

Let Us Become the Perfect Light!: Baptism and Ethics in Gregory of Nazianzus' Oration 39

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완전한 빛이 되자!

연설 39편에 나타난 나지안주스 그레고리의 세레윌리

비록 나지안주스의 그레고리가 위대한 교부이지만 지금까지 학자들은 세레와 윌리 사이의 중요한 관계에 대한 그의 사상에는 거의 관심을 기울이지 않았다. 하지만 세레는 단시 기독교 공동체 입문을 위한 의식이 아니라 본질적으로 윌리와 깊이 연관되어 있다. 이 논문은 그레고리의 39번째 설교인 『거룩한 빛들에 관하여』를 면밀히 분석하면서 그의 세레윌리를 탐구하고자 한다. 그레고리는 기독교의 세레가 거짓된 이교 신비의식들을 대항하는 참된 신비임을 보여주면서, 세레와 세레 후의 삶을 묘사하기 위해 ‘빛’이라는 용어를 사용한다. 그레고리에 따르면 참된 신비로서의 세레는 삼위 하나님의 조명으로 인해 타락 이전의 에덴동산에서 아담이 가졌던 원래의 빛을 회복시킬 뿐만 아니라, 지속적인 하나님의 조명과 정화를 통해 세상을 향한 삼위 하나님의 완전한 빛이 될 것을 요구한다. 이 빛이 되는 과정은 곧 신격화이다. 이런 점에서

그레고리에게서 세례는 존재론적이며 동시에 종말론적인 측면을 가진다. 즉, 하나님의 완전한 빛으로서의 새로운 탄생, 덕의 증진, 우리의 빛된 삶을 통한 세상의 변혁이 그것이다. 기독교 신비는 그 자체로서 고도로 윤리적이다.

Let Us Become the Perfect Light!:
Baptism and Ethics in Gregory of
Nazianzus' Oration 39

주요어

나지안주스의 그레고리, 세례 윤리, 조명, 정화, 신격화

Abstract

Let Us Become the Perfect Light!: Baptism and Ethics in Gregory of Nazianzus' Oration 39

Prof. Dr. Junghun Bae

Though Gregory of Nazianzus was one of the most influential church fathers, scholarly works on him have seldom paid attention to a vital relationship between his theology of baptism and his theological ethics. However, baptism is not just a ritual for an initiation into the church. It is intrinsically linked with ethics. the aim of this paper is to investigate Gregory's baptismal ethics, especially focusing on his oration 39, "*On the Holy Lights*." Showing Christian baptism as the true mystery against false pagan mysteries, Gregory uses the term of 'light' to describe baptism and post - baptismal life. My thesis is that according to Gregory, baptism as the true mystery restores the original light which Adam had in the paradise through the Trinity's illumination, and it also demands that we become the perfect light of the Holy Trinity for the world through the ongoing illumination and purification, which denotes deification. Baptism has both the ontological and eschatological aspects: a new birth as the perfect light of God, encouragement of virtues, and further transformation of world by our light. Christian mystery itself is highly moral.

Keywords | Gregory of Nazianzus, Baptismal Ethics, Illumination, Purification, Deification

1. Introduction

The Light shines in the darkness... that having put away the darkness, we ourselves may approach the Light, and then we may be born as perfect light (φῶς γενώμεθα τέλειον)¹⁾, the children of perfect light (τελείου φωτὸς γεννήματα)²⁾

Though Gregory of Nazianzus was one of the most influential church fathers, scholarly works on him have seldom paid attention to a vital relationship between his theology of baptism and his theological ethics. Instead, most studies have focused on the reconstruction of the orthodox Cappadocian ritual at the end of the fourth century.³⁾ G.W.H. Lampe⁴⁾ and E. Ferguson⁵⁾ mainly examined Gregory's baptism to answer the liturgical questions: the relationship between baptism and confirmation, and contents of instruction for catechumens.

1) "BWGRKL, BWGRKN, and BWGRKI [Greek] PostScript® Type 1 and TrueType fonts Copyright ©1994-2015 BibleWorks, LLC. All rights reserved. These Biblical Greek and Hebrew fonts are used with permission and are from BibleWorks (www.bibleworks.com)."

2) Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 39.2 (Sources Chrétiennes 358:152). All translations are mine unless noted otherwise.

3) S. Elm, "Inscription and Conversions: Gregory of Nazianzus on Baptism," in *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Seeing and Believing*, ed. by A. Grafton and K. Mills (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2003), 2, 5-6.

4) G.W.H Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit: A Study in the Doctrine of Baptism and Confirmation in the New Testament and the Fathers* (London: S.P.C.K, 1967), 237-60.

5) E. Ferguson, eds., *Conversion, Catechumenate, and Baptism in the Early Church* (New York: Garland, 1993), 244-65, 367-78; E. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 592-602 deals with Gregory's baptismal theology briefly; M. Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate: The First Six Centuries*, trans. by E. Hassel (New York: Sadlier, 1979), 77-114.

