

Jesus
and the
Shaping of Our

DESIRE

Mako A. Nagasawa

- “If one thinks that Christianity consists solely in doctrinal precision, the Christian mystery becomes a pious fable.”
 - Gregory of Nyssa



Foundation for Spiritual Experience

- Union with Christ
 - Baptism
 - Eucharist



Early Christian View of the Person

- Knowing God and Self
 - ‘When a man is getting better he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him. When a man is getting worse he understands his own badness less and less.... You can understand the nature of drunkenness when you are sober, not when you are drunk. Good people know about both good and evil: bad people do not know about either.’
 - C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* book 3, chapter 4

Early Christian View of the Person

- (1) God-ward: We are meant to connect with God



- 'I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago--whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows--such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man--whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows-- was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.' (2 Corinthians 12:2 - 4)
 - Visions: Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1 & 10; Acts 10; etc.

Early Christian View of the Person

- (2) Self-ward: Healing Our Desires
 - Recovery from trauma?
 - Widespread child sexual abuse in the Greco-Roman world



- Counsel for how to handle the temptation of same-sex pedophilia in monastic life
 - Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 6
 - Basil of Caesarea to monks, *Renunt.6* and *Sermo asceticus* 323



Early Christian View of the Person

- (2) Healing Our Desires

- ⁸ But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead... ¹⁶ But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. ¹⁷ So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not... ²¹ I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good... ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand **I myself** with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with **my flesh** the law of sin.

- Paul's pre-Christian Jewish experience, *Romans 7:8 – 25*

Early Christian View of the Person

- 'I myself'

- ¹⁶ But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. ¹⁷ So now, **no longer am I the one doing it,**
- **for the willing is present in me,** but the doing of the good is not...
- **in me, the one who wants to do good...**

- 'Sin which indwells me'

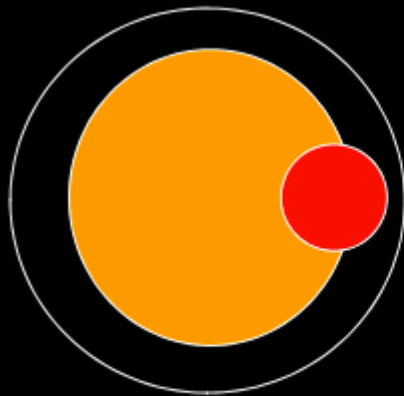
- but sin which dwells in me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh
- ²¹ I find then the principle that evil is present

Early Christian View of the Person

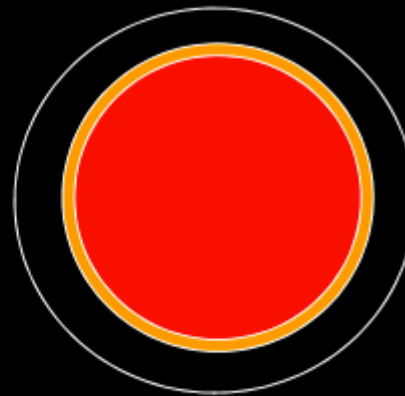
- 'I myself'
 - ²⁴ Wretched man that I am!
Who will set me free
 - So then, on the one hand I **myself** with my mind am serving the law of God,
- 'Sin which indwells me'
 - from the body of this death?
²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!
 - but on the other, with **my flesh** the law of sin.

Early Christian View of the Person

- Discuss:
 - Is the core self good or bad?



Guilt-Based Person



Shame Based Person

Early Christian View of the Person

- Discuss:
 - Is the core self good or bad?
 - Which desires are for God?

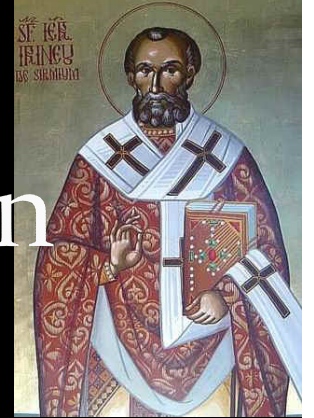
Early Christian View of the Person

- Discuss:
 - Is the core self good or bad?
 - Which desires are for God?
 - A desire for pornography?
 - A desire for money and prestige?

Early Christian View of the Person

- Discuss:
 - Is the core self good or bad?
 - Which desires are for God?
 - A desire for pornography?
 - A desire for money and prestige?
 - Is this 'total depravity'? What does 'dead in sin' (Eph.2:1) mean?:
 1. *Total inability to choose God*: no inclination towards God (and God doesn't help all), maybe no human free will
 2. *Exiled from the tree of life*: 'Who will set me free from the body of this death?' (Rom.7:24) means sin as *foreign corruption*, which made God *exile* us from the tree of life so we would not immortalize our sin

Early Christian View of the Person



- (2) Healing Our Desires

- ‘Man, a created and organized being, is rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God, the Father planning everything well and giving His commands, the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing [what is made], but **man making progress day by day, and ascending towards the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated One.** For the Uncreated is perfect, that is, God.’
 - Irenaeus of Lyons (130 – 202 AD), *Against Heresies* 4.38.3

Early Christian View of the Person



- (2) Healing Our Desires

- ‘It cannot then be doubted that **there are by nature some seeds of goodness in every soul implanted by the kindness of the Creator**: but unless these are quickened by the assistance of God, they will not be able to attain to an increase of perfection... And therefore the will always remains **free** in man, and can **either neglect or delight in the grace of God**. For the Apostle would not have commanded saying: ‘Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling’ had he not known that it could be advanced or neglected by us. But that men might not fancy that they had no need of Divine aid for the work of Salvation, he subjoins: ‘**For it is God that works in you both to will and to do, of His good pleasure.**’ And therefore he warns Timothy and says: ‘Neglect not the grace of God which is in thee;’ and again: ‘For which cause I exhort thee to stir up the grace of God which is in thee..’

