ALLISON L. GRAY

Gregory of Nyssa as Biographer

Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum

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Weaving Lives for Virtuous Readers

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To Liz,

πατήρ, διδάσκαλος, παιδαγωγός, μήτηρ, ἀγαθοῦ παντὸς σύμβουλος

Preface

This book is a revised version of my 2016 University of Chicago doctoral dissertation, submitted for a degree in New Testament and Early Christian Literature. In preparing it for publication, I have incorporated selected scholarly works published since 2016 and have made changes based on generous feedback from colleagues in the field who commented on parts of the manuscript or engaged key parts of the argument in conference settings.

I cannot imagine completing a book about education and exemplarity without acknowledging the mentors who have shown me what it means to teach well and to remain open to lifelong learning. My colleagues at Saint Mary's University have modeled true care for students and their development; in particular, I am grateful to Clare Acosta, Bill Buhrman, Todd Hanneken, Mary Lynne Gasaway Hill, and Leona Pallansch for their commitment to making our community a space where growth and flourishing are possible. My doctoral advisor, Margaret M. Mitchell, and my committee members, Hans-Josef Klauck and David Martinez, are inspiring διδάσκαλοι. Their persistent support and guidance made it possible for me to write about Gregory, exegesis, *paideia,* and rhetoric with some measure of clarity, and their ongoing encouragement helps me continue to develop as a scholar and teacher. The seeds of this project on Christian biography in late antiquity were nurtured early on by my undergraduate advisors, Michael Curley, Douglas R. Edwards, and David Lupher at the University of Puget Sound; David has continued to extend his support and friendship, both of which are true gifts. I am grateful to all of these scholars for their exemplary pedagogy.

I am thankful for many colleagues who read and responded to parts of this project as it developed. The fellows in the 2014–2015 cohort of the University of Chicago Divinity School's Martin Marty Center offered thoughtful feedback and support. My gratitude is also due to members of my graduate school writing group – Matthijs Den Dulk, Cameron Ferguson, Andrew Langford, and Jonathan Soyars – whose comments and company improved the dissertation that lies behind this book. The Early Christian Studies Workshop and ThECLA, with their constantly rotating groups of insightful scholars, provided me with many interlocutors whose wisdom and enthusiasm proved invaluable; I owe particular debts to Laurie Brink, Matthew Calhoun, David DeMarco, Tish Duncan, Justin Howell, Annette Huizenga, Meira Kensky, David Monaco, and Janet Spittler.

Throughout the writing and revising of this text, I have benefited tremendously from the companionship of kind, generous friends and scholars. Conversations with Whitney Chappell and Brent Biglin, Eric and Michelle Chelstrom, Katie Duda, Andy and Virginia Getz, Julia Kowalski and Alex Hsu, Katharine and Kevin Mershon, Lauren Osborne and Peter Shultz, Jakob Rinderknecht, Meghann Peace and Scott Stallbaum have enriched my life and allowed me to better understand the kind of fellowship Gregory imagines for an ideal community of learners. Members of the Saint Mary's junior faculty writing group − Josh Doty, Amanda Hill, Sue Nash, Sara Ronis, Betsy Smith, and Lindsey Wieck − have helped me stay focused, light-hearted, and positive during the process of preparing this manuscript.

Most importantly, I thank my family for their unwavering support and good humor. My honorary siblings, Nicole Lasky and David Lyons: your encouragement and your belief in me, from the beginning, have meant more than I can say. Jessica, Lauren, and Joe: I like to imagine that we are something like the great siblings in Cappadocia, except I worry that makes me Naucratius, who set off into the woods on a well-intentioned but disastrous mission; thank you for getting excited about my book and for always reminding me to come home. To my mom, Liz Gray: thank you for your example of unconditional love and of the life in accordance with virtue.

Allison L. Gray
San Antonio, Texas
March 2021

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Introduction

The Woven Garment

Now then, since the manner of life in accord with virtue is something neither uniform nor marked by a single style, but, as in the making of fabric, the art of weaving creates the garment by using many threads, some of which are stretched vertically and others are carried horizontally, so, too, in the case of the virtuous life many things must twine together, so that a noble life is shown forth. In the same way the divine apostle enumerates threads of this sort, by means of which pure works are woven together; he is talking about love and joy and peace, patience and kindness (Gal 5:22) and all the sorts of things that adorn the person who is putting on the garment of heavenly incorruptibility in place of a corruptible and earthly life (2 Cor 5:1–4).

Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs,* Homily 9, 24.271.16–272.4.[1]

For Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335–395 CE), the virtuous life may be likened to a fabric made up of "many threads" (πολλὰ νήματα) held in tension, interlocking to form a coherent whole, united by "the art of weaving" (ἡ ὑφαντικὴ τέχνη). Even the "pure works" (καθαρὰ ἔργα) that adorn a virtuous person are woven out of numerous strands, the fruits of the Spirit that Paul enumerates in Galatians. The "noble life" (ὁ ἀστεῖος βίος) displayed through the weaver's craft is equated with "incorruptibility" (ἀφθαρσία), and it is a departure from the "earthly life" (γηΐνος βίος). With this image of a woven garment and the skill needed for its construction, Gregory captures the complexity involved both in living virtuously and in depicting the "virtuous way of life" (ἡ κατ' ἀρετὴν πολιτεία). Gregory himself takes on the complicated task of weaving literary portraits in three laudatory biographical narratives, or encomiastic *bioi.*

On the surface, the three *bioi* appear to deal with very different types of individuals with distinct life paths, from the biblical figure Moses (*The Life of*

[1] Ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν οὐ μονοειδής τίς ἐστιν οὐδὲ μονότροπος ἡ κατ' ἀρετὴν πολιτεία, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τῆς τῶν ὑφασμάτων κατασκευῆς διὰ πολλῶν νημάτων, τῶν μὲν ἐπ' εὐθείας ἀνατεταμένων τῶν δὲ κατὰ τὸ πλάγιον διηρμένων, ἡ ὑφαντικὴ τέχνη τὴν ἐσθῆτα ποιεῖ, οὕτω καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς ἐναρέτου ζωῆς πολλὰ χρὴ συνδραμεῖν, δι' ὧν ὁ ἀστεῖος ἐξυφαίνεται βίος, καθὼς ἀπαριθμεῖται τὰ τοιαῦτα νήματα ὁ θεῖος ἀπόστολος, δι' ὧν ἡ τῶν καθαρῶν ἔργων ἱστουργία συνίσταται, ἀγάπην λέγων καὶ χαρὰν καὶ εἰρήνην, μακροθυμίαν τε καὶ χρηστότητα καὶ πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα, οἷς κατακοσμεῖται ὁ ἐκ τοῦ φθαρτοῦ τε καὶ γηΐνου βίου τὴν οὐράνιον ἀφθαρσίαν μετενδυόμενος (GNO Online 24.271.16–272.4).

All translations of works of Gregory of Nyssa are my own, as are those of other Greek and Latin texts, unless otherwise noted.

Moses, VM), to a third-century wonderworking bishop (*The Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus,* VGT), to Gregory's older sister, Macrina, who directs a household of ascetic women on the family estate (*The Life of Macrina*, VSM). Yet these three narratives, despite their different subjects and varied sources, are united by a common emphasis on their intended educational impact for some audience. In all three, Gregory explicitly comments on the teaching function of the *bios*:

VSM 1: So since you determined that the record of her good deeds should bear some benefit (κέρδος), lest such a life should go unnoticed in subsequent times and lest she, having raised herself to the most lofty peak of human virtue through philosophy, should silently pass by in unprofitable (ἀνωφελής) obscurity […][2]

VGT 2: For it is clear that when his life of virtue, like a fiery beacon (πυρσός), shines out to our souls through recollection, it becomes a path (ὁδός) toward the good both for the one who describes it and for those listening.[3]

VM I.2, 15: Since the letter which you recently sent requested us to furnish you with some counsel concerning the perfect life (ὁ τέλειος βίος), I thought it fitting to provide [it] […] So then let Moses be set before us in the composition, as an example (ὑπόδειγμα) for life.[4]

In each case, an audience or individual is addressed directly, and the text is depicted as a tool for communicating beneficial truths and desirable lessons about virtue to its recipient(s). What "benefit" (κέρδος) can the record of a life bear, for whom, and how? What does it mean for a life to be "unprofitable" (ἀνωφελής) or to become a "fiery beacon" (πυρσός) or "path" (ὁδός)? What does "the perfect life" (ὁ τέλειος βίος) have to do with the example (ὑπόδειγμα) of any individual's life?

