

‘Through you, men live endowed with reason’: Gregory Nazianzen’s trinitarian thinking as a window to his personal character

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Abstract

It has been recently argued that the doctrine of the Trinity in Gregory Nazianzen’s thinking is the driving force of his personal and ecclesiastical life. However, no serious study has so far been done on the relation between Gregory Nazianzen’s personal character as reflective of his theological mind and personal rationale. This article suggests that the proper road for reaching an accurate and perceptive understanding of Gregory Nazianzen’s character starts from reading the literature of this father in a serious attempt at discovering the man behind the ideas of the texts and to perceive the core of his personality and character as theologian and servant of the church. Gregory’s character and Gregory’s theology, especially his trinitarian thinking, are windows which open towards each other. They reciprocally depict for us a sincere and puzzling servant of God as well as a unique and challenging theologian. The article starts by shedding analytical light on Gregory Nazianzen’s core trinitarian logic, which lies in his understanding of the idea of ‘reciprocity’ and his envisioning of triadic perichoretic trinitarian monarchy, instead of a hierarchical one, in the Godhead. It then explores the presence of this rationale in Gregory’s own understanding of his personal and ministerial character as the ‘dwelling place’ of God’s triune image. The article concludes with the suggestion that Gregory’s writings clearly state his belief that theology is the theologian, and the theologian is someone whose life and personhood mirror her theological mind. For this church father, there is no claimed neutral separation between the theologian and his or her theology.

Keywords: dwelling place, monarchia, reciprocity, trinitarian theology.

Introduction

It has recently been argued that the doctrine of the Trinity in Gregory Nazianzen’s thinking not only interprets Christian life, but also defines this life as such. In other words, the proper understanding of this father’s view on the triune nature of God lies in perceiving the foundational link he

makes between God's being and God's economic actions of salvation for humanity which makes human life as God intends it to be.¹ It has also been noticed that the doctrine of the Trinity is not only central to the meaning of life in general for Gregory, but also 'the driving force of his personal and ecclesiastical life'.² However, no serious study has so far been done on the relation between Gregory Nazianzen's personal character and his trinitarian logic; on, that is, the relationship between the character of the theologian, as reflected in his life, ministry and behaviours, and the content of his theological mind, as presented in his understanding of the trinitarian nature of God. There are enough elements and dimensions in Gregory Nazianzen's writings to give grounds for such a substantial, mutually constitutive link between *who* he is as a person and *how* he understands and interprets the personal being of the triune Godhead, so such a link does not necessarily imply an attempt at boxing Nazianzen's thinking into either an idealist or romanticist, anachronistic framework.

This article endeavours to discover in some of Gregory's writing the man behind the ideas of the texts and to perceive the core of his personality and character as theologian and servant of the church. First, I will highlight basic elements in Nazianzen's view of the Trinity before going on to delve into some selected parts of Gregory's writing to see what kind of a person these texts say their author is. I will limit my observations to a selection of texts from Gregory's orations, poems and letters, relying mainly on Brian Daley's English translation of some of the most important texts left by Gregory Nazianzen.³ For texts not included in Daley's collection, I rely on the classical translation and collection of writings of Gregory in volume 7 of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers series, and in the Fathers of the Church series.⁴

Gregory Nazianzen, the theologian of reciprocity and the defender of triune monarchy

In his trinitarian theology, Gregory Nazianzen emphasises a perichoretic Godhead, rather than restricting the *monarchia* to the Father alone, because he believes that such a trinitarian view of *monarchia* is the best means for maintaining a proportionate relation between 'unity' and 'particularity' in the Godhead. The Father is the source of the Son and the Spirit, insofar as

¹ Christopher A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 187–233.

² Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianus*, p. 188. 'The doctrine of the trinity is the centrepiece of his theological vision and the driving force of his personal and ecclesiastical life.'

³ Brian E. Daley, *Gregory Nazianus* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁴ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), vol. 7.

he is the one who begets the first and spirates the second. Yet, the Father is not the source of the Godhead, because whenever we mention the Godhead, Gregory maintains, we mean the Father, Son and Spirit together. This alone protects the triune nature of God, he concludes, from falling into Sabellian modalism, tritheism or even Judaistic monism.⁵

