

**A PROGRAMMATIC LIFE:
GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS' *ORATIONS* 42 AND 43
AND THE CONSTANTINOPOLITAN ELITES**

SUSANNA ELM

The century between the deaths of the emperors Julian in 363 and Theodosius II in 450 witnessed the evolution of a new civilization that we call, at least in the eastern part of the Roman empire, "Byzantine." Instrumental in its inception and formation were men of the first generation after the legalization of Christianity by Constantine, when, for the first time in the history of the Roman empire, a significant number of members of the provincial and senatorial elites grew up Christian (Barnes 1995). They initiated a cultural transformation that changed Roman civilization into a Roman Christian civilization, with centers in Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Milan, and Ravenna, as well as Rome. This new civilization manifested itself in the creation of new models of identity, power, and authority—that of the bishop prominent among them. The process of establishing this new model of episcopal authority, the imperial bishop, was long, protracted, and highly contested, involving numerous players from many walks of life. It was dominated by several individuals who combined in their writings existing concepts of political theory, administrative and legal language and forms, expressions of social status, and various epistemological methods in the formulation of doctrine. These men approached the writings of the Old and New Testament from their own elite vantage point, and their interpretations and explications of Scripture were the result of their own personal political and social positions as well as their philosophical educations.

Gregory of Nazianzus, bishop of Constantinople from November 27, 380 to July 9, 381, honored with the title "The Theologian" by the

council of Chalcedon in 431 (a title until then only given to John the Evangelist), was one of these men.¹ In this paper, I will draw on two of his orations, *Oration* 42 “Farewell Address to the Bishops” and *Oration* 43 “In Praise of Basil,” both written shortly after July 9, 381, to illustrate some of the mechanisms involved in the formation of a new Christian elite. In these orations, Gregory used aspects of his own life and doctrinal tenets and combined them with Roman administrative and legal procedure to formulate a program designed to exert authority over Nectarius (his successor as bishop of Constantinople) and the bishops assembled in the imperial capital during one of the high points of “orthodox” history, the first ecumenical council of 381. These two orations are thus examples of the dense interplay between theology, politics, and administration that, in my view, characterized the *Selbstverständnis* of this new elite. By unraveling the component parts of this new *Selbstverständnis*, I hope to contribute both to the theoretical and methodological discussion surrounding the notion of “elites” in today’s discourse, and to the study of the process that led to the formation of the characteristics desirable in a bishop in the Theodosian Age and beyond.² Here, the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus are singularly fruitful because of their immense influence on his contemporaries and their neglect by modern scholarship.³

1 See Sieben 1996.8 concerning Gr. Naz.’s acclamation as “The Theologian.”

2 The *Standesbewußtsein* of the senatorial elite after Constantine has for some time now been the focus of scholarly attention. Both Näf 1995.1–48 and Schlinkert 1996.1–74 have contributed significantly towards further methodological and terminological precision. Both independently take a formal legal definition of the *ordo amplissimus* or *ordo senatoribus* as their starting point (following *inter alia*s Chastagnol 1982.265–78 and Jones 1964), to then expand the notion of “senatorial elite” by including aspects of elite mentality and its representation (following *inter alia*s Martin 1984 and Flaig 1993). Both authors are concerned with the senatorial elite as the sole *Führungsschicht*, and since Näf concentrates on the Latin West, and Schlinkert compares legal precepts to the writings of Ammianus Marcellinus, they both leave any consideration of ecclesiastical leaders aside. My own concept of the elite, used in the following, reflects Matthews’ 1990 (reprint of 1975) broader definition of the “governing classes” and their regional and structural differentiation and specificity, bearing, however, Näf’s and Schlinkert’s methodological clarifications and caveats in mind.

3 Gregory’s orations were among the most widely read and cited works in Byzantium, second only to the Gospels and on a par with the writings of Cyril of Alexandria: Noret 1983, Trisoglio 1983. For their influence upon John Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Gregory the Great, see Elm 1999 and 2000. The following work forms part of a larger project, tentatively entitled *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church: Gregory of Nazianzus’ Ideal Orthodox Bishop and the Conversion of the Late Roman Elite*.

A PROGRAMMATIC LIFE: TRADITIONS OF A RHETORIC OF SELF

By the end of 381, Gregory, then fifty-one years old, had returned once more to his estate at Arianzus. Only a few months before, as late as July of 381, he had been the bishop of Constantinople, until a sequence of turbulent events prompted him to offer his resignation, which, somewhat to his surprise, was accepted with alacrity. And so, on July 9, Gregory left for Cappadocia to write about himself, his colleagues, the state of the Church, and the events that had so “happily” conspired to “free” him from the capital and its episcopal see.⁴ The two orations that Gregory wrote in the last months of 381, *Oration* 42 “Farewell to the Bishops” and *Oration* 43 “In Praise of Basil,” were among his last.⁵ Forming, in the words of their most recent editor J. Bernardi (1992.25), “a diptych,” these two orations illuminate the two central themes that guided Gregory’s life: on the one hand, the unbearable tension between a desire for contemplative retreat and the duty to serve in ecclesiastical office, and, on the other, the “reservoirs of bile” that opened up in a stream of invective against other ecclesiastical officeholders (Norris 1991.8). Both themes date back to Gregory’s very first orations; they were subsequently elaborated, honed, refined, and reiterated at every opportunity and in nearly all the literary genres known to an educated man of the time.⁶