- John Cassian (360 – 435 AD), *Conferences* XIII.12

Early Christian View of the Person



- (2) Healing Our Desires

- ‘Bear in mind, too, that **virtue is a gift from God implanted in our nature, and that He Himself is the source and cause of all good, and without His co-operation and help we cannot will or do any good thing. But we have it in our power either to abide in virtue and follow God, Who calls us into ways of virtue, or to stray from paths of virtue, which is to dwell in wickedness, and to follow the devil who summons but cannot compel us. For wickedness is nothing else than the withdrawal of goodness, just as darkness is nothing else than the withdrawal of light. While then we abide in the natural state we abide in virtue, but when we deviate from the natural state, that is from virtue, we come into an unnatural state and dwell in wickedness.**

- John of Damascus (675 – 749 AD), *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* book 2, chapter 30

Early Christian View of the Person



- (2) Healing Our Desires

- ‘Freud must be... turned on his head. It is not that physical ‘sex’ is basic and ‘God’ ephemeral; rather, it is God who is basic, and ‘desire’ the precious clue that ever tugs at the heart, reminding the human soul – however dimly – of its created source. Hence... **desire is more fundamental than ‘sex.’ It is more fundamental, ultimately, because desire is an ontological category belonging primarily to God, and only secondarily to humans as a token of their createdness ‘in the image.’** But in God, ‘desire’ of course signifies no *lack* – as it manifestly does in humans. Rather, it connotes that plenitude of longing love that God has for God’s own creation and for its full and ecstatic participation in the divine, trinitarian, life.’

- Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay ‘On the Trinity’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.10

Gregory of Nyssa (335 – 395 AD)

- Younger brother of Basil of Caesarea and Macrina the Younger
- Bishop of Nyssa (372 – 376; 378-395)
- One of the three ‘Cappadocian’ theologians of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381 AD)
- Strongest abolitionist voice
- ‘Father of mysticism’



Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*

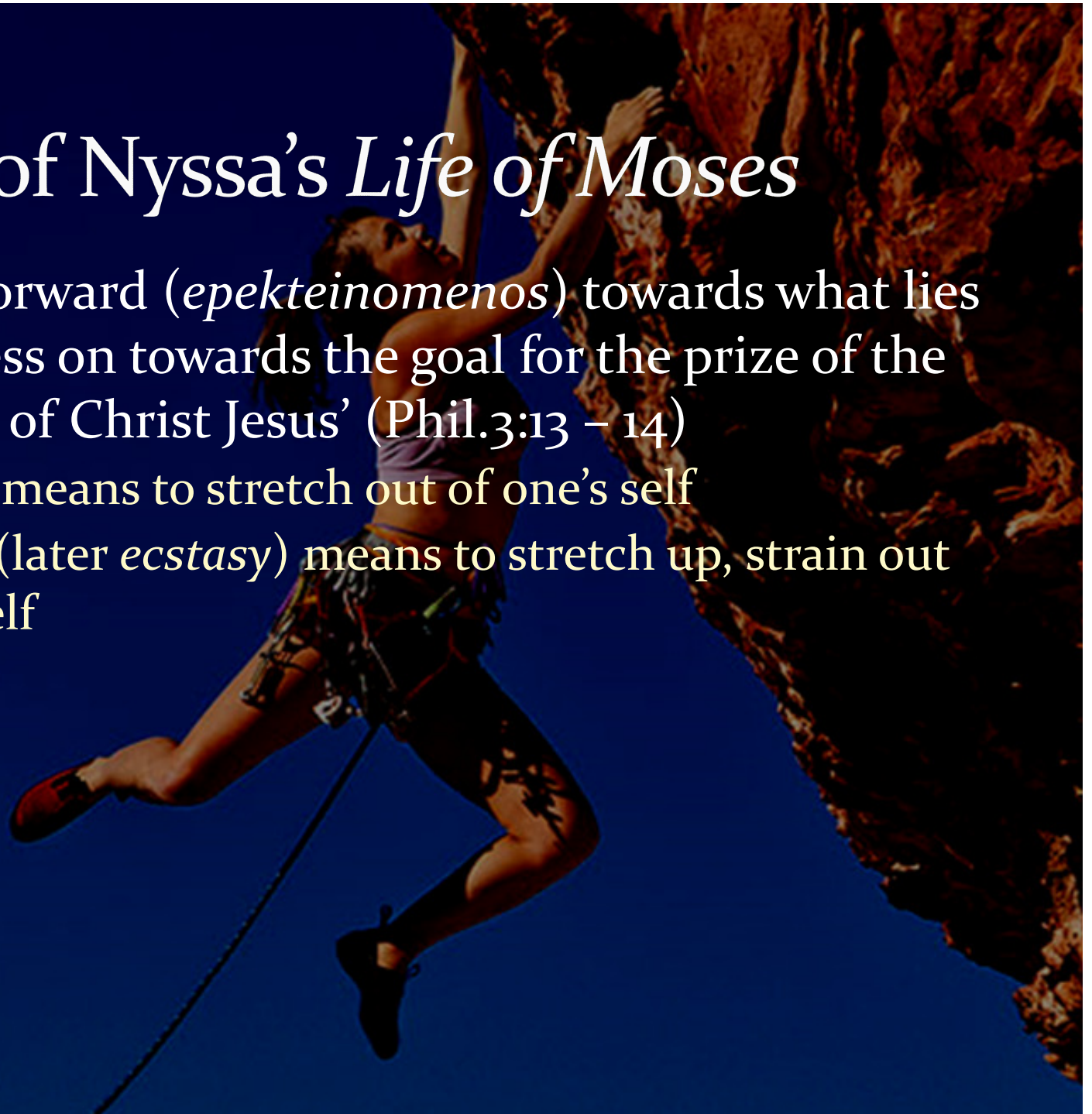
- Meditation on Christian virtue and perfection
 - Classics of Western Spirituality, 1987
- Tradition of reflection on Moses' encounter with God
 - Hellenistic Judaism
 - Philo of Alexandria's *Life of Moses* (1st cent)
 - Christian
 - Clement of Alexandria's *Life of Moses* (2nd cent)
 - Origen of Alexandria's *Homilies on Exodus* (3rd cent)
 - Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* (4th cent)
 - Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions* 9.10 (late 4th cent)
 - Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Corpus* (6th cent)
 - Anonymous, *Cloud of Unknowing* (14th cent)