Reflective of such a theological thinking is the fact that in his farewell address to the gathering bishops in the council of Constantinople, in 381, Gregory combines a speech on his personal character with another one on his trinitarian thinking. Gregory starts his farewell address by affirming his oneness with other bishops in the council. Despite being put on trial by his colleagues, Gregory believes that his judging fellows and he share the same spirit of charity which was bestowed upon them from God.⁶ There is no place for competition in charity between the clerics, because all, as Gregory believes, remain equal sinners despite their good deeds.⁷ The important point here is related to Gregory's style of speech. After emphasising unity in terms of equality, Gregory focuses on the aspect of distinction in order to explain what made him the leader he appeared to be while presiding over the ecclesial council in Constantinople. Gregory's accent in the following lines is of someone putting his personal, character difference in front of the eyes of equal fellow-servants. Yet, when he says that he hands over responsibility 'to the most wicked and sinful people among all the inhabitants of the earth',⁸ he does not exclude himself from the groups of the wicked. He addresses himself as 'sinner from sinners', aiming thereby to remind others that equality between servants – though he is now judged and they are judges – is mutual. So, they should not ascribe to themselves any causal influence or hierarchical presidency.

Now, on what basis does Gregory justify such an accent and from where does he derive his attitude towards his fellows? This immediately brings us to the theological content of Gregory's address and explains why he decides in that speech to remind his audience of nothing but his trinitarian thinking.

⁵ See my detailed exposition of Gregory's trinitarian logic in Najeeb G. Awad, 'Between Subordination and Koinonia: Toward a New Reading of the Cappadocian Theology', *Modern Theology*, 2/32 (2007), pp. 181–204; and in ch. 4 of my book, *God Without a Face? On the Personal Individuation of the Holy Spirit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011). I briefly borrow some of the following lines on Gregory's trinitarian thinking from this.

⁶ Nazianzen, *Orations*, 42.1 (Daley, pp. 139–40).

⁷ This is something Nazianzen maintained an awareness of, even in other writings, when he said 'although a man has kept himself pure from sin, even in every high degree; I do not know that even this is sufficient for one who is to instruct others in virtue': Nazianzen, *Orations*, 2.12.

⁸ Nazianzen, *Orations*, 42.3 (Daley, p. 141).

Nazianzen endeavours to reveal that his emphasis on oneness and equality between him and his colleagues, as well as his attention to the particularity and difference of his character, are derived from his understanding of the identity of God. Gregory makes a significant link between his teaching on the Trinity and how the people who learned his theology live as a community. It expresses Gregory's imaging of God's being in our human self and life on the basis of mutual relationships which create unity and equality and maintain distinction.⁹

When Gregory is asked, but what trinitarian identity do you think the Godhead images? His answer comes as the following: a triune Godhead wherein the begetter, who is not the begotten, and the begotten, who has a beginning, are one, despite one being unbegotten and the other being begotten. These characteristics do not imply any ranking, causal or functional, between the hypostases, for Gregory. For, 'being without beginning is not the nature of the one without beginning, nor is being unbegotten; for nature is never a designation for what something is not, but for what something is'.¹⁰ The Father cannot, in other words, be the Godhead alone or the cause of the Godhead, because such a claim would be ascribing a monarchical particularity to the Father on the basis of a causal logic of linearity. But such logic cannot be a sufficient basis for such an ascription, for causality here lies in the Father's unbegottenness; in his being without a beginning; such things, that is, cannot be definitive of the Father's nature because they are 'what He is not' and not 'what He is'. Because 'what He is not' cannot name what the Father is, the relations of causal linearity which allude to hierarchical ranking are inappropriate for either speaking about the oneness of the three hypostases as the Godhead, or about who the Father is as his particular hypostatic identity.

What we can say about the three persons is that 'there is one nature for all three: God'.¹¹ What particularises the Father, then? For Gregory, it is his unifying role. The Father's character lies in making the unity possible. Even this, nevertheless, should not bestow upon the Father a higher causal position by linking the Godhead's being to him alone. If the 'is' of the three hypostases is 'God', the three *together* – as one and particulars – are the Godhead, and the three 'have caused us to exist in multiplicity'. Being the Godhead reciprocally together does not cause a clash of authority, roles or positions as it creates in human life, because 'for them, whose nature is simple and whose existence is the same, the principal characteristic is unity'.¹²

⁹ Nazianzen, *Orations*, 42.15 (Daley, p. 147).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

Oration 42 helps us to see that, by the above-mentioned logic, Gregory is not only avoiding tritheism and the Arian stress on the three over the one. He is equally against any form of Sabellian emphasis on oneness over the three.¹³ No wonder that a similar concern about the triunity of the Godhead shapes Gregory's argument in his other writings too. For example, Gregory emphasises in Oration 38 that the three persons are together the Godhead, for the 'Holy of Holies converges in a single lordship and a single Godhead'.¹⁴ Similarly, in Oration 20 Gregory states that his trinitarian logic is 'rejecting both a cheap approach to unity and an even sillier version of distinction'. A few lines ahead, Gregory clarifies that by 'cheap approach to unity' he means the one that 'define[s] divinity simply by the notion of being unbegotten'.¹⁵ In other words, causality in terms of origination for Gregory is indicative of narrow-mindedness and an evident insufficiency because it reduces the Godhead to mere relations of origin, undermining thereby the dimension of reciprocity.