Greco-Roman education and moral training often prioritized the use of examples to train students, presenting figures, deeds, and even speeches as models worthy of imitation. Although the importance of exemplarity in Greco-Roman biographical narrative is widely recognized in contemporary scholarship,[5]

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[2] Ἐπεὶ οὖν ἐδοκίμασας φέρειν τι κέρδος τὴν τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἱστορίαν, ὡς ἂν μὴ λάθοι τὸν μετὰ ταῦτα χρόνον ὁ τοιοῦτος βίος μηδὲ ἀνωφελὴς παραδράμοι διὰ σιωπῆς συγκαλυφθεῖσα ἡ πρὸς τὸν ἀκρότατον τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ἀρετῆς ὅρον ἑαυτὴν διὰ φιλοσοφίας ἐπάρασα.

[3] Δῆλον γὰρ, ὅτι πυρσοῦ δίκην διὰ τῆς μνήμης ἐκλάμψας ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἡμῶν ὁ κατ' ἀρετὴν αὐτοῦ βίος, ὁδὸς πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθὸν τῷ τε διεξιόντι καὶ τοῖς ἀκούουσι γίνεται.

[4] Τῆς γὰρ ἐπιστολῆς ἣν πρώην διεπέμψω ταύτην ἀπαγγελλούσης τὴν αἴτησιν τὸ γενέσθαι σοί τινα παρ' ἡμῶν ὑποθήκην εἰς τὸν τέλειον βίον, πρέπειν ᾠήθην παρασχεῖν· […] Μωϋσῆς τοίνυν ἡμῖν εἰς ὑπόδειγμα βίου προτεθήτω τῷ λόγῳ.

[5] Herwig Görgemanns, "Biography," in *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World: Antiquity Volume 2, Ark–Cas* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 651. Both Frederick E. Brenk and Tim Duff have described the importance of exemplarity and individual exempla in the *Lives* of Plutarch (Frederick E. Brenk, "Setting a Good *Exemplum*: Case Studies in the *Moralia*, the *Lives* as Case Studies," in *The Unity of Plutarch's Work: 'Moralia' Themes in the 'Lives,' Features of the 'Lives' in the 'Moralia,'* edited by Anastasios G. Nikolaides,

Gregory's transparent focus and explicit statements on the topic makes these three *bioi* fascinating artifacts of the dynamic fourth-century world of Christian education.[6] The *bioi* provide a rich and detailed collection of woven garments, composed across several decades during a significant period in the ongoing development of a Christian intellectual identity and its literary expression.

While scholars have studied each of the three biographical narratives in detail, there is currently no in-depth study of the three together, nor any sustained discussion of how Gregory the biographer adopts and adapts existing rhetorical and literary techniques to imagine, construct, and train an ideal reading audience. Building upon insights from scholars who work on encomia (laudatory speeches), biography, philosophical and theological anthropology, and the history of Greco-Roman education, I argue that Gregory's attention to audience is not only thoroughgoing in all three *bioi*, but is also critical to understanding the texts' shared formal features and their function: Gregory's encomiastic *bioi* are educational tools that serve a propaedeutic function for Christian readers who, like one of his addressees, wish to "translate" (μεταφέρειν, VM I.3) the virtues described in the texts into their own lives.

This introduction will provide an orientation to Gregory and his three texts before I argue briefly that the three texts share a single biographical narrative genre. I then discuss how author, text, subject, and reader are all implicated in the crafting of an exemplary and imitable biographical portrait. After identifying this project's major questions, I will outline the plan of each chapter.

Millenium Studies [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008]: 237–253; Tim Duff, *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999]). Christopher Gill studies the role of character-development in texts about exemplary lives (Christopher Gill, "The Question of Character-Development: Plutarch and Tacitus," *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series 33.2 [1983]: 469–487).

[6] As the public profile and the political and socio-economic status of Christian communities grew in a tolerant and even supportive post-Constantinian environment, the literary and material records of the lives of ascetic figures and martyrs also grew exponentially. This trend has been documented and analyzed most famously by Peter Brown (see especially Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* [Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992]). Other works taking a socio-literary perspective posit a correlation between historical circumstances and an increase in hagiographic devotional literature: Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) and Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997).

