, he notes that this effort and running is paradoxically standing still and motionless: “This is the most marvelous thing of all: how the same thing is both a standing still and a moving. For he who ascends certainly does not stand still, and he who stands still does not move upwards. But here the ascent takes place by means of the standing. I mean by this that the firmer and more immovable one remains in the Good, the more he progresses in the course of virtue.” (*Vit. Moys.* 2.243: GNO 7/1, 118,3–8)

5. Conclusions

Both Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa, in opposition to Platonic-Aristotelian ontology, postulate the infinity of incorporeal being. In their writings, apart from technical terms indicating infinity, we find the term ἀδιάστατον, which, prior to Clement, was not used in the context of the notion of infinity. The incorporeal being is thus, according to them, infinite, but not in the sense of being non-traversable, but in the sense of absolute absence of dimension (διάστασις) and limit (πέρας).

Both Clement and Gregory discuss the issue of the infinite Good. While Gregory explicitly states that the Good that is God is infinite, Clement, although he does not use the term ἀπειρον in this context, similarly postulates the immutability and inexhaustibility of God's eternal and beneficent activity. Nevertheless, the point is not merely infinite in the sense of temporality, for both thinkers unequivocally state that nothing can put a limit to the absolute Good. Although finite creatures receive the good flowing from God in a finite way, that is, according to the disposition of their finite nature, or even, turning away from the good, may do evil, no rebellion, no opposition, or disobedience can stop or stand in the way of God, whose nature is exclusively to do good.

According to both Clement and Gregory, God is Wisdom, or rather, he possesses Wisdom, which is his Logos. This Wisdom is also infinite. In this case, we are dealing with infinity, not in the sense of having no dimensions and therefore no limits, but in the sense of the superabundance of God's ideas, powers, and graces, which both authors compare to an immeasurable and boundless ocean or abyss. Even if the finite intellect is capable of traversing this divine Wisdom, though never by its own forces only but by God's grace, traversing it will never be completed. In this sense, according to both authors, God is infinite in terms of being non-traversable. Although the process of getting to know him and of man's assimilation to God, because of its infinite object, will never be complete, both authors emphasize that it should not be conceived of as something imperfect. The divine goodness, wisdom, and knowledge are also perfect, though infinite. After all, they are not related to some lack, but to an excess that cannot be encompassed or embraced by anything. Perfect, can also be the happiness of a human being who, at every stage of the process of assimilation to God, lacks nothing but, on the contrary, abounds in an excess of God's goods. Thus, the two authors, by stating that the infinite can be something perfect, are evidently repudiating the Platonic-Aristotelian ontology according to which what has no end cannot be perfect. Finally, let us add that, for both authors, the symbol of the perfect Christian is the Apostle Paul, who excels not in knowledge but in his continuous pursuit of getting to know the infinite God and never stops doing so.

Of course, Gregory of Nyssa's doctrine of the infinity of God is much more elaborate and features in many of his writings. Nevertheless, given the examples, metaphors, and terminology indicated in this article, we can conclude that the inspiration

for this doctrine was precisely the theses put forward by Clement of Alexandria in his polemic against Greek philosophy. These theses, however, were not something new on Judeo-Christian grounds. Earlier, the question of the infinity and unknowability of God had also appeared in Philo of Alexandria and, after Clement, in Origen of Alexandria.

Bibliography

Achtner, Wolfgang. 2011. "Infinity as a Transformative Concept in Science and Theology." In *Infinity: New Research Frontiers*, edited by Michael Heller and W. Hugh Woodin, 19–51. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Annas, Julia. 1999. *Platonic Ethics, Old and New*. Cornell Studies in Classical Philology 57. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Aristoteles. *Physica*: Aristote. 1926. *Physique*. Vol. 1. Edited by Henri Carteron. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

Ashwin-Siejkowski, Piotr. 2008. *Clement of Alexandria: A Project of Christian Perfection*. London: Clark.

Bigg, Charles. 1913. *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria: Eight Lectures Preached Before the University of Oxford in the Year 1886*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Böhm, Thomas. 1996. *Theoria – Unendlichkeit – Aufstieg: Philosophische Implikationen zu "De Vita Moysis" von Gregor von Nyssa*. Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 35. Leiden: Brill.

Choufrine, Arkadi. 2002. *Gnosis, Theophany, Theosis: Studies in Clement of Alexandria's Appropriation of His Background*. Patristic Studies 5. New York: Lang.