Interestingly here is the parallel between Gregory's refusal of any partisanship in relation to either the Father or the Son and his warning against what he calls 'minimizing the Father's rank as ultimate cause'. This juxtaposition shows that Gregory does not ignore that the Father is the cause of the Son and the Spirit. Yet he seriously stays away from any patrological partisanship. He stresses that being the cause of the other two hypostases is a distinctive property of the Father, but it does not make him the cause of the Godhead per se. And, because the Godhead cannot lie in the Father alone, Gregory concludes 'if . . . we must necessarily hold on to the one God while confessing the three hypostases, surely we must speak of three persons, each one with its own distinctive properties'.¹⁶ Relevant to this study in the above discussion is that, after explaining his personal rank and relation to his colleagues in relation to servanthood and churchly leadership, Gregory states that in whatever manner we try to serve we should image the face of God or his triune Godhead in us. 'Imaging God' takes Gregory from self-explanation into applying the reflection of God's image in personal life and conduct to his trinitarian thinking.

In the light of Gregory's above-mentioned emphasis, one can validly warn that turning everything Gregory says on the Trinity into a rhetorical variation of a strict belief that the Father is the Godhead and he is the source of the Trinity and the name of the divinity in God may place

¹³ Nazianzen, *Orations*, 42.16 (Daley, pp. 147–8).

¹⁴ Nazianzen, *Orations*, 38.8 (Daley, pp. 120–1).

¹⁵ Nazianzen, *Orations*, 20.6 (Daley, p. 101).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Gregory within the boundaries of a taken-for-granted belief that spread widely in his theological milieu.¹⁷ But it will in return deny Gregory his own uniqueness and difference as a character, whose life and writings, as we will see in the following section, do not show serious adherence to monarchical reductionistic or hierarchical forms of unity. Everything about Gregory's life, decisions and behaviours say that he was not really a blind, slavish conformist or just a regular member in a general whole. This is gleaned from Gregory's personal behaviour, when, for example, he tells his colleagues in his farewell oration that the particular character which makes him the person he is does not oppose the oneness he and they share as those sinners to whom God mercifully gave a spirit of charity. As Gregory, in his theological understanding of the Trinity, constructs a 'unity-in-particularity' hermeneutics of the divine Godhead that has no place for any hierarchical, reductionist causality which reduces the Godhead to one divine person alone, in his farewell speech he describes himself by means of speaking about the 'unity-in-particularity' relation between him and other clerics in the church. Why would such 'trinitarian Godhead' rather than a Godhead which lies in the monarchy of the Father alone make sense for Gregory? Because, the theologian of perichoresis is reflective of such relationality in his very own personal life and character, as we will see next.

Gregory Nazianzen, the dwelling place of God and the shepherd of the church

My goal in this section is to show that Gregory Nazianzen has a noticeable unique character which is substantially altruistic, self-denying, communion-centred, reciprocity-orientated and far from being hierarchical, authoritarian, exploitative or egoistic. This character is extracted from Gregory's understanding of himself as a theologian, especially as a theologian of a perichoretic deity.

In Oration 20, Gregory reveals his opinion about what makes the servant a real theologian in the following way:

for nothing seems so important to me as for a person . . . , in conversation with himself and with God, to live above the level of the visible, and always to bear the images of divine things within himself in their pure state, free from the stamp of what is inferior and changeable . . . Before one has elevated this materiality as far as possible, and has sufficiently purified

¹⁷ Thus Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, p. 213. See also Beeley, 'Divine Causality and the Monarchy of God the Father in Gregory of Nazianzus', *Harvard Theological Review*, 2/100 (2007), pp. 199–214, 213–14.

one's ears and one's intelligence, I do not think it is safe to accept a position of spiritual leadership or to devote oneself to theology.¹⁸

