

PROSŌPON IN GREGORY OF NYSSA: A THEOLOGICAL WORD IN TRANSITION

In 553 the Second Council of Constantinople declared that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are a Trinity of one *ousia* in three *hypostaseis* or *prosōpa*. It is the first "ecumenical" synod from which we have an extant statement to this effect. It went on to anathematize anyone introducing two *hypostaseis* or *prosōpa* into the mystery of Christ and to enshrine several councils among its authorities from the past. A century before, one of these, Chalcedon, had defined the doctrine of Christ, whose two separate natures "run together" into one *prosōpon* and one *hypostasis* and who is not divided into two *prosōpa*.¹

Thus we summarize those conciliar utterances as a result of which *hypostasis* and *prosōpon* became the two Greek words normally understood to mean "person" in Church teaching about the Trinity and Incarnation. Some recent writers, however, deny that, in their use of *prosōpon* and *hypostasis*, the councils meant "person" in the modern philosophical sense. Among these writers is H. Wheeler Robinson. Discussing the problem which the Christian doctrine on God brings to philosophy, he invokes A. S. Pringle-Pattison's criticism of the "artificial separation of the 'Persons' of the Trinity, for which there is . . . no ground in the actual experience of the Christian (nor even, to the extent described, in the *ancient* doctrine). . . ." Robinson insists that we should "frankly admit that we know nothing of personality possessing three distinct centers of consciousness" and suggests that such a portrayal of the Trinity is incompatible with monotheism.² In another chapter he states that the Eastern Church took *hypostasis* as the rarer synonym of *ousia* and developed a new usage "to denote the distinctive being of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in contrast with *ousia*, their common being." This leads to his claim that it is impossible "to make sense of the classical doctrine of the Trinity without eliminating the . . . content of the term 'person' which fifteen centuries have bequeathed to us."

The process of elimination begins for Robinson and his readers when they note that the Latin word from which our "person" is derived denotes "rank" or "status"; a *persona* is always someone observed in particular circumstances. The word suggests the environment of the one to whom it is applied rather than himself as subject. Even more impersonal, declares Robinson, is the Greek *hypostasis*, an abstraction without any

¹ See, for Chalcedon, E. Schwartz, *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum* (Berlin, 1927-28), 2/2/1, pp. 129-30; for Constantinople II, Centro di Documentazione, Istituto per le Scienze Religiose, ed., *Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta* (Bologna, 1962) 90-92.

² H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit* (Glasgow, 1962) 228-29.

original relationship to "personality" as we know it. Indeed, the "classical doctrine . . . never would have been reached and could not have been established if it had meant the assertion of three distinct centres of personality in our modern sense, which were somehow to be reduced to one." To find a true analogy for "personality" in the patristic vocabulary, we must look to *ousia* rather than to the *hypostaseis* of the Godhead.³ One may ask why he makes no mention of *prosōpon* as the equivalent of *persona*. It is safe to assume, however, that Robinson, if asked, would readily include *prosōpon* with *hypostasis* as terms which do not supply a true analogy for "personality" in the patristic vocabulary.

Baillie, telling us much the same, cites opposing trends toward modalism (Sabellianism) and tritheism which he believes exist in twentieth-century Christian thought.⁴ A prominent exemplar of the former tendency is Karl Barth, who believes that it is better to speak of "three modes of being" in God than of "three persons." Dissatisfaction over terminology began early, according to Baillie's summary of the opinion of Barth: the East settled for *hypostasis* as "safer" than *prosōpon*, and the West for *persona* (preferred over *substantia*, seemingly the natural translation for *hypostasis*), with neither section wholly content. We can hardly justify Baillie's assertion about the East from the major conciliar definitions cited in the first paragraph of the present study: *prosōpon* receives equal prominence with *hypostasis* and is an evident synonym.

The history of how *prosōpon* and *hypostasis* came to be the terms for "person" in the Trinity and in the doctrine of Christ has not been fully traced. More attention has been given to *hypostasis*.⁵ There is equal reason to study *prosōpon* as part of the process of testing the opinion of Robinson and Baillie and thus attempting to reach a conclusion on what the councils meant by the one *prosōpon* or *hypostasis* in Christ and by the three *hypostaseis* or *prosōpa* in God. Our aim in this work is to examine some significant usages of *prosōpon* by a key figure in the closing phase of the Arian controversy, to demonstrate that there is reason for claiming that the word did in fact, in at least some circles, carry a meaning which these writers deny it had.

