Who Wrote Basil’s *Epistula 38*?
*A Possible Answer through Quantitative Analysis*

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1 **Introduction: The Problem**

At the 11th Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa, organized in Tübingen by Volker Drecoll in 2008, a session was devoted to the authorship of *Epistula 38*, a work transmitted in Basil’s epistolary corpus. However this work has also been attributed to Gregory of Nyssa as a dogmatic treatise addressed to his brother Peter. The history of the discussion concerning the authorship of Ep. 38 is marked by three main moments: in 1972 R. Hübner, studying the philosophical contents of the work, attributed it to Gregory; even though this conclusion was sometimes discussed, only in 1996 did V. Drecoll move Ep. 38 back to Basil’s corpus; more recently, J. Zachhuber again defended the authorship of Gregory based on lexicographical analysis. As is evident, the letter has been extensively analyzed and studied from philological, philosophical and theological perspectives. The aim of the present paper is to investigate its authorship by utilizing statistical methods and numerical computations.

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A caveat is required: this kind of research should not be viewed as an occult methodology that transcends philology or theology. Experience demonstrates that only the combination of both knowledge of the texts and expertise in the computational methods can offer trustworthy answers.

In some respects Ep. 38 is a perfect “authorship attribution problem,” because it is already known that the work either belongs to Basil or Gregory. Moreover, the sum of the lengths of the literary works of these authors is conspicuous, so that the application of statistical analysis may yield satisfactory results. But there is another element that seems favorable: both Basil and Gregory of Nyssa have produced extensive works to counter Eunomius, discussing the same subjects and referencing the same citations. It seems reasonable to suppose that these works serve as effective benchmarks to analyze Ep. 38. In fact, if we apply statistical methods and develop a kind of “distance” between different texts, the differences between Ep. 38 and Basil’s or Gregory’s works to confute Eunomius should be due primarily to their personal styles, because the contents are homogeneous. It should also be noted that Ep. 38 possesses dogmatic and Trinitarian content, similar to the works against Eunomius.

2 Corpus

Before analyzing Ep. 38, this method should be verified by testing it against the works with undisputed attribution to the aforementioned authors. Thus, the Corpus used in the present study is composed of all the works of Basil and Gregory of Nyssa currently available in electronic version. The digitalized texts in Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG) have been used.\textsuperscript{7}

All the works, including the spurious and unconfirmed ones, have been used. The letters by Gregory\textsuperscript{8} and Basil\textsuperscript{9} have been individually analyzed. The latter were divided into three groups, according to their lengths: the first (see appendix for the list) includes letters larger than 2,500 characters (L); letters with extensions between 2,500 and 1,250 form the second group (C); and letters less than 1,250 constitute the third (M). Only letters written by Basil (and not to

\textsuperscript{7} See http://www.tlg.uci.edu/. The digital library has been developed by the University of California, Irvine.

\textsuperscript{8} G. Pasquali’s edition has been used: Gregorii Nysseni Opera (= GNO), VIII 2, Leiden 1959.

\textsuperscript{9} Y. Courtonne’s edition has been used: Saint Basile, Correspondance, CUFr, Paris 1957–1961.