However, baptism is not just a ritual for an initiation into the church. It is intrinsically linked with ethics. As W.A. Meeks correctly points out, baptism demands “certain kinds of behavior.”⁶⁾ In this sense, S. Elm’s reading of Gregory’s baptism provides a good starting point for studying his baptismal ethics. Based on a study of C. Moreschini⁷⁾, she argues persuasively that Gregory’s baptism is both “the moment of change” in being and “the ongoing process” in life aimed to restore our original state as Adam in his oration 38-40.⁸⁾ Gregory’s theology of baptism is not only an experience of brief change; it includes the lifelong transformation.

Elm also demonstrates clearly the ontological and eschatological aspects of Gregory’s words on baptism such as “illumination” and “purification.” Baptism is both illumination and purification, and at the same time demands both of them.⁹⁾ That is, we receive the knowledge of God and the Holy Spirit purifies our soul. Furthermore, baptism demands the life of a new identity through the ongoing illumination and purification. For this reason, Baptism shows both who we are and how we live.

An orthodox theologian, S.S. Harakas maintains that in the ontological and eschatological aspects, baptism and its ethical implications have a fundamental connection with each other. In baptism, we are dead to sin, renewed and restored in the image of God, but that ontological change should be “actuated and realized by choice and action.” This spiritual and moral progress is to

6) W.A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 92.

7) See. C. Moreschini and P. Gallay, *Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours 38-41: Introduction, Texte Critique et Notes*, Sources Chrétiennes 358 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1990).

8) Elm, “Inscription and Conversions,” 5-6.

9) Elm, “Inscription and Conversions,” 17.

avoid and fight evil, and do the good.¹⁰⁾ We restore God's image in baptism, and baptism is also the place for beginning deification.

P. Goldman's research on Christian mystery takes a step further on the ethical implications of baptism. He strongly insists on the responsibility of Christian mystery, criticizing Jacques Derrida's claim about it, which argues that the mystery does not have any ethical implications. However, Christian mystery is rooted in "the original event", Christ's Cross and Resurrection, and demands the unconditional rejection of violence and the supreme love for mankind shown by Christ on the Cross.¹¹⁾ Christian mystery includes the refusal of evil and violence, doing the good. Thus, "Christian mystery is fundamentally ethical."¹²⁾ This essential link between baptism and Christian life should be taken into account in Gregory's writings on baptism, especially in his oration 38-40.

With the essential relationship between baptism and ethics, the aim of this paper is to investigate Gregory's baptismal ethics, especially focusing on his oration 39, "*On the Holy Lights*." Showing Christian baptism as the true mystery against false pagan mysteries, Gregory uses the term of 'light' to describe baptism and post - baptismal life. My thesis is that according to Gregory, baptism as the true mystery restores the original light which Adam had in the paradise through the Trinity's illumination, and it also demands that we become the perfect light of the Holy Trinity for the world through the ongoing illumination and purification. Baptism has both the ontological and eschatological

10) S.S. Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life: The Theoria of Eastern Orthodox Ethics* (Minneapolis: Light & Life Pub, 1983), 242-43.

11) P. Goldman, "Christian Mystery and Responsibility: Gnosticism in Derrida's *The Gift of Death*," *Anthropoetics* 4 (1998), 62-68, 72.

12) Goldman, "Christian Mystery and Responsibility," 62-63.

aspects: a new birth as the perfect light of God, encouragement of virtues, and further transformation of world by our light. Christian mystery itself is highly moral.

This thesis consists of four elementary claims in detail. First, Christian baptism is the true mystery against pagan mysteries which demons dominate according to Gregory. Second, we are born again ontologically as the perfect light of God in baptism through illumination. From baptism, we receive the knowledge of God and start becoming like God. Third, Gregory argues that we should prepare for baptism by means of purification. Purification is a preliminary step and includes not only the self-examination of soul, but also avoiding evil and practicing virtues. Finally, baptism demands us to become the perfect light for the world and to enlighten others through progressive illumination and purification. Our ontological state as the recovered light is actually realized by knowing God, reflecting a soul, avoiding evil, practicing virtues, and having mercy. Baptism is toward both our rebirth and reformation of the world.

In this essay, first I deal with analyze the text (Or. 39) within the methodological tool of the relationship between baptism and Christian life. Then, I analyze the connection between deification, baptism, and ethics.