'Theologian' for Gregory is not a certain category of a specific mind-set or a specific form of knowledge bestowed upon the person who occupies an official rank in the church. It is not only expressive of a 'theological knower' in relation with his subject of knowledge. We need to take 'theologian' in Gregory's thinking beyond the boundaries of 'knowledge-knower' relationship¹⁹ into the wider relationship between the subject of theology and the humanity of this subject's servant. It names a special form of character. It is an expression of a certain personality. It does not designate the knowledge of God, by virtue of which the theologian acquires and enjoys a respected position. *Theo-logia* is the theologian's personal figuration of the subject of faith, God, in his very own being. As the real Christian is one who opens her self to others and makes herself a dwelling place for them, the theologian is the one who elevates her life, her earthly self, beyond the narrow circles of egoism and makes her life a dwelling place for the divine other and the human others. The theologian is someone who is pure in ear and pure in mind, which means she neither occupies her mind with proving and marketing her own convictions, needs and worldly ambitions, nor does she fill her ears with her own, sole voice, private feelings and singular appraisals.

Gregory, moreover, does not only think that this is the way for personifying a 'theologian'. He further stresses that this is the only way for becoming a leader in the church. The church fathers used to be the theological guides and the presiding prelates in the early church. Their clerical position in relation to faith and Christian identity cannot be seen more clearly than in the affirmation of Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, that the bishop is the model of the heavenly Father in the church (in *The Letter to the Trallians*), and his calling Christ himself the heavenly bishop of the church, who rules it in the absence of its earthly one (in *The Letter to the Ephesians*).²⁰ The ancient Christian community believed that the bishops, as Gregory himself says, are 'the light of the church', and that 'the church necessarily shares the peril or safety incurred by the conduct of its Chief'.²¹ Bishops, as many fathers of

¹⁸ Nazianzen, *Orations*, 20.1 (Daley, p. 98 (pp. 98–105)).

¹⁹ Thus Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, p. 35.

²⁰ See comments on Ignatius' literature in Francis A. Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops: The Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Church* (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Newman, 2001), pp. 103–25.

²¹ Nazianzen, letter 41. Brian Daley alludes to some moments in church history when certain strong church leaders even reflected favouritism towards a monarchical

the church believed, should lord over, should oversee, rule or even hold the church together in their persons.²² This condition became a double-edged sword which would almost stab the side of the church when one of the clerical leaders used his clerical-theological status to fight other clerics who happened to disagree with him, eventually expelling them from the church and leading to their communal rejection.²³

In the face of this hierarchical misuse of power, Gregory stands in his extraordinary character as a church leader and theologian. Instead of being a leader whose actions mirror a monarchical mentality, Gregory maintained his belief in the reciprocity and perichoresis he learned from the Trinity. We have in him a church servant who believes that leadership lies in opening one's self to the other – God, first, and the served human, second – and in making his soul a dwelling place for others.²⁴ Gregory uses the idea of 'dwelling place' as almost strictly definitive of the *Imago Dei* in us: as God is a dwelling place for us, we are God's image when we open ourselves to be God's dwelling place, or 'living temple of the living God',²⁵ and a dwelling place to our fellow humans. We are called to image God's being (i.e. triune

interpretation of the Trinity and used this understanding to theologially legalise their actions: Brian Daley, "One Thing and Another", *The Persons in God and the Person of Christ in Patristic Theology*, *Pro Ecclesia*, 1/15 (2006), pp. 17–46, 44.

²² G. R. Evans, 'The Church in the Early Christian Centuries: Ecclesiastical Consolidation', in Gerard Mannion and Lewis S. Mudge (eds), *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 28–47, 38 (37–9). For further readings see: Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*, (Berkeley-Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2005); Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops*; and Peter Iver Kaufman, *Church, Book, and Bishop: Conflict and Authority in Early Latin Christianity* (Boulder, CO, and Oxford: Westview and HarperCollins Publishers, 1996).

²³ John McGuckin records very interesting advice the monks in Egypt would hear from their elders about the church's bishops: 'if you see a bishop approaching, flee from him faster than you would before a woman': J. McGuckin, *St Gregory of Nazianzus, An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Press, 2001), p. 89.

²⁴ Profound here is the systematic link Gregory makes between church service and the work of the Holy Spirit. Christopher Beeley successfully spots this theological link. Beeley points with this regard to Oration 12, where Gregory says: "I opened my mouth and drew in the Spirit" (Ps 119/ 118.131) and I give myself and my all to the Spirit – in practice and word and non-practice and silence. Only may it hold me and guide my hand and mind and tongue . . . I am a divine instrument, a rational instrument, an instrument tuned and struck by that master musician, the Spirit': Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, pp. 157–9.