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- 4 Gr. Naz. *de Vita Sua* v. 1273–1999, esp. v. 1868, Jungck 1974.116–44. Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.4, Bernardi 1978.90, McLynn 1997b.299. The *Suidas* mentions Gregory’s date of birth as 301, but the accepted date now is either 329 or 330: Bernardi 1995.9, 104–09.
 - 5 The precise dating of both orations has been subject to debate; I am following McLynn 1997b.301–02 and Bernardi 1992.20–25. *Or.* 42 was written in late 381 or early 382. *Or.* 43 was most probably given in early 382 on the third anniversary of Basil of Caesarea’s death, but our present text is a later revision: Bernardi 1992.25–28. Only *Oration*s 45 and 44 were written later, cf. Bernardi 1968.246–53, Sterk 1998.227–53. For discussions regarding the date of Basil’s death, cf. Rousseau 1994.360–63, Errington 1997b.31.
 - 6 Elm 2000. Unlike Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa, who treated many of their topics in systematic treatises, Gregory primarily used orations, poetry (some seventeen thousand verses), and epistles. Within these genres, he sought to demonstrate his versatility and mastery over all the sub-genres, hence he has orations in the *apologêtikos logos* form, such as *Or.* 2, but also a number of *enkômia*, funeral orations (*epitaphia*), and a “farewell-address” (*logos syntaktêrios*): Bernardi 1992.13, 1968.93–260, Norris 1991.12–17. Most significant for our purpose are Gregory’s autobiographical poems, in particular, *PG* 37.II.1.969–1452 *de Vita Sua*, Jungck 1974; *de Rebus Suis*, *PG* 37.969–1071; *de Se Ipso et de Episcopis*, Meier 1989; and *Querela de Suis Calamitatibus*, in White 1996.154–62, Meehan 1987.

Not surprisingly, these themes also form the basis of the assessment of Gregory in contemporary scholarship.⁷ While modern scholars are unanimous in their praise of Gregory the theologian and Cappadocian Father, they are equally unanimous in their judgment concerning Gregory the politician and ecclesiastical leader. Especially when compared to the two great “model bishops,” Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory is seen as an ecclesiastical loser. Depending on a scholar’s confessional and personal disposition, Gregory either “inspires sympathy for his greater sensitivity or impatience for his fickleness.”⁸ It is, therefore, not surprising that Gregory is very rarely called upon in attempts to discuss the development of the episcopal office in the fourth century. In the eyes of most scholars, Gregory himself was so unlike the model bishop (a model influenced by western medieval standards) that the question of his contribution towards that model simply does not arise. His writings on the subject are cited only if they concern “true” episcopal authorities such as Basil of Caesarea or John Chrysostom.⁹ Almost everything else he had to say about the nature and function of episcopal office is seen as self-serving, elitist, and idiosyncratic, in short, as tinged by the peculiarities of Gregory the person: a “man whom contemporaries and subsequent readers admired for the fluency of his theological treatise about the nature of the Trinity,” but who “‘stuttered’ as he remembered and recorded memories about himself” (Van Dam 1995, quotation 140).

The persistence and longevity of this dual “iconography” of Gregory of Nazianzus as gifted rhetorician and theologian but troubled soul and negligible ecclesiastical player is in itself a high tribute to Gregory’s eloquence. It is precisely his rhetoric that created this picture—Gregory, after all, wrote the story of his own life and portrayed it as dominated by these two themes.¹⁰ To take Gregory at face value and nothing more, to read both his

7 In the following, I will mainly cite recent works. For a bibliographical survey prior to 1965, see Trisoglio 1974.45–62.

8 McLynn 1998.463–83, quotation 465. Thus French scholarship tends towards sympathy with comments on Gregory’s “oriental soul,” “romantic sensibility,” and “depressive temperament”; Anglo-Saxon towards impatience, citing his “paranoia,” “pusillanimity,” “petulance,” and “seething self-pity”: Rousseau 1994.65, 87; Gallay 1943.243; Bernardi 1978.338–48; Demoen 1997.287–98, esp. 288; Hanson 1988.705–06; Sterk 1998.239.

9 The most notable exceptions, *Or.* 2, 21, and 43, are cases in point. They achieved their status via John Chrysostom’s *de Sacerdotio* and because of their subject matter, all model bishops: Pouchet 1997, Sterk 1998.239–53.

10 The continuous repetition of “set-themes,” rather than being an indication of personal turmoil or “stuttering,” was instead a highly effective rhetorical device specific to late

incapacity for making "a definitive commitment [to pastoral life], and sticking to it," as well as his "outpourings of bile," "elitist prejudices," and "haughty disdain" literally, is, therefore, an admission of analytical defeat.¹¹

If Gregory's life is thus to be described as an altarpiece, the traditional rendering misses the centerpiece, namely, why Gregory chose to portray himself in this fashion. The purpose (and essence) of Gregory's writings is to formulate and define the Trinity according to a specific rhetorical-philosophical epistemology (later known as Neo-Nicene); to defend this epistemology against an overwhelming opposition of equally well-formulated counter-epistemologies (which he defined as "heresies"); and to harness all available resources: social class, education, patronage, ecclesiastical office, to win support for his definition of the Trinity where it truly mattered, in Constantinople. Both Gregory's promotion of an ecclesiastical career interspersed with repeated periods of absence and his attacks on other officeholders are means to that end. They are part and parcel of a rhetorical strategy designed to participate fully in and influence the struggle for doctrinal and ecclesiastical leadership. Moreover, far from being the musings of a sensitive, pusillanimous, paranoid, and elitist soul, both themes, as propagated by Gregory, derive squarely from the political rhetoric of the time. They are representative of precisely the social class to which Gregory belonged, and they, as well as his actions, reflect the traditions, concerns, and adjustments of that particular class at that particular historical moment, characterized by tensions between the capital and the local sphere, peer pressure, and challenges from "up-starts," careerists, and social superiors.¹² Gregory's writings on himself and the bishops provide, therefore, precise formulations of and prescriptions for the Christianity this elite, molded by Constantinople and dominated by the court, should embrace and represent. The personality thus carefully crafted in Gregory's writings both reflects and shapes the conversion of an entire class. His orations document firsthand how the elite of the later Roman empire refashioned traditional concepts of leadership in order to form a new office, that of the bishop in an imperial age, and a new kind of authority, that of the "Father of the Church."