2. Gregory's *Oration 39*

Gregory's oration 39 is one of three connected orations (38-40). This oration was preached on the Festival of the Epiphany, probably 5 January 381 C.E. only a few months after his appointment to the bishop at Constantinople on

27 November 380. On the other hand, oration 38 was delivered on 25 December 380 to celebrate the Theophany and the adoration of the Magi.¹³⁾ The Festival of the Epiphany was two-day celebrations and was to commemorate the mystery of Christ's baptism. It began with an evening service and was climaxed with the administration of baptism the next day when oration 40 was delivered.¹⁴⁾

When Gregory was the bishop at Constantinople, Emperor Theodosius implemented strict policies for the defense of Nicene orthodoxy. To settle the Arian debate at Constantinople, he dismissed the Arian bishop, Demophilus when Demophilus refused to agree with a formula of Nicene faith. Then, Gregory was appointed as his successor the day at his dismissal. On 10 January 381, another pro - Nicene law was issued against some heresies such as Photinians, Arians, and Eunomians. They were deprived of meeting places, and those, who resisted the law, were exiled. A general Council of the Eastern Church also was assembled by Theodosius at Constantinople on May 381.¹⁵⁾ Theodosius tried to unite the church in his empire by making laws for Nicene orthodoxy.

In Gregory's times, baptism itself was regarded as a highly elite ritual. People wanted to be baptized by the person who had the strongest power and could administer powerful baptism.¹⁶⁾ Some nobles would ignore the minister of baptism who was inferior in rank to themselves.¹⁷⁾ Arians, Sabellians,

13) Elm, "Inscription and Conversions," 4; J.F. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and the Imperial Court, A.D. 364-425* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 122. For a further study on the date of oration 39, see. Moreschini, *Grégoire de Nazianze*, Discours 38-41, 16-22.

14) J.A. McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 340.

15) Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, 122-23.

16) Elm, "Inscription and Conversions," 20-1.

17) Gregory, Or. 39.14 (SC 358:180).

Novatians, Eunomians, and even ascetics at Constantinople showed themselves as the powerful administrators of baptism.¹⁸⁾ They had a strong influence in the city and the public followed them. Despite Theodosius' ardent support of Nicene orthodoxy, the power of Gregory's baptism was so weak.

3. Gregory's Baptismal Ethics

3.1. Christian Baptism: The True Mystery.

Gregory begins his oration by using mystical terms to describe the nature of baptism. In the beginning of the oration, He calls Christian baptism "mystery" (μυστήριον).¹⁹⁾ Against false pagan mysteries, Christian baptism is the true mystery which is sublime in nature. Gregory says that this mystery is "lofty" (ὕψηλόν), "divine" (Θεῖον), and "belongs to the splendor above" (τῆς ἄνω λαμπρότητος πρόξενον), not "guileful," nor "disorderly," nor "from Greek error and drunkenness."²⁰⁾ Other pagan ceremonies and the Jews' rituals are incommensurable with this true mystery in grace and power. Gregory argues that Christian baptism is the time of rebirth (ἀναγεννήσεως) and reformation

18) Elm, "Inscription and Conversions," 21-3; H. Dörrie, "Die Epiphanias-Predigt des Gregor von Nazianz (Hom. 39) und ihre Geistesgeschichtliche Bedeutung," in *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, vol. 1, ed. by P. Granfield and J.A. Jungmann (Münster: Aschendorff, 1970), 409-12; For the more thoughtful analysis of backgrounds in oration 39, see. Dörrie, "Die Epiphanias-Predigt," 409-23.

19) Gregory, Or. 39.1 (SC 358:150).

20) Gregory, Or. 39.1 (SC 358:150).

(ἀναπλάσεως), but no other mysteries and ceremonies have this grace. Jews' purification rituals are just shadowy and temporary. In particular, Gregory enumerates a long list of pagan mysteries, including the ancient Greek and Egyptians ceremonies, to emphasize the superiority of Christian baptism. Because they came from demons, they are devilish and terrible rituals. They just demonstrate humans' errors by worshipping abominable images.²¹⁾

The reason for this incomparable excellence of Christian baptism is rooted in its the true divine origin. Pagan mysteries came from dark demons and foolishness of human mind. Demons are so envious and evil that they cannot endure our salvation. Thus, making us fall into passion, they entice us to worship worthless idols. Pagan ceremonies also involve secret and obscene acts. Because pagan mysteries belong to demons, their nature is so irrational that they are not worthy of considering of our mind (νόος). They are just trivial things like jokes which people tell children in market place.²²⁾ However, Christian mystery is founded on Christ's baptism.²³⁾ Thus, Christian baptism celebrates the divine Logos with this serious oration.²⁴⁾ A decisive difference between Christian mystery and others is nothing less than the divine Logos. The Logos, Who became like us, makes Christian mystery true and lofty. Accordingly, through baptism, we are free from paganism which demons rule, and enter into Christianity which serves the living and true God.²⁵⁾ Baptism is the initiation into the true mystery.

21) Gregory, Or. 39.2-7 (SC 358:152-62).

22) Gregory, Or. 39.3 (SC 358:154); 39.6-7 (SC 358:160-62).

23) Gregory, Or. 39.1 (SC 358:150).

24) McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus*, 341.

25) Gregory, Or. 39.8 (SC 358:162).

