

ΦΙΛΟΣ ΘΕΟΥ: UNDERSTANDING OF FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD IN GREGORY OF NYSSA'S DE VITA MOYSIS IN COMPARISON TO PHILO

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<https://doi.org/10.47433/tv.xcviiiin9-12.55>

Abstract

This paper examines the content of the term φίλος θεοῦ in Gregory's work De Vita Moysis in comparison to Philo's account.

In Gregory, the notions friend of God (φίλος θεοῦ), servant of God (οἰκέτης θεοῦ), and image of God (κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ) are mutually explanatory notions, identifying the very essence of the life of virtue (ἐναρέτη πολιτεία). The combination of the two terms – friend and household servant – presumes that the one whom God calls His friend shares all things with Him who also remains his Lord. The sharing is further specified in Gregory's work by the term κατ' εἰκόνα, which presumes reflecting God's ineffable qualities as a piece of glass reflects the light of the sun.

Thus, for Gregory, to become φίλος θεοῦ no longer means to be initiated into divine mysteries inaccessible to other people. To be God's friend is to be a recipient of Christ's gifts and of His life, and to offer your own life in return.

Keywords: Gregory of Nyssa, Philo, De Vita Moysis, friend of God / φίλος θεοῦ, οἰκέτης θεοῦ / servant of God, image of God, κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ

Summarising his treatise on the life of virtue, *De Vita Moysis*, Gregory refers to Moses' title φίλος θεοῦ as the title under which the perfection of his life could be subsumed¹. While there is a considerable amount of literature published on *De Vita Moysis*, surprisingly, Moses' title φίλος θεοῦ, despite its central place within Gregory's work, has hitherto received scant attention from scholars. Not only is there a lack of clarity on the exact meaning of this term, but it also remains unclear how it relates to

¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, Mahwah, New York, Paulist Press, 1978, (thereafter – VM), 2.320, p. 137.