I. A Biographical Snapshot of Gregory

Gregory is perhaps best known for his role in defending and cogently re-articulating the orthodox Trinitarian position established in the Nicene Creed (325 CE), but he contributed to a whole complex of debates that gripped fourth-century Christian theologians and bishops.[7] Born in Cappadocia, Gregory was the third son in a wealthy, landed Christian family of nine children.[8] He received an elite education in literature, rhetoric, philosophy, and theology, as well as training for public leadership and service.[9] Gregory's own father, Basil the Elder, was a teacher of rhetoric in Cappadocia, and Gregory's older brother Basil received extensive education in rhetoric and philosophy at a series of urban schools (Caesarea, Constantinople), culminating in some time spent at no less an intellectual center than Athens.[10] It was during Basil's stay at Athens that he met and befriended Gregory Nazianzus; the latter notes how much their friendship was affected by their shared intellectual pursuits.[11] Gregory had the opportunity to apply his skills to diplomatic ecclesiastical governance in 372 when he was appointed to the episcopal See of Nyssa by Basil, who was already

[7] His key contribution to Trinitarian theology was the robust defense of a single divine οὐσία and three ὑποστάσεις in debates with the Neo-Arian Eunomius, in his *Contra Eunomium*, books 1–3. His treatise *Ad Ablabium* refutes the idea that the persons of the holy trinity are three gods. He comments on theological anthropology in *De hominis opificio*, and addresses the connection between Christian resurrection from the dead and human grief in his dialogue *De anima et resurrectione*. Homilies and commentaries treat a variety of biblical books, from the Song of Songs (*In Canticum canticorum*) to the Psalms (*In inscriptiones Psalmorum*) to the Acts of the Apostles (*In Sanctum Stephanum* I and II). Among his more distinctly pastoral works, we might count a discussion of infant mortality (*De infantibus preamature abreptis*) and a treatise on virginity (*De virginitate*). He also composed funerary and commemorative orations for illustrious public figures, like the daughter of the Emperor Theodosius I (*In Pulcheriam*) and for his older brother Basil (*In Basilium fratrem*).

[8] Specifically on the family's social standing, see Thomas A. Kopecek, "The Social Class of the Cappadocian Fathers," *Church History* 42.4 (1973): 453–466. He places them in the Roman curial class.

[9] Gregory seems to have received his education locally within Cappadocia and his native Pontus, unlike his brother Basil who was trained at Athens (cf. Gregory's *Epistle* 13 to Libanius, GNO Online 33.44.14ff.). That Gregory was intimately familiar with classical Greek literature is beyond doubt. For the impact this knowledge had on his portrayal of Macrina in the VSM, see Georgia Frank, "Macrina's Scar: Homeric Allusion and Heroic Identity in Gregory of Nyssa's Life of Macrina," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8.4 (Winter 2000): 511–530; and Ellen Muehlberger, "Salvage: Macrina and the Christian Project of Cultural Reclamation" *Church History* 81.2 (2012): 273–297.

[10] Raymond Van Dam, *Families and Friends in Late Roman Cappadocia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), Chapter 1, esp. pp. 18–22; Gregory Nazianzus' account of the time he spent with Basil is in his *Oration* 43.13-14 (the funerary oration for Basil).

[11] See for example Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration* 43.15 on their friendship.

the bishop of Caesarea (329/330−379 CE). By the end of his life, Gregory had participated in the Council of Constantinople (381 CE), where his leadership in doctrinal matters so distinguished him that he was later remembered as "a father of fathers."[12] He also spent some time in 385 CE at the Constantinopolitan court, where he pronounced funeral orations for the Empress Flacilla (wife of Theodosius I) and her daughter Pulcheria.[13] It is probably during this period that he met Olympias, a prominent Christian woman who was also in correspondence with John Chrysostom and to whom Gregory addressed his masterful *Commentary on the Song of Songs*.[14]

Not only did Gregory and his Cappadocian compatriots participate in the world of classical *paideia* and Christian leadership, but the family also had wide-ranging connections within a subset of similarly educated and similarly influential Christians. Their most well-known historical connection was to Or-

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[12] The note honoring Gregory from the Second Council of Nicaea, 787 CE, reads as follows: "Gregory Bishop of Nyssa, whom all call a father of fathers" (*Gregorius Nyssensium episcopus, quem omnes patrum patrem vocant*, Acta VI.5). The Latin text is from Joannes Dominicus Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, Volume 13 (Graz: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1902, repr. 1960), 692. A new Greek edition of the Acts of the Second Nicene Council is currently being published in the *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, Series Secunda from De Gruyter, but at the time of writing only volumes containing Acts I–III (vol. 3, part 1) and IV–V (vol. 3, part 2) were available. See English translation in John Mendham, transl., *The Seventh General Council, the Second of Nicaea, Held A.D. 787, in Which the Worship of Images Was Established with Copious Notes from the "Caroline Books", Compiled by Order of Charlemagne for its Confutation,* (London: W.E. Painter, 1850), 382.