VARIED PATRISTIC USES

Throughout the patristic age *prosōpon* was employed regularly with the meaning it had as far back as Homer, i.e., "face." It also occurred with various associated and derivative meanings, such as "expression," as

³ Ibid. 215-18.

⁴ D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (New York, 1948) 134-35.

⁵ See, e.g., P. Galtier, "L'Unio secundum hypostasim chez saint Cyrille," *Gregorianum* 23 (1952) 351-98; Marcel Richard, "L'Introduction du mot 'hypostase' dans la théologie de l'incarnation," *Mélanges de science religieuse* 2 (1945) 5-32, 243-70.

when Origen speaks of showing children, for disciplinary purposes, a fearsome *prosōpon*,⁶ and “sight” or possibly “presence,” as when Ignatius, in the *Letter to Polycarp* (1, 1), writes: “I rejoice exceedingly, having been favored with the *prosōpon* of you.” Dramatic usages such as “mask” and “character” can be noted.⁷ Broadly associated with these is an appearance of the word in Athanasius’ *Apologia contra Arianos* (17), which describes the intrigue at an Alexandrian synod in 338. One of Athanasius’ foes, John, perceives that the Eusebian party is covertly siding with the Arians, while for some reason deeming it impolitic to bring this support into the open; John observes them “seeking to use other *prosōpa*.” We may render it “mask” or, preferably, with a less concrete meaning such as “guise.”

By contrast with these usages, we have some which are discernibly “personal,” but not in the philosophical sense, i.e., not with any thought on the user’s part of “inner content” such as rationality or consciousness. What seems to be the first chronologically among Christian authors is *I Clement*, originating from Rome in the late first century. Immediately after his greeting, Clement speaks of an unholy sedition and attributes it to some “rash and arrogant *prosōpa*.” Not many years after, in the early decades of the second century, we find Ignatius in his *Epistle to the Magnesians* (6, 1)—referring to a delegation from the Magnesian Church which has visited him—declaring that he has seen the entire congregation “in the *prosōpa* mentioned above.” Athanasius, writing in the fourth century, warns his readers⁸ that, if they are to understand the teaching of Paul, they must note the *kairon kai to prosōpon kai to pragma* (“time and the *prosōpon* and the object”) concerning which the Apostle is writing in whatever passage they study.

The Greek Fathers, for the most part, use *prosōpon* in ways that reflect their biblical and pagan heritages. An awareness of these influences is invaluable background for an examination of *prosōpon* as it came to be applied to the Father, Son, and Spirit. Clement of Alexandria refers to *prosōpon kyriou* and the OT idiom according to which God’s showing and concealing His face signify blessings and evils respectively.⁹ Similarly, Athanasius describes Jesus as praying a psalm in order to turn in our direction to *prosōpon tou patros*.¹⁰

More important is an Athanasian statement identifying the *prosōpon tou theou* with *ho logos*.¹¹ And Clement—between allusions to God’s treating with Jacob and the people of Israel *prosōpon pros prosōpon*—says that the Logos is *prosōpon tou theou*.¹² This identification of the

⁶ *Hom. 18 in Jer.* 6.

⁷ See, respectively, Basil the Great, *Hom.* 1, 2, and Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.*; the latter mentions an author who introduced *prosōpa dialegomena* into his work (36, 2).

⁸ *C. Ar.* 1, 54.

¹⁰ *Exp. in pss.* 21, 2.

¹² *Paed.* 1, 7, 57.

⁹ *Paed.* 1, 8, 70.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 20, 7.