antique writers, often employed to highlight and emphasize especially important points: Cox Miller 1998 and Roberts 1989.78–92, 122–38, though Roberts concentrates exclusively on Latin writers.

11 Rousseau 1994.84–90, Norris 1991.8, Demoen 1997.296.

12 Arjava 1998, Brown 1992, Dagron 1996, Eck 1978, Forlin Patrucco and Roda 1986, Gryson 1979, Näf 1995, Schlinkert 1996, Teja 1974.

LIFE AS PROGRAM

On November 24, 380, Theodosius I entered Constantinople with full ceremony. Some nine months earlier, on February 27, 380, he had issued an edict at Thessalonica that imposed upon all peoples under his rule an allegiance to strict orthodoxy. He had defined this orthodoxy as the teachings represented by Damasus of Rome and Peter of Alexandria, the two foremost bishops.¹³ A few months later, Theodosius fell dangerously ill and was baptized by bishop Acholius of Thessalonica. As a result, he entered Constantinople both as a victorious general and as a baptized Catholic Christian. Three days later, on November 27, 380, he installed Gregory of Nazianzus as bishop of Constantinople. On the previous day, Theodosius had deposed Gregory's precursor Demophilus and dismissed him to the suburbs after he had refused to sign a formula of orthodoxy offered by the emperor. A successor of the "Arian" or Homoian Eudoxius, and himself Homoian, Demophilus had been a popular and successful bishop since April 370.¹⁴ Theodosius was well aware of his popularity: an armed guard protected Gregory's installation as bishop of the city.¹⁵ On January 10, 381, Theodosius issued another law condemning specific heretical dissidents and, to implement his legal policy, summoned a general council of the eastern bishops to assemble in Constantinople in May 381.¹⁶ Presided over by Meletius of Antioch, the 150 bishops present at the council formally consecrated Gregory as bishop of Constantinople. Soon after the opening of the council, however, Meletius died. During the ensuing debates concerning his succession, and with the arrival on May 31 of the Egyptian bishops, who had launched Maximus as their own candidate for the Constantinopolitan see several months before, the tide turned against Gregory. Amidst a storm of anti-"western" and pro-Alexandrian sentiment and formal charges that, as bishop of Sasima, he had violated canon 15 of Nicaea prohibiting a transla-

13 *Codex Theodosianus* 16.1.2 *Cunctos populos*, in Mommsen and Meyer 1990.833; Errington 1996, 1997a; Matthews 1975.122–23.

14 According to the "Arian" Church historian Philostorgius, Demophilus was quite a blunderer when it came to doctrinal subtleties: Philost. *Hist. Eccl.* 9.14, Bidez 1972.120–22; Dagron 1974.446. But see Bas. *Ep.* 48, Gallay 1957b.I.120, and Brennecke 1988.187–89, n. 54; for his anti-eunomian politics, see Brennecke 1988.216.

15 Gr. Naz. *de Vita Sua* v. 1336–41, Jungck 1974.118; *Or.* 36.2–3, *PG* 36.268, Ensslin 1953.17–18; Dagron 1974.449–51, Ritter 1965.28–33.

16 *C. Th.* 16.5.6, Mommsen and Meyer 1990.836, Ritter 1965.32–41, Ensslin 1953.15.

tion of bishoprics, Gregory offered his resignation.¹⁷ On July 9, he departed for Cappadocia.

Almost immediately upon his arrival at Arianzus, Gregory embarked upon the composition of four closely related pieces: *Oration 42* "Farewell to the Bishops" and its companion-piece, the poem *de Se Ipso et de Episcopis*, written in late 381, followed several months later, in early 382, by the much better known and more polished autobiographical poem *de Vita Sua* and *Oration 43* "In Praise of Basil."¹⁸ All four pieces are addressed to those involved in Gregory's brief and stormy tenure as bishop of Constantinople, and all four pieces serve the same purpose, namely to inform all those addressed of the components of true Christian leadership. *Oration 42*, which purports to have been delivered at the moment of Gregory's resignation, uses a formal organizational structure to enhance Gregory's own achievements and hence criticize those who failed to recognize them appropriately, a theme carried *ad hominem* in the invective "About Himself and the Bishops." In *Oration 43* and the poem *About His Life*, Gregory then uses his own life and that of Basil as models for such appropriate leadership.