[13] Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio funebris in Flacillam imperatricem* (GNO Online 48); *Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam* (GNO Online 47). Anna Caimi Danelli outlines the rhetorical structure of each oration and argues that Gregory uses the typical form of a eulogy described by Menander but incorporates his own Christian teaching about death and mourning, modulating his emphasis on theological and doctrinal topics based on the make-up of his audience (Anna Caimi Danelli, "Sul Genere Letterario delle Orazioni Funebri di Gregorio di Nissa," *Aevum* 53, Fasc. 1 [1979]: 140–161, esp. pp 146–152). In 1999, Ulrike Gantz published an edition of the oration for Pulcheria with commentary (Ulrike Gantz, *Gregor von Nyssa: Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam*, ΧΡΗΣΙΣ: Die Methode der Kirchenväter im Umgang mit der Antiken Kultur 6 [Basel: Schwabe, 1999]). Similarities between Gregory's two texts, imperial funerary orations, and Basil's consolatory texts are described in Robert C. Gregg, *Consolation philosophy: Greek and Christian paideia in Basil and the two Gregories*, Patristic Monograph Series 3 (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1975), esp. Chapter 4.

[14] This timeline for their meeting is proposed by Daniélou in his "Introduction," *La Vie de Moïse, ou Traité de la Perfecion en Matière de Vertu*, ed. and transl. by Jean Daniélou, S.J., 3rd ed., *Sources Chrétiennes* 1 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1968): 6–42, 13. The timeline allows him to explain how Gregory dedicated the *In canticum canticorum* to Olympias ca. 389 CE (Gregory of Nyssa, *In Canticum canticorum* title, GNO Online 24.3.Tit).

igen (ca. 184–ca. 253 CE), for whom Christian engagement with classical education had been a fraught matter.[15] The Cappadocian link to Origen, as we learn in the VGT and from the Cappadocians' own letters, comes partly from Neocaesarean family connections: Macrina the Elder and her husband were trained in their faith by Thaumaturgus, who was trained by Origen.[16] Origen

[15] See Karl Olav Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer: School, Pagan Poets and Early Christianity,* Library of New Testament Studies 400 (London: T&T Clark, 2009), esp. Chapter 11 on Origen and his attitude toward classical *paideia*. Carl Vernon Harris claims that in the *De principiis*, "Origen's purpose, it seems, was less to augment the number of religious truths than to clarify the teachings of the Church by an exposition that would be at once coherent, true to Scripture, and scholarly enough to win the attention of the philosophers" (Carl Vernon Harris, *Origen of Alexandria's Interpretation of the Teacher's Function in the Early Christian Hierarchy and Community* [New York: The American Press, 1966], 54). Robert M. Grant argues that Origen "was not enthusiastic about a literary education," but does note that in his *Contra Celsum* (when he is "writing for an audience outside the church, at least ostensibly") Origen displays a familiarity with literature in the canon of secular *paideia* (Robert M. Grant, "Theological Education at Alexandria," in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986]: 178–189, 185–186). In particular, Origen's work of Scriptural interpretation is informed by philosophical interpretation of Homeric texts (see Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer*, 151–2 on *Contra Celsum* 1.42), and he sees the study of philosophy as propaideutic "for an adequate reading of biblical texts" (145). Peter Martens highlights the importance of training in philology for Origen, especially the role of philology in text criticism and exegesis (Peter W. Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life*, Oxford Early Christian Studies [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012].). Origen's *Hexapla*, a massive undertaking, may be taken as evidence of his commitment to detailed exegetical work and his conception of its importance for Christian scholars (John Wright, "Origen in the Scholar's Den: A Rationale for the Hexapla," in *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser and William L. Petersen [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988]: 48–62). Patricia Cox Miller gathers illustrative examples of Origen's comments on the necessity of interpreting Scripture allegorically, and she proposes that "… in the hands of such an interpreter as Origen, allegory is the name of interpretation as such, provided that one brings to interpretation the kind of poetic and abysmal recognitions that Origen expressed so well. Consciousness of the perceptual structures that one brings to words entails the recognition that all writing is allegory, a fall into a poetic abyss" (Patricia Cox Miller, "Poetic Words, Abysmal Words: Reflections on Origen's Hermeneutics." in Kannengeisser and Petersen, *Origen of Alexandria*: 165–178, 178).