²⁵ Nazianzen, *Orations*, 20.4 (Daley, p. 100). Becoming church theologian and leader means for Gregory, as R. R. Ruether says, 'freeing the image of God within man from the depressing power of matter and bringing it back to its aboriginal state as a reflection of the divine archetype': Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*:

from A to Z, to Gregory) and the mind of Christ, and to show that this image not only recreates our actions but also our characteristics and personalities. Having a 'cleansed head' means to image God in ourselves by holding fast to the head of Christ, which reveals the triune reality of God.²⁶

For Gregory, theology as 'openness towards God and becoming a dwelling place for Him' means to reflect God as God is, and not to reflect one's self via God or reflect God as I see him or need him to be seen in a specific setting or situation. This is what Gregory essentially stresses when he says 'I pray . . . not to think or say anything about God that is simply my own'.²⁷ The church's servant incarnates his spiritual leadership and theological character by means of the manner of his life. 'Do you want to become a theologian', Gregory says, 'keep the commandments, make your way forward through observing the precepts: for the practical life is the launching-pad for contemplation'.²⁸

Brian Daley successfully places the translation of Gregory's Orations 20 and 26 consecutively in his translation of Gregory's literature. Each of these two orations interprets the other and plays the role of the hermeneutic ground for the other in a clear correspondence. In the light of Gregory's speech on the character of the theologian and the church leader in Oration 20, one can more properly perceive the core of Gregory's speech on his personal clerical, hierarchical status in Oration 26. There, we have someone whose personality images itself in acting as 'a mirror to a form outside oneself'.²⁹

In this regard the link between Gregory's view of the theologian and his comments on his own character as a church leader who enjoys a hierarchical authority and referential power is strong. Gregory was accused of weakness, passivity and cowardice by other church fathers and members because he did not fight for his position, defend his personal image or stand against those who tried to snatch his clerical leadership from him in Constantinople in 381. Gregory's words in response to all these charges are worth quoting at length and reflecting upon in detail:

This is what I have to say – I, the cowardly and over-cautious shepherd, accused of being slack because I have tried to be safe. I am not one of those shepherds who gulp down the milk and wrap themselves in the wool, who slaughter the sheep, oppress them with hardship and sell them off, saying 'praise the Lord – we're rich'. They are shepherds for themselves,

Rhetor and Philosopher (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 136 (pp. 136–55). Gregory expressed this also in *Orations*, 2.91.

²⁶ E.g. Nazianzen, *Orations*, 40.32, 39.

²⁷ Nazianzen, *Orations*, 20.5 (Daley, p. 100).

²⁸ Nazianzen, *Orations*, 20.12 (Daley, p. 104).

²⁹ Nazianzen, *Orations*, 26.1 (Daley, p. 106 (pp. 105–17)).

not for the sheep, if you will remember the saying of one of the prophets, by which he tried to evict the wicked shepherds – I belong, rather, to those who can say with Paul, ‘who is weak, and I am not weak?’ who is made to fall, and I am not indignant – or concerned?³⁰

‘Tending the sheep’ does not mean, for Gregory, controlling their paths or shaping their track causally. The shepherd is not a causer who influences the sheep from the vantage point of authority in a linear form of connection. He, rather, walks as one carrying the yoke of hardship *along* with them: a leader by means of mutual, communal actions and equal participation. Those leaders who attribute to themselves causal influence and referential prerogatives due to their hierarchical positions are shepherds to themselves, according to Gregory. They are ‘like the person who thinks himself the best of athletes but never goes down into the stadium, or thinks himself a tried and true steersman, and makes much of his skill in fair wealth, but when winds blow, hands over the rudder to someone else’.³¹

Missing the depth of Gregory’s personality, which appears through his words in this important oration, would easily make us misjudge Gregory and hastily consider him to be like many of his contemporaries who are obsessed with power-games and ‘winning–losing’ calculations. Such a rash appraisal of Gregory’s character is found in John McGuckin’s essay on Gregory’s reactions and behaviour in response to the devastating decision to depose him from his episcopal chair in Constantinople and his presidential responsibility in the ecumenical council of 381.³² McGuckin, in addition, initially perceives an affinity in Gregory’s texts between Gregory’s character and his primary theological interests and argues that, during the council of 381, Gregory tried to relate his clerical leadership and responsibilities in the capital and the ecumenical council to his trinitarian theology.

