

Trinitarianism in the Pastoral Theology of Gregory Nazianzen

Barry J. York

*Professor of Pastoral Theology
Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary*

Only by extraordinary providence would a premier work on pastoral ministry, grounded upon crystalline Trinitarian theology, be written by one who fled his first charge immediately after ordination. Yet such is the case with Gregory of Nazianzus and his *Oration 2*.

As one of the three Great Cappodocians of the fourth century church, Gregory of Nazianzus is well known for his development, defense, and dissemination of the doctrines of the deity of Christ and his formulation of the Trinity. For instance, through his famous *Five Theological Orations* Gregory went beyond his mentor Basil of Caesarea in the development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, being the first to use the Christological term *homoousios* to describe the Spirit's essence as well. Such was Gregory's ability that "for his clear and persuasive teaching on the Trinity, he was accorded the title 'the Theologian' by the Council of Chalcedon" posthumously in 451 A.D.¹

Yet Gregory's theological astuteness was combined with a pastoral heart for the people of God. Christopher Beeley states, "Among his many achievements, Gregory Nazianzen is one of the foremost pastoral theologians of the early church."² Gregory demonstrates this most clearly in *Oration 2*. This work was long a reference for pastoral ministry, contributing significantly two centuries later to Pope Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*, which in turn was a standard until Martin Bucer's *Concerning the True Pastoral Care* of the Reformation era.³ To the church's detriment, many treatments of Gregory fail to avoid "the bifurcation of head and heart"⁴ common in modern theological study. Beeley comments on this when he says of *Oration 2*:

Although it is a well-known patristic resource, Gregory's teaching on pastoral ministry is usually studied independent of his teaching on Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity. From this vantage point, the ministry of the Church, like the purification and illumination of the theologian, is seen to be extrinsic to his

1 Christopher A. Beeley, "Theology and Pastoral Leadership," *Anglican Theological Review* 91, no. 1 (2009): 22.

2 Christopher A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2008), 235.

3 Andrew Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 10.

4 Robert Letham, lecture statement from "The Doctrine of the Trinity Class" at Ligonier Ministries in Orlando, Florida, July 9, 2012.

Trinitarian doctrine and his other properly theological concerns. Yet such a view could hardly be farther from Gregory's mind. Since the doctrine of the Trinity – and all Christian theology – takes place within the divine economy in the age of the Church, it involves the Church's pastoral and teaching ministry in an integral way.⁵

By looking closely at Oration 2, the influence that Gregory's Trinitarian theology had on his view of pastoral ministry is readily seen. "Rather than finding *thēoria* and *praxis* opposed to each other, he regarded them as parallel concepts, mutually interdependent, not mutually exclusive."⁶ In discovering this in Oration 2, ministers in the modern, Western church can make helpful applications to reorient their ministries in ways consistent with faith in the Triune God. This will be examined first by considering briefly the life and ministry influences on Gregory that led to the writing of Oration 2. Then, a closer look at Oration 2 will reveal how Gregory's Trinitarian doctrine influenced his pastoral ministry especially in the areas of determining a pastoral call; working toward forming Christ in people by the deification of the soul; bringing unity to the church with its variation of members; and helping Christians grow by illuminating the Scriptures. A final concluding section will explain how Gregory's high regard for ministry on behalf of the Triune God drew him back after fear of the same caused him to flee the ministry for a time.

Consideration of Life Influences

Gregory (born c. 329 A.D.) was the son of the bishop of Nazianzus in Cappadocia, also named Gregory. His father had been converted earlier by the influence of his wife out of the monotheistic cult of the Hypsistarians. Thus, Gregory grew up with vivid, theological debates regarding the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit taking place not only in the churches and streets, but in his own home.⁷ Perhaps this family environment best explains how Gregory purportedly had a vision as a child in which two virgins, named Chastity and Temperance, appeared to him and invited him to join with them in the contemplation of the Trinity.⁸

Gregory spent the ages of eighteen to thirty traveling and studying, with much of this time consisting of learning from Basil of Caesarea in Athens. When he eventually returned to Nazianzus in 361, his father forced him against his volition into the priesthood in an ordination service on Christmas Day. In fear Gregory fled, before he even delivered his first homily, and stayed with Basil. He returned home several months later to aid his father, who had become embroiled in controversy with pro-Nicenes. Notably, it was during these doctrinal struggles over the Godhead that Gregory penned Oration 2 to explain to the congregation why he had left the ministry and returned. "Thus, despite the conventional view of his ecclesiastical ambivalence, Gregory began

5 Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 235.