[16] VGT 22. See Gregory of Nazianzus *Or.* 43.5–6 on Macrina the Elder. Vasiliki Limberis, *Architects of Piety: the Cappadocian Fathers and the cult of the martyrs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) claims that the personal connection to Thaumaturgus through Macrina the Elder imbues the family with a heredity sanctity that they draw upon to enhance their local ecclesial authority (135). The major source for Thaumaturgus' education under Origen is Thaumaturgus' own text, *In Origenem oratio panegyrica*. The authenticity of its attribution to Thaumaturgus has been questioned, but Crouzel defends it in Henri Crouzel, "Faut-il voir trois personnages en Grégoire le Thaumaturge? A propos du 'Remerciement à Origene' et de la 'Lettre à Grégoire'," *Gregorianum* 60.2 (1979): 287–320, esp. 289–300.

himself was, according to Eusebius, a student of Clement of Alexandria (ca. 160–ca. 215).[17] Clement's text *Paedagogus* lays out a program of education and training for Christians.[18] Even this brief overview demonstrates that a concern for a particularly Christian, highly philosophical and rhetorical form of education was part of Gregory's intellectual and theological heritage.

Scholars have pieced together various accounts of Gregory's upbringing, education, ministry, and personal life, drawing on his own letters and treatises to demonstrate that he served as Church lector before his appointment as bishop, to show that he participated (if at first reluctantly) in the veneration of local saints and martyrs, and to argue that he may have married and had a son.[19] Raymond Van Dam's three volumes published in 2002–2003 richly recreate the social, economic, and political *milieux* of the Cappadocian Fathers and their congregations.[20] More general studies, like Andrea Sterk's 2004 book *Re-*

Thaumaturgus' text describes features of Origen's philosophical and theological teaching, and praises his ability to lead his students toward virtue. On the relationship between the *In Origenem* and the VGT, Maraval writes, "En fait, l'*Éloge de Thaumaturge* et le *Remerciement à Origène* présentent le même personnage, mais sous des aspects différents: le premier est un moine devenue évêque qui convertit les païens grâce à ses pouvoirs de thaumaturge, l'autre un membre actif d'une école philosophique qui fait devant celle-ci la preuve des compétences acquises auprès de son maître – un aspect qui présentait peu d'intérêt pour l'auditoire de Grégoire" (Maraval, "Introduction," in *Éloge de Grégoire le Thaumaturge, Éloge de Basile,* transl. Pierre Maraval, Sources Chrétiennes 573 [Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2014]: 7–64, 29). On Origen as Thaumaturgus' teacher in Caesarea, largely on the basis of accounts in Eusebius and Thaumaturgus' own writings, see Anders-Christian Jacobsen, "Conversion to Christian Philosophy – the case of Origen's School in Caesarea," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 16.1 (2012): 145–157.

[17] Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.2.2–6.

[18] See also discussion in Teresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 48–52.

[19] Gregory's vivid personal anecdote about a dream encounter with the martyrs associated with the cult of the 40 Martyrs at Sebaste is found in Gregory's *In XL Martyres*; see also Limberis' recent work on the Cappadocians and their engagement with martyr cult: Vasiliki Limberis, *Architects of Piety,* 21, 63–65.

Daniélou holds that Gregory was married, though he points out there is not much evidence to determine whether he kept his wife after being appointed bishop (Jean Daniélou, "Introduction," 9; Jean Daniélou, "Le mariage de Grégoire de Nysse et la chronologie de sa vie," *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 2.1-2 [1956]: 71–78). For a summary of the debate over Theosebeia and Cynegius, see Anna M. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters. Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*. Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 83 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp 15–18. Suffice it to say here that Gregory's *Epistles* 13, 14, and 197 and the treatise *De virginitate* have been pored over by numerous scholars who come to quite different conclusions.