3.2. Baptism and Illumination: New Birth as the Perfect Light

The true mystery of baptism is a place where the marvelous grace and power of God are given to us. Gregory as a mystagogue encourages us to see “the grace” and “power” of this mystery.²⁶⁾ Above all, we are changed ontologically through divine illumination in baptism. “The true light” (Τὸ ἀληθὲς φῶς) of the Trinity shines (φωτίζει) through Christ in baptism.²⁷⁾ “Terminology of light” is paramount for understanding Gregory’s thoughts.²⁸⁾ Baptism is a time to receive the divine light, illumination. Gregory urges us to hear “God’s voice”(Θείας φωνῆς); “I Am The Light Of The World” (Jn 8:12).²⁹⁾ We hear God and approach Him in order to be illuminated.

In this illumination, we are to be born anew from above and restored again to the image of God. For the person created in the image of God, baptism is to “to receive again the image whole.”³⁰⁾ Baptism is a new birth and the path to return to “heavenly life (*himmlischen Leben*).”³¹⁾ Especially, Gregory

26) Gregory, Or. 39.2 (SC 358:152).

27) Gregory, Or. 39.1(SC 358:150); 39.2 (SC 358:152); 39.20 (SC 358:194-96).

28) Elm, “Inscription and Conversions,” 16; Gregory argues that because God is light and evil is darkness, our salvation is primarily carried out by illumination. After putting off our darkness, we enlighten others. These ideas are clearly discernible in this oration (Or. 39). A. Meredith, *The Cappadocians* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 43, argues that for Gregory the center of theology is soteriology which is expressed in term of enlightenment. For a discussion about the term of ‘light’ in Gregory, see. C. Moreschini, “Luce e purificazione nella dottrina di Gregorio Nazianzeno,” *Augustinianum* (1973), 535-49.

29) Gregory, Or. 39.2 (SC 358:150).

30) J. Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Have: Yale University Press, 1993), 281.

31) H. Althaus, *Die Heilslehre des heiligen Gregor von Nazianz* (Münster: Verlag Aschendorff, 1972), 157.

emphasizes our restored being as the perfect light of God. Once enlightened in baptism, we are purified from sin and recover the light which we received in the beginning, but destroyed by sin. In God's illumination, having put off darkness, we go near "the Light" and are born again as "perfect light" (φῶς γενόμεθα τέλειον), that is as "the children of perfect light" (τελείου φωτὸς γεννήματα).³²⁾ Through baptism, we become the perfect light of God in the world which Christ made entirely new in His baptism, like Adam in Paradise.³³⁾ In this world, we reflect the Light of the Trinity.

Baptism as a new birth is closely related to the knowledge of God through illumination. From baptism, we receive divine knowledge and begin knowing the living and true Trinity. Gregory says that because grace of mystery is given to us, we are free from "the superstitious error," and "are born with the truth." Now, it is possible to "see and philosophize about God (τὰ περί Θεοῦ) and divine things (τὰ Θεῶν)."³⁴⁾ Baptism is a necessary element in pursuing divine knowledge.

In fact, baptism and illumination are synonyms. This belief was common in the early church. From the second century, the verb 'illuminate' (φωτίζω) was used as a technical term for baptism to explain divine knowledge which was obtained in baptism.³⁵⁾ Because illumination needs purification, Gregory considers purification, baptism, illumination as one. All three things are

32) Gregory, Or. 39.1 (SC 358:150); Or. 39.2 (SC 358:152). Althaus, *Die Heilslehre des heiligen Gregor von Nazianz*, 157-62, notes that purification and illumination play a key role in Gregory's baptism.

33) Gregory, Or. 39.16 (SC 358:184).

34) Gregory, Or. 39.8 (SC 358:162).

35) J. Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology: Its Origins and Early Development* (Nijmegen: Dekker & Van de Vegt, 1962), 173-76; Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit*, 235-60.

“necessary first conditions to contemplate the divine; but all three also make such contemplation possible through their potential to restore man to his original dignity.”³⁶⁾ Through baptism, we restore the original state and enter into “a mystagogical life.”³⁷⁾

Shivering with fear in tongue and mind (διδόναιαν), Gregory speaks about God Who we know through illumination.³⁸⁾ If we experience the dignity of God, we will realize that fear is the most proper attitude in front of God. With fear, we enter into the world of the Trinity. Our God is the Holy Trinity, one in three and three in one. Gregory emphasizes one essence and three persons at the same time. According to him, when we speak about God, we are illuminated by one light and three lights at once. God is three in respect to “Individualities” (ιδιότητας) or “Hypostases” (ὑποστάσεις), or “persons” (πρόσωπα). According to “the Substance” (οὐσία), however, He is one.³⁹⁾ Beyond human understanding, God exists paradoxically one and three at once, which is the mystery itself. Gregory argues that God is divided inseparably

36) Elm, “Inscription and Conversions,” 17.