I principally concur with McGuckin’s conviction that Gregory’s post-Constantinople poems are not just ‘emotion recollected in tranquillity’. The strong wording of these poems and their vibrant expressions vigorously depict more than just nostalgic or elegiac feelings. However, the problem in McGuckin’s reading of Gregory lies in ‘the conspiracy-theory’ option he imposes on Gregory’s attitude. McGuckin claims that Gregory was actually aiming to force the council to concede his fitness for holding the office of the archiepiscopal president in the council and the archbishop of the capital by

³⁰ Nazianzen, *Orations*, 26.4 (Daley, p. 108).

³¹ Nazianzen, *Orations*, 26.9 (Daley, p. 111).

³² J. C. McGuckin, ‘Autobiography as Apologia in St. Gregory of Nazianzus’, *Studia Patristica*, 37 (2001), pp. 160–77.

playing a twofold drama: lapsing first into silence and withdrawal, and then pretending to abandon his leading positions.³³ Instead of the man of Christ he is, McGuckin turns Gregory into a cleric deep in dirty politics, busy with power-lobbying and authority-maintaining concerns and eager only to save his own self-image.³⁴

Gregory's texts in general are a mirror to his character as a theologian, a church prelate and a Christian believer. They depict the mind-set, the personal values and the life principles of Gregory the theologian and the human being. They are windows on the soul from which his theological thinking grew. This is why I find it necessary to question McGuckin's appraisal of Gregory's post-Constantinople poems as 'in every sense apologetic pieces, designed for redress and settling personal scores'.³⁵ Gregory's other orations depict a person whose character is inherently of a different nature. McGuckin turns Gregory rather easily into someone playing exactly the same dirty games as those who tried to snatch his clerical position from him, or by those friends and colleagues who tried to use him to achieve their own personal agendas (e.g. when Basil made him the bishop of Sasima).³⁶ McGuckin overshadows the depth of the characteristics which are seen in Gregory's life and writings. The textual records of Gregory Nazianzen's understanding of the characters of the theologian and the shepherd do not merely show the fruits of a rhetorically skilful mind. There is neither plausible reason nor sufficient historical evid-

³³ McGuckin, 'Autobiography as Apologia', p. 165. C. Beeley almost repeats a similar interpretation yet in less polemic words: Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, p. 41.

³⁴ McGuckin, 'Autobiography as Apologia', pp. 166–7. McGuckin supports this by arguing, for instance, that the Egyptian bishops' attack against Gregory Nazianzen was because this latter stood with the emperor in his attempt to break down the legacy of Meletius after his death during the procession of the 381 council. Gregory eventually lost his presidency, McGuckin concedes, because he lacked the support not only of the Egyptians but also the Antiochenes, who considered Gregory's conformity to the emperor's plan against Melitius' legacy an act of treason against them. For an insightful narration of the events which led to the decision of the Antiochenes to abandon Gregory's side, see Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, pp. 45ff. Beeley eloquently describes the setting as the surprised, even shocked Egyptian bishops, who worked hard to sack Gregory from his position, hear him in the council reciting his decision of resignation and allegiance to the Trinity instead of to the clerical chair (*ibid.*, p. 51).

³⁵ McGuckin, 'Autobiography as Apologia', p. 161.

³⁶ One wonders how McGuckin's appraisal above harmonises with his other judgement of Gregory's character as like a 'highly introspective, insecure and sensitive child'. McGuckin's interpretation of Gregory's relationship with his father, furthermore, seems to turn Nazianzen into a fourth-century quasi-Oedipus figure, obsessed with stabilising his personal identity by contrasting and opposing himself to his father's: McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, p. 2 (pp. 1–34).

ence to make Gregory a fraud or an unethical, power-seeking and manipulating theologian and church leader. McGuckin's proposal hermeneutically imprisons Gregory in specific historical circumstances and patterns of conduct which find a trace in the clashes and competitions between bishops contemporaneous to him. Such a hermeneutic conceals rather than reveals Gregory's character, because it reduces his personality to certain, predetermined history-reading rules, rather than reading the historical life of Gregory as the history of the person he was, or as a reflection of the character his writings demonstrate.

There is nothing in the Nazianzen's writing which prevents the conviction that here we have a man of God who withdraws actively and willingly, not theatrically or pretentiously, to maintain 'God's image' in him, adhering to his theological mind and making the space for others to indwell in his view of service. He is a shepherd who cares for the sheep, not someone who serves himself through them. He is, in this sense, very trinitarian in mind: reciprocal, fully relational and non-hierarchical. What explains Gregory's withdrawal from the council of Constantinople is not the failure of a plan of power-gaining, or smart acting that is part of a monopolisation-play which he tried to orchestrate. Gregory's withdrawal is perfectly suited to the mind of the author of Orations 8, 14, 20, 26, to mention just a few. It would be expected from the man of God whose perichoretic character and mind find expression in (1) a passionate eagerness for dwelling in God by withdrawing from the arenas of power, popularity and self-satisfaction, and (2) the concern about becoming a dwelling place for other humans by means of opening one's self to them and their self-fulfilment.