[20] Raymond Van Dam, *Becoming Christian: the Conversion of Roman Cappadocia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Raymond Van Dam, *Families and*

nouncing the World Yet Leading the Church: The Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity, examine the social and ecclesiastical conditions that shaped the episcopal experience of bishops like the Cappadocians.[21] Some recent works like Susan R. Holman's 2001 *The Hungry are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia* and Vasiliki Limberis' 2011 *Architects of Piety: The Cappadocian Fathers and the Cult of the Martyrs* explicitly draw on parts of Gregory's oeuvre (homilies and orations, respectively) as case studies for different aspects of fourth-century Christian life.[22] These reconstructions evince an abiding scholarly interest in the connections or overlap between Gregory's personal experiences and his literary output.

This is an interest Gregory himself shares. He displays an active and earnestly pastoral and pedagogical approach to his social world through his letters and addresses to a broad range of interlocutors – young priests, fellow bishops, lay congregations, women, non-Christian rhetors, members of the imperial family, and devotees of famous saints and martyrs.[23] Whether forging letters to Basil in the name of an uncle to mend a familial rift (see Basil, *Epistles* 58, 59, 60)[24] or recommending the student Cynegius to the Athenian rhetor Libanius (Gregory, *Epistles* 13 and 14), Gregory frequently shows his concern for using the word, spoken and written, to foster and preserve human connection.

His diverse corpus reflects the highly creative intellect of this pastor, theologian, and teacher. However, some have identified his less than systematic expressions of doctrine and, more troubling still, his apparent acceptance of Origen's teachings about *apokatastasis* (universal salvation) as problematic aspects of his literary production.[25] As Anthony Meredith points out, however,

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Friends; Raymond Van Dam, *Kingdom of Snow: Roman Rule and Greek Culture in Cappadocia* (Philadephia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

[21] Andrea Sterk, *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church: The Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[22] Susan R. Holman, *The Hungry are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Limberis, *Architects of Piety*.

[23] See collected letters in Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*. The pedagogical approach is summarized well in Morwenna Ludlow, "Texts, Teachers and Pupils in the Writings of Gregory of Nyssa" in *Literature and Society in the Fourth Century AD: Performing* Paideia*, Constructing the Present, Presenting the Self*, edited by Lieve Van Hoof and Peter Van Nuffelen, Mnemosyne Supplements, Monographs on Greek and Latin Language and Literature 373 (Leiden: Brill, 2014): 83–102.

[24] Basil rebukes Gregory in Basil, *Epistle* 58. Basil, *Epistle* 59 is an appeal to the uncle, another Gregory, for reconciliation, and *Epistle* 60 to the uncle comments on Gregory of Nyssa's previously demonstrated unreliability in communicating the uncle's words to Basil.

[25] Gregory's thought is characterized as unsystematic in, for example, Rowan Williams, "Macrina's Deathbed Revisited: Gregory of Nyssa on Mind and Passion," in *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy in Late Antiquity: Essays in tribute to George Christopher Stead*, *Ely Professor of Divinity, University of Cambridge (1971–1980), in celebration of his eightieth birthday, 9th April 1993,* edited by Lionel R. Wickham and Caroline P. Bammell, assisted by

we should keep in view the occasional nature of most of Gregory's texts, since they were "written in response to particular challenges he and the Church felt themselves called on to face. This means in practice that we sometimes find him using quite inconsistent models in his desire to dispose of objections to his own particular understanding of the gospel."[26] The *Lives* of Moses, Thaumaturgus, and Macrina are, in Gregory's own formulation, written to teach Christians in this turbulent fourth century Mediterranean world how to recognize and pursue lives of virtue.

II. Three Narrated *Lives*

The extant form of *The Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus* (VGT) is a narrative expansion of a commemorative oration Gregory delivered in 379 or 380 CE in Neocaesarea, the seat of the text's eponymous "Wonderworker" bishop (ca. 210/215–ca. 270/275 CE).[27] The oration was originally delivered to a live au-

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Erica C.D. Hunter, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 19 (Leiden: Brill, 1993): 227–246, 228.

