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Knowing-by-likeness

Some origins of a patristic epistemology

According to Clement of Alexandria, a key ingredient for successful education is likeness to one's teacher:

And just as Ischomachus will make whoever attaches himself to him a husbandman, and Lampis a sea-captain, and Charidemus a general, and Simon a horseman, and Perdix a salesman, and Crobylus a cook, and Archelaus a dancer, and Homer a poet, and Pyrrho a wrangler, and Demosthenes an orator, and Chrysippus a dialectician, and Aristotle a scientist, and Plato a philosopher, so whoever obeys the Lord . . . is perfectly perfected after the image of his Teacher, and goes about a god in flesh.¹

Origen, Clement's slightly younger successor, agreed with him: "The goal of the teacher . . . is this: to make the disciple as [ὡς] himself." Indeed, Jesus says as much too, Origen points out: "It is sufficient for the disciple that he be as his teacher" (Matt 10:25).² Clement and Origen both witness to a *phenomenological* observation, or piece of common sense, that was basic to ancient Greek *paideia*: you become like what you study. But along with this observation, Clement and Origen made an additional *epistemological* claim: likeness to your object of study is not only *the result of*, but the *condition for* knowing it. First comes the movement, following the steps of your teacher, then comes the understanding; or, as Aristotle was

1. *Strom.* 7.16.101 (SC 428, 304).

2. *Jo.* 32.10.118–19 (SC 385, 238–41).

the first to put it, “like is known by like.”³ This truism of Greek thought entered Christianity when Alexandrian theologians, namely Clement and Origen, made Greek education and epistemology their own, as they forged a distinct Christian concept and practice of education. In their picture, not only might a believer hope to be conformed to the objects of Christian philosophy, but he should seek this conformation *in order* to discern these objects. This chapter tackles in detail the question of how the seeds of this epistemological model—that “like is known by like”—landed in the Christian discourse of second- and third-century Alexandria and began to flourish there (wherefrom its roots grew and eventually extended to the thought of Maximus the Confessor and nourished it, as we will see in the ensuing chapters). This is a preliminary question; my aim in asking it is to fill out the background and tradition upon which Maximus’ epistemology stands. But this is also a really worthwhile question to ask for its own sake, because the principle that “like is known by like” was widespread enough in Greek thought to sit indistinctly against the early Christian landscape, hiding in the open, and has largely eluded the specification of scholars of early Christianity. To answer this difficult question with control in this chapter, it will be enough to focus on two unmistakable sources of a developing Christian likeness epistemology.

The first source to explore is ancient Greek philosophy and science. The maxim that like is perceived or known by like was an old, prevalent, but somewhat vague assumption of Greek philosophy. I will summarize how it began to be more deliberately articulated from Aristotle in the fourth century BCE onwards, and then notably attracted the scientific, or biological, elucidation of Galen in the second century CE. The product of this tradition was a version of the like-is-known-by-like maxim imagined and defined in *optical* terms, terms of “perception,” “vision,” “light.” This product was polished and available, but, I will argue, Christians did not buy it. They seemed to consider this knowing-by-likeness model to be true, but at the same time obvious enough to earn only occasional interest. On such occasions, we will see, Christian thinkers deployed it in intriguing ways. Ultimately, however, the like-by-like maxim in its optical rendition appears sporadically and insubstantially in the writings of Greek-speaking Christians of the first centuries CE. The situation has not changed much with Maximus either: whilst, as we will see later, he was probably aware of Galen’s scientific theory that like is perceived by like, it

3. *De an.* 404B.

was hardly a major inspiration of the broad brushes of the knowing-by-likeness motif that color Maximus' writings.