Son and Logos as the *prosōpon* of God the Father is not limited to Clement and Athanasius.¹³ But does it mean simply that the Son is the "face" of the Father in some allegorical way? We consult the statements of a pair of writers more than two hundred years apart. The second-century apologist Theophilus of Antioch raises a problem concerning the statement in Genesis that God "walked" in paradise. He explains this by bringing in the Logos, the power and wisdom of God through whom he made all things, who, *analambanōn to prosōpon tou patros kai kyriou tōn holōn, houtos paregineto eis ton paradeison en prosōpō tou theou* ("taking the *prosōpon* of the Father and Lord of all things, came into Paradise in the *prosōpon* of God").¹⁴ Late in the fourth century one of the Cappadocians, Gregory of Nyssa, wrote: *hē tou huiou hypostasis hoionei morphē kai prosōpon ginetai tēs tou patros epignōseōs kai hē tou patros hypostasis en tē tou huiou morphē epignōsketai* ("the *hypostasis* of the Son becomes, so to speak, form and *prosōpon* of the knowledge of the Father, and the *hypostasis* of the Father becomes known in the form of the Son").¹⁵ Is it the same thing to say that the Word took on the *prosōpon* of the Father, walked in Paradise, and conversed with Adam as it is to say that the Son's *hypostasis* is "as it were the form and *prosōpon* of the knowledge of the Father, and the Father's *hypostasis* is known in the form of the Son"? Are these two statements simply developments of the assertion by several patristic writers that the Son or the Logos is the *prosōpon* of the Father?

The affirmations of Theophilus and Gregory at first appear very much alike. The latter seems to make a less mythological and more philosophical and generalized statement of the same truth: the Son is the means by which the Father is known. Yet, even before an inquiry into the theological backgrounds of the two men, one can observe differences: whereas in the Cappadocian the Son's *hypostasis* is, "as it were, the form and *prosōpon* of the knowledge of the Father," in Theophilus the Logos *assumes* the *prosōpon* of the Father. The employment of *prosōpon* as "role" or "character," either in drama and literature¹⁶ or in actual life,¹⁷

¹³ Cf. Origen, *Frag. in pss.* 20, 7; Didymus, *Exp. in pss.* 30, 20; Cyril of Alexandria, *Comm. in Joan.* 3, 5.

¹⁴ *Autol.* 2, 22; see the observations of M. Simonetti, "La sacra scrittura in Teofilo d'Antiochia," in J. Fontaine and C. Kannengiesser, eds., *Epektasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou* (Paris, 1972) 204.

¹⁵ Basil, *Epist.* 38, 8. Virtual unanimity has been reached on attribution of this treatise, which is included among the letters of Basil, to Gregory; for the most recent treatment, see R. Hübner, "Gregor von Nyssa als Verfasser der sog. Ep. 38 des Basiliius," in *Epektasis* 463-90.

¹⁶ See above, section on "Varied Patristic Uses."

¹⁷ Epictetus, in the *Dissertationes* of Arrian, is quoted as saying that a Cynic who is disloyal to God will no longer pursue "the *prosōpon* of the perfect man." Elsewhere we find the exhortation, "You are an actor in a drama. . . . It is your choice to act the *prosōpon* given" (*Enchiridion* 27).

was in vogue at a time not long before Theophilus. The usage appears some decades later in Origen.¹⁸ This widespread application of *prosōpon*, coupled with the statement cited above, suggests that Theophilus here intended it as "role." A case can also be made for "guise," if there is a preference for a word with a less dramatic connotation.

GREGORY'S USE OF *PROSŌPON*

What, then, of Gregory? He, of course, with his fellow Cappadocians, affirmed the Nicene faith and applied the notion of consubstantiality both to the Son and to the Spirit.¹⁹ The difference from Theophilus is readily understandable when one recalls that two centuries of theological debate, culminating in the Arian and related controversies, separate the two. This in itself alerts us to the possibility of a significant difference in meaning between the citations. There is also the presence, in Gregory, of the words *morphē* and *hypostasis*. Since the latter is linked with *prosōpon* in more than one authoritative document of the era we are considering,²⁰ a brief consideration of its significance is advisable.

In the letter we are treating, Gregory asks his readers to picture four individuals, Peter, Andrew, John, and James. What they have in common is their *ousia*, "man." Making Peter different from the other three, marking each one off as a separate *hypostasis*, are their *gnōristikai idiotētes*. With Kelly we can translate the latter expression as "identifying peculiarities."²¹ Basil similarly distinguishes *ousia* from *hypostasis*, using the expressions *to koinon* and *to kath' hekaston*.²² Returning to Gregory's letter, we find several synonyms for the "identifying peculiarities" which characterize a *hypostasis*: *idiazon*, *idiōma*, *idion gnōrisma*, *charaktēr*, and *morphē*.²³ Elsewhere Gregory, straining to dodge being suspected of tritheism, maintains that it is, strictly speaking, incorrect to say that there are many "men."²⁴ Just as there is only one divine *ousia*, so there is only the *ousia* "man" and it is common to Peter, Paul, and the rest.²⁵ The Cappadocians were primarily responsible for making Origen's distinction of one *ousia* from three *hypostaseis* in the Trinity achieve

¹⁸ See, e.g., the fragment from *Com. min. in Cant.* in *Philoc.* 7, 1: "the *idiōma* of the *prosōpa* of the passage." Cf. *Cels.* 1, 49.