6 Donald F. Winslow, "Gregory of Nazianzus and Love for the Poor," *Anglican Theological Review* 47, no. 4 (1965): 351.

7 John Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, vol. 2 of *Formation of Christian Theology* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), 325.

8 Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 11.

his priestly ministry determined to renew the leadership of the Church, and particularly the central place that a fulsome doctrine of the Trinity must hold in it.”⁹

Gregory’s appointment to a position, retreat from controversy into a period of contemplation, then return to ministry became a pattern during his lifetime. After a decade of service alongside his father in Nazianzus, Basil appointed him as bishop of Sasima. Yet, after a short time there, he fled and returned to help his dying father. After that death in 374, though many assumed Gregory would take over as bishop there, he instead left for Seleucia for a further period of reflection and mourning over the deaths of several other close family members.

In 379 a small Nicene congregation in the center of the empire in Constantinople called for his help. Surprisingly, Gregory responded to this call in this midst of a great metropolis, a city that was swirling with political and ecclesiastical intrigue created by Arian leaders who controlled most of the churches and influenced greatly the civic leaders there. With Gregory’s help, the congregation met in a renovated building owned by his cousin that they called “Anastasia” (Resurrection). Again it is worthy to note that it was during his time in Constantinople, serving as a pastor under considerable duress, that Gregory formulated his Five Theological Orations on the Trinity. Upon one occasion, when the persecution by Arian forces caused Gregory to go into seclusion for a time, it is a testimony to his God-centered ministry that they called him back by saying to him, “You cause the Trinity to depart with you.”¹⁰ He was eventually appointed bishop there under the new emperor Theodosius, and presided for a time over the Council of Constantinople. When thirty-six of the bishops walked out of the council over their disgust of Gregory’s views, he “refused to make compromises in regard to his ‘Beloved Trinity.’”¹¹ Eventually disputes about the legitimacy of his bishopric made by the Anti-Nicene party caused Gregory to retire from this position and spend the remainder of his life back in Nazianzus. Yet largely through his influence this council “definitively proclaimed the doctrine of the Trinity.”¹²

Oration 2 was likely expanded by Gregory during this retirement before his death in 390.¹³ These aggregate experiences in defending the Trinity, in the midst of ministering in highly stressful circumstances, clearly influenced his views of the pastorate reflected in this work.

Materialization of the Call

For Gregory, pastoral ministry itself was ordained by the Triune God. “Nearly two decades before his discussion of the gradual revelation of the Trinity in the fifth Theological Oration, Gregory’s first reflection on the scope of the divine economy focuses on the pastoral ministry of the Church.”¹⁴

9 Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 12.

10 Behr, *Nicene Faith*, 328.

11 John McGuckin, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 355.

12 Justo Gonzalez, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, vol. I of *The Story of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 188.

13 Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 237.

14 *Ibid.*, 239.

As such, ministry begins with a call from God. Gregory confessed the error of his flight and modestly said, “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.”¹⁵ Yet he went on to explain that, beyond returning to Nazianzus in order to care for his aging parents and to see the people there, he came because of duty to God’s call.¹⁶ Gregory saw the pastor as being “stationed on high by the Spirit.”¹⁷ Pastoral ministry for him was entrance into a life of sacrifice so pulsating with the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that he hesitated to enter it:

Since then I knew these things, that no one is worthy of the mightiness of God, and the sacrifices, and priesthood, who has not first presented himself to God, a living, holy sacrifice, and set forth the reasonable, well-pleasing service, and sacrificed to God the sacrifice of praise and the contrite spirit, which is the only sacrifice required of us by the Giver of all, how could I dare to offer to Him the external sacrifice...before my ear had been sufficiently opened to the instruction of the Lord,...before my mouth had been opened to draw in the Spirit, and opened wide to be filled with the spirit of speaking mysteries and doctrines,... before all my members had become instruments of righteousness, and all mortality had been put off, and swallowed up of life, and had yielded to the Spirit?¹⁸

