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*Graeco-Latina Brunensia*. 2016, vol. 21, iss. 1, pp. 5-19

ISSN 1803-7402 (print); ISSN 2336-4424 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/GLB2016-1-1>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/135485>

Access Date: 29. 11. 2024

Version: 20220831

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# ***Paideia* [Education] through the lens of the words in the poetry of Gregory of Nazianzus**

Erika Brodňanská

## **Abstract**

The affection for words was an intrinsic part of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus' personality. As a theologian, orator, and poet he was well aware of the nuances and the power words yield. The aim of this article is to examine Gregory's approach to classical education as presented in his poetry, [and] expressed through his praise of words, or eloquence, in general. The motivation for focusing the research on his poetry is the fact that, for Gregory, poetry was his the means of influencing young Christians. Gregory intended to offer them more appealing reading than the austere Christian commandments. For him, *logoi* and *mythoi* embracing, inter alia, ancient erudition (i.e. not the knowledge of philosophy and literature alone but also, for example, mythology) were the solid cornerstones to build upon, and which could also be used by young Christians able of critical thinking to choose only the good and beneficial from it. Thus, Gregory's poetry reflects various philosophical motifs, including his striking inspiration by Cynicism, but also his reservations concerning empty formal rhetoric.

## **Key words**

*paideia*; words; poetry; Gregory of Nazianzus; ancient philosophy

After the end of the persecution of Christians, Christianity as one of the approved religions in the Roman Empire disputed over the interpretation of Christian dogmas and the surviving cults of pagan antiquity – these are only a few of the attributes which characterised the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. To a certain extent, the social situation of this turbulent era is reflected in the work of one of the four great Church Fathers of the East,<sup>1</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus. His writings are a source from which we can both learn about the time he lived in and learn our lesson for today. At the same time, they are also a source of information about his life, his relationships with those around him, and his own

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1 Along with Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom; Gregory of Nazianzus is known for his theology of the Holy Trinity.

human and spiritual journey. Even though he loved solitude and wished for reclusive living to fully immerse himself in contemplation, he felt a constant duty to participate in the social and political life of his times and also be involved in the uneasy fight against the heresies of the period. It seems that his life was a constant oscillation between the *vita activa* and the desire for *vita contemplativa*. He was a Christian, yet did not condemn the culture he lived in. He was a theologian with contemplative soul, as well as an orator and a poet.<sup>2</sup> History has preserved for us 44 of his speeches (“orations”), around 250 letters, and more than 17,000 lines of poetry.<sup>3</sup> In his work, including his poetry, he gave attention not only to the purpose and factual substance of the subject, but also to the literary form. He offered impressive language to those who read and heard his work, appealing to both Christians and pagans. His love for the word was an intrinsic part of his personality. In the epitaph for himself, Gregory enumerates ten significant aspects of his life. The fourth of these is: Τέταρτον ἀμφήκη μῦθον ἔδωκε Λόγος.<sup>4</sup> Gregory feels that his gift of speech came from *Logos*, and he crafts his words to imitate it. “In respect of this poetry line, A. Hofer points out that while Ā. Milovanović translates this phrase ‘blessed with a two-edged speech’ and writes that Gregory ‘was so proud of his literary versatility’ of being both a supreme orator and a prolific poet, W. R. Paton<sup>5</sup> takes ‘two-edged speech’ to mean sacred and profane.”<sup>6</sup>

Obviously, a sensitive perception of words or the word is nothing exceptional and certainly not the domain of St. Gregory of Nazianzus alone. The word had already been of extraordinary interest to ancient philosophers. The origin of Greek philosophy was connected to discovering a new approach towards the world, a new type of speech, and a new manner of understanding. Beginning with Homer and Hesiod, we can identify certain elements of rational understanding of the whole world through conceptualising of human experience (such as Homer’s description of Achilles’ shield in *Iliad*,<sup>7</sup> or the alternation of generations or epochs in Hesiod’s work Ἔργα καὶ ἡμέραι, vv. 106–201). Ancient Greeks developed a great awareness of the unity of language and thinking, i.e. thinking (an idea) was a silent discussion (a word) to them, while discussion (a word) was thinking (an idea) aloud.<sup>8</sup> With the rise of Christianity “many early Christian writers

2 Brodňanská (2012: p. 11).

3 A complete critical edition of his texts, especially his poems, has still not been published. Only his letters and speeches have been published in a combined volume thus far. A critical edition of letters was put together by P. Gallay (*Lettres*, Paris 1964–1967). A French issue of *Sources Chrétiennes* published a well-known edition of Gregory’s writings, basing itself on ten of his most significant manuscripts: Bernardi (*Discours 1–3*, Paris 1978); Bernardi (*Discours 4–5. Contre Julien*, Paris 1983); Calvet-Sebasti (*Discours 6–12*, Paris 1995); Mossay & Lafontaine (*Discours 20–23*, Paris 1980); Mossay & Lafontaine (*Discours 24–26*, Paris 1981); Gallay & Jourjon (*Discours 27–31*, Paris 1978); Gallay & Moreschini (*Discours 32–37*, Paris 1985); Gallay & Moreschini (*Discours 38–41*, Paris 1990); Bernardi (*Discours 42–43*, Paris 1992); Gallay & Jourjon (*Lettres théologiques*, Paris 1974).