Clemens Alexandrinus, *Protrepticus und Paedagogus*: Clemens Alexandrinus. 1905. *Protrepticus und Paedagogus*. Edited by Otto Stählin. Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte 12. Leipzig: Hinrichs. English translation: Clement of Alexandria. 1954. *Christ the Educator*. Translated by Simon P. Wood. Fathers of the Church 23. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press.

Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata*: Clemens Alexandrinus. 1906–9. *Stromata*. Edited by Otto Stählin. Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte 15, 17. Leipzig: Hinrichs. English translation: Clement of Alexandria. 1991. *Stromateis: Books One to Three*. Translated by John Fergusonthe. Fathers of the Church 85. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press.

Crouzel, Henri, and Manlio Simonetti, eds. 1978. Origène. *Commentaire et fragments*. Vol. 2 of *Traité des principes*. Sources chrétiennes 253. Paris: Cerf.

Daniélou, Jean. 1944. *Platonisme et théologie mystique: Doctrine spirituelle de saint Grégoire de Nysse*. Paris: Aubier.

Dillon, John. 1996. *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Dillon, John. 2019. "The Ideas as Thoughts of God." In *The Roots of Platonism: The Origins and Chief Features of a Philosophical Tradition*, 35–49. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Douglass, Scot. 2010. "Diastēma." In *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, edited by Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco and Giulio Maspero, 227–28. Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 99. Leiden: Brill.

Epiphanius. *Panarion*: Epiphanius. 1915. *Panarion*. Edited by Karl Holl. Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte 25. Leipzig: Hinrichs.

Ferrari, Franco. 2005. "Dottrina delle idee nel medioplatonismo." In *Eidos-Idea: Platone, Aristotele e la tradizione platonica*, edited by Francesco Fronterotta and Walter Leszl, 233–46. International Plato Studies 21. Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag.

Ferrari, Franco. 2015. "Metafisica e teologia nel medioplatonismo." *Rivista di storia della filosofia* 70:321–37. <https://doi.org/10.3280/SF2015-002003>.

Ferrari, Franco. 2020. "Il Bene e il demiurgo: Identità o gerarchia? Il conflitto delle interpretazioni nel medioplatonismo." In *Interpretare Platone: Saggi sul pensiero antico*, edited by Maria Luisa Gatti and Pia De Simone, 239–61. Milano: Vita e Pensiero.

Geljon, Albert. 2002. *Philonic Exegesis in Gregory of Nyssa's de Vita Moysis*. Brown Judaic Studies 333. Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies.

Geljon, Albert. 2005. "Divine Infinity in Gregory of Nyssa and Philo of Alexandria." *Vigiliae Christianae* 59 (2): 152–77. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1570072054068348>.

Giardina, Giovanna. 2022. "Homoiōsis Theōi (Plato, *Theaetetus* 176b1) in Late Neoplatonism." In *New Explorations in Plato's Theaetetus: Belief, Knowledge, Ontology, Reception*, edited by Diego Zucca, 325–52. Brill's Plato Studies Series 10. Leiden: Brill.

Gilson, Étienne. 1955. *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press.

Gregorius Nyssenus, *Contra Eunomium libri*: Gregorius Nyssenus. 1960. *Contra Eunomium libri*. Edited by Werner Jaeger. *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 1–2. Leiden: Brill. English translation: Gregory of Nyssa. 2018. *Contra Eunomium I: An English Translation with Supporting Studies*. Edited by Miguel Brugarolas, translated by Stuart George Hall. Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 148. Leiden: Brill; Gregory of Nyssa. 2007. *Contra Eunomium II: An English Version with Supporting Studies*. Edited by Lenka Karfíková, Scot Douglass, and Johannes Zachhuber, translated by Stuart George Hall. Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 82. Leiden: Brill; Gregory of Nyssa. 2014. *Contra Eunomium III: An English Translation with Commentary and Supporting Studies*. Edited by Johan Leemans and Matthieu Cassin, translated by Stuart George Hall. Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 124. Leiden: Brill.

Gregorius Nyssenus, *In Canticum canticorum homiliae*: Gregorius Nyssenus. 1960. *In Canticum canticorum homiliae*. Edited by Hermannus Langerbeck. *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 6. Leiden: Brill. English translation: Gregory of Nyssa. 2012. *Homilies on the Song of Songs*. Translated by Richard A. Norris Jr. Writings from the Greco-Roman World 13. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature.

Gregorius Nyssenus. *In Ecclesiasten homiliae*: 1962. *In Ecclesiasten homiliae*. Edited by James McDonough and Paul Alexander. *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 5. Leiden: Brill.