Furthermore, Gregory explained that God ordains many to be subject to pastoral care, while others should be pastors “who surpass the majority in virtue and nearness to God...in order that both [pastor and congregation] may be so united and compacted together, that, although one is lacking and the other preeminent, they may...be so combined and knit together by the harmony of the Spirit, as to form one perfect body, really worthy of Christ Himself, Our Head.”¹⁹

Gregory sees here a remarkable model of pastoral ministry. The pastor is to be close in fellowship with the Father, sacrificially offering his life as Christ did, and experiencing the Spirit binding together his heart with those of the congregation in such a way that they display a “perfect body” worthy of Christ. This flows forth from Gregory’s Trinitarian understanding. Purves writes:

Gregory developed a dynamic, personal, perichoretic construal in his understanding of the Trinity in terms of internal relations. Not being as such, but relations as communion form the ultimate ontological category by which we may comprehend the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity, as three persons, one God, in which God is “divided without division.”²⁰

¹⁵ Gregory, 2.9.

¹⁶ Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 26.

¹⁷ Gregory, 2.7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.95.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.3.

²⁰ Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 15.

He goes on to state that “this insight is important for theological anthropology and pastoral theology.”²¹

The pastor’s calling then is to bring his congregation with him into experiencing the interpersonal knowledge and unity of the Triune God. Rather than seeing the ministry of the church as program based, the pastor should always be viewing it first and foremost as person based – knowing the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and bringing the people of congregation with him into that knowledge of God and one another. With thoughts so ideal, it is not difficult to understand why Gregory hesitated walking through the door of pastoral ministry.

Deification of the Soul

As stated previously, one of Gregory’s great contributions to historical theology was his clarity on the deity of the Spirit. Letham states from his analysis of the Five Theological Orations the source of Gregory’s development of this doctrine: “Gregory argues for the Spirit’s deity from deification.”²² Thus, so prominent was his belief that the role of the pastor was to help shape the soul of the congregant into the image of God, Gregory was able from this to formulate for the greater church the clarity of the Scripture’s teaching on the person and nature of the Trinity’s third person.

Gregory was aware of the divine order set in place by the Lord for godly ministers to lead their congregations to the ultimate goal of reflecting fully the image of God. Gregory states that the goal of pastoral ministry is “to deify, and bestow heavenly bliss upon, one who belongs to the heavenly host.”²³ To help the minister see his role in this regard and the work involved, Gregory employs his famous analogy of the pastor as physician.

For the guiding of man, the most variable and manifold of creatures, seems to me in very deed to be the art of arts and science of sciences. Any one may recognize this, by comparing the work of the physician of souls with the treatment of the body; and noticing that, laborious as the latter is, ours is more laborious, and of more consequence, from the nature of its subject matter, the power of its science, and the object of its exercise.²⁴

Daley states regarding Gregory, “The role of the pastor is first of all to bring order (taxis) into a human community disordered by sin and individual self-promotion; a community without order,

²¹ Ibid., 16.

²² Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Philipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2004), 161. As Letham explains, the term “deification” in the ancient church is similar to the modern use of “sanctification,” being the process by which the redeemed become more like God. Though the Western church disagrees with significant aspects of what became the Eastern doctrine of deification, Gregory has a right focus on the need for the pastor to foster a robust union with the Triune God that prepares people to spend eternity with Him.

²³ Gregory, 2.22.

²⁴ Ibid., 2.16.

he observes, is incapable of worshipping God.”²⁵ Just as the physician seeks to release the body from the afflictions of wounds and illnesses through the use of medicines, surgeries, and diets, so pastors are to be soul-healers “who are set over others, are the ministers and fellow-labourers; for whom it is a great thing to recognize and heal their own passions and sicknesses.”²⁶ Clearly it was due to the work of the Trinity in the process of deification that made viewing the pastor as a soul physician appealing to Gregory.

Like a physician, Gregory taught that the pastor meets with many difficulties in his work. His only assistance, Gregory believed, was the involvement of each of the persons in the Godhead. For instance, just as physicians struggle to help people see just how sick they are, so the pastor meets with the same difficulty in dealing with soul sickness. He is then much reliant upon the help of God to diagnose the one to whom he ministers.