4 “The Word granted me double-edged speech”; (II, I, 93, 4; PG 37, 1448).

5 *The Greek Anthology* (1919: p. 435).

6 Hofer (2013: p. 11).

7 *Il.* 18, 478–608.

8 Kessidi (1985: p. 73).

dealt with the question of the nature of Christian discourse, as they debated the relation of Christian rhetoric to the Classical one, the problem of reaching the uneducated in their preaching, as well as the nature of Christian knowledge, especially the problem of how Christian truth could be represented in words at all”.<sup>9</sup>

Considering Gregory of Nazianzus, the bibliography of works covering his personality and writings is rather extensive. Numerous authors do not fail to mention Gregory’s language skills. Nevertheless, as far as we know, a work dedicating at least one chapter dealing more comprehensively with the meaning of the word (*logos*) in Gregory’s writings was published only in 2013. The author explores Gregory’s teaching on the *logos* through four brief studies that speak of significance of *logos* in human life, especially in the lives of Gregory and his audience. “The first attends to Gregory’s appreciation of *logos* as expressed” in the three genres he engaged in: speeches, letters and poetry.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, my work will focus on words and their meaning. Nevertheless, my aim is not to concentrate on Gregory’s understanding and use of *logos*, whether it regards the position it enjoyed in philosophy, or rhetoric, or Christianity. Above all, I will focus on Gregory’s approach to classical education expressed through the praise of words, or eloquence, in general. Using lexemes, Gregory does not restrict himself only to *logos*, but with equal frequency he also uses *mythos*. Pursuing our subject, we will leave Gregory’s speeches and letters behind, focusing on how our subject is reflected in his poetry. Using verse, Gregory tried to provide, especially to those young people longing for more knowledge, a more pleasant reading experience than the austere Christian commandments. In this way, he more or less competed with non-Christian poets (II, I, 39, 37b–53; PG 37, 1332–1333).

Even a quick look at Gregory’s poetic work convinces us that it is justified to narrow the focus to his poetry in understanding his use of *logos* and its affinity to youth. He confesses in his verses:<sup>11</sup>

Λόγοις πτερωθείς, μὴ πτερῶν ἔξω πέτου  
Πτερῶν γὰρ οὐδὲ πτηνὸν ἵπταται δίχλα.<sup>12</sup>

[...] πλέον γὰρ οὐδὲν φθέγξομαι  
– καίπερ σφαδᾶζων ἔνδοθεν πολλοῖς λόγοις  
ὥσπερ τις ἄσκος δέσμιος γλεύκους ζέων  
ἢ καὶ φυσητῆρ χαλκῆως γέμων πνοῆς –<sup>13</sup>

9 Cameron (1991: p. 5).

10 Hofer (2013: pp. 11–54).

11 Except for works published in the critical issue, in translation of quotes from Gregory’s works we drew on the Migne’s publication of Gregory’s works contained within *Patrologia Graeca* (PG), volumes 35–38 (*Patrologiae cursus completus*, Series Graeca, Paris 1857–1858; poetry is collected in volume 37).

12 I, II, 32, 5–6 (PG 37, 916). “What are wings for a bird, / are words to a poet.” (Prosaic translation).

13 II, I, 11, 847–850 (PG 37, 1087–1088). “[...] I shall say no more / – though my inside is vibrating with multitude of words, / as a tied-up wineskin, where young wine ferments, / or metal pipe filled with air –.” (Prosaic translation).

Μῦθοι γὰρ βίोटιο θεμείλιον, οἳ μ' ἀπὸ θηρῶν  
 ἔσχισαν, οἷσιν ἔγειρα πόλεις, καὶ τέθμι' ἀνεῦρον,  
 καὶ Θεὸν ὑμνεῖω μεγακυδέα, οἷσιν αἰείρω  
 τῆς φαενῆς ἀρετῆς ὑψοῦ κλέος, οἷσι δαμάζω  
 τῆς στυγερῆς κακίης πικρὸν σθένος, οἷσι κεάζω  
 κόσμους, [...]<sup>14</sup>

Μῦθοι καὶ παθέεσσιν ἄκος μέγα· τοῖσι δαμάζω  
 θυμὸν ὑπερζείοντα, νόου νέφος· οἷσιν ἀνίας  
 εὐνάζω, καὶ μέτρον εὐφροσύνησι τίθημι,  
 οὔτε λήην μογεροῖσιν ἀτώμενος, οὔτ' ἀγαθοῖσιν  
 αἰρόμενος, ἕτερον δ' ἑτέρω σταθμώμενος ἄλκαρ,  
 ἐλπίδ' ἐν ἀργαλέοισιν, ἐν εὐδιώωσι δὲ τάρβος.<sup>15</sup>