*And Mount Sinai was all in smoke
Because the Lord descended upon it in fire . . .
and the Lord called Moses up to the top of the mount.
And Moses went up.*

Exodus 19:18, 20

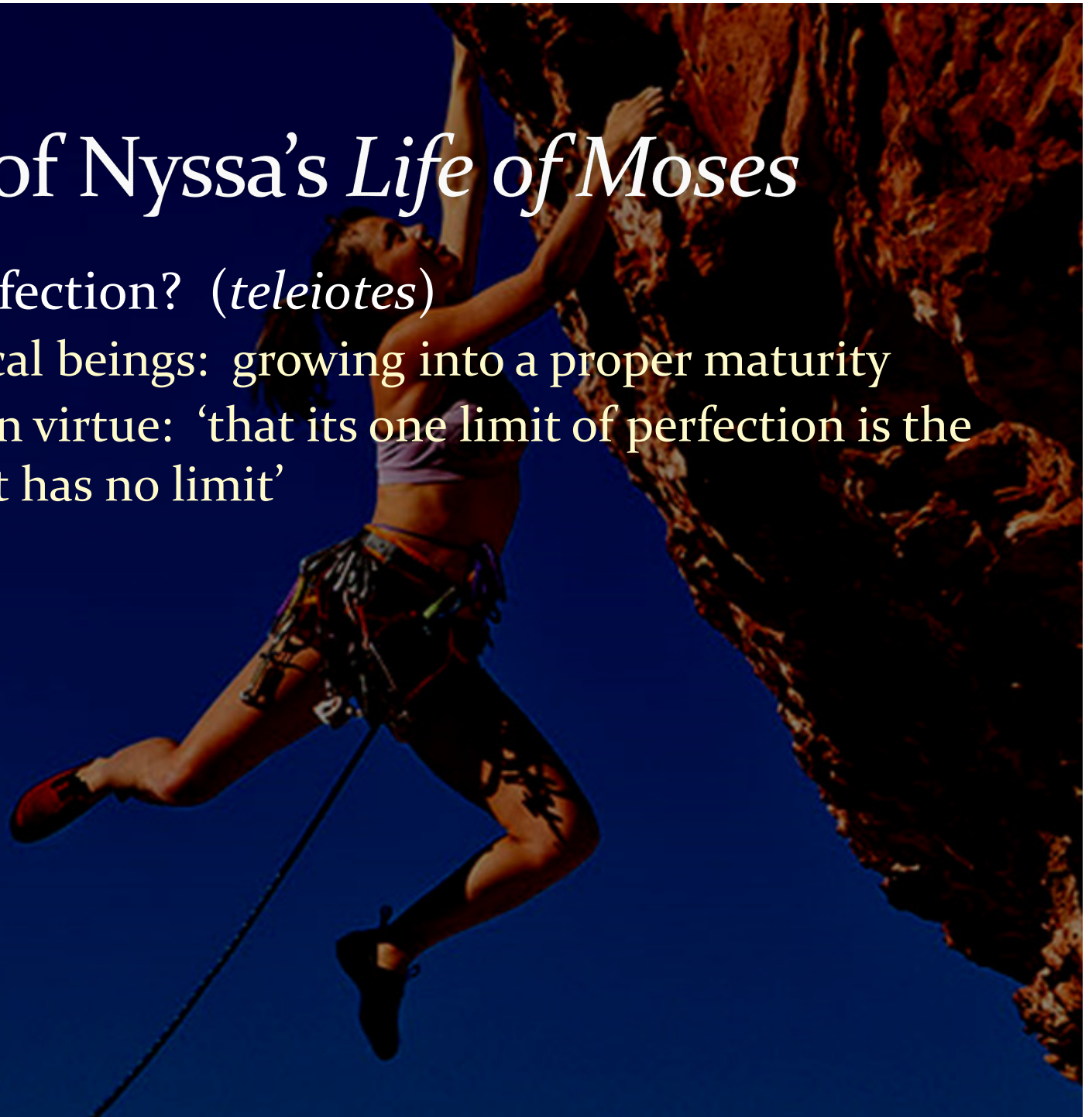
Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*