37) D.S. Kalleres, “Demons and Divine Illumination: A Consideration of Eight Prayers by Gregory of Nazianzus,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 61 (2007), 173; Gregory’s language of illumination and mystagogical life was that of Neoplatonism, especially of Iamblichus. Iamblichus argues that the god illuminates from above and the illuminated things participate in the light; J.F. Finamore, “Iamblichus on Light and the Transparent,” in *The Divine Iamblichus: Philosopher and Man of Gods*, ed. by H.J. Blumenthal and E.G. Clark (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), 55-61. With regard to the origin of illumination from a god, the worship of the Sun is interesting because the Sun is considered as the manifestation of a god. In ancient philosophy, Platonists, Aristotelians, and Stoics hold monotheistic belief in the worship of the Sun; P. Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, eds., *Pagan Monotheism in late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 19.

38) Gregory, Or. 39.11 (SC 358:170).

39) Gregory, Or. 39.11 (SC 358:170-72).

and is united in division. God, the Father, did not cease to be “Unoriginate” (ἀναρχος), nor the Son to be “Begotten” (γεννητῶς), or “not Unoriginate” (οὐχἀναρχος), nor the Holy Spirit to be “Procession” (ἐκπορευτῶς) from the Father.⁴⁰⁾ At the same time, these three are always one. In such a way, baptism is the moment of our change as a new light. We begin to know the Trinity more truly, the Light itself, from baptism after we are delivered from demons, sins, and darkness by illumination. Baptism opens a door for the ongoing progress toward becoming akin to God.

3.3. Purification: A Preliminary Condition for Baptism

Because the center of baptism is God’s illumination, baptism requires purification as a preparation for illumination. Citing Proverbs 1:7, Gregory emphasizes fear (φόβον) which the people of Israel felt in the presence of God at Mount Sinai.⁴¹⁾ Fear is the beginning of wisdom (Pr 1:7). Fear before God enables us to see both the highest holiness of God and our uncleanness. Gregory mentions a sort of steps from fear to illumination. A person with fear obeys the commandments of God. Where there is obedience, there is purification (κάθαρσις) of flesh. Further, purification results in illumination (ἐλλαμπης).⁴²⁾ Illumination requires purification. The more we are purified, the more we are illuminated. Thus, Gregory insists that it is necessary for one desiring to approach the Light to purify (καθαίρω) oneself first.⁴³⁾ Thus,

40) Gregory, Or. 39.11 (SC 358:172-74).

41) Gregory, Or. 39.8 (SC 358:164).

42) Gregory, Or. 39.8 (SC 358:164).

baptism is a spiral process that is ongoing and making progress.

We need purification because of attributes of God. God is the very Light. He is holy and pure. Thus, He does not permit the impure to come to Him. God as the true Light is revealed only to a purified person. It is necessary to have “moral purity leading to vision” to know Him.⁴⁴⁾ Meeting God without purification is very dangerous. Gregory in his orations speaks about this danger in contemplating God without preparation. He says that “contemplation without bridle” (θεωρία ἀχαλίνωτος) may push us down from cliffs.”Because of the nature, the same Logos is “terrible and dreadful” (φοβερός) to those who are unworthy of Him, while is blessed to those who are prepared.⁴⁵⁾

In *Oration 28*, Gregory uses a special metaphor from the experience of Israel at the Mount Sinai to stress purification before contemplation. Like Aaron, we can either stand near God or stand far off like Nadab or Abihu or the Elders according to the degree of purification. But if we belong to the unworthy multitude, we never approach to Him. Gregory maintains that if someone is “entirely impure”, he should not come near to God. This is because that is “not safe” (οὐ ασφαλές).⁴⁶⁾ In *Oration 27*, he also uses the same expressions in relation to purification. It is not safe for the impure to touch the pure. That is equal to seeing the sun’s ray directly with weak eyes. According to Gregory, philosophizing about God is not allowed to everyone.

43) Gregory, Or. 39.9 (SC 358:164).

44) Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 43. In emphasizing of purification before divine knowledge, Gregory follows Origen, and through him Plato. They maintained that only those who are purified by means of practice of morality and mind have access to the highest knowledge (Origen, *On First Principles* 2.11.7, Plato, *Republic* 7).

45) Gregory, Or. 39.9(SC 358:164, 168); 39.10 (SC 358:168).

46) Gregory, Or.28.2 (SC 250:102).

Only those who are purified in soul and body can meet Him. God is not the “cheap” and “low” (τῶν χαμαί ἐρχομένων) subject which is available to us whenever we want.⁴⁷⁾

From the Scriptures, Gregory gives some examples of people who fled from the presence of God due to the lack of preparation through purification. Israel did not endure the glory of God in the face of Moses and asked a veil (Ex 34:30). When Jesus visited Peter, he could not welcome Him in his boat. He confessed that he is a sinner (Lk 5:8). Wanting his servant to be healed, the Centurion too did not accept Jesus’ visit (Mt 8:8).⁴⁸⁾ An interesting example is Christ’s purification. Explaining the lessons of His baptism, Gregory argues that the baptism of Christ, who is fully pure, warns those who ignore purification. If He was purified, we should never despise the necessary step for baptism.⁴⁹⁾ God is so pure that we cannot receive Him with our impurity. In such a way, purification is a preliminary step for baptism, because baptism is a place for us to approach God as the Light. Accordingly, baptism is very dangerous to those who are not prepared with purification.