But the whole of our treatment and exertion is concerned with the hidden man of the heart, and our warfare is directed against that adversary and foe within us, who uses ourselves as his weapons against ourselves, and, most fearful of all, hands us over to the death of sin. In opposition then, to these foes we are in need of great and perfect faith, and of still greater co-operation on the part of God...²⁷

Another complication that arises is being able to ascertain the particular spiritual sickness from the wide range of potential troubles afflicting differing types of people.

But we, upon whose efforts is staked the salvation of a soul, a being blessed and immortal, and destined for undying chastisement or praise, for its vice or virtue,— what a struggle ought ours to be, and how great skill do we require to treat, or get men treated properly, and to change their life, and give up the clay to the spirit. For men and women, young and old, rich and poor, the sanguine and despondent, the sick and whole, rulers and ruled, the wise and ignorant, the cowardly and courageous, the wrathful and meek, the successful and failing, do not require the same instruction and encouragement.²⁸

Thus, the people of God, each with their unique constitutions, have a wide variety of soul maladies that require the ministry of the Spirit. Using the idea of the “art” of a physician in bringing healing so that growth in Christ’s likeness can occur, Gregory states in full Trinitarian language:

The scope of our art is to provide the soul with wings, to rescue it from the world and give it to God, and to watch over that which is in His image, if it abides, to take it by the hand, if it is in danger, or to restore it, if ruined, to make Christ dwell in

25 Brian Daley, “Saint Gregory of Nazianzus as Pastor and Theologian,” in *Loving God with Our Minds: The Pastor as Theologian*, ed. Michael Welker and Cynthia Jarvis (Grand Rapids, MI.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 113.

26 Gregory, 2.26.

27 Ibid., 2.21.

28 Ibid., 2.28.

the heart by the Spirit: and in short, to deify, and bestow heavenly bliss upon, one who belongs to the heavenly host.²⁹

The cure for these spiritual diseases, as Gregory saw it, was for the minister to fulfill God's desire to bring about "a direct and dynamic relationship with God" with His people. This was to occur by seeing that "acts of salvation history are for overcoming separation from God and restoration to unity with him."³⁰ In Paragraphs 23-25 of Oration 2 Gregory delineates numerous acts of redemptive history, highlighting how the members of the Godhead were at work to bring about the healing of the nations.

All these are a training from God for us, and a healing for our weakness, restoring the old Adam to the place whence he fell, and conducting us to the tree of life, from which the tree of knowledge estranged us, when partaken of unseasonably, and improperly. Of this healing we, who are set over others, are the ministers and fellow-labourers...³¹

By performing their "art" and ministering these lessons of redemptive history into the particular lives of those in their congregations, pastors are further bringing about the deification of the people. In so doing, Gregory presents the pastor as "a steward, or an administrator (οἰκονόμος), of the Word, sharing in the stewardship of the divine economy (οἰκονομία)."³²

Bringing people closer to God and preparing them to meet Him through the healing of Christ by the Spirit's work is transformative for pastoral ministry. A Christological focus, often the expressed concern of the evangelical church, can only be realized in the minister seeing Christ in union with the Father and Spirit, then administered appropriately as such to the congregation. Weekly worship services, each a seven-day step closer to eternity than the previous one, become a deliberate means through prayer, Word, and sacrament of preparing people to spend heaven in the presence of the Trinity. The preaching and teaching of redemptive history would be influenced by seeing God's offering of Christ to broken people through the ages and now made applicable to the congregation by the Spirit. Rather than a dry diagnosis and a hopeful attempt at application in counseling hurting people, a pastor's role becomes more one of gently probing one's relationship to Christ, offering the hope and promises of God, and relying upon the Spirit's work to offer fitting words to the needs of the moment. A ministry that does not actively rely on the Trinity and seek to restore God's image in the people places itself in great danger. "The implication is that the loss of the doctrine of the Trinity means the loss of the basis for personhood."³³

Variation of the Body

Another area of pastoral emphasis where the Trinity is manifested, already alluded to above, is that of the varied nature of the members of the church. Purves captures this in his summary of

29 Ibid., 2.22.

30 Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 14.

31 Gregory, 2.25-26.

32 Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 240.