- 'Reaching forward (*epekteinomenos*) towards what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of Christ Jesus' (Phil.3:13 – 14)
 - *epekteino* means to stretch out of one's self
 - *epektasis* (later *ecstasy*) means to stretch up, strain out of one's self



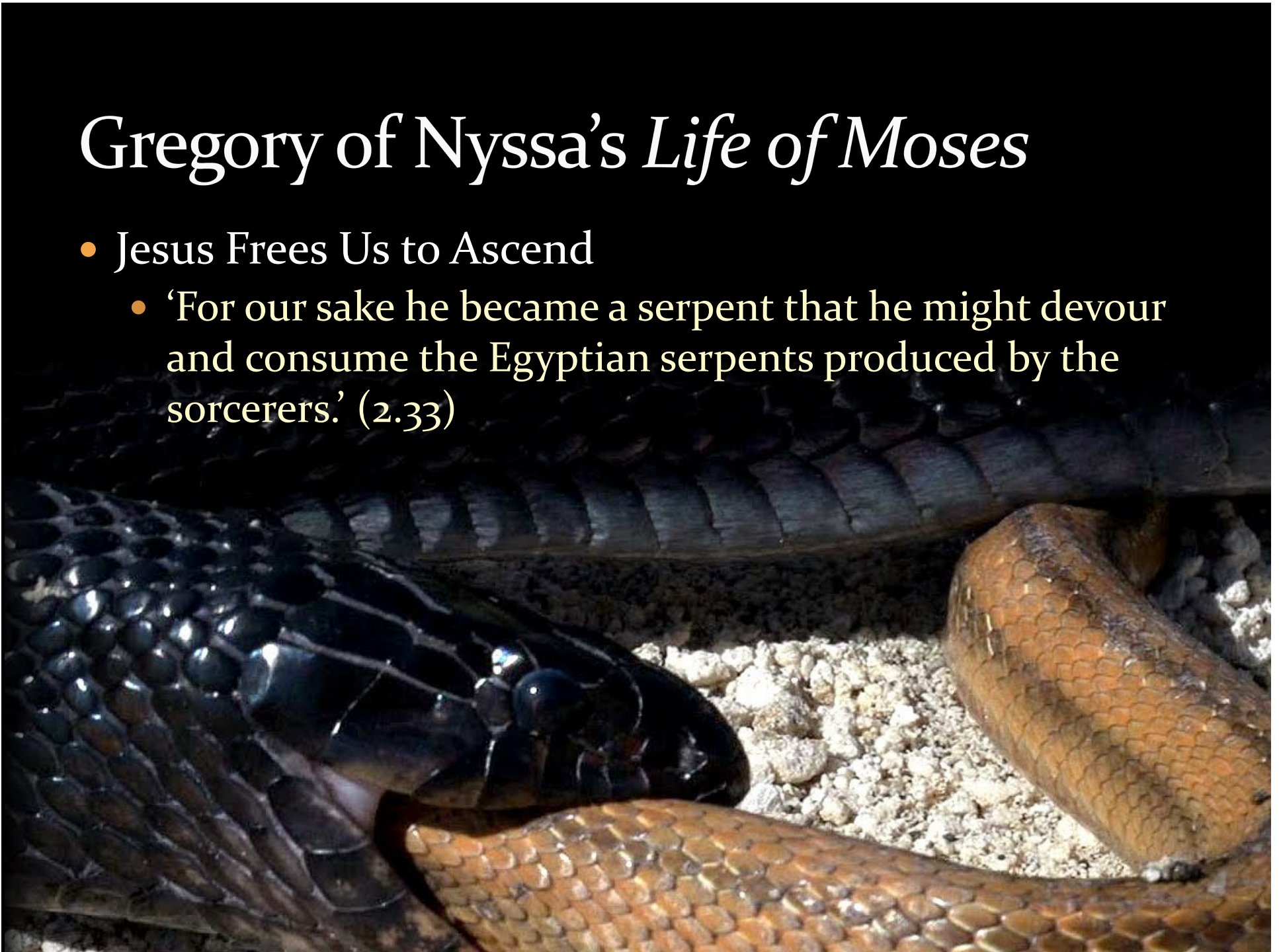
Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*

- What is Perfection? (*teleiotes*)
 - For physical beings: growing into a proper maturity
 - For human virtue: 'that its one limit of perfection is the fact that it has no limit'



Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*

- Jesus Frees Us to Ascend
 - 'For our sake he became a serpent that he might devour and consume the Egyptian serpents produced by the sorcerers.' (2.33)



Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*

- Jesus Frees Us to Ascend
 - 'The apostolic word testifies that **the Lord was made into sin for our sake by being invested with our sinful nature.** This figure therefore is rightly applied to the Lord. For if sin is a serpent and the Lord became sin, the logical conclusion should be evident to all: By becoming sin he became also a serpent, which is nothing other than sin. **For our sake he became a serpent that he might devour and consume the Egyptian serpents produced by the sorcerers.**' (2.32 – 33)

Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*

- Our Struggle: If We Desire God, Why Is Growth Hard?
 - 'Because man finds himself between these two who have contrary purposes for him, **it is in his power to make the one prevail over the other.** While *the good angel* by rational demonstration shows the benefits of virtue which are seen in hope by those who live aright, *his opponent* shows the material pleasures in which there is no hope of future benefits, but which are present, visible, can be partaken of, and enslave the senses of those who do not exercise their intellect.' (2.46)

Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*

- Our Struggle

- 'If, then, one should withdraw from those who seduce him to evil and by the use of his reason turn to the better, putting evil behind him, it is as if he places his own soul, like a mirror, face to face with the hope of good things, with the result that **the images and impressions of virtue, as it is shown to him by God, are imprinted on the purity of his soul.** Then his brother brings him assistance and joins him, for the angel, who in a way is a brother to the rational and intellectual part of man's soul, appears, as I have said, and stands by us.'
(2.47)

Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*

- Our Destination is Desire (Eternal Progress)
 - 'Activity directed towards virtue causes its capacity to grow through exertion'
 - 'What Moses yearned for is satisfied by the very things which leave his desire unsatisfied' (2.235)



Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*

- The Reward for Desiring God is More Desire for God
 - 'Every desire for the good constantly expands as one presses on towards the good... this is the vision of God: to see God is to never be satisfied by the desire to see Him' (2.239)



Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*

- 'Seeing' God
 - To move in the same direction as God's expansion
 - 'To follow God wherever he might lead us is to behold God'
(2.252)



Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*

- 'Farther Up and Farther In'
 - 'And soon they found themselves all walking together and a great, bright procession it was – up towards mountains higher than you could see in this world even if they were there to be seen. But there was no snow on those mountains: there were forests and green slopes and sweet orchards and flashing waterfalls, one above the other, going up forever. And the land they were walking on grew narrower all the time, with a deep valley on each side: and across that valley the land which was the real England grew nearer and nearer...



Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*

- 'Farther Up and Farther In'
 - 'And as he spoke, he no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventure in Narnia had only been the cover and title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.'
 - C.S. Lewis' *The Last Battle*, ch.16

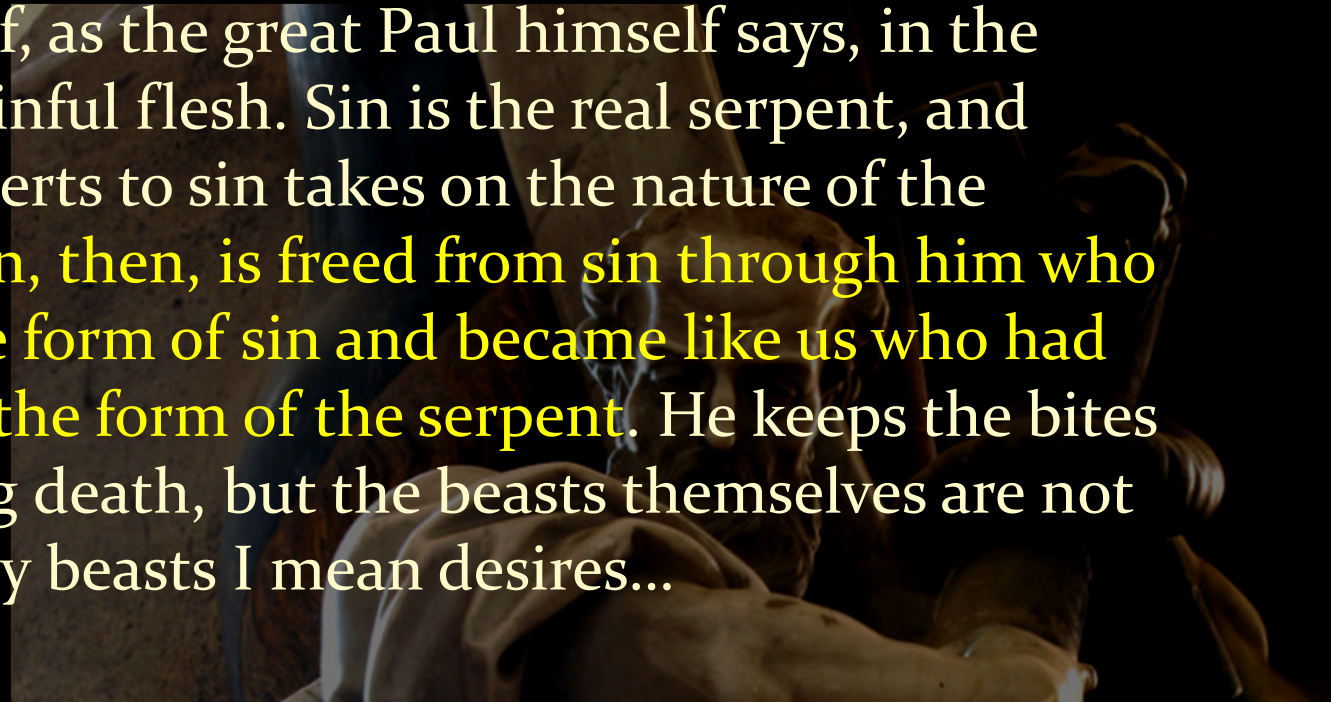
Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*

- Jesus Continues to Heal and Empower Us
 - ‘...the gnawings of desire are frequently active even in the faithful. Nevertheless, the person who looks to the One lifted up on the wood rejects passion, diluting the poison with the fear of the commandment as with a medicine.’