After pointing out the danger of illumination without purification, Gregory explains what purification is. Purification is not only the self - examination of soul, but also avoiding evil and practicing virtues. Baptism demands purification both in soul and body. First, Gregory pays attention to care of the soul. We need to drive out “the impure and worldly spirit” (τὸ ἀκάθαρτον καὶ ὑλικὸν πνεῦμα) from our soul. This is related to exorcism. By casting out evil spirits, we are purified in soul and body. Then, it is necessary to

47) Gregory, Or. 27.3 (SC 250:76).

48) Gregory, Or. 39.9 (SC 358:164-66).

49) Gregory, Or. 39.14 (SC 358:180).

sweep clean and adorn our soul “with the knowledge” (τῇ ἐπιγνώσει). This means self-examination. A cleaned soul needs to reflect ourselves working diligently to master contemplation (Θεωρία).⁵⁰⁾ Purification does not end with care of the soul alone, but leads us to do the good. Gregory advises us to flee from evil and exercise virtue to protect the power of evil from ruling us.⁵¹⁾ Purity of soul bears naturally good and righteous life. The fact that purification of soul should include virtue is very important. As the Bible says, purification is to “break up our unplowed ground and sow righteousness” (Jer 4:3; Pr 11:18). These elements of purification allow Christ to dwell within us.⁵²⁾ Christ becomes a new Lord in our lives where evil dwelled before.

Gregory compares the process of purification with the story of Zacchaeus. Though he was of a high class and wealthy, he climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus when he heard that Jesus is visiting his town. Zacchaeus confessed his faults of the past to Christ who came to his house. Gregory points out Christ’s word; “Today salvation has come to this house” (Lk 19:9).⁵³⁾ As the example of Zacchaeus shows, purification itself is a hard work. However, it makes illumination of baptism brighter. For a purified person, illumination is no longer dangerous, but is most blessed instead. Through purification, we are invited to our new birth as the light for the world. The light of the Trinity waits for those who prepare themselves with fear for a glorious moment.

50) Gregory, Or. 27.3 (SC 250:76); Or. 39.10 (SC 358:168).

51) Gregory, Or. 39.10 (SC 358:168).

52) Gregory, Or. 39.10 (SC 358:168).

53) Gregory, Or. 39.9 (SC 358:166).

3.4. Post - Baptismal Life: the Perfect Light of the Trinity for the World

Our ontological change in baptism demands eschatological life. Baptism itself includes the direction of post - baptismal life. Baptism is a place for a new birth. At the same time, it requires life which is worthy of this new identity. In other words, this new state is actually realized by our decision and action. Indeed, when Cappadocians speak about the sacramental mysteries and the orthodox doctrines, they did not ignore the moral responsibilities. Jesus' word, "You will recognize them by their fruit" (Mt 7:20), is a standard to judge whether Christian belong to the true salvation.⁵⁴⁾ In this oration, Gregory urges us to become the perfect light of God for the world through ongoing purification and illumination. With our light, we enlighten others and make the world taking away darkness. For Gregory, the moment of change, an ongoing process, illumination, purification, and ethics are all united in baptism.⁵⁵⁾

The final aim of baptism is to become the perfect light of God in this world. In baptism, we change ontologically as the perfect light of the Trinity. Now, this baptism demands life as the perfect light of God. Our new birth as light of God is not completed in one flash of light, rather it is actuated by lifelong purification and illumination.⁵⁶⁾ Life as the light is started again from purification. Gregory strongly advises us to be always purified even after baptism. Using the example of Zacchaeus, Gregory compares purification in post - baptismal life with Zacchaeus' life. Purification is to "bear fruit of

54) Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 305-306.

55) Elm, "Inscription and Conversions," 17.

56) Elm, "Inscription and Conversions," 17.

life more perfectly by scattering and dispersing things which we wrongly gathered as a tax gatherer.”⁵⁷⁾ We reflect on our soul to find out if there is evil in us. Then, we purify ourselves by throwing out evil deeds and doing the good.

Purification leads us to illumination. If we are not purified, God's light does not shine in us, and we lose our purpose of life to be the perfect light. Gregory says that through purification, we as the perfect light stand near the Great Light again. Just as before baptism, purification is a preparatory step for illumination, this is so after baptism too. In baptism, illuminated by the Trinity more purely and clearly, we are initiated into the mystery of light (μυηθήτε τὴν φωταγωγίαν).⁵⁸⁾ The center of illumination is our regeneration. Under God's illumination, we already are born as light of God in baptism. This illumination also makes it possible for us to realize our new being. Thus, we actually appear as the perfect of light by means of both the ongoing purification and illumination: knowing God, cleaning the soul, avoiding evil, and practicing virtues. Darkness within us disappears more and more, and light of God shines within us. We become akin to God who is the Perfect Light itself.⁵⁹⁾

57) Gregory, Or. 39.9 (SC 358:166); 39.20 (SC 358:194).