Gregory of Nazianzus considered the spoken word to be a basic characteristic feature of man. He perceived it as a gift, as something that strengthens heart and mind, that caresses and admonishes, that is a bearer of laws, and that leads to knowing God. He also considered the word to be an effective medicine to cure passions or calm anger as well as excessive joy. This is the meaning found in the versed letter II, II, 5 *Nicobuli patris ad filium*. Here, Gregory allegorically interprets myths in which Hermes gives Odysseus a miraculous herb as a gift and an advice on how to behave with Circe, the sorceress, and in which Polydamna gives a magical medicine to Helene of Troy to sooth the grief and anger of Menelaus:

[...] Οἶδα δὲ Πομποῦ  
 φάρμακον, ὡς λόγος ἦεν, ὃν ἐρχομένῳ μετὰ Κίρκην  
 Λαρτιάδη πόρε δῶρον, ὅπως κε σύεσσιν ἀρήξει  
 οἷς ἐτάροις, μηδ' αὐτὸς ἔδοι συοθρέμματα φορβήν.  
 Μῦθον καὶ Πολύδαμνα κεράσσατο, Θῶνος ἄκοιτις,  
 Αἰγυπτίη, δῶκεν δ' Ἑλένη ξεινήϊον ἐσθλὸν,  
 νηπενθές τ', ἄχολόν τε, κακῶν ἐπίληθον ἀπάντων.<sup>16</sup>

14 II, II, 5, 165–170a (PG 37, 1533–1534). “A gift is in foundations of the life of speech! That’s what distinguishes me from animals. / By words I have erected cities and revealed laws through words / By words I worship the mighty God and towards the heaven I send / the hymn of shining virtue, through words I overcome and tame / repugnant passions’ bitter power, I am discerning worlds through words.” (Prosaic translation).

15 II, II, 5, 182–187 (PG 37, 1535). “Words are an effective cure for passions; through words I can control / a glinting anger, which blinds my mind, and can relieve worries, / moderate the joy, make the failure not so tormenting / or the pride too absorbing, when I feel the ecstasy of happiness. / In one thing or the other, they are my remedy and strong support: / they offer hope in problems and awe when I rejoice.” (Prosaic translation).

16 II, II, 5, 196b–202 (PG 37, 1535–1536). “[...] In a healing gift / has turned a piece of advice for the king of Ithaca, brought to him by gods’ / messenger: he is to visit Circe and save the fellow transmogrified into / pigs, he himself not touching the food for pigs. / Polydamna, ruling in Egypt with Thoón, did good with / her advice: committing to Helene medicines that appease sorrow, / put away anger and bitter memories

These interpretations are considered traditional. The miraculous herb of Hermes (μῶλυ) is frequently mentioned in moral and philosophical literature and its explanation is rather closely linked to the term *logos*. The oldest evidence is found in Cleanthes. In his opinion, the herb symbolizes the word by which Odysseus controls instincts and affections. Philostratus used it when speaking of speech, whereas Gregory of Nazianzus understood it as a gift of speech that distinguishes man from animals.<sup>17</sup>

While the abovementioned lines reflect to a certain extent the motif of the Greeks' ethical work on oneself, the meaning of *word* can be understood in a broader sense, too, i.e. as rational reasons through which a man is capable of controlling one's passions. In Gregory's poetic letter II, II, 3 *Ad Vitalianum*, written in the name of the expelled sons of Vitalianus pleading to be taken back by their father,<sup>18</sup> we find a narrower Christian view of the healing power of words. The author refers to two of his friends, the bishops in Colonium and in Iconium – Bosporius and Amphilocheus, who are able to completely overcome the terrible hardships of the disease (here: the negative human emotions of envy and anger, alternating throughout the letter) by means of prayer, sacrifice, and reverence towards the Holy Trinity (II, II, 3, 242–244).<sup>19</sup>

Other layers of perceiving *logos* can be at least partially uncovered if we take a deeper look at Gregory's poetry.

*Logos* was always at the centre of Greek philosophical thinking and Gregory of Nazianzus, although a Christian, spoke highly of the beauty and importance of that knowledge. He received his education based on the knowledge of classical Greek literature and philosophy, which is indicated in his writings by many references to a wide array of authors (Homer, Hesiod, Theognis, Simonides, Pindar, Callimachus, Theocritus, Plato, Aristotle, and Lysias, among others). Gregory accepted classical education and tried to make it beneficial to Christianity; in addition, in respect to pagan erudition, he held the position of controlled acceptance. He was a Christian who thought of his faith in a way that would be comprehensible to Platonists in order to be able to explain his faith.<sup>20</sup> It must be mentioned that this was largely a common approach, although the period in which he lived was characteristic for its very close bond between philosophy and religion and for the strong emphasis placed on ethics. St. Gregory advocated philosophical education to those believers who despised it to such a degree that their disdain threatened the intellectual accomplishment.<sup>21</sup> He was aware that young Christians must embrace the fruit of ancient erudition, since Christianity was unable to immediately make up for such erudition in the days of its early evolution. At the same time, he emphasized that education without Christianity offers only incomplete truth.

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of all manner of woes." (Prosaic translation).