For such a theologian, it does not really matter if the council of 381's delegates crowned him 'the theologian of theologians', 'the arch-guardian of the church' and support or not his theology on the Spirit or on the triune consubstantiality of the three *hypostases*. What matters is maintaining the truth and abiding with its proclamation, no matter what this may produce in terms of suffering, aggression, solitude or condemnation. Thus, for instance, paying attention to Gregory's words on Maximus the Cynic's attempt to steal his position should not prevent us from noticing Gregory's welcoming of Maximus and encouraging his active presence in his church. He even composed a farewell speech to Maximus (Oration 25) on his return to Egypt, wherein he praised Maximus as one of the heroes of faith and defenders of the Trinity. Had Gregory been a political-games orchestrator and someone obsessed with positions and authority, he would have been able to perceive Maximus' intentions very early. The bitterness and sharp edge of Gregory's words about his experience with Maximus show, on the

contrary, someone whose innocence and purity of heart find him easily victimised by power-seekers and dirty-politics players.³⁷

In the biographical introduction to his selected translation of Gregory Nazianzen's literature, Brian Daley reveals a more positive and sensitive appreciation of Gregory the man and his personal values than McGuckin does. Daley states that, unlike his Cappadocian colleague, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory is a man of spiritual solitude and servanthood more than a man of authority and power. While Basil would react to any threat to his own position by taking immediate steps to affirm his own position (e.g. as he did when he decided to oppose the imperial policy to gain popularity and support among the churches of Asia Minor), Gregory responds to the attempt at snatching his leadership from him (e.g. in Constantinople) or to his friends' exploitation of him for the service of their own interests (e.g. when Basil assigned him the bishopric of Sasima to strengthen his position in synodal debates) by 'passive resistance', resentfulness and longing for the life of contemplation and self-denial before God.³⁸ Daley recites a very significant section from Gregory's poem 'On His Own Life', where Gregory, as bluntly as one can be, states to Basil why he thinks that he should resent and refuse to practise his authority and leadership in Sasima:

you reproach us with inactivity and laziness, because we have not taken possession of your Sasima, and are not making motions of . . . helping arm all of you for your struggles . . . For me, the main form of action is in-action. . . . I am so ambitious about my inactivity . . . so much so, that if everyone were to imitate us, there would be no dispute among the churches, nor would the faith be swept away in the flood by becoming the weapon of each one's private ambitions.³⁹

There are no clearer words to introduce the substance of Gregory's personality. There is nothing to support interpreting Gregory's refusal to preside in Sasima as an indication of his disappointment at Basil's depreciation of his familial and educational rank and of his ambition to become Basil's 'regular advisor and spokesman'.⁴⁰ On the contrary, in the light of knowing

³⁷ Christopher Beeley probably takes the same line of reading of Gregory's character in this story: *Gregory of Nazianzus*, pp. 40–1.

³⁸ Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, pp. 10–11.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12. One can trace similar standpoints in Gregory's other writings, like *Oration* 9–12, and letters 48–50 and even in his panegyric to Basil, *Oration* 43.

⁴⁰ Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, p. 11, and also McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, pp. 190–1. McGuckin even claims that Gregory's obsession with his familial and educational rank appears, as McGuckin thinks, in his eagerness for socialising with the aristocrats and the people of high rank segments of society: '[Gregory's] correspondence demonstrates

that the ultimate action for Gregory lies in in-action; in self-retreat and making space for others, if not becoming their dwelling place after the image of God's openness, one can be persuaded more by Daley's conclusion that, whenever Gregory's actions in relation to the church's clerical hierarchy are minimal, the man lives 'one of the happiest times of his life'.⁴¹ This fits with the claim Gregory makes about himself in Oration 2 when he states 'I did not, nor do I now, think myself qualified to rule a flock or herd, or to have authority over the souls of men', and his critique of other clerics who, in his opinion, have never really 'thought of the virtue of flocks or herds', but regarded their own pleasure as more important than people's advantage.⁴² In addition, Daley's point also concurs with Gregory's attack on what he describes as the act of becoming 'the base of operations for every kind of passion, which perversely feed on us and eat up the very person we inwardly are'.⁴³ We detect this attack, for instance, in his letter to Gregory of Nyssa, when the latter gave up his desire to serve the church, blaming him for falling into greed for reputation and love of honour.⁴⁴ The same also is Nazianzen's message in one of his letters to Basil, when he complains about Basil's abuse of his friends in private, self-interest wars and hidden agendas.⁴⁵