The second origin will be worth exploring at greater length. I will argue that a Christian likeness epistemology largely emerged not out of a philosophical or scientific heritage but out of an *exegetical* heritage: that is, a tradition of opinion about how to interpret texts. To be specific, I will claim that an *exegetical* rendition, as I will call it, of the knowing-by-likeness motif was adopted by Alexandrian Christians as a working assumption at the point that they began reading Scripture as an *enigmatic* text, a text that at first conceals its deepest meaning. Here Christians joined a long Greek tradition of "allegorical" or "figurative" reading, as it is normally called in the scholarship. This joining took place in the second and third centuries,⁴ especially in the hands of Clement and Origen of Alexandria, two theologians who, working in a city of libraries and temples (and libraries in temples⁵), began wondering in detail how best to approach a *text* whose meaning is *mysterious*. The premises of the allegorical tradition that they embraced—premises given authority, they thought, by the Bible itself—offered Clement and Origen the ingredients for a model of discernment according to which readers must conform themselves to the hidden truth of the text to access it. The definitive themes of this exegetical rendition of the likeness epistemology are not "vision" and "light," but *darkness* and its demands: "enigma," "mystery," "holiness," "initiation," "purity." It is this rendition and these themes that most obviously find their way to Maximus in the seventh century. I will come at this exegetical origin of the Christian likeness epistemology in three parts. First, a selection of allegorical accounts from a one-thousand-year period (fourth century BCE to the sixth century CE) will introduce the crucial and lasting link between allegorical or enigmatic exegesis and the knowing-by-likeness motif. Then our focus will narrow to Alexandria at the turn of the millennium, to find the same link upheld by some influential figures whose practice of allegorical reading directly informed Clement and Origen's philosophical culture. Thirdly, we will turn to these two theologians themselves, and explore how their allegorical reading

4. However, the stirrings of Christian allegorical reading belong to the Bible itself, most obviously when Paul uses the verb ἀλληγόρεω in Gal 4:24. As Alain Le Boulluc puts it: Paul gives the examples, Origen gives the theory (Boulluc, "De Paul à Origène," 415).

5. Watts, *City and School*, 149–50.

substantially furnished the thesis that “like is known by like” for the first time in Christian discourse.

Knowing-by-likeness in Greek philosophy and science and its impact on Christian thought

Let us turn to the first origin of a Christian likeness epistemology that I mentioned: the *optical* rendition of the knowing-by-likeness motif that came out of Greek philosophy and science. Plato mentions the proverbial maxim that “like is friend [φίλον] to like.” He calls it an “ancient saying” (λόγος ἀρχαῖος), with folkloric origin in Homer, and attributes it to the philosophers of nature in general.⁶ In the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle gives this maxim the same provenance—the poets and philosophers of nature⁷—and elsewhere identifies a similar teaching in Democritus⁸ and Heraclitus.⁹ As Müller says, what Plato and Aristotle pointed to was less a “theory” than “a tacit assumption . . . widespread among early Greek thought.”¹⁰ A number of famed philosophers and scientists seem to have brought this assumption to discussions about sense perception, and especially sight, discussions that were summarized by doxographers (writers describing the opinions of past thinkers) from Aristotle onwards with the formula: “like is known by like.”¹¹ Two passages that were normally voiced in evidence of this notion were the following by Empedocles and Plato accordingly:¹²

6. *Lysis* 214A–15D. The line from Homer that Plato references is *od.* 17.218: “God always brings like and like together” (ὥς αἰεὶ τὸν ὁμοῖον ἄγει θεὸς ὥς τὸν ὁμοῖον). Plato also invokes the maxim that “like is friend to like” at *Grg.* 510B and *Leg.* 716C.

7. *Eth. Eud.* 1235A. Amongst his citations from the poets, Aristotle includes the same line from Homer.

8. *Gen. corr.* 323B.

9. *De an.* 405A; and again at *metaph.* 1000B.

10. Müller, *Gleiches zu Gleichem*, 8. Müller’s work is the key piece of secondary literature on the various manifestations of this assumption among pre-Socratic philosophers.

11. Schneider clarifies that the late-antique epistemological model emerged from pre-Socratic sayings about sense perception (Schneider, “Der Gedanke der Erkenntnis,” 66).