17 Kaiser (1964: pp. 109–136, 197–224).

18 The letter shows the absurdity of the father's anger towards the sons, whose only transgression is that in his eyes, he saw them being worse than he himself. For more see Brodňanská (2012: pp. 128–152).

19 Brodňanská & Koželová (2013: pp. 43–66).

20 Sheldon-Williams in Armstrong (2002: p. 499).

21 Zozulák (2005: p. 121).

He severely admonished those Christians for whom pagan learnedness was an abomination. In a eulogy for Basil the Great (*Or.* 43, 11), he stressed that it had been a good general education assisted by a Christian upbringing that had contributed to his friend's perfection. Nevertheless, he recommended only those matters from profane science which tended towards virtue. Moreover, he underscored the benefits of living in a pagan town where many well-known Christian figures, including himself, received their education:

βλαβεραὶ μὲν τοῖς ἄλλοις Ἀθηναὶ τὰ εἰς ψυχὴν· οὐ γὰρ φαύλως τοῦτο ὑπολαμβάνεται τοῖς εὐσεβεστέροις: [...] Τοῦναντίον μὲν οὖν, εἴ τι χροῆ καὶ παράδοξον εἰπεῖν, εἰς τὴν πίστιν ἐντεῦθεν ἐβεβαιώθημεν, καταμαθόντες αὐτῶν τὸ ἀπατηλὸν καὶ κίβδηλον, ἐνταῦθα δαιμόνων καταφρονήσαντες, οὐ θαυμάζονται δαίμονες. Καὶ εἴ τις ἔστιν ἢ πιστεύεται ποταμός, δι' ἄλμης ῥέων γλυκύς, ἢ ζῶον ἐν πυρὶ σκαῖρον, ᾧ τὰ πάντα ἀλίσκεται, τοῦτο ἡμεῖς ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ἤλιξι.<sup>22</sup>

In his writings, St. Gregory vehemently stood up for the right of Christians to be educated. He was well aware of the fact that the language of the emerging Christian writings was poor and artless. Thus, by means of his poetic works, he tried to draw on the Greek literary tradition and bring forward both the didactic and aesthetic functions of poetry. He became a pioneer of the dogmatic poetry, in which he dealt with difficult theological questions,<sup>23</sup> neither was he negligent of issues of morality.<sup>24</sup> In line with ancient Greek philosophers, he stressed the role of reason and individual virtue. He was conscious of the fact that to preach and explain the issues of faith to educated people is possible only when the preacher shares their educational background and uses the terminology they are familiar with. Thus, the ideas on ancient philosophers frequently resonate in his verses.

Regarding wisdom and education, for example, in the poetic letter II, II, 4 *Nicobuli filii ad patrem* ideas resonate that allude to Plato's ideas on perception of world by means of the senses. They are documented using a picture of the cave (*State* 514A–516B):

[...] κούφησι σὺν ἐλπίσιν ἔνθεν ἀερθῶ,  
καὶ ζωῆς καθαροῆς τε καὶ ἀλήκτοιο τύχοιμι,

22 *Or.* 43, 21, 5–6 (*Funebris oratio in laudem Basilii Magni Caesareae in Cappadocia episcopi*): “Even though some people's souls may be harmed by Athens, this will not happen to the pious ones easily. [...] On the contrary, we must state something unexpected. Cognizing and getting to know the monstrosity and falseness of their divinities do not raise admiration towards idols in us, but we are growing stronger in our faith. And if there really exists a river, remaining freshwater even when crossing the sea waters, and if there is such animal that can freely jump in the burning fire eating up everything around, we resemble them amidst our friends.”

23 The Holy Trinity, the soul, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, as well as the creation of man, God's Ten Commandments, the parables and miracles of Jesus.

24 He pointed to Christian values, compared the secular with the spiritual life, spoke highly of virtues, and warned against giving in to anger, profit-seeking (greed) and other human weaknesses.

μηκέτ' ἀληθείης ἰνδάλματα τηλόθε Λεύσσων,  
ὥστε δι' ἔσσοπτροιο καὶ ὕδατος ἀδρανέοντα,<sup>25</sup>

Well-known fragments from Heraclitus in the poem I, II, 14 *De humana natura* are found in the symbolic description of the fleetingness of earthly things and the ephemerality of man. The first example corresponds to the Heraclitus fragment B 12: ποταμοῖσι τοῖσιν αὐτοῖσιν ἐμβαίνουσιν ἕτερα καὶ ἕτερα ὕδατα ἐπιρρεῖ,<sup>26</sup> the second to fragment B 91: ποταμῶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐμβῆναι δις τῷ αὐτῶ:<sup>27</sup>

Ἐμπεδον οὐδέν· ἔγωγε ῥόος θολεροῦ ποταμοῖο  
αἰὲν ἐπερχόμενος, ἔσταός οὐδέν ἔχων.<sup>28</sup>

Οὔτε δις ὄν τοπάροιθε, ῥόον ποταμοῖο περήσεις  
ἐμπαλιν, οὔτε βροστὸν ὄψαι, ὄν τοπάρος.<sup>29</sup>