33 Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 16.

a section of Oration 2 (paragraphs 27-33) as he describes Gregory's view of pastoral ministry: "This work demands great skill, since people are so varied, and requires care correspondingly."³⁴ Gregory points out the dissimilarity between people in a congregation with the experienced eye - and even humorous tongue - of a knowing shepherd when he describes them this way:

If you examine more closely, how great is the distinction between the married and the unmarried, and among the latter between hermits and those who live together in community, between those who are proficient and advanced in contemplation and those who barely hold on the straight course, between townsfolk again and rustics, between the simple and the designing, between men of business and men of leisure, between those who have met with reverses and those who are prosperous and ignorant of misfortune. For these classes differ sometimes more widely from each other in their desires and passion than in their physical characteristics; or, if you will, in the mixtures and blendings of the elements of which we are composed, and, therefore, to regulate them is no easy task.³⁵

Gregory employs several illustrations to describe the variation of the body and the skilled work that a minister must bring to the church. One is that of playing a stringed instrument, with the congregation being like the varied strings harmonizing together by the bow of a common confession. "I have now briefly dwelt upon the subject, to show how difficult it is to discuss such important questions, especially before a large audience, composed of every age and condition, and needing like an instrument of many strings, to be played upon in various ways; or to find any form of words able to edify them all, and illuminate them with the light of knowledge."³⁶ Later he uses the imaginative imagery of an animal trainer taming a "compound" beast to describe the minister's work with a congregation:

If anyone were to undertake to tame and train an animal of many forms and shapes, compounded of many animals of various sizes and degrees of tameness and wildness, his principal task, involving a considerable struggle, would be the government of so extraordinary and heterogeneous a nature, since each of the animals of which it is compounded would, according to its nature or habit, be differently affected with joy, pleasure or dislike, by the same words, or food, or stroking with the hand, or whistling, or other modes of treatment. And what must the master of such an animal do, but show himself manifold and various in his knowledge, and apply to each a treatment suitable for it, so as successfully to lead and preserve the beast? And since the common body of the church is composed of many different characters and minds, like a single animal compounded of discordant parts, it is absolutely necessary that its ruler should be at once simple

34 Ibid., 29. Pages 28-32 of this work include a helpful, detailed outline of *Oration 2*.

35 Gregory, 2.29.

36 Ibid., 2.39.

in his uprightness in all respects, and as far as possible manifold and varied in his treatment of individuals, and in dealing with all in an appropriate and suitable manner.³⁷

Gregory also highlights ministering to the variation in Christ's body by comparing it to feeding children at different stages of maturity with forms of food matching their ability; racing different temperaments of horses; or, returning to his most familiar running metaphor, administering various medicines to different patients.³⁸

Gregory makes it clear that it is only with the knowledge and help of the Triune God, the One who made the world both varied and harmonious, that a pastor can take people from such diverse backgrounds, dispositions, and experiences and bring them to the place where "both the Unity of the Godhead [is] preserved, and the Trinity of Persons confessed, each with His own property."³⁹ With the threats innumerable false teachers were bringing, Gregory understood that "such popular heresies as Arianism, Sabellianism, and a widespread corruption of Trinitarianism into 'the Gentile plurality of principles from which we have escaped' (tri-theism) threatened to pull apart the unity of the Church."⁴⁰ In light of this threat, Gregory would agree that knowing that God is a union of Three Persons "drives us inexorably to our conclusion that we are called to worship the Holy Trinity, to live in loving and joyful union and communion with the Holy Trinity, and – precisely because of that – to live in loving communion with other human beings."⁴¹ Gregory saw the minister as one called to make known in a manner appropriate to his hearers the great doctrines of the faith, from original creation to Christ's death and resurrection to the final judgment. Yet central to them all, indeed "to crown all," was "what we are to think of the original and blessed Trinity."⁴²

These insights into seeking unity amidst a diverse gathering of people in the local church can assist the modern minister in numerous ways. Rather than giving into the common ecclesiastical pressure of achieving unity through uniformity in practices or liberalism in belief, which amounts to legalism on the one hand and heterodoxy on the other, he can and should make his central teaching focus, underlying all that he does, be that of bringing the congregation into fuller knowledge of and union with the Triune God. Instead of being fearful of a wide variation in the composition of people's background, social status, race, etc., the minister can lead the congregation to rejoice in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit's work in making disciples of all nations and bringing together people from every tribe and language and people group.⁴³ A particular expression of this can be made in ministering to those shunned in society: "For Gregory, caring for the poor is a

37 Ibid., 2.44.

38 Ibid., 2.45, 2.30, 2.33 respectively.

39 Ibid., 2.38.

40 Addison H. Hart, "Between Two Fears: Why Gregory Nazianzen Ran Away from the Priesthood: A Reflection on His *Second Oration*," *Touchstone* 13:3 (2000), <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=13-03-027-f> (accessed September 28, 2012).

