

OXFORD

GREGORY OF NYSSA
ancient and [post]modern

MORWENNA LUDLOW



GREGORY OF NYSSA, ANCIENT AND (POST)MODERN

This page intentionally left blank

Gregory of Nyssa,
Ancient and
(Post)modern

MORWENNA LUDLOW

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford ox2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in

Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press
in the UK and in certain other countries

Published in the United States
by Oxford University Press Inc., New York

© Morwenna Ludlow 2007

The moral rights of the author have been asserted
Database right Oxford University Press (maker)

First published 2007

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press,
or as expressly permitted by law, or under terms agreed with the appropriate
reprographics rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction
outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights Department,
Oxford University Press, at the address above

You must not circulate this book in any other binding or cover
and you must impose the same condition on any acquirer

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Typeset by SPI Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India
Printed in Great Britain
on acid-free paper by

Biddles Ltd., King's Lynn, Norfolk

ISBN 978-0-19-928076-6

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

To Piers

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

THIS book is the fruits of a research project which began in 2001 at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. I am most grateful to the Master and Fellows for electing me to the S. A. Cook Bye-Fellowship and for my productive and congenial stay in Cambridge. My thanks also to the Faculty of Divinity of the University of Cambridge, for making me welcome, and particularly to Janet Soskice, Thomas Graumann, and David Ford for their support and encouragement.

Midway through this project I joined the Faculty of Theology in the University of Oxford as a Lecturer in Patristics. I am grateful to the Leventis foundation which sponsored my post and to my colleagues, not only for appointing me but for their support, not least in terms of sabbatical leave. I am very grateful for the encouragement of my colleagues in the study of the early Church, particularly Mark Edwards and David Taylor, who have sat through more seminar papers on Gregory of Nyssa than anyone could reasonably expect in a lifetime. To John Barton and my other colleagues in the Oxford–Bonn research project I owe much gratitude for the opportunity to engage in profound interdisciplinary theological dialogue and to think about the issues involved in theological readings of the Church fathers.

The very final stages of this book were completed in my new post as Lecturer in Patristics at the University of Exeter: many thanks to all my new colleagues, who have made me feel so very welcome.

I would also like to thank those scholars and friends I have got to know through our common interest in Gregory of Nyssa in particular or the reading of the Christian past in general: Sarah Coakley, Scot Douglass, Mike Higton, Judith Kovacs, Johannes Zachhuber, and others with whom I have discussed my project. Some of these have read various parts of this work and I very much appreciate their input. I am particularly grateful to those who have looked on as I have examined their own readings of Gregory—I only hope that they feel that I have dealt fairly with them and that the results do not look as though I have been wielding a scalpel! This book is absolutely not intended as a hatchet-job on recent readings of Gregory and I want to record here my respect for all those who have delved into the work of this most elusive of writers with such attention and creativity. I am only too aware that I will not have done full justice to their work by focusing on their references to one particular fourth-century writer.

To those who have supported my research in various other practical ways, I also owe great thanks. I should mention particularly the exceptionally friendly and helpful staff of the Faculty Libraries in both Cambridge and Oxford. Thanks also to my research assistant David Newheiser. I am extremely grateful for the cheerful and supportive professionalism of my editors, Lucy Qureshi and Tom Perridge, and for the helpful comments of my readers. My final reader in particular provided most valuable advice about the overall structure and aim of the volume and in asking pertinent questions about some of the distinctions I make in my introduction and conclusions.

Although it is not conventional to do so, I would also like to thank the various carers of my two daughters, not least my parents and parents-in-law; in particular, though, I want to thank the staff of Balliol College Day Nursery: in a very literal sense I couldn't have written this book without you, but your unfailing care and good humour have meant that I've gone about it with a lighter heart.

My two daughters Lydia and Eva, *dulce ridentes, semper loquentes*, have been a distraction in more ways than one, but I wouldn't have it any other way. Thank you! And finally, to my husband Piers—this book is dedicated to you with much gratitude and love.

M. L.

December 2006

Contents

Introduction: The Elusive Gregory	1
-----------------------------------	---

PART I. THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

1. Historical and Conceptual Background	13
2. Philosophy and the Gospel	15
T. F. Torrance	15
Robert W. Jenson	37
3. The Social Doctrine of the Trinity	51
John Zizioulas	52
David Brown	68
4. Reading Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology	82

PART II. GOD BECAME HUMAN FOR OUR SALVATION

5. Christology	97
6. Salvation	108
7. Spirituality: Perpetual Progress in the Good	125
8. The Christian Life: Ethics	135
9. Reading Gregory of Nyssa on Christ, Salvation, and Human Transformation	151