These examples point to the Gregory's erudition as *pars pro toto*. They indicate his relationship to Greek philosophy and science and the emphasis he put on classical education. We may only guess whether he was aware that Heraclitus was the first philosopher to introduce the notion of *logos* into philosophy; undoubtedly, Gregory was acquainted with his language full of metaphors, symbols, and imagery. Heraclitus did not focus on logical accuracy and precisely defined terms. He stressed the accuracy of the relationships between expressions. Like Gregory of Nazianzus in his poetry, Heraclitus' sentences were full of experience from ordinary life, from which he often drew a new understanding of meanings. He claimed that complete and definite knowledge of the substance of things (*logos*) could be achieved only by thinking, and he supposed that thinking is the achievement of the activity of the senses as well as the only true way to know the substance of things.<sup>30</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus also understood that if Christianity was to be something more than a religion of the unschooled, it needed to cope with Greek philosophical thinking and its representatives.<sup>31</sup>

25 II, II, 4, 82–85 (PG 37, 1511–1512). “With joyful hope I set my foot to go away from there, just so I may / recognize the pure and eternal life and not be compelled to / look at poor imitations of truth from a distance, / as they are reflected on pellucid water.” (Prosaic translation).

26 Ever-newer waters flow on those who step into the same rivers.

27 You could not step twice into the same river.

28 I, II, 14, 27–28 (PG 37, 757). “Nothing remains the same; I am the flow of muddy river, / that is constantly flowing, having nothing stable in itself.” (Prosaic translation).

29 I, II, 14, 31–32 (PG 37, 758). “As you cannot step into the same water twice, so you cannot / see the same man twice.” (Prosaic translation).

30 Kessidi (1985: pp. 59–63).

31 This fact was already understood almost two centuries earlier by Clement of Alexandria. In the first book of his work *Stromata* (I, 43, 4) we read: “a man educated the best is the man, who devotes all his efforts to the truth, and thus gains beneficial knowledge from geometry, music, grammar and the philosophy itself, and so protects the faith from every trap.” In addition to Gregory of Nazianzus, also Basil the Great followed on Clement in his opinions. In his essay *Ad adolescentes* he calls upon Christian young men to make

In his poetry, St. Gregory presents himself as a theologian and a representative of the Church with moral authority and position. At the same time, he presents himself as a man with desires, faults, and his own world view. In the poem II, I, 39 *In suos versus* – emblematic for his work – he defines 4 thematic areas or directions to follow. Two of them have been indicated above. When writing poetic verse, he wants to do especially the following:

- 1) keep an adequate measure;
- 2) provide more pleasant reading to young people than that offered by the austere Christian commandments;
- 3) compete with foreign (non-Christian) poets;
- 4) find consolation poetry provides in his old age.

I will focus my attention on the first: keeping an adequate measure. The principle of keeping things in appropriate moderation is not new in the history of thinking, and is still valid today, both in life and in art, where it is a guarantee of aesthetic effectiveness. Gregory of Nazianzus often declared in his works (especially in his speeches) that he was tired of empty talk, spoken in public or in private (e.g. at feasts), because it only served to amuse or to prove someone's importance. He criticised wordy sermons and theological debates that lacked the Spirit and became mere skilful rhetoric exercise, a verbal equilibrium proficiency (here it must be said that, before this, piety was manifested through actions and not in eloquence of words; *Or.* 4, 23).

However, Gregory knew and offered a cure for vacuous speaking-asceticism. His understanding of the word ἄσκησις directly follows on that of ancient philosophers who thought asceticism to be a solely spiritual exercise meaning a certain internal activity of will and thinking.<sup>32</sup> In order to learn moderation in speech, one should get trained in silence. After all, already in the fragments of the Cynics we read that “virtue is related to actions and does not need many words or schooling” (fragment related to Antisthenes; Diogenes Laertius VI 11) or that “it is better for a wise man to remain silent in his favour, than to speak to his detriment. That is, many are obsessed with speaking, but no man with silence.” (fragment related to Diogenes of Sinope; *Gnom. Monac. Lat.* XXVI 3). One must not forget that this principle still applies today. Silence, which is considered “eloquent”, is not alien to modern literature.

Gregory of Nazianzus “promotes keeping silence”;<sup>33</sup> nevertheless, he does not deny the right to express oneself to anyone. In his verses, he only reminds that just like it is possible to improve one's dress, conduct, laughter, or whatever a person sets his mind to, one's language and silence can be worked on, too. Gregory only wishes, applying it also to himself, “that the tongue be taught what is right to say and what is not, to respect the complete quiet and only speak with adequacy” (II, I, 34, 125–129; PG 37, 1316); he does not want to exceed appropriateness, neither as to the scope or content of the utterance.

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use of the values of secular literature and to study pagan classics. However, they should learn to wisely choose from them and pay attention to examples worth following and copying (22, IV, 2–12).

32 Hadot (1992: p. 3).

33 E.g. I, II, 2, 74–81a (PG 37, 584); II, II, 7, 231b–233 (PG 37, 1569).

He offers instruction in how to write as well as how to live; instruction that, in fact, still holds true nowadays more than ever before.