¹⁹ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London, 1958) 263.

²⁰ See citations at beginning of this essay.

²¹ Kelly 265.

²² *Epist.* 236, 6.

²³ Appearing in "Basil" 38, respectively in 2, 3, 4, and (the last two) 6. Cf. Basil, *Eun.* 2, 28.

²⁴ *Tres dii* (PG 45, 117-20). The column numbers from PG are supplied in the margins of W. Jaeger, *Gregorii Nysseni opera* (Leiden, 1958-).

²⁵ Cf. the critique of J. Tixeront, who asserts that the "Bishop of Nyssa seems to forget that the divine *ousia* cannot but be concrete, whereas the human *ousia* can be either abstract or concrete" (*History of Dogma* 2 [St. Louis, 1910] 86).

permanent ascendancy over Athanasius' identification of *ousia* with *hypostasis*.²⁶

Gregory's understanding of *morphē* involves no major investigation. As we just saw above, he makes it one of several synonyms for the identifying peculiarities which mark the possessor of an *ousia* off as a *hypostasis*. Here *morphē* seems to be identified with *prosōpon*, and both words are employed of the means by which the *hypostasis* becomes known. This *prosōpon* or *morphē* is none other than the *hypostasis* of the Son.

The present discussion began as a consideration of *prosōpon* in more primitive theological uses. Obviously, Gregory is not a primitive theologian, especially with reference to the Trinity. Hence one could almost determine a priori that, in the two passages we have been considering, *prosōpon* must have different meanings. For Theophilus it is a "role" or "guise," and it is "taken" by the Logos who walks and speaks in this role or guise. In Gregory we seek something more abstract. But note that, having achieved an understanding of the *morphē* (and its several synonyms) as that which sets off a definite *hypostasis* of a given *ousia* from another definite *hypostasis* of the same *ousia*, we are asked to consider the *hypostasis* of the Son as the *morphē* and *prosōpon* by which the Father's *hypostasis* is known. When we put the statement in context, we perceive that Gregory is at this point emphasizing the *unity* in the Deity, describing the "co-inherence, or as it was later called 'perichoresis', of the divine Persons."²⁷ Their common essence makes it possible for even that which *differentiates* the Son from the Father (the *hypostasis*) to function as a perfect "form and presentation" (*morphē kai prosōpon*) of knowledge of the Father.²⁸ So, in the passage from Theophilus, *prosōpon* is active and dramatic, a "role"; in that from Gregory, it is static and abstract, a "presentation," or, better, a "manner of presentation." In Gregory it is something which eternally puts across a totally adequate presentation of the Father. In Theophilus the understanding of the Logos (the being that walks in the Garden of Eden is obviously not the human nature of Jesus) as subordinate to the Father is the basis for the ability of the Logos to appear in the world at a certain time and place; in Gregory what is at issue is not how the transcendent and eternal God reveals Himself in time and space (the implication is that He can) but how knowledge of the *hypostasis* of the Father occurs: He becomes known through the *hypostasis* of the Son, who has the same substance and therefore is not subordinate.

A decisive step has been made with Gregory's use of *prosōpon*. Associated with the Logos in both authors, it has moved from something transitory in Theophilus to something permanent in Gregory. He is not,

²⁶ See Tixeront 2, 75-76; Kelly 264.

²⁷ Kelly 264.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Kelly's translation.

however, using it interchangeably with *hypostasis*, even though it is here a term intimately connected with the *hypostasis* which is the Logos, an indicator of what the Logos does: reveal the Father perfectly. *Prosōpon* is a predicate of the *hypostasis* which is the Logos.