It is important here to realise in Gregory's mind a noticeable difference between criticising the exploitative conduct of others for the sake of a private interest related to the public, on one hand, and calling for prudence and carefulness in teaching the truth which would maintain the peace and goodwill of the church of Christ, on the other. This difference appears when we look at Gregory's critical accent in letter 48 to Basil in comparison to his

just how much the intercourse with literate pagan and Christian intellectuals, socialites, and provincial aristocracy, was meat and drink to him through all his life' (ibid., p. 87).

⁴¹ Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, p. 13. A similar attitude also characterises Gregory's reaction to his ordination, as we read in his second oration. There, Gregory shows that his solitude in Pontus in response to Basil's assignment of him to priesthood at Christmas 361 was not because he was ashamed of the rank and desiring a higher one: Nazianzen, Oration 2, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, sect. 5, pp. 204–27. Rosemary R. Ruether is not far from the truth when she realises that Gregory's exaggerated agitation at Basil's assignment to him of the bishopric of Sasima may just express his 'over-sensitive' character, and that the accusation of being proud and engulfed with self-centredness is actually Basil's reaction to Gregory's decision: Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, p. 35 (pp. 34–41). See also Nazianzen, letters 45, 46 in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, P. Schaff and H. Wace (eds) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), vol. VII, p. 452.

⁴² Nazianzen, *Orations* 2.9.

⁴³ Nazianzen, *Orations* 39.7 (Daley, pp. 130–1 (pp. 128–38)).

⁴⁴ Nazianzen, letter 11 (Daley, pp. 173–4).

⁴⁵ Nazianzen, letter 48 (Daley, pp. 176–7).

justificatory and explanatory accent in letter 58. In the second letter, Gregory narrates to Basil a debate between him and a philosopher who happened to attend one of Basil's sermons and noticed that Basil deliberately avoided calling the Spirit 'God' in public. Against this philosopher's accusation of Basil, and of himself, of cowardice and 'hiding the light under the bushel', Nazianzen responds by explaining the sensitivity and delicacy of Basil's authority position and the negative consequences an ill choice of words in teaching may cause the church, if not the whole city.⁴⁶ For Gregory, Basil's carefulness in his teaching serves a crucial cause, for it does not jeopardise the truth of faith and does not exploit it. It rather signifies a denial of self-satisfaction and heroic rewarding which ultimately serves nothing but the speaker's self-fulfilment. 'For the church', on the contrary, 'there will be a great loss if truth is put to flight through the defeat of a single man'.⁴⁷

In letter 58, Gregory affirms his oneness and unity with Basil. He even addresses him as a senior, leading fellow, and asks for his advice and guidance about the appropriate way of preaching the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸ In letter 48, nevertheless, Gregory maintains his distinction from Basil and addresses him as his equal partner, not as a junior writing to his senior. He says to his friend, whom he considers ahead of him in holiness and value, 'I am different from you'. He says this not to deny Basil's particular position in the circle of friendship that gathered the three Cappadocians. He says it, instead, as someone who believes in the mutual, complete indwelling of the equal members of Christ's body in each other, just as God in Christ reveals to us that 'the mutual indwelling between equals' is definitive of his divine Godhead.

The discussion above seriously invites consideration as to whether the man, who is clearly reciprocal and communal in his theological thinking, could have been other than reciprocal and mutual. He is someone who believes that (1) the divine Godhead is constituted by, and finds its origin in, the three persons *together*, and not the Father alone, and (2) the relationship between the three divine hypostases does not tolerate this hierarchical, causal linearity which undermines the constitutive value of 'mutual indwelling' and 'openness before the other' in God's being.

⁴⁶ Nazianzen, letter 58 (Daley, pp. 179–80).

⁴⁷ Nazianzen, letter 11 (Daley, p. 180).

⁴⁸ Nazianzen, letter 58 (Daley, p. 180).

Conclusion: when theology is personified in the theologian

In this article, I have argued that the best access to understanding Gregory Nazianzen's personal character and life is to link them with his trinitarian logic. Gregory's writings clearly state his belief that theology is the theologian, and the theologian is someone whose life and personhood mirror her theological mind. Gregory's character and Gregory's theology, especially his trinitarian thinking, are mutual windows that open towards each other. They reciprocally depict before us a unique and challenging theological mind, as well as a sincere and puzzling servant of God.