Gregorius Nyssenus, *De vita Moysis*: Gregorius Nyssenus. 1964. *De vita Moysis*. Edited by Herbert Musurillo. *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 7/1. Leiden: Brill. English translation: Gregory of Nyssa. 1978. *The Life of Moses*. Translated by Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

Gregorius Nyssenus. *De beatitudinibus*: Gregorius Nyssenus. 1992. *De beatitudinibus*. Edited by John Callahan. *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 7/2. Leiden: Brill.

Gregorius Nyssenus. *De anima et resurrectione*: Gregorius Nyssenus. 2014. *De anima et resurrectione*. Edited by Andreas von Spira. *Gregorii Nysseni Opera 3/3*. Leiden: Brill.

Hägg, Henny. 2006. *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism*. Oxford Early Christian Studies. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Havrda, Matyáš. 2021. "Clement of Alexandria." In *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Philosophy*, edited by Mark Edwards, 357–71. London: Routledge.

Helleman, Wendy E. 1990. "Philo of Alexandria on Deification and Assimilation to God." *Studia Philonica Annual* 2:51–71.

Hoek, Johanna Louisa van den. 1988. *Clement of Alexandria and His Use of Philo in the Stromateis: An Early Christian Reshaping of a Jewish Model*. Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 3. Leiden: Brill.

Koetschau, Paul, ed. 1913. *De principiis*. Vol. 5 of *Origenes Werke*. Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte 22. Leipzig: Hinrichs.

Krainer, Franz. 2019. "The Concept of the Infinity of God in Ancient Greek Thought." In *The Infinity of God: New Perspectives in Theology and Philosophy*, edited by Benedikt Paul Göcke and Christian Tapp, 21–36. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Lavecchia, Salvatore. 2007. *Una via che conduce al divino: La "homoiosis theo" nella filosofia di Platone*. Pubblicazioni del Centro di ricerche di metafisica 101. Milano: Vita e Pensiero.

Lilla, Salvatore. 1971. *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lilla, Salvatore. 2014. "Aristotelianism." In *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, edited by Angelo Di Berardino, 1:228–35. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.

Louth, Andrew. 2007. *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mateo-Seco, Lucas Francisco. 2010. "Epektasis." In *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, edited by Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco and Giulio Maspero, 263–68. Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 99. Leiden: Brill.

Meredith, Anthony. 1999. *Gregory of Nyssa*. Early Church Fathers. London: Routledge.

Meredith, Anthony. 2010. "Gregory of Nyssa." In *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, edited by Lloyd P. Gerson, 1:471–81. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Merki, Humbert. 1952. 'Οροιώσις Θεῷ: Von der platonischen Angleichung an Gott zur Gottähnlichkeit bei Gregor von Nyssa. *Paradosis* 7. Freiburg in der Schweiz: Paulusverlag.

Mira, Manuel. 2010. "Philo of Alexandria." In *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, edited by Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco and Giulio Maspero, 601–3. Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 99. Leiden: Brill.

Moore, Adrian. 2001. *The Infinite*. London: Routledge.

Moran, Dermot. 2014. "Neoplatonism and Christianity in the West." In *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, edited by Paulina Remes and Svetla Slaveva-Griffin, 508–24. Routledge Handbooks. London: Routledge.

Moreschini, Claudio. 2005. *Storia della filosofia patristica*. Brescia: Morcelliana.

Moreschini, Claudio. 2008. *I padri cappadoci: Storia, letteratura, teologia*. Roma: Città Nuova.

Moreschini, Claudio. 2013. *Storia del pensiero cristiano tardo-antico*. Pensiero occidentale. Milano: Bompiani.

Mrugalski, Damian. 2017. "Nieskończoność Boga u Orygenesu: Przyczyna wielkiego nieporozumienia." *Vox Patrum* 67 (37): 437–75. <https://doi.org/10.31743/vp.3409>.

Mrugalski, Damian. 2018. "Potentia Dei absoluta et potentia Dei ordinata u Orygenesa? Nowa próba wyjaśnienia kontrowersyjnych fragmentów *De principiis*." *Vox Patrum* 69 (38): 493–526. <https://doi.org/10.31743/vp.3272>.

Mrugalski, Damian. 2020. "The Forms as God's Thoughts in the Platonist Tradition: A Polemic with John Dillon's Thesis," review of *The Roots of Platonism: The Origins and Chief Features of a Philosophical Tradition*, by John Dillon, *Kronos Philosophical Journal* 9:159–70.