Gregory's brother Basil, in one of his theological letters, issues a warning on the use of *prosōpon* which offers a contrast to the further development of the word as we shall examine it in Gregory. "It is not enough," Basil says of the Trinity, "to enumerate distinctions of *prosōpa*; rather it is necessary to profess faith in each *prosōpon* as having an independent existence (*hyparchon*) in a genuine *hypostasis*."²⁹ We can easily interpret *prosōpon* here as "manner of appearance," especially since, as Basil adds, "After all, not even Sabellius objected to a nonhypostasized portrayal of the *prosōpa*, stating as he did that the identical God, being one in *hypokeymenon* [an evident synonym for *hypostasis*], is metamorphosed according to the needs of the moment." The conclusion which emerges from this admonition is that *prosōpon*—whether or not Basil is historically accurate in ascribing this use of it to Sabellius³⁰—was, for Basil at least, a word applicable to something which might not be endowed with an independent existence and thus fall short of equivalence with *hypostasis*.³¹

Nevertheless, as will be evident, Gregory has no hesitation in employing it in numerous texts as an unqualified synonym for *hypostasis*. While he devotes greater attention to the Trinity, it is useful first to examine his Christological use of the word, inasmuch as in Christology the focus is on the singularity of a *prosōpon* rather than on a plurality.

SIGNIFICANT USE IN CRITIQUE OF APOLLINARIS

In a discussion of Acts 2:36, "God has made both Lord and Christ the same Jesus you crucified," Gregory explains that Scripture is saying "that two things have been done with regard to one *prosōpon*."³² Attacking

²⁹ *Epist.* 210, 5.

³⁰ We have no reliable evidence on how, or whether, Sabellius used *prosōpon* in his theology. The more probable opinion is that he did not speak of three transitory *prosōpa* in God. This seems to follow from the fact that his contemporary Hippolytus, who regarded Pope Callistus as a Sabellian, accuses Callistus of making God *hen prosōpon* and, in a second passage, of portraying God as not *heteros* from the Logos (*Philosophoumena* 9, 12; 10, 27). Hippolytus himself is the source of the earliest available references to at least two *prosōpa* in God, applying the term explicitly to the Father and the Son (*C. Noet.* 7 and 14). There is a difference of opinion, however, on whether he was influenced by Tertullian, his contemporary at Carthage, who wrote of the Father, Son, and Spirit as *personae*. See C. Andresen, "Zur Entstehung und Geschichte des trinitarischen Personbegriffes," *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 52 (1961) 9, 38.

³¹ Although he does not consistently repeat this caveat when speaking of the *prosōpa* in God; see *Hom. 9 in hexaemeron* 6.

³² *Contra Eunomium* (PG 45, 697).

Apollinaris, who taught that the Logos assumed the place of a rational soul in the human nature of Jesus, Gregory writes: "He asserts that we say there are two *prosōpa*, the one being God, the other man."³³ The least that can be said about these texts is that *prosōpon* has progressed to status as a being which can serve as a subject of predicates such as Lord, Christ, Savior, and, of course, "God and the man." Moreover, it should not be overlooked that Apollinaris is portrayed as basing his accusation that others are dividing Christ into two *prosōpa* on their insistence—in disagreement with himself—that a rational soul is present in the human nature of Jesus; for Apollinaris, the Logos united to a body constitutes one *prosōpon*, whereas if one should add a rational soul to the body, two *prosōpa* result. Gregory is well beyond an understanding of *prosōpon* as a simple "manner of appearance."

The treatise *Ad Graecos ex communibus notionibus* was composed, according to a plausible analysis, as part of a movement to reconcile fundamentally orthodox Christians divided by ambiguous terminology. The focal point of controversy was the word *hypostasis*. Athanasius and the first generation of "Nicaeans" had understood it as the equivalent of its Latin etymological counterpart *substantia* and therefore spoke of one only *hypostasis* in God. However, the "Neo-Nicaeans," most prominent of whom were the Cappadocians, preferred to express the Nicene doctrine with the formula *mia ousia, treis hypostaseis*. Complicated by other factors, a schism involving an "old Nicaean" bishop, Paulinus, and the Neo-Nicaean Meletius was prolonging itself at Antioch. Against this background R. Hübner puts forth a hypothesis that Gregory wrote *Ad Graecos* to facilitate the work of a conciliatory Antiochene synod in 379.³⁴ Once again we find him affirming a shared belief in the divine unity as prelude to a defense of his own party's mode of expressing the Trinitarian mystery.