12. Some late-antique writers, like Sextus Empiricus, attributed the theory to Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans (*math.* 1.303). Schneider takes for granted that it was a Pythagorean doctrine on the basis of Sextus’ attribution (“Der Gedanke Der Erkenntnis,” 65–66), but Müller has shown that this attribution stems from an earlier

For it is with earth that we see earth, with water water, with air divine air, with fire destructive fire, with love love, with grim strife strife. For all are constructed and fitted together out of these, and it is with these that we think and feel pleasure and pain.¹³

The eyes were the first of the organs to be fashioned by the gods, to conduct light . . . Now the pure fire inside us . . . they made to flow through the eyes . . . Now whenever daylight surrounds the visual stream, like makes contact with like and coalesces with it to make up a single homogenous body aligned with the direction of the eyes . . . This brings about the sensation we call “seeing.”¹⁴

Although in passages like these the notion that “like is known by like” appears obscurely and in passing, philosophers in the fourth century BCE began to uphold Empedocles, some other pre-Socratics, and Plato as propounders of a *theory* of knowing-by-likeness.¹⁵ In *De Anima*, Aristotle was the first to name the thesis, citing the above passages to attribute it to Empedocles and Plato: “like is known by like” (γινώσκεσθαι τῷ ὅμοιῳ τὸ ὅμοιον).¹⁶ In reality, this epithetical phrase collectively referred to lone and ambiguous passages, like those above, from two or three philosophers (normally Parmenides, Empedocles, and Plato),¹⁷ rather than to the epistemological theory of any one author, or to widely shared opinions. It was, in David Sedley’s words, an “over-schematised and doxographical” invention.¹⁸ Sedley points to Theophrastus, Aristotle’s student and successor, who gives us a clear glimpse not only of what the like-by-like theory was understood to comprise, but of how the

misinterpretation by Poseidonius (*Gleiches zu Gleichem*, 3–7).

13. Fr. 77–78 (Wright, *Empedocles: The Extant Fragments*, 123–24; trans. Sedley, “Empedocles’ Theory of Vision,” 28).

14. *Ti.* 45B–D (trans. Cooper and Hutchinson, *Plato: Complete Works*, 1248).

15. Neither Empedocles nor Plato were describing sense perception *per se* in these passages, and in that sense Aristotle and his students misinterpreted them. Empedocles was explaining what he thought made up blood—for him, the mediator of sense-perception (Sedley, “Empedocles’ Theory of Vision,” 28). And Plato was explaining how, when the fire from the eyes meets the fire from the sun, a cone-shaped visual body is formed, which acts as a quasi sense organ.

16. *De an.* 404B.

17. On the ambiguity and misinterpretation of these passages, see Sedley, “Empedocles’ Theory of Vision,” especially 29–31.

18. Sedley, “Empedocles’ Theory of Vision,” 29.

theory was used as a category to carve up and sort the philosophical landscape. It is worth looking at the opening few sentences of Theophrastus' *De Sensibus* in full:

The various opinions (δόξαι) concerning sense perception, when regarded broadly, fall into two groups. By some investigators it is ascribed to likeness, by others to contrast. Parmenides, Empedocles, and Plato attribute it to likeness; Anaxagoras and Heraclitus to contrast. The one party is persuaded by the thought that other things are, for the most part, best interpreted in the light of what is like them; that it is a native endowment of all creatures to know their kin; and furthermore, that sense perception takes place by means of an effluence, and like is carried towards like. The rival party assumes that perception comes to pass by an alteration; that the like is unaffected by the like, whereas opposites are affected by each other.¹⁹

Theophrastus' ensuing interpretation of the first group of thinkers is questionable, because his chief care is to fit each of them into the like-by-like box whatever they have to say. That he is schematizing or stereotyping becomes more obvious, Sedley notices, when he eventually admits that the latter group are not in fact opposite-by-opposite theorists, but rather simply those who do *not* hold to the like-by-like theory.²⁰ Theophrastus may have begun his work with these two contrary opinions (like-by-like vs. opposite-by-opposite) in imitation of Aristotle's parallel schematisation of the maxim that "like is friend to like" in *Eudemian Ethics*, but Aristotle at least admitted that "these two opinions are so widely separated [i.e., contrary] as to be too general."²¹