Mrugalski, Damian. 2022. "The Notion of Divine Infinity and Unknowability: Philo, Clement, and Origen of Alexandria in a Polemic with Greek Philosophy." In *Hellenism, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity: Transmission and Transformation of Ideas*, edited by Radka Fialová, Jiří Hoblík, and Petr Kitzler, 69–84. *Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte* 155. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Mrugalski, Damian. 2024. "The Influence of Origen on Augustine: The Question of the Infinity of God." *Vox Patrum* 91:467–98. <https://doi.org/10.31743/vp.17293>.

Mühlenberg, Ekkehard. 1966. *Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa: Gregors Kritik am Gottesbegriff der klassischen Metaphysik*. *Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte* 16. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Neidhart, Ludwig. 2008. *Historischer und theologischer Teil*. Vol. 2 of *Unendlichkeit im Schnittpunkt von Mathematik und Theologie*. Göttingen: Cuvillier Verlag.

Origenes. *Commentariorum in Matthaeum series*: Origenes. 1933. *Matthäuserklärung*. Edited by Erich Klostermann. Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte 38. Leipzig: Hinrichs.

Origenes. *Contra Celsum*: Origène. 1967–69. *Contre Celse*. Edited by Marcel Borret. 4 vols. *Sources chrétiennes* 132, 136, 147, 150. Paris: Cerf.

Origenes. *De oratione*: Origenes. 1899. *Die Schrift vom Gebet*. Edited by Paul Koetschau. Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte 3. Leipzig: Hinrichs.

Origenes. *De principiis*: Origène. 1978–80. *Traité des principes*. Edited by Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti. 4 vols. *Sources chrétiennes* 252–53, 268–69. Paris: Cerf.

Origenes. *In Numeros homiliae*: Origène. 1976. *Philocalie 21–27 (Sur le libre arbitre)*. Edited by Éric Junod. *Sources chrétiennes* 226. Paris: Cerf.

Origenes. *Philocalia*: Origène. 1996–2001. *Homélies sur les Nombres*. Edited by Louis Doutreleau. 3 vols. *Sources chrétiennes* 415, 442, 461. Paris: Cerf.

Origenes, *Selecta in Psalmos*: Origenes. 1862. In *Opera omnia*, edited by Carolus Vincentius Delarue. *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Graeca*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, 12:1053–1686. Paris: Migne.

Osborn, Eric. 1957. *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria*. Texts and Studies 3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Osborn, Eric. 2005. *Clement of Alexandria*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Osmański, Marek. 2007. *Filona z Aleksandrii etyka upodabnia się do Boga*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL.

Owen, Huw. 2006. "Infinity in Theology and Metaphysics." In *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Donald M. Borchert, 4:668–71. Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale.

Peroli, Enrico. 1993. *Il platonismo e l'antropologia filosofica di Gregorio di Nissa, con particolare riferimento agli influssi di Platone, Plotino e Porfirio*. Milano: Vita e Pensiero.

Philo Alexandrinus. *De confusione linguarum. De opificio mundi. De posteritate Caini. De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini. De somniis. Quis rerum divinarum heres sit*: Philo. 1929–62. *Philo in Ten Volumes*. Edited by George P. Goold, translated by Francis H. Colson and Georg H. Whitaker. Loeb Classical Library 226, 227, 261, 275. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Plato. *Parmenides*: Platon. 1923. *Oeuvres Complètes*. Vol. 8. Edited by Auguste Diès. Collection des Universités de France. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

Plato. *Phaedo*: Platon. 1983. *Oeuvres Complètes*. Vol. 4. Edited by Paul Vicaire. Collection des Universités de France. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

Plato. *Phaedrus*: Platon. 1985. *Oeuvres Complètes*. Vol. 4/3. Edited by Paul Vicaire. Collection des Universités de France. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

Plato. *Philebus*: Platon. 1941. *Oeuvres Complètes*. Vol. 9/2. Edited by Auguste Diès. Collection des Universités de France. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

Plato. *Respublica*: Platon. 1931–34. *Oeuvres Complètes*. Vol. 6, 7/1, 7/2. Edited by Emile Chambray. Collection des Universités de France. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

Plato. *Theaetetus*: Platon. 1923. *Oeuvres Complètes*. Vol. 8/2. Edited by Auguste Diès. Collection des Universités de France. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

Plato. *Timaeus*: Platon. 1925. *Oeuvres Complètes*. Vol. 10. Edited by Albert Rivaud. Collection des Universités de France. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

Ramelli, Ilaria. 2010. “Good / Beauty.” In *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, edited by Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco and Giulio Maspero, 356–63. Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 99. Leiden: Brill.