17 Nicaea can. 15 Hefele and Leclercq 1907–52.1.1.597–601. Violations voided the new ordination; the culprit had to return to his original see. Meletius' death immediately reopened the long-standing issue of succession in Antioch, long divided by schism into two (sometimes three) "Nicene" parties. After Meletius' death, two contenders vied for his see: Paulinus, the one remaining schismatic bishop, supported by Gregory of Nazianzus and Ambrose, and Flavianus, a presbyter under Meletius. Gregory's and the "west's" suggestion to retain Paulinus until his death and then to elect a new bishop was thwarted; the council voted for Flavianus, but, for reasons that are unclear, failed to consecrate him. Then, the "eastern" faction turned their attention to Gregory. Already by 380, Peter of Alexandria had put forward Maximus as the candidate for the bishopric of Constantinople. In 381, he dispatched two bishops to Constantinople who smuggled Maximus into Gregory's church, the *Anastasia*, and secretly consecrated him. Theodosius rejected him out of hand. However, if Peter's methods were shady, Maximus himself was not. He had been a supporter of Gregory's interpretation of Nicene orthodoxy and was approved by the council of Aquileia and Ambrose of Milan in September 381 as the legitimate bishop of Constantinople: Ambr. *Ep.* 13.3–5, *PL* 16.950–53. Denied their candidate, and already in an anti-western mood, as can be seen by the election of Flavianus, the Alexandrian faction now attacked Gregory directly, pointing out that his election was not canonical since he was already bishop of Sasima (*hyperorios*): Matthews 1975.125–27, Dagron 1974.451–56, Ritter 1965.55–68. Regarding the highly politicized circumstances of Gregory's "ordination" at Sasima in 372, see Van Dam 1986.53–68.

18 McLynn 1997b.299–302, indicating the poem's rough edges and disorganized structure. Pace Bernardi 1992.16–25, who dates the writing of *Or.* 42 to 381, but considers the work unfinished and unpublished. Regarding the date of *Or.* 43, see Bernardi 1992.27. Cf. Bernardi 1988, Meier 1989.16–18, Jungck 1974.169.

FAREWELL TO THE BISHOPS

Gregory had formally designated his *Oration* 42 as a “farewell address,” a *logos syntaktêrios*. This pretense is short-lived. With the first four rhetorical questions, Gregory changes genre: he launches upon a full-fledged *logos apologêtikos*, a formal plea in his defense: “How do you judge our affair, dear pastors and colleagues . . . messengers of peace and good tidings (*euangelizomenôn*) . . . [who] came to us in good time, not to reassemble a dispersed flock, but to visit a pastor who was himself displaced? What do you think of this displacement that affects us and what are its results? . . . Will you be . . . good auditors in our affair, or must we, too, just like those required [to submit] an account of funds [handled] during their military command, government of a province, or fiscal administration, present to you publicly the accounts of what we have administered?”¹⁹ Drawing on the classic language and vocabulary of legal procedure, Gregory positions himself as if he were addressing the assembled tribunal of bishops, with the congregation and clergy of Constantinople called as his witnesses.²⁰ Allusions to Scripture are present—the citation above alludes to Isaiah 52:7 and Romans 10:15—but the staging is that of the law-courts, more specifically, the public accounting of a civil servant at the end of his tenure.²¹ Gregory declared himself confident, “we are not ashamed to be judged,” and certain to receive “a certificate of discharge, just as the emperors [issue] for magistrates.”²² Indeed, he had no need for concern. For *Oration* 42 is precisely such a “certificate of discharge,” issued to Gregory not by the emperor, but by himself, the “bishop emeritus” of Constantinople, in retirement at Arianzus by his own “volition” (McLynn 1997b.302). To put it differently, by submitting himself with his plea to the judgment of the bishops at Constantinople, Gregory in his “Farewell Address” leaves no doubt that he considers himself to be the embodiment and representative of the standard according to which he must be judged.

19 Gr. Naz. *Or.* 42.1, Bernardi 1992.48, 50. Given that *Or.* 42, in its present form, is the product of several revisions, I am basing my argument more on its broad outline rather than on specific citations, Bernardi 1992.17–24. The translation is my own.

20 Both syntax and vocabulary are those of classic Athenian rhetoric: Bernardi 1992.49–51, with notes, Volkmann 1963.148–64, Martin 1974.75–89.

21 *C. Th.* 1.32.3, 8.7.8 and 14, Mommsen and Meyer 1990.67–68, 396, 398. *The Theodosian Code*, Pharr 1952, s.v. “discharge, from imperial service.” See Van Dam 1995.126, Jones 1964.I.377–90, 411–25, for audits and settlement of debts with the imperial household.

22 *Or.* 42. 1 and 25, Bernardi 1992.50, 106. The practice arises from the ranking of administrative officials in military units, the *militia officialis*. Hence Gr.’s term for magistrate, *stratiôtikos*: Pack 1986.82–103, Beck 1965.1–23.

Thus *Oration* 42 in its entirety is a public presentation of “the accounts of what we have administered,” which closely mirrors the requirements for such an accounting as defined in *Codex Theodosianus* 1.32.3. It is divided into three parts. After a short listing of his own leadership credentials (3), Gregory devotes the first part of *Oration* 42 to presenting a precise and detailed description of his “turn-around” of the Nicene congregation in Constantinople (2–6) and his successful implementation of Nicene doctrine after his election as bishop (7–12). The second part addresses the content of Nicene doctrine as understood by Gregory. A short discussion of the epistemological principles guiding his approach to doctrine in contrast to those of his opponents leads to a succinct and masterful synopsis of Gregory’s doctrinal tenets (13–19).²³ The final part of the oration is devoted to Gregory’s analysis of the dismal situation faced by his audience, the bishops assembled at Constantinople (20–21). Here he offers a sharp critique of his opponents, their doctrines, behavior, lack of credentials, and insidious tactics (22–25).²⁴ The oration concludes with a series of “farewells,” to his church (the *Anastasia*), to the city, to the emperor and his court, to the council, and, last but not least, to his people, *ton emon laon* (26–27).