In an effort to demonstrate the acceptability of *treis hypostaseis*, Gregory makes continual use of *prosōpon* as an unqualified substitute for *hypostasis*. His very first sentence declares: "If the name 'God' were descriptive of *prosōpa*, we who say 'three *prosōpa*' would necessarily be speaking of three gods; but if the name 'God' denotes an *ousia*, we who confess the one *ousia* of the holy Trinity fittingly teach the doctrine of one God, since 'God' is the single name of one *ousia*."³⁵ As one would anticipate in a writer fending off insinuations of tritheism, he begins by accentuating the singularity of the divine *ousia*. In reference to *prosōpon*, Gregory says no more than that, for those who use the expression "three

³³ *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarem* (PG 45, 1200, 1265).

³⁴ R. Hübner, "Gregor von Nyssa und Markell von Ankyra," in M. Harl, *Écriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nysse* (Leiden, 1971) 206-9.

³⁵ PG 45, 176.

prosōpa” of God, “God” and *prosōpon* are not equivalent. He adds to this a further statement that “the *prosōpa* are not the same but different, varying from each other according to the meaning of the names.”

Gregory, in sum, begins an essay upholding the oneness of God with the distinction between God as *ousia* and the three in God as *prosōpa*. Does he shed any light on what positive significance the term *prosōpa* in the Trinity has in his theology, apart from three differing names referred to a single *ousia*?

The answer to this comes when he returns to the well-worn analogy involving “human beings” contrasted with “humanity” to illustrate *prosōpa* contrasted with “divinity.” This time his discussion of the equation helps considerably to clarify the meaning he attaches to *prosōpon*. After reiterating his initial statement that “God” is a term for an *ousia*, not a *prosōpon*, he continues:

Suppose someone remarks that we call Peter, Paul, and Barnabas three “particular *ousiai*”—obviously meaning “separate,” since this is a more precise way to put it—because, though speaking of a particular, i.e., separate, *ousia*, we want to indicate nothing more than an individual which is a *prosōpon*. . . . Now “God,” as has been indicated, does not apply to *prosōpa*. . . . How, then, do we counter the charge that we say Peter, Paul, and Barnabas are three “men”? Not “They are *prosōpa*,” since references to *prosōpa* are not made by the characteristic name of the common *ousia*. Nor is the particular or separate *ousia* under discussion, this being the same as the *prosōpon*. In view of their belonging to a single *ousia*, of which “man” is the name, what is our reason for saying “three men,” since we state that neither *prosōpa* nor the particular or separate *ousiai* are objects of reference? We admit to using this phrase improperly and incorrectly, through a kind of habitual usage arising from unavoidable causes which are not under consideration in the holy Trinity. . . . They are summed up thus: “man,” by observation, is a term *not* eternally limited to the same individuals or *prosōpa*.³⁶

He elaborates on this remark with a discussion of the fact that beings of the *ousia* “man” are born, die, and constantly vary in number, whereas the *prosōpa* of the Trinity are everlastingly the same.

TOWARD A DEFINITION OF *PROSŌPON*

As a preliminary to examining Gregory’s definition of *prosōpon*, it is worth emphasizing that it is his effort to ward off charges of cryptotritheism which leads him to censure the pluralizing of any word which designates an *ousia* such as “man.” By contrast, he has little to say, if anything, by way of explicit admonition about the effort a theologian should exert to differentiate the Father, Son, and Spirit qua *prosōpa*

³⁶ PG 45, 177-79. The omissions indicated in the translation represent phrases incorporated by F. Müller, editor of the text of *Ad Graecos* in Jaeger (n. 24 above), though not present in all MSS. They are omitted as immaterial to the meaning of the passage.

from Peter, Paul, and Barnabas.³⁷ Our citation, as a result, makes it evident that Gregory of Nyssa, in his use of *prosōpon*, is emphatically excluding Sabellianism. A *prosōpon* is an *atomon*, the Greek etymological equivalent of "individual," or (though, to be sure, he strains to brand the notion unacceptable) a particular or separate *ousia*. It is no more transitory or masklike or comparable to a part in a drama than are three flesh-and-blood beings named Peter, Paul, and Barnabas. So, later in the essay, he says: "Again we similarly apply to *hypostasis* those things [which are related] to the division from each other of *prosōpa* which have the same name, i.e., *hypostasis*, in common and differ among themselves not in the matters which pertain to *ousia* but in those which are called accidents (*sumbebēkota*)."³⁸

To synthesize: a *prosōpon* is an entity, identifiable both as a participant in an *ousia* (God; man) and as an individual (the Father; Paul) separate from others (the Son and the Spirit; Peter, Barnabas, and all other human beings) which share the same *ousia* but not the same differentiating qualities.

