Williams cover the crucial period from the 350s to the 370s. Kelley McCarthy Spoerl gives a superb analysis of Apollinarius' creative use of the Nicene Creed, and makes the striking claim that he was the first meaningfully to explore the implications of Nicaea's doctrine for Christology. There is still a story to be written about how the avowedly and self-consciously 'Nicene' Apollinarius could come to be condemned in 381, in the very same breath that the Nicene Creed was emphatically re-confirmed.

The volume closes with two longer-term perspectives on Nicaea, one focusing on its Roman Catholic reception (by Geoffrey Dunn) and one on its legacy in the Orthodox tradition (by Paul Gavrilyuk). Gavrilyuk's piece stands out as a perceptive study on how the Nicene Creed could come to be affirmed as authoritative and sufficient, yet also be capable of legitimate modification over time. If the latter contention is conceded, of course, it helps to explain how the West could regard the addition of the *filioque* as not only preferable, but necessary. For the sake of completeness, it is regrettable that there is no chapter on the legacy of Nicaea among the Protestant Churches – perhaps this could be included in a second edition.

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Gregory of Nyssa as biographer. By Allison L. Gray. (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum, 123.) Pp. xiv + 290. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021. €84 (paper). 978 3 16 157558 7

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What makes for a good life? What makes for a good biography? What makes for a good interpreter of such a biography? Allison Gray explores the complex interplay between subject, biographer and readers in three works by Gregory of Nyssa: *The Life of Moses*, *The Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus* and *The Life of Macrina*. Despite the differences between the subjects of these treatises – one a biblical figure, one a wonder-working bishop of a previous generation, and one Gregory's own sister – Gray makes a good case for classifying all three as encomiastic *bioi*. She argues that they ought to be read in the light of 'rhetorical and literary theory that could have been known and employed by Gregory and educated readers in his fourth-century Greco-Roman and Christian context' (p. 23). Accordingly, she uses as the organising principle of her study the encomiastic headings (*kephalaia*) set out in Aphthonius' *Progymnasmata*: introduction (*prooimion*); birth (*genos*); upbringing (*anatrophe*); deeds (*praxeis*), culminating in a noble death (*euthanasia*); comparison (*synkrisis*); and epilogue (*epilogos*).

Gregory faces the same dilemmas as other Greco-Roman biographers, such as how to demonstrate universal values through the particularities of a life which may be far removed from those of his readers. Given that 'the circumstances of the exemplar's birth are matters determined by chance, the role of choice or will in cultivating virtues is, at the outset, unclear' (p. 54). And there is 'a tension between portraying an exemplar who possesses a virtue and portraying an exemplar who is gaining or practicing a virtue' (p. 74). Should the emphasis

be on constancy or transformation? As Gregory tackles these dilemmas, he draws upon Christian resources. He is able to blend constancy and transformation thanks to his theological principle of *epektasis* – continual striving for progress toward the divine. Gray highlights the value he places on education (*paideia*) and training. Throughout the *bioi*, his subjects learn and teach. Gray suggests that he features three modes of learning: 'the Three Rs of reading, revelation, and relationship' (p. 94). And she presents the aim of his *bioi* as training his readers to be skilled interpreters of what they read, so that they can translate the exemplar's virtues into their own lives. Ethical imitation is dependent upon skilled textual interpretation. Gregory deploys his literary artistry so as to act as a mediator, seeking 'to transform an experience of reading a text into an interpersonal encounter' (p. 183). He models the learning expected of his readers using embedded narrators and internal audiences, as well as offering authoritative explanations and scriptural precedents. In his vivid narrative of Macrina's death, for example, he admits to losing his self-control and giving in to grief, so that his readers can learn from his struggle and failure. Vetiana, by contrast, directs Gregory's attention to Macrina's scar, and teaches him how to interpret it – as a sign of healing and divine protection.