PART III. SEX, GENDER, AND EMBODIMENT

10. Introduction: Feminism and the Fathers	163
11. Creation in the Image of God	166
12. What is Virginitly?	182

13. Macrina—in Life and in Letters	202
14. Reading Gregory on Sex, Gender, and Embodiment	220

PART IV. THEOLOGY

15. Apophatic Theology as ‘Reaching out to What Lies Ahead’	231
16. God and Being: Beings and Language	234
Scot Douglass	234
17. The Gift, Reciprocity, and the Word	247
John Milbank	247
18. Returning to the Trinity	261
19. Reading Gregory of Nyssa on Language, Theology, and the Language of Theology	268
20. Conclusions	279
Tradition, History, and Historiography	279
The Interpretation of Ambiguity: Christian Theology and Pedagogy	287
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	293
<i>Index</i>	307

Introduction: The Elusive Gregory

GREGORY OF NYSSA...

Bishop, Mystic, Theologian and Saint¹

An Origenist and speculative Trinitarian.²

the youngest of all the so-called Cappadocians, and simultaneously the most elusive and compelling. . . . a writer of astonishing spiritual insight, philosophical sharpness, and theological complexity, an ascetic guide to the exigencies of 'desire' who had no fear of the sexual act, and whose musings on the goals of 'contemplation' are shot through with reflections on gender transformation and fluidity.³

that most Platonic of Christian Old Testament exegetes . . .⁴

one of the most penetrating and original thinkers of Greek Christianity⁵

Gregory had the advantage of outliving the worst of the controversies of his time. He has, therefore, left us writings that are more concerned to articulate his faith positively than to refute the errors of others. . . . he was in part self-taught and . . . felt free to find his own way of expressing what he had learned.⁶

. . . an opponent of the last representatives of the Arian tradition and thus consolidated the achievement of Nicaea. As a speculative theologian he was certainly the greatest of the three, though inferior to the other two [Cappadocians] in rhetorical skill and organizing ability.⁷

Left at home wrapped in the skirts of his mother and sister, he is hesitant about his calling, ambivalent about married life, dreamy, impractical, and occasionally duplicitous. His role in the threesome . . . appears supplementary at best: another brother, another Gregory, a scribe who will complete Basil's tragically unfinished sentences. . . . Or is he not rather too much? Indeed, there is something excessive about Gregory of Nyssa: his

¹ L. Cohn-Sherbock (ed.), *Who's Who in Christianity*, 113.

² Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, iv. 116.

³ Sarah Coakley, "Persons" in the social doctrine of the trinity, 109–10.

⁴ Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, 17.

⁵ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 139.

⁶ Rowan Greer, *Christian Hope and the Christian Life*, 69.

⁷ Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 80.

astounding literary productivity, his highly cultivated style, his philosophic bent, and his panting desire for God all seem to overflow the bounds of sufficiency... he is not so much wimpy as wily.⁸

a subtle, sophisticated thinker, the most rigorously intellectual of all the early Christian thinkers... he chooses his words with care.⁹

One of the Cappadocian fathers, noted especially for his vigorous defense of the doctrine of the Trinity and the incarnation.¹⁰

Safety lies, as Gregory of Nyssa asserts, in the *not* doing of theology... The Cappadocians have... been rewritten as tools of absolute orthodoxy and been subsumed within an onto-theological triumphalism that their best thinking and greatest contributions seem to preclude.¹¹

Perhaps his most important contribution to Christian thought was (and is) his sophisticated development of Origen's view of Christian life as unceasing advance, 'straining forward to what lies ahead'.¹²

Basile de Césarée, chef de file et homme d'action, son ami Grégoire de Nazianze, humanist et parfait écrivain, son frère, Grégoire de Nyssa, philosophe hardi et mystique.¹³

Gregory of Nyssa never occupied in the minds of his contemporaries of the later Roman Empire, or indeed among the theologians of East and West, quite the same position as that occupied either by his brother, Basil, or by their common friend, Gregory Nazianzen... Is Gregory simply an interesting fossil from a theological cabinet, or has he something of interest to say to us now?¹⁴

WHY has Gregory of Nyssa proved so attractive to contemporary writers?¹⁵ One reason is that Gregory shares with the other Cappadocians a large corpus of writings, has a sophisticated literary style, and writes at a high level of theological and philosophical complexity. As much as, and perhaps even more so than Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa deals with a wide variety of themes, ranging from standard theological disputes on the Trinity and the nature of Christ, to other theological subjects such as creation, anthropology, and eschatology, practical issues such as alms-giving, and standard

⁸ Virginia Burrus, 'Begotten not made': *Conceiving Manhood*, 80–1.

⁹ Robert Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine*, 11.

¹⁰ Alistair McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 64.

¹¹ Scot Douglass, *Theology of the Gap*, 276.

¹² Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, 52.

¹³ Jean Daniélou, *Nouvelle histoire de l'église*, 305–6.