Ramelli, Ilaria. 2017a. “Divine Power in Origen of Alexandria: Sources and Aftermath.” In *Divine Powers in Late Antiquity*, edited by Anna Marmodoro and Irini-Fotini Viltanioti, 178–98. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ramelli, Ilaria. 2017b. “The Mysteries of Scripture: Allegorical Exegesis and the Heritage of Stoicism, Philo, and Pantaenius.” In *Clement’s Biblical Exegesis: Proceedings of the Second Colloquium on Clement of Alexandria (Olomouc, May 29–31, 2014)*, edited by Veronika Černušková, Judith L. Kovacs, and Jana Plátová, 80–110. Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 139. Leiden: Brill.

Ramelli, Ilaria. 2018. “Apokatastasis and Epektasis in *Cant* and Origen.” In *Gregory of Nyssa: “In Canticum Canticorum”; Analytical and Supporting Studies. Proceedings of the 13th International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Rome, 17–20 September 2014)*, edited by Giulio Maspero, Miguel Brugarolas, and Ilaria Vigorelli, 312–39. Leiden: Brill.

Reale, Giovanni. 2018. *Storia della filosofia greca e romana*. Edited by Vincenzo Cicero. Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 150. Milano: Bompiani.

Reydam-Schils, Gretchen. 2017. “Becoming Like God’ in Platonism and Stoicism.” In *From Stoicism to Platonism: The Development of Philosophy, 100 BCE–100 CE*, edited by Troels Engberg-Pedersen, 142–58. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Runia, David. 1993. *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey*. Assen: Van Gorcum.

Runia, David. 1999. “A Brief History of the Term *Kosmos Noétos* from Plato to Plotinus.” In *Traditions of Platonism: Essays in Honour of John Dillon*, edited by John J. Cleary, 151–71. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Russell, Daniel. 2004. “Virtue as ‘Likeness to God’ in Plato and Seneca.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42 (3): 241–60. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2004.0055>.

Russell, Norman. 2004. *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*. Oxford Early Christian Studies. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Simonetti, Manlio. 2000. “Dio (Padre).” In *Origene. Dizionario. La cultura, il pensiero, le opere*, edited by Adele Monaci Castagno, 118–24. Roma: Città Nuova.

Smith, Waren. 2018. “Becoming Men, Not Stones: *Epektasis* in Gregory of Nyssa’s *Homilies on the Song of Songs*.” In *Gregory of Nyssa: “In Canticum Canticorum”; Analytical and*

Supporting Studies. Proceedings of the 13th International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Rome, 17–20 September 2014), edited by Giulio Maspero, Miguel Brugarolas, and Ilaria Vigorelli, 340–359. Leiden: Brill.

Sweeney, Leo. 1998. *Divine Infinity in Greek and Medieval Thought*. New York: Lang.

Tarrant, Harold. 2010. “Platonism Before Plotinus.” In *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, edited by Lloyd P. Gerson, 1:63–99. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Torri, Paolo. 2019. “The *Telos* of Assimilation to God and the Conflict Between *Theoria* and *Praxis* in Plato and the Middle Platonists.” In *Thinking, Knowing, Acting: Epistemology and Ethics in Plato and Ancient Platonism*, edited by Mauro Bonazzi, Filippo Forcignanò, and Angela Ulacco, 228–50. Brill’s Plato Studies Series. Leiden: Brill.

Torri, Paolo. 2024. “Assimilation to God and Practical Life from Plato to Plotinus.” In *Longing for Perfection in Late Antiquity: Studies on Journeys Between Ideal and Reality in Pagan and Christian Literature*, edited by Johan Leemans, Geert Roskam, and Peter Van Deun, 19–57. Ancient Philosophy & Religion 11. Leiden: Brill.

Tzamalikos, Panayiotis. 2006. *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time*. Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 77. Leiden: Brill.

Völker, Walther. 1955. *Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker*. Wiesbaden: Steiner.

Whittaker, John. 1976. “Philological Comments on the Neoplatonic Notion of Infinity.” In *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, edited by Baine Harris, 155–72. Studies in Neoplatonism: Ancient and Modern 1. Norfolk, VA: International Society for Neoplatonic Studies.

Wyrwa, Dietmar. 1983. *Die christliche Platonaneignung in den Stromateis des Clemens von Alexandria*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Young, Frances M., with Andrew Teal. 2010. *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and Its Background*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Zachhuber, Johannes. 2020. *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics: Patristic Philosophy from the Cappadocian Fathers to John of Damascus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