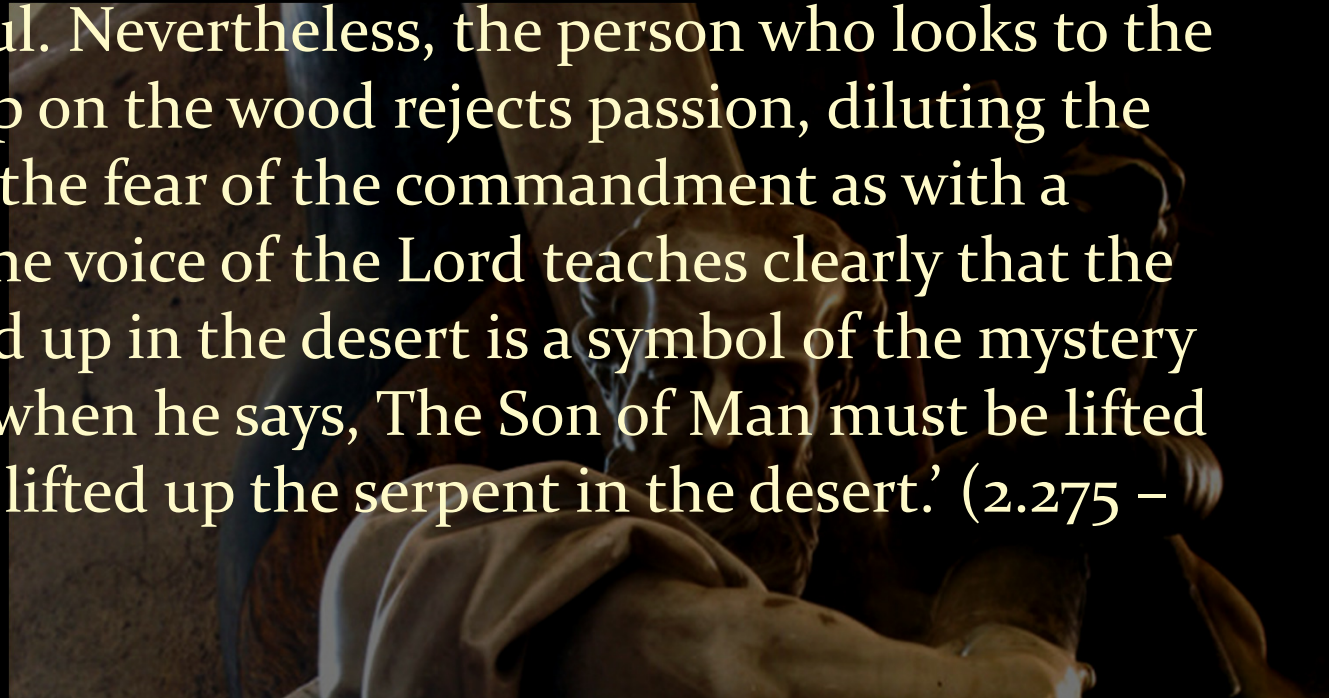
Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*

- Jesus Continues to Heal and Empower Us
 - 'Since therefore unruly desires brought forth the deadly serpents from the earth (for every offspring of evil desire is a serpent), the Law prefigures for us what is clear in the wood. This figure is a likeness of a serpent and not a serpent itself, as the great Paul himself says, in the likeness of sinful flesh. Sin is the real serpent, and whoever deserts to sin takes on the nature of the serpent. **Man, then, is freed from sin through him who assumed the form of sin and became like us who had turned into the form of the serpent.** He keeps the bites from causing death, but the beasts themselves are not destroyed. By beasts I mean desires...



Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*

- Jesus Continues to Heal and Empower Us
 - 'For although the evil of death which follows sins does not prevail against those who look to the cross, the lust of flesh against spirit has not completely ceased to exist. In fact, the gnawings of desire are frequently active even in the faithful. Nevertheless, the person who looks to the One lifted up on the wood rejects passion, diluting the poison with the fear of the commandment as with a medicine. The voice of the Lord teaches clearly that the serpent lifted up in the desert is a symbol of the mystery of the cross when he says, The Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert.' (2.275 – 277)



Early Christian View of the Person



‘...the desert became the powerhouse of a new culture. [...] The discipline of meditation on the holy text often assumed philological resources that could be found only in upper-class circles, in close proximity to great cities. In the *Life of Antony*, and in successive layers of monastic spiritual guidance, we can detect the emergence of an alternative...

