

GREGORY OF NYSSA AND ARISTOTLE

BY MARK EDWARDS

It is widely surmised that Aristotle's *Categories*, whether read at first hand or mediated by the Neoplatonists, are at the root of Cappadocian teaching on the Trinity. On the other hand, it seems that we cannot simply equate God with second *ousia* and the discrete hypostasis with first *ousia*, as God is not ontologically a genus, and "God" is not a universalisable predicate for Christian thinkers. It may be, however, that Porphyry's understanding of the *Categories*, as concerned with "words insofar as they signify", affords a key to Gregory's argumentation in [Basil's] letter 38, and also that the discussions of the terms *idios* and *genos* in the *Topics* have contributed to his refinement of the Christian vocabulary. His celebrated discussions of the reality of matter also seem to be grounded in Aristotelian definitions, although he reasons to different effect; his denial that there is *dunamis* or potentiality in God is directed against the Aristotelianizing notion of *dunamis* in Eunomius, but may owe something to remarks in the *De Interpretatione* of Aristotle himself. In some respects, e.g. his understanding of the body-soul relationship, Gregory seems to be further from Aristotle than his influential predecessor Origen had been, so that it might be argued that disengagement from Origen did not only entail a dilution of the latter's "Platonism".