The rhetorical construction of this “certificate of discharge” is masterful, in particular when considering its intended audience: Nectarius, bishop of Constantinople.²⁵ Within days of Gregory’s resignation, Theodosius had selected Nectarius, a senator and former urban praetor, as Gregory’s successor, ignoring a list of candidates presented to him by the assembled bishops.²⁶ After initial surprise, the council received Nectarius with acclaim into his new office.

Several months later, from his retirement in Cappadocia, Gregory

23 The structure of *Or.* 42.1–7, Bernardi 1992.48–64, in particular, follows *C. Th.* 1.32.3, Mommsen and Meyer 1990.67–68. The doctrine is essentially that of his five *Theological Orations*: Norris 1991.

24 For an excellent discussion of the doctrinal background, see M. Barnes 1998.47–67.

25 Its immediate and direct audience was in all probability his circle of friends and supporters present at Constantinople: McLynn 1997b.299–302, 1998.478–79.

26 Nectarius was originally from Tarsus in Cilicia. The precise circumstances of his nomination are reported differently in the sources: Socrates *Hist. Eccl.* 5. 8, Hansen 1995.280, says that the people of Constantinople lobbied for him, whereas Sozomen *Hist. Eccl.* 7.8.1–8 and 7.10, Bidez and Hansen 1960.310–13, mentions Bishop Diodoros of Tarsus as his nominator and Flavianus of Antioch as his backer, a more convincing interpretation, supported by Theodoret *Hist. Eccl.* 2.24, 5.23, Parmentier and Scheidweiler 1954.293. This reading would make Nectarius the “favorite” of the very people who had ousted Gregory: Gr. Naz. *de Vita Sua* v. 1584, Jungck 1974.130, Dagron 1974.452–53, Matthews 1975.126.

circulated his two orations, 42 and 43, as well as the two poetic works on himself and against other bishops. All these writings are united by one central theme: the characteristics of a true Christian leader, his internal and external attributes, and what distinguishes the model bishop from his opposite. The answer is simple. The model bishop must conform to the prerequisites Gregory had first developed in the years 363–64, in his *Orations* 1–6, and propagated in oration after oration, especially after his arrival at Constantinople: “a man with clean hands, not without rhetorical talent . . . capable of assuming his place in the affairs of the Church.”²⁷ The candidate should be baptized, and he should be leading the “philosophical life.” He should be a man who has received advanced training in rhetoric and philosophy, and who has spent significant portions of his life in *otium* or retirement devoted solely towards reaching a better understanding of Scripture. Only such a man, who had received the professional training that permits him to grasp the intellectual nuances of Scriptural exegesis (his own as well as those of his opponents), has the wherewithal to then lead the congregation appropriately and safely towards God. Only he will be able to act with dignity, as demanded by the prescriptions of political theory—to paraphrase Cicero: *cum dignitate otium*.²⁸ In short, he must be a man like Gregory himself or like his friend Basil of Caesarea.²⁹

However, at the time of *Oration* 42’s composition and subsequent circulation, Nectarius was already in office. The former urban praetor could hardly have differed more from the successor Gregory had envisaged. Not only was he not a cleric when Theodosius selected him, he had not even been baptized.³⁰ Moreover, Nectarius’ grasp of doctrine was negligible. Instead of a man leading a “philosophical life,” whose devoted immersion in Scripture was only interrupted by calls of duty to lead Christ’s flock towards salvation, Theodosius and the council had selected a man of the world who was secure in his social position and had proven to be a highly skilled

27 Gr. Naz. Or. 42.19–20, Bernardi 1992.88–92. Of the orations delivered in Constantinople, 21, 20, 25, 26, but also 36 are especially important: Sieben 1996.17–26.

28 Plat. Rep. 6.489c; Dio Cass. 36.24.5–6, 27.2; Plin. Pan. 5.5. One of his most favored arguments, soon to become “uno schema tipologico relativo all’ elezione del vescovo,” Lizzi 1987.23, 33–56; Gómez Villegas 1997.365; Elm 2000; Roda 1985.95–10.

29 For a fuller analysis of the role of professional, rhetorical training in Gregory’s concept of the ideal bishop, see Elm 2000, and for a detailed analysis of *Oration* 42, Elm 1999.

30 Amidon 1997.79 n. 35, 103; Soz. Hist. Eccl. 7.8, 6, Bidez and Hansen 1960.310–13, an omission probably as swiftly remedied as that in the case of Ambrose of Milan, otherwise canon 2 of Nicaea would have been violated: Ritter 1965.112–14.

administrator. Gregory's *Oration* 42—according to von Campenhausen the only one among Gregory's orations that was “würdig und wahrte das Gesicht”³¹—was his counterattack. In no uncertain terms, he carried “the fight with pen and ink” right back into the capital. *Oration* 42 is a direct challenge to his successor and the council, demonstrating how to be a bishop of Constantinople, what doctrinal positions to take, and how to implement them—thus implying that the man now leading the Constantinopolitan congregation was sorely in need of such counsel. With his “certificate of discharge,” Gregory had thrown down the gauntlet, or at least had provided his friends at the highest echelons in Constantinople with the arguments to do so on his behalf.³² Just like Nectarius, Gregory informs us, he, too, was a man of rank and tested administrative capacities. However, in addition, he also possessed the qualifications that mark the true “slave of Christ”: the appropriate preparation to grasp the meaning of the word of God fully and to guide his flock accordingly. Nectarius, in clear violation of Nicaea's canon 2, did not.³³

Oration 42 spearheaded the attack. As mentioned above, it forms one part of a diptych, the other is represented by *Oration* 43 “In Praise of Basil.”³⁴ Here, in the person of Basil the Great, Gregory gives life and body to the more formal notions of *Oration* 42: he who wishes to lead the Christian capital and to guide the emperor as well as his congregation must at least approximate the ideal Christian leader as represented by Basil of Caesarea.