In short, the notion that "like is known by like" probably cropped up fitfully and ambiguously amongst Greek thinkers before it was schematized by Aristotle and others in the fourth century. Aristotle himself rejected the theory,²² but by examining it in multiple works he lent weight to the topic, and it became something of a general or self-evident law.²³

19. *Sens.* 1–2 (Stratton, *Theophrastus*, 66–67).

20. *Sens.* 25 (Stratton, *Theophrastus*, 88–89); Sedley, "Empedocles' Theory of Vision," 30.

21. *Eth. Eud.* 1235A (trans. modified from LCL 285, 363). For more on how the first part of Theophrastus' *De Sensibus* depends upon, crystallizes, and updates Aristotle's schematizations, especially of like-by-like theorists, see Jaap Mansfeld, "Aristote et la structure," 158–88.

22. *De an.* 409B–411A.

23. Lehoux, *What Did the Romans Know?*, 122.

Neoplatonists, for example, reaching almost into the period of Maximus himself, would analyze and defend the theory, in spite of Aristotle's own rejection of it, in their commentaries on the *De Anima*.²⁴ And from an early period, Christian thinkers too seem familiar with the language in which the like-by-like theory was cast by Aristotle and his students. Hippolytus of Rome cites and discusses the above-cited popular proof text from Empedocles, for example,²⁵ and a number of other Christian writers inherit the phrase itself, "like is known by like," appropriating it in theological discussions of vision in particular. But before turning to these discussions, it is worth getting a sense of the odd variety of other theological topics in which Christians could put the like-by-like maxim to use.

In a homily on Psalm 48, Basil of Caesarea uses the maxim to interpret the meaning of God's breathing life into Adam's "face," as the Septuagint puts it (Gen 2:7): the text depicts, says Basil, how God "stowed away a part of his own grace in the human being in order that the like recognize the like [τῷ ὁμοίῳ ἐπιγινώσκει τὸ ὅμοιον]." This is what distinguishes humans as being in God's image and as having authority over other creatures, Basil says.²⁶ Basil's friend Gregory Nazianzen occasionally fixes upon the formula as a smart tool for comprehending another theological locus: the incarnation. In the one very short passage that survives from his *Letter* 110, the key theme, variously put, is learning; Gregory uses the words "admonition," "teaching," "training," "law-giving," and "taming." And Gregory's key claim is that learning happens *by likeness*. He gives the example that silent truths are taught through silence. In just the same way, he says, God "tames" humanity through what is human, that is, through becoming a human himself. In this light, Gregory contends,

24. A good example is the Christian Neoplatonist John Philoponus, *In Aristotelis De anima libros commentaria* 73–75 (CAG 15, 73–75). Some scholars have suggested that Maximus may have been influenced by Philoponus: Lévy, *Le créé et l'incréé*, 187–91; Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology*, 42–44, 52–53, 58, 114.

25. *Haer.* 6.11.1 (PTS 25, 216).

26. *Hom. in Ps.* 48 (PG 29, 449B–C). Basil's family friend Evagrius also uses this formula when commenting on the Psalms, though the nub of his point is somewhat more cryptic: "We know like through like [διὰ τοῦ ὁμοίου τὸ ὅμοιον ἐπιγινώσκομεν], and love through love, and righteousness through righteous. For such is the great and principle commandment itself. The lover serves the beloved. He calls God his own strength, since by him he was delivered from all his enemies, sensible and intelligible" (*sel. in Ps.* XVII, [PG 12, 1224D]; this work was for a long time attributed to Origen, see Rondeau, "Le commentaire sur les Psaumes," 329–48).