Early Christian View of the Person



- ‘The monk’s own heart was the new book. What required infinitely skilled exegesis and long spiritual experience were the ‘movements of the heart,’ and the strategies and snares that the Devil lay within it. [...] The deepest relief of the soul came now, not from the written pages, but from that tap of the Old Man’s fingers on the disciple’s chest, which assuaged the heart beneath. The shift from a culture of the book to a cultura Dei, based largely on the nonliterate, verbal interchange of a monastic ‘art of thought,’ was rightly hailed as the greatest and the most peculiar achievement of the Old Men of Egypt: it amounted to nothing less than the discovery of a new alphabet of the heart.’
 - Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, p.229

Early Christian View of the Person

- Developmental View of the Relational Self
 - *Imago Dei*: We Have a Godly Core Self-in-Relation
 - Genesis 1 – 2: spread the garden, grow in goodness, eat of life
 - Proverbs 8: God's commands fit His creation
 - Romans 7:14 – 25: 'I myself' vs. 'sin which indwells me'
 - Vs. Negative self and desires in Marx, Nietzsche, Freud
 - Vs. the Shamed Self: Western and Eastern

Early Christian View of the Person

- Developmental View of the Relational Self
 - *Imitatio Christi*: Jesus is Our Medical (not Penal) Substitute, Source of Healing
 - E.g. Romans 8:3 – 4; Ephesians 4:17 – 24
 - Joins ‘moral exemplar’ and ‘substitutionary atonement’
 - Godward, ‘upward’ and outward
 - Our choices shape our desires
 - E.g. Romans 1:21 – 32

Early Christian View of the Person

- The Human Will Needs Healing
 - Maximus the Confessor (580 – 662 AD) argued that Jesus had two wills in one person (e.g. wilderness, Gethsemane), to heal the human will
 - A will is part of a 'nature' (divine, human)
 - A will is not synonymous with a 'person' (Jesus is one *person*)
- Sixth Ecumenical Council (680 – 681 AD), Constantinople III

Augustine's View of the Will



- Humanity in Creation

- ‘According to Augustine, man in Paradise was endowed from the start with all possible wisdom and knowledge: his was a realized, and in no sense potential, perfection. The dynamic conception of Irenaeus clearly fits more easily with modern theories of evolution [and the text of Genesis!] than does the static conception of Augustine.’

- Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993 2nd edition), p.219 – 220; also found here: http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/history_timothy_ware_2.htm#n2

Augustine's View of the Will

- Why Does the Human Will Sometimes Resist God?
 - 'For Augustine, by contrast, the sheer size of the inner world, was a source of anxiety quite as much as of strength. 'There is, indeed, some light in men: but let them walk fast, walk fast, lest the shadows come.' The conscious mind was ringed with shadows. Augustine felt he moved in a 'limitless forest, full of unexpected dangers.' [...]

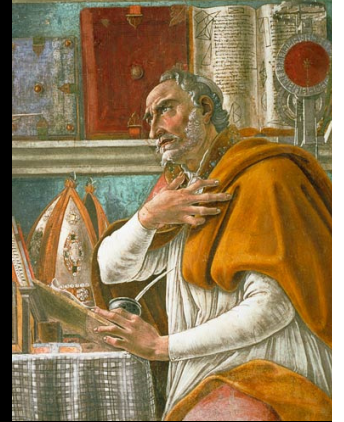


Augustine's View of the Will

- 'This memory of mine is a great force, a vertiginous memory, my God, a hidden depth of infinite complexity: and this is my soul, and this is what I am. What, then, am I, my God? What is my true nature? A living thing, taking innumerable forms, quite limitless...' 'As for the allurements of sweet smells' for instance, 'I am not much troubled... At least, so I seem to myself: perhaps I am deceived. For there is in me a lamentable darkness in which my latest possibilities are hidden from myself, so that my mind, questioning itself upon its own powers, feels that it cannot rightly trust its own report.'
- Quoted in Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, p.164 – 174

Augustine's View of the Will

- The Human Will: East vs. West
 - 'The bishop of Hippo placed the dilemma of a free will which was created good but which chooses evil anyway inside his nature/grace dialectic, whereas [Maximus] the Confessor saw the problem primarily inside his Christology; for... Christology dominates Maximus' thought far more than it does in Augustine, with fateful consequences in the West. Moderns tend to identify person with the person's will... This too is a deeply held presupposition (and error) of modernity, which tends to identify personhood with both consciousness (mind) and will...



Augustine's View of the Will



- The Human Will: East vs. West
 - ‘When personhood is identified without further ado with mind or consciousness, then the concept of eternal life after death becomes well-nigh incredible, since consciousness is so obviously tied to the continued metabolism of the brain; and when personhood is identified without further ado with the will, then the cult of will in Friedrich Nietzsche and his postmodern successors inevitably follows.’
 - Edward T. Oakes, S.J., *Infinity Dwindled to Infancy: A Catholic and Evangelical Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), p.163 – 164

Luther's View of the Will



- Negative, Individualist View of Human Self and Desires
 - ‘To say that Augustine exaggerates in speaking against heretics is to say that Augustine tells lies almost everywhere.’
 - Martin Luther, “Disputation against Scholastic Theology”; cf. *On the Bondage of the Will*
 - ‘To progress is always to begin again’
 - Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, translated by William Pauck, The Library of Christian Classics, p.370; quoted by Forde, p.28

Luther's View of the Will



- How Do We Grow? Can We Reflect On It?
 - ‘One should talk about the place of morality and virtue and such things. Although we do not accept them as the means by which we are sanctified, they *are* the means by which and through which we care for the world and for the other.’
 - Gerhard O. Forde, ‘The Lutheran View,’ edited by Donald L. Alexander, *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, p.31
 - Sanctification \neq Growth in Care, Morality, Virtue [?]