IN PRAISE OF BASIL

Oration 43 “In Praise of Basil” is a traditional *logos epitaphios*, a version of which Gregory delivered, according to the majority of scholars, on January 1, 382, the third anniversary of Basil's death, at the invitation of Bishop Helladius of Caesarea.³⁵ Composed according to the “rules of eloquence” and highlighting all of Gregory's rhetorical brilliance, the oration

31 Campenhausen 1961.110, Ritter 1965.108–09.

32 Gr. Naz. *Or.* 42.26, Bernardi 1992.112, see also 76; *de Se Ipso* v. 129, Jungck 1974.38, Gómez Villegas 1997.359–70.

33 Ritter 1965.114–16 with a discussion of canon 2.

34 Gr. Naz. *de Se Ipso* v. 375–695, Jungck 1974.50–66 and *passim*.

35 The present form is a later revised and enlarged version: Bernardi 1992.27–28, 1968.238–46. For discussions regarding the date of Basil's death, both year and day, see Errington 1997b.31 and n. 56, Rousseau 1994.360–63, Kierdorf 1980.

presented the public at Caesarea with the model of a bishop entirely at odds with that embodied by Nectarius.³⁶ Framed by *prooimion* and *epilogos*, Gregory begins with a description of Basil's external virtues (*ta exôthen*), containing all the classic "markers" of elite *Selbstverständnis*. First, he established Basil's noble birth (*eugeneia*), genealogy (both maternal and paternal), and his excellent education (*paideia*).³⁷ Only the references to Basil's ancestors' Christian connections distinguish this section from the non-Christian *enkômion*; everything else corresponds precisely to the classic canon. This applies as well to the next "step," Basil's exercise of public office.³⁸ As any man of standing, Basil, together with his friend Gregory, began his public career with a period of *otium* or retreat, devoted, of course, to the study of Scripture. Only after such training, "respecting the order and the laws of spiritual ascent" did Basil accept his ordination, against his will and under duress.³⁹ This was Basil's and Gregory's period of withdrawal to Annesi, the beginning of their "philosophical life" of asceticism. Yet, the notion of "refusal of office" derives squarely from Platonic political theory. The more strenuous the refusal, the more capable the eventual officeholder and the more powerful the institution, be it the *vox populi* or, as in this case, the *vox Dei*, that eventually persuades the reluctant candidate. In contrast, those unqualified for the job, those "hungry for power," rush to it.⁴⁰

His credentials thus established, Basil's public career proceeded in an ideal manner. He became, according to Gregory, a second Moses, the archetypal ideal of leadership. Turning to Basil's virtues (*ta peri psychen*)—always in keeping with the traditional structure of the *enkômion*—Gregory emphasizes step by step the typological identity of the two men. As did Moses before him, Basil combines in exemplary fashion the administrative skill of the lawgiver and the philosophical values of a pious man, namely self-control (*enkrateia*) imbued with divine enlightenment.⁴¹ This combination, self-control and philosophical exegesis of Scripture, acquired in periods of withdrawal, together with their application in the practice of ecclesiastical office, is essential for leadership. Only thus prepared may a man act

36 Gr. Naz. Or. 43. Himerius' fragments demonstrate his persistent influence upon Gregory: Bernardi 1992.30 n. 4.

37 Gr. Naz. Or. 43.3–24, Bernardi 1992.122–80, Kolb 1977. Näf 1995.49–68, Schlinkert 1996.84–153, Schlumberger 1989.

38 Gr. Naz. Or. 43.25–59, Bernardi 1992.180–206.

39 Gr. Naz. Or. 43.25, Bernardi 1992.184.

40 Lizzi 1987.40–42, Michel 1973.160–74, Wallace-Hadrill 1982.32–48.

41 Bernardi 1992.27, Sterk 1998.239–53, Rapp 1998a.277–98, 1998b.

as the mediator between God and his congregation, always striving to follow Basil, "for the public, the model (*typos*) of the order they respect."⁴²

The model Basil of *Oration* 43 is entirely the construct of Gregory. Basil's life embodies in exemplary fashion all the themes Gregory had been developing ever since 362, for the most part in concert with Basil himself. The life of both men is programmatic. Not surprisingly, Gregory constructed his own biography almost at the same time, the poem *de Vita Sua*, and according to the same principles: noble birth, membership in the "governing classes," extensive education, and comprehensive rhetorical training, followed by a period of retreat and complete immersion in the study of Scripture. Then comes the "refusal of office," followed by acceptance and periodic retreats, which are interrupted in times of crisis for the sake of the public good: these are the central themes of Gregory's literary oeuvre, derived from Platonic-Ciceronian political theory but adapted for a new, Christian purpose.⁴³ Correspondingly, Gregory characterizes his opponents and all those he deems unworthy of ecclesiastical office as low-born, lacking in education, wholly unprepared, badly mannered, and motivated solely by greed and blind ambition. In short, they are careerists and newcomers. While certainly reflecting *de facto* social mobility—some members of the ecclesiastical leadership such as Epiphanius did come from significantly lower strata than Gregory—such rhetoric was directed primarily against others whose status was very much like Gregory's own, for example, his "Egyptian" opponents or Eunomius of Cyzicus (Norris 1991.34–35). Gregory's "elitist" comments, sharply critical of behavior unbecoming of men of rank, thus reflect his own and his audiences' status consciousness: everyone agreed that only those who represented authority according to the classic canon of the "governing classes" were fit for ecclesiastic office.