58) Gregory, Or. 39.20 (SC 358:194).

59) Gregory's language about the deifying aspect of baptism is similar to the Neoplatonic language about theurgy, particularly to Iamblichus and Plotinus. Theurgy is a philosophical end. However, deification in Gregory consists of purification of soul and practice virtues, while the Neoplatonic theurgy mainly focuses on a spiritual aspect; G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 1-17, cf. 59-126. For other studies about Neoplatonic theurgy, see G. Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7 (1999), 573-99; J.F. Finamore, "Plotinus and Iamblichus on Magic and Theurgy," *Dionysius* 17 (1999), 83-94; S.I. Johnston, "Rising to the Occasion: Theurgic Ascent in its Cultural Milieu," in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. by P. Schäfer and H.G. Kippenberg (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 165-94.

Stressing this continual realization of our being, Gregory urges us to illuminate the world with our light. He says that we are born as “illuminators in the world” (φωστήρες ἐν κόσμῳ). As we receive the Light of God in baptism, now it is time for us to enlighten the world. We speak about “God’s wisdom in mystery”(Θεοῦ σοφία ἐν μυστηρίῳ) which was hidden in the past, and our light enlightens (εκλάμπω) other people. They see our light and return to God from demons and darkness. Then, they are reborn as light of God like us. Wherever we go, the kingdom of light is expanded. Darkness disappears bit by bit and the world is gradually filled with the light of God. Accordingly, our light is the living power (ζωτικὴ δύναμις) for other people.⁶⁰⁾ Baptism is life for the world. Baptism starts from the rebirth in us and ends up in the transformation of the world.

4. Deification, Baptism, and Christian Ethics

Christian ethics is based on doctrines, especially deification.⁶¹⁾ We cannot understand it without deification. This is because Christian ethics is more than to seek good life; it is to become God-like. In fact, deification is the purpose of mankind created in God’s image. Created in the image of God, man has the fundamental “telos” to become akin to God.⁶²⁾ Due to our original sins, however, it is impossible for us to accomplish our ultimate goal of union

60) Gregory, Or. 39.10 (SC 358:168); 39.20 (SC 358:194).

61) Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life*, 26.

62) Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life*, 27-28.

with God by ourselves. To solve this problem, Christ who is God became human being. God became man that we may become God. Christ's incarnation and redemption should not be separated from our deification. The descent of Christ not only sets us free from evil and sins, but also opens the door for us to become like God in the Holy Spirit.⁶³⁾ Through deification which was the result of Christ's salvation, we gradually imitate God in all our thoughts and acts. In his book entitled "Living the Liturgy," Harakas writes about this quality of deification as follows:

We are to become as much as is humanly possible like God. This happens when our thoughts are like His thoughts, our desires coincide with His desires, our will chooses as He chooses, our actions are reflections of His actions. In other words, we become like God when our ways of thinking, feeling, acting, and doing are united with God's ways of doing these things.⁶⁴⁾

In such a way, deification is a foundation for Christian ethics. Baptism is the very door to begin deification, and entering into sacramental life from baptism, we start the ongoing spiritual and moral growth.⁶⁵⁾ First of all, baptism is ontological change. As Paul says in Romans, baptism is above all our death and resurrection with Christ (Ro 6:1-14). Paul argues that we are united with Christ's death and resurrection in baptism. Through baptism, our old self is

63) V. Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 97-110.

64) S.S. Harakas, *Living the Liturgy: A Practical Guide for Participating in the Divine Liturgy of the Eastern Orthodox Church* (Minneapolis: Light & Life Pub, 1974), 13.

65) Harakas, *Living the Liturgy*, 13.

crucified with Christ and we are no longer slaves to sin. We are a new being in Christ, just as He was raised from the dead. We are free from the domination of Satan and belong to Christ. Thus, Baptism is to reject Satan and belong to God. Baptism places us “on God’s side” from the side of the devil and sin.⁶⁶⁾ “This sacramental resurrection in Christ” not only gives us eternal life, but also lifts us up into the heavenly glory.⁶⁷⁾ However, baptism does not mean the change of our being alone. Paul says that we should live a new life. Because we die to sin, we do not let sin reign in us again, but offer ourselves to God as “instruments of righteousness” (13).

Therefore, the ontological change of baptism demands eschatological life which actuates the new reality. We should live according to our new nature because we already put off the old-self with “its practices” in baptism (Col 3:9).⁶⁸⁾ This shows clearly a link between baptism and its ethical implications. We died to sin and our old self was crucified (Ro 6:1, 6). The power of Satan and sin can no longer dominate over us. In baptism, we are renewed and become the children of God. Yet “the ontological reality” needs our choice and action to realize the change of state. Because the passion remains within us, we should act to put on new self.⁶⁹⁾ If we do not act according to our new being with our will, baptism is fruitless and our transformation is not realized. Though this emphasis about our will and act does not intend to weaken the priority of grace, grace does not force us to do the good. Post - baptismal life is “the synergism” of grace and will.⁷⁰⁾ It is a proper response to the

66) S.S. Harakas, *Living the Faith: The Praxis of Eastern Orthodox Ethics* (Minneapolis: Light & Life Pub, 1992), 19.