41 Letham, *Holy Trinity*, 475.

42 Gregory, 2.36.

43 Matthew 28:18-20; Revelation 5:9-10.

basic expression of the knowledge of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁴ Though somewhat beyond the scope of Gregory’s treatise, by inference the minister, in working toward union with God and one another in the body of Christ, can encourage various members to supply what is lacking in others. For “there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all.”⁴⁵

Illumination of the Scriptures

After discussing the subjects above, Gregory brings up “the distribution of the word, to mention last the first of our duties.”⁴⁶ For Gregory, pastoral ministry is fulfilled, and the Trinity is made known, chiefly through the medium of the Word of God. The pastor’s ministry must begin with his own discovery of the Godhead as revealed in Scripture. Gregory expresses passionately the Scripture’s personal revelation of the Trinity to the dutiful minister:

Who is the man, whose heart has never been made to burn, as the Scriptures have been opened to him, with the pure words of God which have been tried in a furnace; who has not, by a triple inscription of them upon the breadth of his heart, attained the mind of Christ; nor been admitted to the treasures which to most men remain hidden, secret, and dark, to gaze upon the riches therein? and become able to enrich others, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. Who is the man who has never beheld, as our duty is to behold it, the fair beauty of the Lord, nor has visited His temple, or rather, become the temple of God, and the habitation of Christ in the Spirit?⁴⁷

Thus, “the sort of Biblical study that prepares one for the priesthood is for Gregory a Trinitarian enterprise, as the Spirit purifies one to know God and minister Christ to others.”⁴⁸

Given this need for the minister himself to know God through His Word, Gregory then shows how central it is to his ministerial role to bring the Bible to bear upon others in this manner. Commenting on Gregory’s view of the minister, Beeley states, “Consequently, the interpretation of the Bible – of the Old and New Testaments, or Covenants – is the lifeblood of the Church, since in Scripture Christians come to know Jesus Christ, the image of God the Father, as he is worshipped and obeyed in the teaching and the mysteries of the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁹ Indeed, in reading Oration 2, it is striking the degree to which Scripture saturates Gregory’s writing, whether through direct quote, illustrations, or allusions.

Though the heat and pain of theological controversy are never desirous, for Gregory, the theological battles with the Arians, Pneumatomachi, Macedonians, Sabellians, and others

44 Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 255.

45 I Corinthians 12:4-6 (ESV).

46 Gregory, 2.35. See also Christopher Beeley, “Theology and Pastoral Leadership,” 18.

47 Gregory, 2.96-97.

48 Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 261.

49 *Ibid.*, 240.

became a sharpening influence. He had witnessed what became of those ministers who failed to comprehend the Triune God of the Bible.

Gregory knew firsthand the deleterious consequences of theological error both to the unity of the church and the salvation of persons. The Trinitarian heresies of his own day had shipwrecked the faith of many and led them not to the God who is Father, Son, and Spirit, but to a God whose name was filled with empty terms and deceptive identities. It had led people not to God as he truly is, but to ‘god’ as they wished him to be and thought he ought to be. Therefore the pastor must be a theologian, one who reads and thinks from Scripture and to Scripture in a disciplined and habitual way.⁵⁰

Gregory had “pastured alongside priests who had grossly misunderstood their calling or willfully substituted their own more convenient images for those given in Scripture.”⁵¹ In refuting them, Gregory’s study of Scripture and earlier developments of Christology led to further insights into the Trinity, for “all the revelation about the Trinity is in the Son.”⁵² Seeing how improper study of the Scriptures created this idolatry, Gregory, with other orthodox teachers, could be described in this manner:

Early Christian theologians quickly began to recognize that the substance and shape of pastoral ministry, and indeed the very life of the church, are most succinctly expressed in the doctrine of the Trinity. Through the early rules of faith and baptismal confessions, the homiletical expositions of the Bible, and doctrinal disputations, the church repeatedly proclaimed its faith in the Trinity as the heart of its meaning and mission.⁵³

Even at “his departure from the council in 381, he proclaims that the stewardship of souls and the dispensation of the word consists mainly in the doctrine of the Trinity.”⁵⁴

Today’s evangelical minister must regain Gregory’s passion for knowing the Trinity Scripturally. He must return from the “wild wanderings” of seeking contemporary relevancy by immersion in the world’s ways to a more contemplative and studied view of the ministry. He needs to comprehend how the removal and minimization of the Scriptures from Christian worship, to make room for such things as musicals, dramas, and movies, is in essence a removal of the Triune God from His holy temple and a leading of people into heterodoxy with its eventual accompanying heteropraxy. Rather than reliance on ecclesiastical traditions or faddish innovations, his heart needs to be inflamed for feeding souls with a deeper knowledge of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - the originator, fulfillment, and power of the Great Commission, respectively – who expect the church

50 Brian Williams, *The Potter’s Rib: Mentoring for Pastoral Formation* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Publishing, 2005), 35.

51 Ibid., 32.

52 Edith M. Humphrey, “The Gift of the Father,” *Trinitarian Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 91 n.6.

53 Beeley, “Theology and Pastoral Leadership,” 21.

54 Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 267.

to be baptized, disciplined, and taught in the Triune name. The modern pastor must recognize that being evangelical should mean, first and foremost, being Trinitarian.

Concluding Explanation of the Flight

In one sense no true “defense of his flight to Pontus” exists for Gregory. No minister should leave his post immediately following his ordination. The fact that Gregory did so in fleeing Nazianzus nearly disqualifies him as a guide to pastoral ministry. Yet perhaps what is more noteworthy than *why* he left is looking at *what* brought him back to his pastoral duties. For it was the very Trinitarian view of the ministry he lays out in *Oration 2* that returned him to obedience.

Gregory cites the study of Scriptures as the reason for his return to ministry, for in “remembering the days of old, and, turning to one of the ancient histories, [I] drew counsel for myself therefrom as to my present conduct.”⁵⁵ He looked to the example of Jonah and reasoned that “however high the standard of priestly righteousness and virtue might be, who would dare to make it an excuse for blatant disobedience?”⁵⁶ Gregory knew he himself needed the further deification that comes through repentance, and so he admitted and confessed his guilt.

I fell down and humbled myself under the mighty hand of God, and asked pardon for my former idleness and disobedience, if this is at all laid to my charge. I held my peace, but I will not hold my peace for ever: I withdrew for a little while, till I had considered myself and consoled my grief: but now I am commissioned to exalt Him in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the seat of the elders. If my former conduct deserved blame, my present action merits pardon.⁵⁷

He then found comfort in knowing that ministers, like the flocks they serve, have differences in their disposition also, yet the Triune God is patient and heals them as well.

I resort once again to history, and on considering the men of best repute in ancient days, who were ever preferred by grace to the office of ruler or prophet, I discover that some readily complied with the call, others deprecated the gift, and that neither those who drew back were blamed for timidity, nor those who came forward for eagerness. The former stood in awe of the greatness of the ministry, the latter trustfully obeyed Him Who called them. Aaron was eager, but Moses resisted, Isaiah readily submitted, but Jeremiah was afraid of his youth, and did not venture to prophesy until he had received from God a promise and power beyond his years.⁵⁸

55 Gregory, 2.104.

56 Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 263.

57 Gregory, 2.116.

58 *Ibid.*, 2.114.

“Through such examples the Spirit worked its magic on Gregory and relaxed his soul.”⁵⁹ Thus Gregory could reenter the ministry, and calls others to do the same, with the concluding Trinitarian hope:

May He give strength and power unto his people, and present to Himself His flock resplendent and spotless and worthy of the fold on high, in the habitation of them that rejoice, in the splendour of the saints, so that in His temple everyone, both flock and shepherds together may say, Glory, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to Whom be all glory for ever and ever. Amen.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 263.

⁶⁰ Gregory, 2.117.