Here, then, is Gregory writing (according to the plausible theory of Hübner) two years before the First Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (381) and employing *prosōpon* in such a way that the impression of clearly distinct and enduring *prosōpa* in the Trinity is impossible to explain away. As for the Council itself, there is a strong probability that it taught the one *ousia* and the three *hypostaseis* or *prosōpa*, although, as noted above,³⁹ Constantinople II is the first such council from which we have an extant statement using the formula.⁴⁰ Gregory participated in the deliberations of Constantinople I.⁴¹

The Father, Son, and Spirit, as *prosōpa*, are, for Gregory, distinct while one in *ousia*. Are they, as *prosōpa*, also "centres of consciousness," the

³⁷ On the other hand, as the discussion which follows this citation demonstrates, he is by no means making a simplistic equation of the modes by which divine *prosōpa* and human *prosōpa* participate in their *ousiai*. What is clear is that he is placing the burden of maintaining the divine unity on *ousia*, while assigning *prosōpon* to function as the term which conveys the real distinction of the Father, Son, and Spirit. With Hübner's theory as background, one could interpret Gregory's frequent use of *prosōpon* in *Ad Graecos* as a component of his attempt to sway the opposition, which had so strongly objected to speaking of a plurality of *hypostaseis* in God.

³⁸ PG 45, 185.

³⁹ See citation in opening paragraph of this essay.

⁴⁰ Constantinople I issued a *Tome* which has been lost. It is from this document that a local synod held at the same locale a year later is probably quoting when it speaks of "one divinity, one power and one *ousia* . . . in three most perfect *hypostaseis*, that is (*ēgoun*), three perfect *prosōpa*." The citation is from a letter which the synod of 382 sent to Pope Damasus and the Western episcopate. The letter appears in Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 5, 9. For a discussion see I. Ortiz de Urbina, S.J., *Nicée et Constantinople*, Vol. 1 of *Histoire des conciles oecuméniques*, ed. G. Dumeige (Paris, 1963) 173-74.

⁴¹ Ortiz de Urbina 170.

expression which the modern authors with whom we began assert has no warrant in patristic doctrine? The question for our present purposes is this: Do we have sufficient evidence to say that, when a council recognized as authoritative used the word *prosōpon* in its Trinitarian theology, it meant a "centre of consciousness," or, to take the definition of Boethius, *rationalis naturae individua substantia*?⁴²

Boethius evidently has all the elements we have found in Gregory, adding only *rationalis*. Gregory, for his part, nowhere incorporates an explicit reference to rationality or self-consciousness. It is, moreover, necessary to remember the warning of Basil: an unqualified use of *prosōpon* is to be judged unsafe in that it leaves one open to a charge of Sabellianism. This, in turn, reminds us that, throughout the entire span of its use, *prosōpon* is regularly found with the meaning "face."

This having been said, the fact remains that Gregory seems to be limiting his theological applications of the word in *Ad Graecos* to rational, or spiritual, or self-conscious beings. Nowhere do we find references to *prosōpa* of the *ousia* horse or the *ousia* rock. The implication of rationality is heightened when we recall Gregory's Christological use of the word. *Prosōpon* functions as a subject to which predicates like "God" and "the man" can be attributed and has a most significant place in Gregory's account of what Apollinaris says about his opponents: in virtue of their claim that Christ has a rational soul, they are making Christ "two *prosōpa*." Here the conclusion, as noted, is that the addition of the spiritual or rational component is the event which effects two *prosōpa* instead of one.

It is apparent that, without feeling any need to deal directly with Basil's objection, Gregory has consciously begun to use *prosōpon* in a fashion which *ex professo* signifies an individual and concrete existent and, by implication, includes the further note of rationality. What remains to be established in order to complete the demonstration of inaccuracy in the claims of Pringle-Pattison, Robinson, and Baillie is whether those who drew up the definitions of Chalcedon and Constantinople II (as well as, very probably, Constantinople I) were accustomed to using *prosōpon* theologically as Gregory did in *Ad Graecos* and other writings both Trinitarian and Christological.

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⁴² *De personis et duabus naturis* 3; formulated in the same century as Constantinople II.