“training the like with the like” (τῷ ὁμοίῳ τὸ ὅμοιον ἐκπαιδεύων) is the very “law of Christ,” the law of God’s “economy” of salvation.²⁷ Gregory uses this logic in *Oration* 38 too, saying that the Word of God “bore flesh for the sake of our flesh, and mingled himself with an intelligent soul for my soul’s sake, purifying the like by the like [τῷ ὁμοίῳ τὸ ὅμοιον ἀνακαθαίρων].”²⁸ And then in another letter he calls upon this same “law of Christ” to insist, against his Apollinarian opponents, that, since in Adam sin came to be through human flesh, soul, *and* mind, so the Word had to assume a human flesh, soul, *and* mind—and this is because the divine Word is in the business of “sanctifying the like by the like” (τῷ ὁμοίῳ τὸ ὅμοιον ἀγιάσας).²⁹

Christians could adopt the like-by-like maxim in multiple ways, then, to help answer theological questions—about the human condition, or the character of the incarnation, for example. But if one continues to explore this maxim in the writings of late-antique Greek Christian (and non-Christian) theologians, one will notice that it usually crystallizes around the themes of light and vision.³⁰ The claim, hinted at by Plato in the *Timaeus* passage cited above, that light is seen by light, had already taken root in theological discussions by the turn of the millennium. Philo of Alexandria, for example, suggested that the highest form of divine knowledge works exactly like the perception of light: one knows “God by God [τὸν θεὸν θεῶ],” just as one sees “light by light [φωτὶ φῶς].”³¹ Along with non-Christian theological precedents like this,³² by the time Christians began adopting the optical like-by-like model it had received greater prominence and clarification thanks to well-known scientists, who adopted it as a foundation for their optical theories, compounding the maxim in the imagination of their philosophical culture.³³ In Rome in

27. *Ep.* 110 (Gallay, *Lettres*, vol. 2, 6).

28. *Or.* 38.13 (SC 358, 132–3).

29. *Ep.* 101, 51 (SC 208, 58).

30. This is the theme that Schneider follows when he traces like-by-like epistemologies among thinkers of the first centuries CE (“Der Gedanke der Erkenntnis,” 71–75).

31. *Praem.* 47 (PAO 5, 346; see also *gig.* 9). I was led to this passage by Schneider, “Der Gedanke der Erkenntnis,” 71–72.

32. Plotinus makes exactly the same claim: the soul’s likeness to God enables vision of God, just as the eye’s sun-likeness enables vision of the sun (*enn.* 1.6.9; *enn.* 5.3.17).

33. For a fourth-century CE compilation of like-by-like optical theories, see Nemesius of Emesa on sight in Plato, Galen, Porphyry: *nat. hom.* 7 (Morani, *Nemesii Emeseni De Natura Hominis*, 58–59).

the second century CE, the physician Galen, who proved a great and lasting influence for Christians,³⁴ worked this maxim into a detailed scientific theory. Galen summarizes sense perception generically “in a phrase”: “like is known by like” (τὸ ὅμοιον τῷ ὁμοίῳ γινώριμον).³⁵ He argues that vision occurs through lightsome or luminous *pneuma* extending from the eyes and striking the object of sight, and the like-by-like logic animating his account is obvious:

[T]he organ of sight must be light-like [αὐγοειδές], the organ of hearing air-like [ἀεροειδές], that of smell vapour-like [ἀτμοειδές], that of taste moist, that of touch earth-like [γεῶδες]. It is impossible that they be anything else, for they need to be altered by what is like them, and this was what Empedocles wished to show when he said, “It is with earth that we see earth, with water water [etc.] . . .” For we do really perceive by the more earthy of the senses, which is touch, the earthy nature in sense objects, and by the most light-like, which is sight, their light-like nature [etc.] . . .³⁶

Galen’s citation of Empedocles shows clearly that he has drawn his assumption from the like-by-like tradition as it was mediated through Aristotle. This becomes clear again immediately, as Galen invokes Plato’s discussion of seeing by fire in the *Timaeus*, and then cites the same passage from Empedocles once more, all in order to justify his position that sight operates when “like comes to share properties with like” (τῷ γὰρ ὁμοίῳ τὸ ὅμοιον εἰς τὴν τῶν παθημάτων ἀφικνεῖται κοινωνίαν).³⁷

