

*Christ in the Life and Teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus*. By ANDREW HOFER. Pp. xii + 270. (Oxford Early Christian Studies.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. ISBN 978 0 19 968194 5. N.p.

ONE of the most attractive features of Gregory's rhetoric is the way he involves his audience in the events of Christ's life, and one of the most noteworthy features is the prominence Gregory accords himself as a herald of those events and a mediator and model of that incorporation—both in his oratory and his poetry. Andrew Hofer adds to our understanding of Gregory by paying those distinctive features, and the connection between them, close, sustained, and careful attention.

The central focus of Hofer's work, then, is the ways in which Gregory's theology of deification through participation in Christ is worked out in the rhetorical practice of his pastoral ministry. While this focus is frequently apparent in Hofer's argument, he casts his contribution primarily as a corrective to received views of Gregory's *Christology*. Gregory's Christology has been found wanting by the history of dogma approach to the study of Christology, Hofer contends (p. 195). However, such an approach abstracts Gregory's Christology from its rhetorical context and so distorts it, not least on account of an over-concentration on the Theological Orations (Or. 27–31) and Theological Letters (Eps. 101–2). We understand Gregory's Christology much better, he argues, when we see its autobiographical character: the comprehensive and intense way in which Gregory interweaves his own life with that of Christ not only in accounts of his own life, but also in expositions of the incarnation, the mysteries of Christ, and the character of pastoral ministry (pp. 5, 195).

That interweaving is indeed a pervasive and striking characteristic of Gregory's work, but as a label, 'autobiographical Christology' does not quite seem to fit Hofer's subject matter. 'Christology' usefully denotes the study of something central to Hofer's subject matter, but does not seem to span well its breadth and complexity of component topics. 'Autobiographical' also seems a little misleading as a qualifier for Gregory's Christology. Gregory does indeed describe the salvific purpose and force of the incarnation in first person terms throughout his writings. In such passages, however, the particularities of the narrative of Gregory's own life do not appear to contribute to the content of his Christology. The particularities of Gregory's story *do* feature when he describes his life in Christomorphic terms, exemplifying the mimesis of Christ. But this highly effective rhetorical practice does not justify the title 'autobiographical Christology' either. We have then to see beyond Hofer's way of framing his argument to see the value of his contribution.

First, Hofer documents instances of the interweaving of Christ and Gregory in great detail and brings out their pastoral purpose. In his autobiographical writings, he notes, Gregory 'repeatedly evokes Christ in a way that blends Christ into the troubles, fears, and joys of his own life' so as to represent the baptismal mystery of incorporation into Christ and the formation of Christ in Gregory's life (pp. 56–7) and so inspire others to enter into this mystery – and the biblical narratives – for themselves. (Hofer is a little cursory in dismissing more suspicious construals of Gregory's purposes in literary constructions of his identity.)

In chapter 3, Hofer documents 'Gregory's distinctive approach of writing about Christ's life through himself' (p. 91). Nazianzen frames the incarnation 'as the mystery of the Word coming to mingle with human life, the life that Gregory knows to be his own.' Similarly in chapter 5, Hofer shows the pastoral purpose of Gregory's

interweaving of his own life with that of Christ in his festal orations, in order to incorporate his hearers along with him in the events of Christ's life and to exhort them to the imitation of Christ. Likewise in chapter 6, Hofer shows how Gregory, in extension of this logic, depicts various forms of Christian vocation in Christomorphic term, from pastoral office to love for the poor.

Second, Hofer helps us account for these phenomena. The quasi-sacramental function of this rhetorical practice should be seen in the context of Gregory's understanding of his oratory and poetry as Spirit-inspired and scripturally infused vessels for the mysteries and pedagogy of divine Word and his theology of deification, including his Christology.

This point brings us, third, to Hofer's contribution to the understanding of Gregory's Christology. His account of these rhetorical practices contextualises Gregory's Christology in its soteriological and pastoral contexts, and shows how they explicate and amplify the soteriological meaning of the incarnation. It also shows Gregory as offering something more sophisticated than the mere popularisation which G.L. Prestige attributed to him (*God in Patristic Thought*, 2nd edn., pp. 233–4).

The use of the label 'autobiographical Christology' suggests Hofer intends a stronger rebuttal of older criticisms of Gregory's Christology: that in some way the rhetorical interweaving of Christ and Gregory constitutes the distinctiveness of his Christology. This claim is not really sustained when Hofer turns to Christology proper when analysing Gregory's talk of the mixture of divine and human in Jesus Christ, which he identifies as an area of 'bewilderment for modern scholarship' (p. 4). That analysis, however, is valuable quite apart from the label applied to its conclusions.

Hofer gives a thorough, detailed account of philosophical uses of mixture language available to Gregory before describing Gregory's use of this language to

describe the world, and the human condition, and the incarnation as a unique deification that makes possible Gregory's own secondary and derivative deification. Gregory features in the last of these an Adamic figure created, then recreated, by Christ, but there is no real contribution of the particulars of Gregory's life to justify the claim that such language constitutes an 'autobiographical Christology' (p. 111). Hofer notes the distinctiveness (among pro-Nicenes) of Gregory's emphasis on the mediating role of Christ's human mind in the blending of divine and human in Christ, but again it is not clear to me that Gregory's framing of this point in terms of its efficacy for his own salvation makes this Christology 'autobiographical' (pp. 115–16). Hofer concludes, against several scholars, that Gregory's Christological use of mixture language is best appreciated in relation not simply to Stoic theories of mixture but a wider debate initiated by Aristotle to which they contributed. Moreover, his supple use of mixture terms does not fit any ancient philosophical model of mixture neatly. Neither do his doctrine of the immateriality of the soul or his emphasis, in Christology and anthropology, on the stronger constituent in a mixture prevailing over the weaker fit the Stoic theory Gregory is often held to refer to here. Hofer shows that Gregory uses such language consistently, but in order to emphasize the mysterious character of the mixtures of the human being, and of Jesus Christ, rather than to explain them.

This emphasis on Christ's unreserved solidarity with humanity, rhetorically crystallized in his salvific union with Gregory's whole humanity, is carried through in Hofer's analysis of Epistle 101 in chapter 6. Against Christopher Beeley (*Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 128–30), Hofer takes the letter to be as much anti-Apollinarian as against Diodore of Tarsus. His questionable inference (p. 129), however, that the

attempted Apollinarian take-over of Gregory's church bespeaks as significant a doctrinal disagreement with Gregory as Gregory had with the Antiochenes is undermined by Hofer's admission (p. 130) that the Apollinarians claimed common ground with Nazianzen. In any case, Hofer's overall argument takes Gregory's use of mixture language to emphasize the fullness of the Word's solidarity with humanity, a very similar conclusion to Beeley's claim that Gregory emphasizes the salvific unity of Christ.

While it may not justify talk of Gregory's 'autobiographical Christology', Hofer's erudite and careful analysis helpfully corrects an older optic which viewed pre-Chalcedonian Christologies through the lens of later dogmatic formulae, and evinces the spiritual theology animating Gregory's talk of Jesus Christ. As Hofer says (p. 7) Gregory does indeed offer more than his (nevertheless significant) contribution to the development of doctrine.

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