Scripture plays a vital role in all three biographies. There are numerous scriptural quotations and allusions. Gray argues that Gregory neglects a final formal *synkrisis* in his *bioi* because of incidental *synkriseis* placed throughout the works. Thaumaturgus is compared to Moses, and Macrina to Job. In the case of the *Life of Moses*, the biblical books of Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy provide the raw material from which the *bios* is constructed. Gray demonstrates how Gregory wrests moral principles from troubling episodes where straightforward imitation would seem ill-advised, such as Moses's command to despoil the Egyptians. She comments in a footnote that '"historical facts" become malleable in service of interpretive goals' (p. 107 n. 58). The relationship between Scripture and interpretation is not, however, all one-way. By forcing Gregory's hand, as it were, scriptural puzzles galvanise his thinking. Gray quotes a passage from *Life of Moses* in which Gregory explains the concept of *epektasis* (II.230–1), and comments that 'Gregory narrates Moses's theophany in terms that highlight the complicated interplay between physical sight and knowing, between seeing, desire, and growth in virtue' (p. 124). She fails to mention, however, that he is tackling a very specific difficulty in the biblical text, namely the contradiction between Exodus xxxiii.11 – where God speaks to Moses 'face to face' – and Exodus xxxiii.20 – where God says that no-one can see the divine face and live. Gregory models the skill of close reading, and testifies to the rich rewards of wrestling with scriptural enigmas.

Gray's study opens the door for plenty more research questions, not least as regards the differences between these *bioi*. She uses male and female pronouns interchangeably for both the subject and the reader of a biography. Does Gregory, however, have the same expectations of male and female exemplars, and of the lessons they might teach? It is striking, for example, that whereas Moses and Thaumaturgus are depicted as benefitting from the wealth of pagan learning, Macrina's reading is restricted to Scripture, as befits her 'soft and pliable nature' (VSM 3). And, given the rhetorical techniques that Gregory

employs, what assumptions is he making about his readers, in terms of education, social class and church responsibility? When, at the end of *Life of Moses*, he says that 'each one of us … might transcribe in himself the type of beauty which has been shown to us' (II.319), who is he including in the 'us'? Who does he regard as worthy and able to follow Moses up Mount Sinai, and who does he expect to imitate the people of Israel – staying at the foot of the mountain and worshipping in the earthly tabernacle?

As the structure of *Life of Moses* demonstrates – *historia* followed by *theoria* – Gregory does not think it sufficient simply to recount an exemplary life. That life needs to be reflected upon in order to see beyond the visible to the hidden qualities of the virtuous soul. The story of a life inevitably involves change. Gregory embraces that change, and its potential for transforming his readers.

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Ambrose, Augustine, and the pursuit of greatness. By Warren J. Smith. Pp. xiv + 293. Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020. £75. 978 1 108 49074 0

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This book is a study of the transformation, in two Latin patristic authors, of Classical ideals of human greatness. It is also, through a sometimes uneasy conflation, a selective study of the history of terminology for greatness of soul ('megalopsychia'/'magnanimitas', in neither Greek nor Latin exactly equivalent, as Smith points out, to the Christian-influenced 'magnanimity', pp. 1–2).

The first part of the book sketches as much of the Classical background as is necessary to undergird the studies of Ambrose and Augustine which follow. After an introduction that situates the narrative first in the scholarship on 'greatness of soul', then on the attitudes of Ambrose and Augustine toward pagan ethics, Smith begins with the reception of Homer's heroic ideals in Aristotle and Plato. The second chapter sketches the accommodation of ideas of magnanimity (as I will for succinctness call it) to the political circumstances of Cicero, Seneca and Plutarch. Both historical and literary elements shape the later parts, so Smith is wise to incorporate them explicitly into the first part. That said, the first chapter's Homeric backdrop is largely (albeit not entirely) abstracted from the philosophers' immediate cultural context. It would have anchored the narrative more vividly if Smith had devoted more attention to Athenian politics. We hear at some length (as we should) about the Alcibiades of Plato's dialogues (pp. 47–50), but only in passing about 'Athens' colonial adventures … such as the failed Sicilian expedition' (p. 66). That the historical Alcibiades stood behind that disastrous invasion goes unmentioned. Especially for theologians less familiar with the Classical world, it would have helped to see, through so stark an illustration, how much a misguided ideal of greatness could seem to Plato and his readers to matter. The idea, furthermore, that Plato (who rarely speaks of *megalopsychia*, p. 46) should be treated second, in order to show up 'the abiding flaws in Aristotle's great-souled man' (p. 17), needed more development.

As one might expect from an expert on Ambrose's moral theology, the book's heart is its second part. The third chapter describes Ambrose's treatment of the