The writings of a number of Christian thinkers from the second to fourth centuries bear *theological* notions of vision that often display assumptions about how seeing works inherited from the optical theory exemplified by Galen; and Plato’s lapidary passage from *Timaeus* was also surely in the backs of their minds. We can begin with Clement of Alexandria, perhaps the earliest of Christian philosophers to appropriate the

34. For Galen’s influence on Origen see, Grant, “Paul, Galen, and Origen,” 533–36. Nemesius’ *nat. hom.* is a good later example of Galen’s thorough influence on Christians. Later still, in the sixth century, Cassiodorus would recommend that his monks read Galen (*inst.* 1.31.2).

35. *UP* 8, 7 (Helmreich, *Galen De Usu Partium Libri XVII*, vol. 1, 641).

36. *De plac.* 7.5.42–44 (De Lacy, *On the Doctrines*, vol. 2, 462).

37. *De plac.* 7.6.2–11 (De Lacy, *On the Doctrines*, vol. 2, 462–64). For a more detailed summary of Galen’s like-by-like optical theory, see Lehoux, *What Did the Romans Know?*, 121–25; and for an analysis of its relation to Plato and Aristotle’s teachings on vision, see Cherniss, “Galen and Posidonius’ Theory of Vision.”

language of “like by like.” In *Paedagogus* 1.6, Clement discourses on the spiritual transformation that baptism makes possible for Christians:

[T]hose who are baptized are cleansed of the sins which like a mist overcloud their divine spirit, and then acquire a spiritual sight which is clear and unimpeded and lightsome, the sort of sight which alone enables us to behold divinity . . . This is an admixture of eternal sunlight, giving us the power to see the eternal light. Like indeed is friend of like; so it is that what is holy is friend of the Source of holiness [ἐπεὶ τὸ ὁμοιον τῷ ὁμοίῳ φίλον, φίλον δὲ τὸ ἅγιον τῷ ἐξ οὗ τὸ ἅγιον] who properly speaking is called Light.³⁸

The baptizand’s vision fixes upon God because it itself deals in the same light that belongs to God, the object of vision. With Galen, Clement takes for granted that seeing occurs when eye and object deal in the same light.

One important locus for Christian theological discussion of vision was Jesus’ transfiguration. It has been pointed out before that Greek patristic authors often presented the disciples themselves as agents in the transfiguration; that is, the change occurs not only in Jesus but in the disciples and their perception of him.³⁹ And in these discussions a like-by-like theory of vision may be at work in the background. Origen’s account in his *Commentary on Matthew* is a clear example:

It does not simply say, “he was transfigured,” but with this comes a certain necessary addition, which Matthew and Mark record; for according to both of them, “he was transfigured *before them*.” And according to this you will say that Jesus is able to be transfigured before some . . . but at once not transfigured before others . . . For Jesus is transfigured before them, and not to any of those below [at the foot of the mountain]. When he is transfigured his face shines like the sun, so that he may be shown to the “children of light” [see Eph 5:8], who have put off “the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light” [Rom 13:12] and are no longer children “of darkness or night” [see 1 Thes 5:5] but become the sons of day . . .⁴⁰

38. *Paed.* 1.6.28 (SC 70, 162; trans. modified from FC 23, 27–28).

39. E.g. Clement, *strom.* 6.16.140.3 (SC 446, 340–341); Gregory of Nyssa, *cant.* 1 (GNO 6, 14–15). See McGuckin, “The Patristic Exegesis,” 336; Plested, *The Macarian Legacy*, 216.

40. *Comm. in Mt.* 12.37 (GCS 40, 152–4; trans. modified from Menzies, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: additional volume*, 470).