For Gregory's reception of Origenic thought, see recent discussion in Ilaria Ramelli, "Christian Soteriology and Christian Platonism: Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Biblical and Philosophical Basis of the Doctrine of Apokatastasis," *Vigiliae Christianae* 61 (2007): 313–356; Ilaria Ramelli, "Harmony between *Arkhē* and *Telos* in Patristic Platonism and the Imagery of Astronomical Harmony Applied to Apokatastasis," *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 7 (2013): 1–49. Several scholars have pointed out that we must, of course, be cautious in claiming a through-line from Origen to Gregory. In his 2002 article on how Origen and Gregory treat the Lord's Prayer, Meredith writes, "The conclusion of this investigation is that neither in thought nor in vocabulary or use of Scripture is there very much in common between the two writers. Even if Gregory knew Origen's treatment of The Lord's Prayer, he made very little use of it; and the probability is that he was ignorant of it. If this is true, it is another indication of the doubtfulness of the facile suggestion that Gregory is to be thought of as a disciple of Origen (albeit at several removes, through his grandmother Macrina and Gregory the Wonder-worker). The evidence of these five sermons hardly supports such a claim" (Anthony Meredith, "Origen and Gregory of Nyssa on the Lord's Prayer," *Heythrop Journal* 43 (2002): 344–356, 355). A further complication arises when we consider that even the connection through Gregory Thaumaturgus is tenuous at best: on the basis of the VGT, it is unclear and even doubtful that Nyssen knew Thaumaturgus' theological writings. See Raymond Van Dam, "Hagiography and History: The Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus," *Classical Antiquity* 1 (1982): 272–308, and Jean Bernardi, *La Prédication des pères cappadociens, le prédicateur et son auditoire*. Publications de la Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de l'Université de Montpellier 30, (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968), esp. p. 301.

[26] Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 15.

[27] A recent summary of the scholarly debate surrounding the dating of the original delivery and the location may be found in Pierre Maraval, "Introduction," 14–23. Its delivery

dience of Neocaesarean citizens, most likely Christians gathered for Thaumaturgus' feast day. Accordingly, it begins with an address that reflects its initial live delivery. Scholars believe the surviving form of the text includes some additions to the original address; as Slusser puts it, "we may assume that Gregory of Nyssa added such improvements as he wished before letting the oration circulate more widely."[28] This wider audience was probably a group of Christians interested in learning about a luminary of the Church. As Stephen Mitchell has shown, the majority of the information Gregory offered was "no more than pious fiction."[29] Thaumaturgus becomes, in Gregory's hands, an exemplar of Christian wisdom and a model for successful evangelization of the Pontic region, but the historical details of Thaumaturgus' life are inaccurate when considered against the evidence from the earlier bishop's own autobiographical writings.[30]

Gregory describes his older sister's life, death, and burial in *The Life of Saint Macrina* (VSM), a text he writes in approximately 382 CE from the position of an eyewitness and admirer; this narrative presents Macrina (ca. 327–379 CE) as a model of virtues, with a special emphasis on her philosophical self-control. Vasiliki Limberis has argued that this *bios*, with its emphasis on asceticism, allows Gregory to claim a privileged connection to the "celestial family" of martyrs.[31] The extended account of events that technically occurred immediately before and after Macrina's death is much longer than the summary of her life, and that dilation makes this a somewhat atypical *bios*. Gregory addresses an epistolary opening to a family friend who asked for an account of

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relative to the death of Basil in 379 CE and the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE is somewhat unclear, though Maraval suggests, on the basis of Gregory's *Epistle* 19, that Gregory could indeed have delivered the speech in Neocaesarea in the autumn of 379 CE. Stephen Mitchell proposes the precise date of November 17, 379. November 17 would have been the anniversary of Thaumaturgus' death, and the date is preserved independently in the Latin *Life* (Stephen Mitchell, "The Life and Lives of Gregory Thaumaturgus," in *Portraits of Spiritual Authority: Religious Power in Early Christianity, Byzantium and the Christian Orient*, ed. Jan Willem Drijvers and John W. Watt, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 137 [Leiden: Brill, 1999]: 99–138, 115).

[28] Michael Slusser, "Introduction," in *St. Gregory Thaumaturgus: Life and Works*. The Fathers of the Church, a new translation, Volume 98 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998): 1–37, 16. Basing his division on that proposed by Koetschau, Slusser takes Gregory's remarks about "resuming" (ἐπαναλαβών) the story of Thaumaturgus' early priesthood as an indication that he is adding a new section (VGT 96.8).

[29] Stephen Mitchell, "The Life and *Lives*," 99.

[30] Mitchell points out that Eusebius' information about Thaumaturgus' early life, including his name change from Theodore to Gregory, probably came from the *In Origenem* (Mitchell, "The Life and *Lives*," 105).

[31] Limberis, *Architects of Piety*, 109ff.

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