67) G. Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption*, vol. 3 (Belmont: Nordland, 1976), 149-55.

68) Harakas, *Living the Faith*, 3.

69) Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life*, 243.

grace of God which He gave us in baptism.

Thus, Baptism and ethics can be distinguished, but never be separated from each other in that baptism demands any kinds of acts in relation to a renewed being. In particular, these acts are to avoid evil and do the good. Avoiding evil is a first step for doing the good.⁷¹⁾ Paul says that we should cloth ourselves with “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and above all these, love.” (Col 3:12).⁷²⁾ We “put off the old man” and “put on the new” through these acts, resulting in becoming like God. Baptism, which is a rebirth, demands acts in eschatological aspect. These acts are the process of deification. Indeed, deification, baptism, and Christian ethics are interrelated closely with each other.

At this point, it is important to pay greater attention to the intrinsic morality of baptism. In fact, Christian mystery originally has strong ethical aspects from the Old Testament. The people of Israel met God in fear and trembling at the Mount Sinai. This mystical fear made them remember the law and internalize it in their minds. The internalized law guided their life. The prophets following Moses too emphasized a directed connection between sacrifice and ethics. They said that God did not delight in the blood of sacrifice, but wanted Israel to do the good; relieving the oppressed, and caring for the fatherless and the widow (Isa 1:11, 17; Jer 7:6).

Christ is the summit of the Old Testament's teachings about mystery and ethics. He showed nonviolence and self - sacrificing love as the essences of Christian mystery on the Cross.⁷³⁾ Christian baptism itself requires the refusal

70) Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption*, 155.

71) Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life*, 232-43.

72) Harakas, *Living the Faith*, 3-4.

of evil, nonviolence, goodness, mercy, and love for others. Further, as an orthodox scholar, A. Schmemmann, insists, Christian baptism gives the life for the world.⁷⁴⁾ It promotes the good for the community beyond individuals. The experience of mystery is related to ethics not only for individuals, but also for the community.

5. Conclusion

Baptism and Christian ethics are one in both ontological and eschatological aspects. Baptism as the moment of change of our being requires ongoing progress in spiritual and moral life in the new state. This life is deification. We restore a lost state in baptism. At the same time, baptism itself encourages us to avoid evil and do the good: nonviolence, mercy, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and love. Furthermore, it aims toward transformation of the world by our deeds. Ethics without baptism is to lose the purpose of life. Baptism without life is a just ritual without power.

For Gregory, baptism is a new birth as the perfect light of God through illumination. First, baptism as the true mystery is to flee from false pagan mysteries and to enter into ‘the true mystery of light.’ Originating from the divine Logos, Christian baptism is sublime and rational, unlike pagan mysteries that are evil and irrational due to their origin from demons. Christian baptism

73) Goldman, “Christian Mystery and Responsibility,” 62-63, 66-68.

74) A. Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), 68.

is superior over any other religious ceremonies. Above all, baptism is a glorious and wonderful time to return to the light of God. Through illumination, we put off darkness and put on light. The glory and power of baptism is immeasurable. From baptism, we know the Light who is one in three and three in one at the same time. By the light of the Trinity, we become God-like.

Because the center of baptism is God, it vitally requires purification as a preparation step which most of us ignore today. Gregory emphasizes many times that we do not easily access to God without purification. Purification is not only to examine our soul, but also to avoid evil and practice virtues. Baptism without purification is very dangerous. Finally, we should realize our new being as the perfect light of God through lifelong purification and illumination. Baptism gives us a heavenly citizenship and good works are the requirement for this citizenship.⁷⁵) In particular, we are born as 'illuminator for the world.' The Light of God shines in this world through us. When people see the light of God within us, they return to the Light from demons and darkness. The Light enlightens us in baptism and we illuminate others in this world. Our baptism is not finished yet, but continues until we become the perfect light. Now, God invites and tells us; Come to me and be the perfect of light for the world.

Always be purified and you will be purified... that you may be born as illuminators in the world (φωστήρες ἐν κόσμῳ), a living power (ζωτικὴ δύναμις) to other people, and that as perfect light, having stand near to the Great Light you may be initiated into the mystery of light (μυηθῆτε τὴν φωταγωγίαν) in that place, illuminated (ἐλλαμπ

75) Elm, "Inscription and Conversions," 24.

όμενοι) by the Trinity more purely and clearly, from him now you received moderately the One Ray from the One divinity (τήν μίαν αὐχὴν ἐκ μιᾶς τῆς Θεότητος) in Christ Jesus our Lord, to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.⁷⁶⁾

76) Gregory, Or. 39.20 (SC 358:194-96).

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