In Origen's interpretation, Jesus appears transfigured only to those who have been "conformed to his brilliance," as one commentator puts it,⁴¹ and this is a theme that Maximus himself will rehearse.

A century after Origen, we find the same like-by-like optical theory in Athanasius of Alexandria. At the end of *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius tells his readers that he has only offered "the rudiments and paradigm" of the Christian faith in his treatise.⁴² Consequently he implores them to seek a more complete knowledge in two ways: first, by reading Scripture, and second:

... in addition to the study and true knowledge of the Scriptures are needed a good life and pure soul and virtue in Christ, so that the mind, journeying in this path, may be able to obtain and apprehend what it desires, in so far as human nature is able to learn about God the Word. For without a pure mind and a life modelled on the saints, no one can apprehend the words of the saints. For just as if someone wishes to see the light of the sun he cleanses and clears his eye, and purifies it until it is like [ὁμοιον] what he desires, so that as the eye thus becomes light it may see the light of the sun . . . [,] so he who wishes to grasp the thought of the theologians must first cleanse and wash his soul by his conduct and approach the saints in the imitation of their deeds, so that, being included in their company through the manner of his life, he may understand those things which have been revealed to them by God . . .⁴³

One must be like Christ to learn from God the Word, and one must imitate the saints to understand them and grasp the revelations that they did. And this theological method, Athanasius says, follows the rules of vision, whereby the eye "becomes light" in order to see light. Athanasius expressly grounds his theological epistemology on the like-by-like optical theory.

Gregory of Nyssa is another example. For him, the vocation of all human souls from birth is "looking upon God" (βλέπειν πρὸς τὸν θεόν), or "partaking of God" (τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μετέχειν).⁴⁴ In a passage from *De Infantibus Praemtura Abreptis*, Gregory clarifies how this can be the case:

41. Wright, "The Literal Sense," 255.

42. *Inc.* 56 (Thomson, *Contra Gentes*, 272–73, including trans.).

43. *Inc.* 57 (Thomson, *Contra Gentes*, 274–75, including trans.).

44. *Infant.* (GNO 3/2, 78–79).

The would-be partaker must in some degree be akin to that which is to be partaken of. The eye enjoys the light by virtue of having light within itself to seize its kindred light, and the finger or any other limb cannot effect the act of vision because none of this natural light is organized in any of them. The same necessity requires that in our partaking of God there should be some kinship in the constitution of the partaker with that which is partaken of. Therefore, as the Scripture says, man was made in the image of God; that like, I take it, might be able to see like [τῷ ὁμοίῳ βλέπει τὸ ὁμοίον]; and to see God is, as was said above, the life of the soul.⁴⁵

As with his brother Basil, Gregory uses the like-by-like formula to characterize the calling that belongs to humans in God's image. For Gregory, being in God's image implies "partaking" in God the archetype. "Partaking" is an ambiguous concept, but fortunately Gregory pinpoints it with an analogy: he suggests that participation in God—the fundamental condition of human existence, "the life of the soul"—works like *vision*. Both participation and vision share the same "necessity"; they both are made possible by like coming together with like. It is nothing other than a like-by-like theory of vision that provides the rules for Gregory's anthropology: just as an eye sees because it shares a likeness with the object seen, so does a human soul exist because it shares a likeness with God.

It is clear that Christians adopted the optical rendition of the knowing-by-likeness model from Greek philosophy and science, and creatively introduced it to a variety of theological topics. But such explicit appropriations of the like-by-like theory appear somewhat scarcely in Christian literature. This scarcity might indicate nothing more than the theory's status as a general, uncontested, and perhaps uninteresting assumption of the time. It is my suggestion that Greek Christians adopted and cultivated this conviction, that "like is known by like," with a great deal more eagerness and consistency, and at an early date, thanks not to scientific or philosophical legacies, but rather to the world of literary assumptions inherited in their work of interpreting Scripture.

45. *Infant*. (GNO 3/2, 79–80; trans. Schaff and Wace, *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, etc.*, 375–76).