The "diptych" of *Orations* 42 and 43, together with the two poems on his life and on the bishops, brought these themes to a lasting and impressive crescendo. Gregory orchestrated this showpiece on the model bishop as a "bishop emeritus" who had voluntarily stepped down from his high office. As Neil McLynn has pointed out (1997b.302), Gregory was fully aware of the force his authority carried, especially because of his liminal "status." Yet again, he was in retreat, and yet again, this retreat was a field of action. Nevertheless, based on his autobiographical poem with occasional recourse to *de Se Ipso et de Episcopis* and the autobiographical

42 Gr. Naz. *Or.* 43.60–77, Bernardi 1992.254–96. Quotation 43.27.3, Bernardi 1992.188.

43 Elm 2000, 1999, Lizzi 1987.40–42, Kolb 1977.

passages of *Oration* 43, most scholarship characterizes Gregory's actions in response to the events of 381 as follows: shocked by the vicissitudes of the capital, the social and moral decline of the episcopate, and the politicking of the court, especially a certain "Arian" coterie of eunuchs,⁴⁴ Gregory, the provincial ascetic, returned a deeply disappointed and exhausted man to his native Cappadocia. His experience was all the more traumatic because he had always rejected clerical office, Church politics, and their consequences. Hence the paranoid and plaintive tone of his writings after 381: the provincial novice at the high-stakes game of ecclesiastical leadership had predictably failed; his critical remarks concerning his colleagues reveal the rancor of a man who knew that he had failed at the very game he had always so strenuously resisted.⁴⁵

As my re-examination has shown, nothing about the structure and the arguments of *Oration* 42, later enhanced and elaborated in *Oration* 43, suggests a man unfamiliar with power brokering or someone unwilling to join the fray. In fact, the precise opposite is the case.⁴⁶ Gregory's "certificate of discharge" emphasized that his administrative record had been stellar. The finances of the Nicene congregation, badly in need of overhaul, were now in order, the congregation had been reorganized and turned from a "meager vestige of a flock, a remnant without organization or bishop, badly defined, without free pasture, without shelter . . ." into a shining example, "so vigorous and so much enlarged," under his guidance.⁴⁷ He had accomplished all this in the short span of two years and under highly adverse circumstances.⁴⁸ Further, *Oration* 42, with its succinct doctrinal program as *via media* between "Arians" and "Sabellians," its acknowledgment yet criticism of "Italian" renderings of the three *hypostaseis* as persons, and its direct references to his earlier, more detailed works on the subject, showcases "Gregory the Theologian," a man at the height of his intellectual and rhetorical powers.⁴⁹ This, again, is the implied consequence of the "philosophical life" of withdrawal. Ensconced in the *otium* of retreat from office, men such as Gregory and Basil had gained precisely the required superior knowledge of doctrine that Nectarius

44 Gr. Naz. *Or.* 42.26, *Or.* 43.47, Bernardi 1992.110, 224; *Or.* 37.18–20, Mossay and Gallay 1985.306–10, Gómez Villegas 1997.367.

45 Bernardi 1992.9, Demoen 1997.288, 291–94, Meier 1989.15–16, Van Dam 1995.138–41, Gallay 1943.132–211, Ritter 1965.105–11.

46 Elm 1999, McLynn 1997b.299–308, Gómez Villegas 1997.359–70.

47 See Van Dam's masterful analysis 1995.126–27, 132–34.

48 Gr. Naz. *Or.* 42.2–6, Bernardi 1992.50–62.

49 Referring to the *Theological Orations*: Norris 1991.25–71.

lacked (Elm 2000). In short, “refusal of office” and “philosophical retreat” guaranteed Gregory the two qualities essential for any leader, but especially one who must guide the fate of Christendom: administrative ability combined with philosophical-doctrinal excellence.⁵⁰ Under the pretext of a canon affecting his ordination, the council at Constantinople had removed a bishop well proven in both and substituted instead a mere administrator. According to Gregory, they had done so to their own detriment.

ABSENCE AND AUTHORITY

A significant portion of Gregory's literary oeuvre after 381 was devoted to concerted efforts to highlight Nectarius' doctrinal shortcomings, emphasize the importance of Gregory's own theological acumen, and maintain influence in the affairs of the church at Constantinople. In addition to the two orations and the two poems, Gregory collected and circulated his and Basil's correspondence, carefully highlighting the bonds of their friendship.⁵¹ More to the point, as Neil McLynn has so convincingly demonstrated, Gregory's letter welcoming Nectarius as “royal ornament” for a “royal city” was gracious in form but dismissive in substance.⁵² Later letters continue to address the bishop as a layman, and hold forth, time and again, on matters of doctrine, clearly implying that Nectarius had failed to grasp the bare essentials of his new assignment.⁵³

Events seem to have justified Gregory's assessments. By 382/83, Theodosius, disappointed with the implementation of his doctrinal policies, called for another synod at Constantinople, this time also inviting the dissenting or heretical “Arian,” “Macedonian,” and “Eunomian” bishops. In convoking this so-called “synod of all heresies,” the emperor intended to reach doctrinal accord through open discussion. To that end, he approached Nectarius, who proved, however, unequal to the task.⁵⁴ Gregory had not been invited.⁵⁵ Instead, he dispatched his *Third Theological Letter* (*Ep.* 202) to Nectarius, inviting him to persuade Theodosius to suppress the Apollinarists, then a “neglected” heresy. Again, from far away Nazianzus, Gregory sought

50 Hahn 1989.33–45, 67–99; Dagron 1968.35–48, 54–74.

51 Gallay 1957a.7–14.

52 Gr. Naz. *Ep.* 88, Gallay 1957a.142, McLynn 1997b.303–08.

53 Gr. Naz. *Ep.* 91, 130–33, 135–36, Gallay 1957a.143, 157–59, 160. *Ep.* 101–02, regarding theological issues, Gallay 1974.

