

# **“YOU CANNOT WANT WHAT YOU DO NOT KNOW.” BRINGING SAINT GREGORY OF NYSSA’S TEACHING ON ASCENT DOWN THE MOUNTAIN.**

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<https://doi.org/10.47433/tv.xcviii1-4.185>

## **Abstract**

*This contribution is based on a short extract from my Master’s dissertation submitted during 2016<sup>1</sup>. Saint Gregory of Nyssa writes at length about the mystical experience of God that comes via ascent. Basing his work on both Hellenistic philosophy and the preceding theologians, he asserts that the soul is capable of ascending a ladder, or mountain, towards God, made possible and empowered by the Christ. As the soul climbs, so it experiences a deeper, transcendent encounter of God, that for Moses culminated on Mount Sinai in what he describes as a “luminous darkness”. I set out to show that Saint Gregory of Nyssa was both highly theoretical and strongly practical in his approach. His profoundly rooted theology is evocatively written, and he has an undoubted ability to give clarity to complex ideas by earthing them in everyday life. He is an excellent learning facilitator and as such both inspires and equips his audience. It is my assertion that the work of Saint Gregory of Nyssa continues to have relevance for the modern expression of faith, and deserves a wider audience.*

**Keywords:** Gregory of Nyssa, faith, revelation, mystical experience, luminous darkness

## **Introduction**

Having been around evangelical protestant churches in the United Kingdom for some 30 years I came to theology somewhat late in life. At this stage in my walk of faith I was well and truly pressed up against my own impenetrable Christian Wall of “Encounter

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Eldon, “How Does Gregory of Nyssa Nurture the Pursuit of Mystical Encounter Through a Theology and Practice of Spiritual Divine Ascent”, in [https://www.academia.edu/43262946/How\\_does\\_Gregory\\_of\\_Nyssa\\_Nurture\\_the\\_Pursuit\\_of\\_Mystical\\_Encounter\\_Through\\_a\\_Theology\\_and\\_Practice\\_of\\_Spiritual\\_Divine\\_Ascent](https://www.academia.edu/43262946/How_does_Gregory_of_Nyssa_Nurture_the_Pursuit_of_Mystical_Encounter_Through_a_Theology_and_Practice_of_Spiritual_Divine_Ascent), 14/20/2022.