Gregory's emphasis on moderation in expression is confirmed by a part of the letter on how to write letters, which he addressed to his nephew Nicobulus (*Ep.* 51):

“With those who write letters [...], ones expand their lines more than is right, others are too brief. Those and these miss the aim of moderation similarly to archers who miss the target when sending an arrow a bit too close or too far. This way or another, they miss, although for different reasons. To letters, however, there is a measure. Usefulness. They must neither be too long, if there is not much to write about, nor shorty if the subject is broad. What do I mean? [...] Disproportion of either approach must be avoided and the right measure achieved. This is what I think of brevity.”

Concerning asceticism, some ancient philosophers practiced lifestyles corresponding to some extent to the modern understanding of asceticism, such as abstinence or restriction in food, drink, sleep, and property, or continence and self-restraint in sexual life. In Greek Cynicism,<sup>34</sup> we find a radical effort to live an independent and self-sufficient life, which is manifested in the rejection of everything created by people, using the words of L. Flachbartová, as an aid to be able to live in society. Cynic contempt for conventions “is related to training oneself (ἄσκησις) in self-sufficiency (αὐτάρκεια) and indifference to the outside world, as well as to human laws putting accent on a life in harmony with the natural (φύσις).”<sup>35</sup> As regards the Socratic tradition of thinking, V. Suvák points out that Cynics became even more radical with several Socratic attitudes and motifs (e.g. criticism of conventional morals, irony, self-control, modesty, moderation), while turning Socratic irony into direct ridicule, in particular in relation to the desire for prosperity and customary respect towards family-line morality. “The proclaimed Socratic modesty grows into a strict asceticism, which is rather a condition than an objective of a Cynic life; [...] placing the stringent interpretation of the Socratic maxim in the forefront, which says *well-being is based on virtuous action*.”<sup>36</sup>

For Gregory of Nazianzus, the Cynic satisfaction with little served as a role model of independence from property, modesty, simplicity, selflessness, and self-restraint that are an integral part of the virtue of poverty (εὐτέλεια), to which he points in the poem I, II, 10 *De virtute*. Apart from poverty, he attempts to introduce three other aspects of virtue to his nephew Nicobulus in his poem: ἐγκράτεια (moderation), ἀνδρεία (bravery) and σωφροσύνη (virtuousness). At the beginning of the poem, he recommends that the young man rise above the fleeting earthly goods and be independent<sup>37</sup> as much as possible. He enumerates everything he considers superfluous when pursuing God,<sup>38</sup> asking about the

34 Flachbartová (2014: p. 11).

35 Flachbartová (2011: p. 523).

36 Suvák (2011: pp. 545–546).

37 Demoen in Boeft & Hilhorst (1993: p. 248).

38 He is asking: what if you had the wealth of Gyges (v. 31), if you conquered Troy (v. 36), if you were respired Demosthenes spirit in law courts, if Lycurgus and Solon subdued to you by laws, if you had possessed the

benefit of the values preferred by people and pondering how one can find any trace of wisdom among the Greek and call them wise – those who are unaware of the existence of the one and only God. Gregory appreciates that some of the wise men are able to put virtue first. Among those who excelled in living a simple life, he mentions the Cynics first – Diogenes of Sinope and Crates of Thebes (I, II, 10, 218–258; PG 37, 696–698). He also praises the poverty of Cleanthes of Assos, a representative of the Old Stoic School (I, II, 10, 286; PG 37, 700). After all, Stoics were not too distant from the “morality exercises” associated with turning inward, to one’s inner self, wanting to carry out something akin to the “transformation of the vision of world and metamorphosis of the being”. They tried to seek and find moral principles, while they were not after a code of correct conduct but seeking a manner of being, in the strongest sense of the word.<sup>39</sup> Yet, St. Gregory placed a special emphasis on Diogenes and the fact that he himself decided to live a simple and modest life without any hope that it might bring him somewhere, unlike many Christians who opted for such life with clear purpose and calculation.

Gregory’s relationship to Cynic philosophy may be observed in his autobiographic poem II, I, 11 *De vita sua*, and also in several of his speeches.<sup>40</sup> In the end, the linking element between Gregory of Nazianzus and Cynics is the Cynic diatribe, whose traces are found and used in Christian sermons and Christian literature. The poem I, II, 28 *Adversus opum amantes*, is a quick-witted satirical sermon, leaning towards Cynicism (or more precisely, towards a Cynic-like lifestyle) also in content, where Gregory strongly decries the desire for wealth and property. A critical and strict preaching tone faithfully following a diatribe pattern is at times relieved by examples of damaging greed, which he finds in nature, mythology, zoology, and the Old Testament.<sup>41</sup>

These references take us, in a manner of speaking, back to what is essential – to be familiar with Greek philosophy and literature. Gregory’s poetry clearly outlines his attitude towards education and, at the same time, his Christian attitude. To illustrate this, I state a poetic letter in which St. Gregory, writing as if he were his nephew Nicobulus to his father (Nicobulus Sr.), asks for permission to leave home to study. The young man emphasizes that education is beneficial and noble. He praises Greek and Roman education (II, II, 4, 58–68; PG 37, 1510), highlights rhetoric, history, grammar, and logic. The whole letter is about words themselves, as well as about the endeavour to master them and control their use. The words and scholarship are the focus of a young man’s interest.<sup>42</sup> He is confident that if he were to receive the education in literature, he would also be able to devote to more sacred topics in the future:

Αὐτὰρ ἐπὶν δὴ ταῦτα διεξέλασσω νεότητι,  
πνεύματι θειοτέρῳ δάσω φρένας, ὅσσα κέλευσε

Homer’s muse and the tongue of Plato (v. 40–44)?