Luther's View of the Will

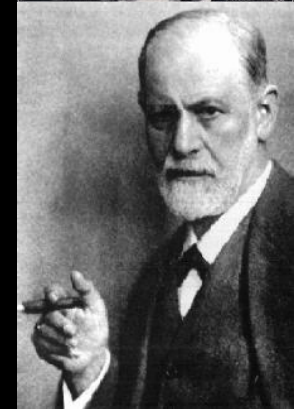
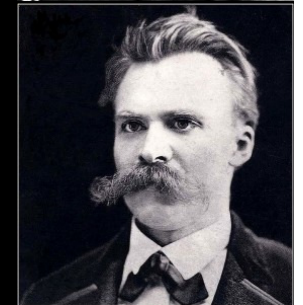
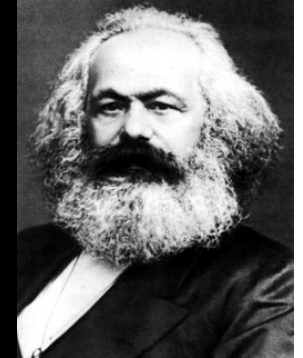


- Is God's Grace Competitive with Human Willing?
 - '[In the contemplative mode,] One strives towards perfection until, theoretically, one would need less and less grace or perhaps finally no grace at all.'
 - Gerhard O. Forde, 'The Lutheran View,' edited by Donald L. Alexander, *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, p.24
 - Grace = Mercy [?]

Secular Versions of Luther's Anthropological Pessimism



- Karl Marx
 - Father converted from Judaism to *Lutheranism*
 - German philosopher, economist
 - Human nature: Desire for wealth
- Friedrich Nietzsche
 - Father was a *Lutheran* pastor
 - German philosopher, existentialist
 - Human nature: Will to power
- Sigmund Freud
 - Family was Jewish
 - Austrian psychoanalyst, studied *Nietzsche* heavily
 - Human nature: Desire for sex

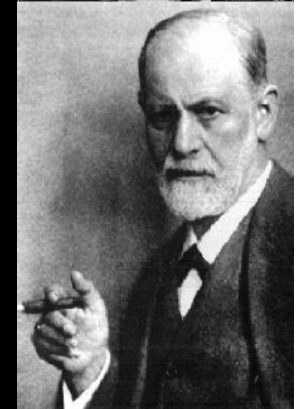
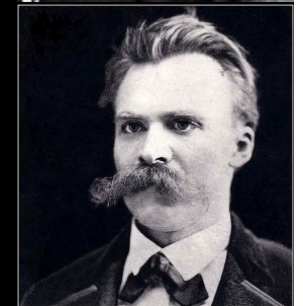
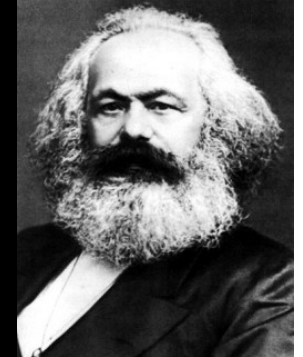


Secular Versions of Luther's Anthropological Pessimism

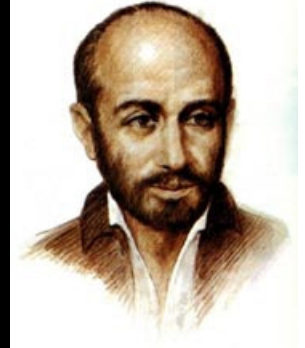


- Discuss

- What would you do if you believed your core self and desires were irredeemably self-centered?
- What would you do if you believed that about everyone else?

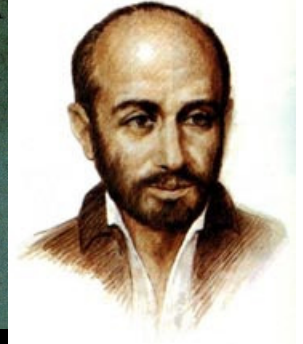


Ignatius' View of the Will



- Developmental View of Human Self and Desires
 - 'While at prayer he began to remember his sins one by one, and he went on thinking about one sin after the other out of his past and felt he was required to confess them again. But after these thoughts, disgust for the life he led and the desire to give it up came over him... From the lessons God had given him, he now had some experience of the diversity of spirits, and he began to wonder about the means by which that spirit had come. He decided very clearly, therefore, not to confess anything from the past anymore. From that day forward he remained free of those scruples...'
 - Ignatius of Loyola, *Autobiography*, p.36; quoted in Oakes, p.235 – 236

Luther and Ignatius



- Martin Luther (1483 – 1546)
 - ‘I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God...’
 - Martin Luther, “Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther’s Latin Writings (1545), in *Luther’s Works*, translated by Spitz
- Ignatius of Loyola (1491 – 1556)
 - ‘Ignatius, in contrast, always hated *himself* during his struggles...’
 - Edward T. Oakes, S.J., *Infinity Dwindled to Infancy*, p.236

An Evangelistic and Pastoral Approach to Self and Desires

1. 'See' the person
 1. Jesus in the Gospel of John
 2. See the true self and desires as gifts of God
2. 'See' areas of resistance
 1. Some desires are sinful or misdirected
 2. And/or demonic lies (e.g. C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*; Eph.2:1 – 3)
3. Monasticism outside the monastery
 1. Rhythm of life, spiritual exercises
 2. Intentional community, service to the world
 3. Retreats
4. Restorative justice
 1. Self and desires in Michael Sandel, *Justice*