54 Soc. *Hist. Eccl.* 5.10.2, Hansen 1995.282, Walraff 1997.271–79.

55 Gr. Naz. *Ep.* 173.6, but see *Ep.* 130, Gallay 1957a.182, 157.

to upstage Nectarius. Involved in futile discussions with the leaders of “recognized” heresies, Nectarius had entirely overlooked the true danger to orthodoxy, namely the Apollinarists. In short, Gregory continued to press his point, and it was a significant one. Irrespective of the actual doctrinal capability of Nectarius and regardless of Gregory’s physical location, the fact that letters and poems composed by the leading theologian of the day questioning Nectarius’ doctrinal competence circulated among the Constantinopolitan elite posed a challenge to Nectarius’ position as bishop. It was a challenge to which Nectarius, the senator and former urban praetor, had to respond as bishop of Constantinople. Apollinarists were banned in an edict issued in December 383.⁵⁶

Whether Gregory’s tactics, including his insistence on the necessity of superior doctrinal training as a prerequisite for successful administration of episcopal office, succeeded in achieving his goal of establishing Nicene orthodoxy at Constantinople, and therefore in the eastern part of the empire, is an entirely different matter. According to Gregory, his opponents saw him as a “stubborn anvil,” unrelenting in his doctrinal convictions and unwilling to compromise.⁵⁷ Doctrinal firmness and rhetorical brilliance were laudable but misplaced when the order of the day was forging a livable compromise on a durable basis. Thus, it is testimony to the political acumen of the emperor, and of great significance for the development and implementation of an imperial Christianity at Constantinople, that doctrinal and intellectual purists such as Gregory were quickly replaced—on administrative grounds—by doctrinally more mediocre, but administratively more skilled administrators and mediators. Nectarius remained a successful bishop of Constantinople until his death in September 397. He was succeeded by John Chrysostom, another brilliant rhetorician, trained in ascetic retreat to be a formidable man of learning, and another “stubborn anvil” in matters of doctrine and clerical conduct. His tenure as bishop of Constantinople, not surprisingly, was short and stormy. After his removal from office in 404, members of the Arcadian court chose Nectarius’ brother, Arsacius, as his successor—hardly an accidental move.⁵⁸ Apparently, the degree of emphasis

56 *C. Th.* 16.5.12, Mommsen and Meyer 1990.838. Of course, we have no precise record of Nectarius’ activities: Dagron 1974.469.

57 *Gr. Naz. de Vita Sua* v. 712, Jungck 1974.88.

58 Dagron 1974.461–70, Elm 1998.68–93. It is worth noting that about half of Gregory’s orations were composed at Constantinople, and that he devoted the lion’s share of his autobiographical writings to the city: Dagron 1974.447, 461; Van Dam 1995.120.

to be placed on experts in matters of doctrine *vis-à-vis* those who excelled in matters of administration was, at least until the middle of the fifth century, under constant negotiation.

Gregory of Nazianzus' program as presented in his *Orations* 42 and 43, in concert with his two contemporaneous poems, exemplifies how a leading theoretician of the day mixed the traditional forms and language of administration and the law, *enkômion* and invective, with those of theology and doctrine to forge a new model of leadership in response to specific challenges. This new model of leadership sought to preserve and build upon a form of political authority long pre-eminent among elite political theoreticians, namely that of the philosopher.⁵⁹ For Gregory, the philosophical life, now devoted to a new divine concept, Christianity, was the *conditio sine qua non* for ecclesiastical authority. Gregory's model was, therefore, both conservative and innovative. It sought to defend a particular kind of elite, namely the one to which he himself belonged, i.e., a highly trained provincial nobility with a long tradition of leadership, against uneducated, lower-class, Christian "upstarts," such as Epiphanius, who might taint the new movement through lack of decorum. On the other hand, Gregory stressed the importance of the philosophical life as a safeguard against high-profile administrators and courtiers, especially those at Constantinople, who, according to him, might destroy the endeavor because they were neither inclined nor intellectually capable of grasping the subtleties of this new philosophy, the content of which had as yet to be properly fashioned. All three aspects combined, namely the defense against pressures from below as well as from above (and even sideways, from Peter and Damasus), together with the need to formulate the content of the new philosophy, resulted in innovation, as is made evident also by the formal rhetorical strategies Gregory employed. In his programmatic writings, he propagated a new personality, whose authority is based on doctrinal sophistication as well as political and administrative skill, and whose influence is intrinsically linked to the emperor and the court, a *vir optimus ecclesiae Constantinopolensis*, a model bishop for the Theodosian age.⁶⁰

University of California, Berkeley

59 Elm *Orthodoxy*, forthcoming.

60 Markus 1986.137–46, Markus 1997.17–33, Lim 1995.182–229, Maas 1986.17–31, Maas 1996.