39 Hadot (1992: p. 2).

40 For more see Asmus in Billerbeck (1991: pp. 185–206).

41 Brodňanská (2010: p. 74).

42 Brodňanská (2012: p. 155).

καλὰ ἀνιχνεύων τε καὶ ἐς φάος αἰὲν ὀδεύων,  
καὶ στάθμην βίότιοι φέρων κινήμασι θείοις,  
ὧς ἀοσητήρα, συνέμπορον, ἡγεμονῆα  
Χριστὸν ἔχων, [...]⁴³

The response (again fictitious) of Nicobulus Sr. to his son becomes a tribute to words. He does not contradict the boy's desire to be educated, nor opposes his studies:

Μύθων δ' ἡγητήρσι πέλοις φάος, ἐν προνόμοις δὲ  
αὐτίκ' ἀριθμήσειαν ἐμὸν πᾶν, ἴσα τέκεσσι  
τίοντες. Κρητῆρ δὲ λόγων καὶ πυθμένος ἄχρῃς  
ζωρὸς διψαλέησιν ἀφύσσοιτο πρᾶπίδεσσι.⁴⁴

Τέκνον ἐμὸν, μύθους ποθέων, ποθέεις τὰ φέριστα  
καὐτὸς γὰρ μύθοις ἐπιτέρπομαι, οὓς περ ἔδωκε  
Χριστὸς ἄναξ μερόπεσσι, βίου φάος, οἷον ἀπ' ἄλλων  
δῶρον ἐπουρανίης ἐξ ἄντυγος. Οὐδὲ γὰρ αὐτὸς  
αἰρόμενος πολλῆσιν ἐπωνυμίησι, γέγηθεν  
ἄλλο τι πρόσθε Λόγοιο καλούμενος. [...]⁴⁵

Beside the praise of education, the abovementioned verses offer another dimension of understanding the *logos* lexeme. They emphasize that God reveals himself to people through words, while He himself is the Word. For St. Gregory of Nazianzus, it was the Divine *Logos* that gives authority to a human voice (φωνή) (*Or.* 32, 10). He asks in one of his speeches: *Which other creation than the one who has the gift of speech, would be given preference by the one who is Logos (the Word)?* (*Or.* 27, 5). These words hide to a certain extent the mystery of the Divine Love in which man also participates, because man has the capacity to express himself through words.

According to T. Špidlík, Gregory of Nazianzus used the term to express that man is *logikos* by nature and has a share in *Logos* from Origen.<sup>46</sup> While in Origen's texts, the term *logikos* is translated as *he who has the reason, the mind*, who is united with Christ,

43 II, II, 4, 77–82a (PG 37, 1511). “However, when I have disclosed all of this to the young, when I give myself / to the God's Spirit and voice, when I always seek the good news of the Bible / and likewise keep walking in pursuit of the Light, / when I firmly embrace the rules of living, as these were inspired by God, / Christ will become my protector, guide and leader on my path.” (Prosaic translation).

44 II, II, 5, 238–241 (PG 37, 1538–1539). “May every teacher of rhetoric trace the light in you, / may he rank my son to the top ones and / honours him as his own child. And may your soul yearning / for words drink the cup of science up.” (Prosaic translation).

45 II, II, 5, 1–6a (PG 37, 1521–152). “My son, longing for education surely is the best of desires. / Indeed, I am happy for the words that Christ, the light of life, has kindly bestowed / on mortal people, in the words came to us from heavens / the greatest of gifts for sure. Our Lord hasn't got more pleasure in other names, / which are many and used to call to him, / as when as the Word he is called.” (Prosaic translation).

46 *De principiis* II, 6, 3.

since He is the *idea of the Father*, in Gregory's theological speeches this term is translated as he who has *the gift of speech* and through this capacity is united with Christ, who is the Word of the Father.<sup>47</sup>

The capacity to express through the word was more than innate to Gregory of Nazianzus. He considered the gift of eloquence to be his mission. T. Špidlík labelled him a religious poet and theologian of poetry; Basil the Great gave him the title of "the mouth of Christ". St. Gregory considered his talent<sup>48</sup> to be what gave meaning to his life, but also something that could raise him up to the level of the life lived for God.<sup>49</sup> He understood that without knowing language, it is impossible to develop literature; without literature it is impossible to improve knowledge; and without knowledge it is impossible to develop true piety and perfect faith.<sup>50</sup> He considered Bible to be the highest authority. He elevated it above all pagan writings. Gregory regarded the books of Bible to be a voice (φωνή), while the Word to be its content. He pointed out that the language of the Scriptures, which he also denotes using the lexeme of *logos*, does not reveal a direct truth, but a semi-hidden form of truth, and the uncovering of this truth depends on the level of the recipient's knowledge:

Ἄθρει κἀνθάδε μοι λόγον ἄτροπον, ὥσπερ οἶω  
Ἔστι καὶ ἡμετέροισι διπλοῦς λόγος, ἔνδοθι σεπτοῦ  
πνεύματος, ὃς δ' ἄρ' ὑπερθε, χαράγματος ἡγαθέοιο  
ἄμφω, ὃ μὲν παύροισιν, ὃ δὲ πλεόνεσσι θεητός.  
οἶομαι, ὡς κεν ἔχωσι σοφοὶ πλέον, ἢ λαβόντες  
μόχθῳ κατίσχωσι. Τὸ δ' οὐ σχετὸν, ὅτι τάχιστον.  
Ἄλλ' ἔμπης μύθοισιν ἐμοῖς καὶ σῶμα φαεινόν,  
ψυχὴν ἀμφίς ἔχον θεοειδέα διπλόον εἶμα,  
πορφύρεον, μαλακοῖο διεκφανὲς ἀργυφέοιο,  
αἰσχος δ' οὐδὲν ἔπεστιν, ὃ μοι Θεὸν ἀμφικαλύπτει.<sup>51</sup>

Gregory of Nazianzus was not given the title "Theologian" for nothing. Although he earned this title of honour with his five theological speeches on the Holy Trinity (*Orr.* 27–31), the lines of his poetry give testimony to his "right view of God", too.<sup>52</sup> Ancient

47 Špidlík (2010: pp. 231–232).

48 Celebration of words and talent is seen for example in Gregory's poems II, I, 13; II, I, 32; II, I, 34; II, I, 38.

49 Špidlík (2010: pp. 222–223).

50 Brodňanská (2014: p. 27).

51 II, II, 7, 137–146 (PG 37, 1561–1562). "Behold, here is the proof, surely an irrefutable one: / our Scripture too has a twofold nature; inside one / full of Spirit, on the outside another. Sacredness embedded / in either; the inside one is revealed to a few, the outer one to many, though. / I think this is because the wise should learn more, / since it is not easy to uncover. The too easily gained, / is quick to be lost. So be aware our words, they indeed have / shining body and divine spirit as a double gown, / which glimmers fully with white and soft silver shine, / still touched by no disgrace, which hides God from me." (Prosaic translation).

52 For more see Špidlík (2010: pp. 221–245).

philosophers were fully aware of a deeper meaning of the word *theologos* in the Greek environment and used the word for men who wrote poems about the gods. For Plato, poets were theologians, “because they express divine realities via a symbol of the myth (mysterious words).”<sup>53</sup> For Gregory, theology was above all a synonym of homiletics, an interpretation of divine truths.<sup>54</sup> To be a theologian in Christian thought meant first and foremost to spread the Divinity of Christ. Still, it was not common to be called a “Theologian”. The Church only gave this title to “three exceptional men,<sup>55</sup> whose theology outweighed other Christian theologians and was outstanding for its charismatic nature.”<sup>56</sup> Even today, when tradition is discussed and *Theologos* is mentioned, we can be sure that Gregory of Nazianzus is the topic of the discussion. Almost symbolically, *logos*, the word, has become part of his name.

The golden age of patristic literature – the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. – provides us with many sources of great theological and literary significance. It is the period in which the fading pagan cultures of antiquity and successfully expanding Christianity met. This meeting is also visible in the works of St. Gregory of Nazianzus who greatly contributed to the promotion of scholarship as an important part of Christian life. He taught and explained fundamental questions of faith, explained the Scripture, commented on the issues of upbringing and schooling, admonished and praised, pondered over being, dealt with morality issues, and offered an insight to his inner world. He was gifted with eloquence, so words literally became his work tools. Gregory of Nazianzus regards words a gift, a cure or evidence of thought and a bridge between the pagan and Christian worlds. His verses explicitly proclaim the praise of words and the gift of eloquence as a means to express his relationship or approach to classical *paideia*. *Logoi* and *mythoi* embracing, *inter alia*, ancient erudition (i.e. not just the knowledge of philosophy and literature but also, for example, mythology) were for Gregory the solid cornerstones to build upon, which could also be used by young Christians able of critical thinking to choose only the good and beneficial from it. Thus, Gregory did not hesitate to draw on the ideas of ancient pagan philosophers. His poetry resonates with various philosophical motifs, ideas clearly inspired by Cynicism, and even objections against empty formal rhetoric. However, first and foremost, he never fails to accentuate that it is *the word* that gives authority to human words, the Word with a capital W, the divine *Logos*.

53 *Ibid.* (p. 218).

54 *Ibid.* (p. 220).

55 Besides Gregory of Nazianzus, the title is attributed to John the Evangelist and Symeon the New Theologian.

56 Zozulák (2005: pp. 90–91).

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