¹⁴ Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 129–30.

¹⁵ In this book, with some misgivings and fully aware of its ambiguity, I have chosen to use the word 'contemporary' to mean late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This is purely to avoid confusion between using 'modern' to mean 'recent' and to indicate theological or philosophical 'modernism' (as opposed to 'postmodernism').

late antique *topoi* such as fate and the death of infants. Gregory writes in a variety of genres: works exhorting his readers to an ascetical life; commentaries and sermons on various books of the Bible; letters to Christian and pagan friends; eulogies on members of the Imperial family. One can then, easily agree with Anthony Meredith's contention that Gregory 'compels us to ask the sort of questions about his literary character, his originality and self-consistency, which we ask of any great author'.¹⁶

However (as Meredith himself argues), there is more to it than that. In particular, Gregory's writings such as the *Life of Moses* and the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* have struck a chord in the past half-century when both academic study of and lay interest in mysticism or spirituality has greatly increased. Theologians and philosophers alike are fascinated by the tensions between faith and reason in his works. His writings on the Trinity are of interest not only to patristic scholars working on reactions to various forms of Arianism, but also to modern systematicians trying to develop the doctrine of the Trinity in a period when there has been a notable upsurge of interest in the renewal of trinitarian theology. The fact that Gregory's work contains much biblical exegesis and reflections on the nature of language appeals both to the current upsurge of interest in biblical interpretation among patristic scholars, but also to systematicians interested in hermeneutics and the philosophy of language. Historians in general, and feminist historians in particular, are driven to increasingly more complex answers to the question of to what degree Gregory was—and was not—a man of his time. With regard to many of these themes, the interests of patristic scholars and systematicians have coincided, and the importance of this is not to be underestimated. Contemporary theologians will not, on the whole, be driven to read an early theologian who is little discussed in the historical literature and for whom no good editions or translations are available.

However, there is still something more to Gregory's popularity than this, I believe, and it lies in the complexity of his theology and the ambiguity of his own persona. In the literature (in accounts by both theologians and historians) he comes across as one of the most multi-faceted Greek patristic writers: to some readers he is a mystic, to others a philosopher; some emphasize his reliance on Hellenistic intellectual culture, others his use of Scripture; he is the defender of the orthodox Nicene definition of the Trinity, but also of the controversial idea of universal salvation. Often he is seen as a moderate, even liberal, thinker whose contemplative style suggests that he rose above the more brutal aspects of the period's conflicts; yet some of his attacks on his opponents are harsh and intemperate and the little we know of his career gives the lie

¹⁶ Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa* (Routledge, London, 1999), 130.

to a picture of scholarly isolation. He wrote an essay apparently advocating virginity, in which he tells us he is married; in some treatises he appears to advise rising above earthly things, while in a letter to a friend he luxuriates in the cultivated beauty of a friend's estate.¹⁷

It is, I suggest, these contrasts or tensions—his very elusivity—which make Gregory an attractive source for both historians and theologians. At a very basic level, there is simply more to argue about than with Basil, for example. Furthermore, precisely because of these ambiguities, Gregory can be read in many different ways, which means that he appeals to theologians of surprisingly diverse views, from radical feminists to conservative evangelicals. This is the central reason why I have chosen him for this project. What do these amazingly different readings say about Gregory in particular? And what do they imply about contemporary theologians' attitudes to tradition, normativity and the authority of the 'fathers'?

One might ask why current patristic scholarship on Gregory might not be a sufficient and in fact a better resource for finding out more about him and his theology. Indeed, I am in no way intending to challenge the value of traditional patristic scholarship, with all the skills, historical, philological, and philosophical that it has brought to bear on this writer. Nor I am claiming that patristic scholarship is, by definition, non-theological (although much of it is not, and in that which is the boundary between historical and theological reflection is often difficult to perceive). One of the aims of my final Conclusion will be to outline a productive relationship between historical and explicitly theological readings of the Church fathers. Nevertheless, this book does begin with the assumption that the use of reception-history in both biblical and classical studies has shown the value of adding this technique to traditional patristic scholarship. The best reception-history does not merely list later readings (although that work needs to be done, clearly and precisely), but it analyses them with the hope that some such readings or some aspect of the readings as a group might illuminate facets of an author that other kinds of scholarship might miss. In this book I suggest not just that individual readings are of interest, but that revealing the sheer variety of interpretations of Gregory is in itself instructive: in particular it is something which patristic scholars sometimes either miss, or—crucially—view as a problem to be overcome in the quest for a definitive meaning. One of the issues I will raise in my Conclusion is whether this search for a single meaning actually undermines that concern

¹⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *Letter 20*. I have attempted to give a brief indication of the sort of variety of opinions one can find, by including a selection of 'thumbnail sketches' of Gregory on the pages preceding this introduction. None is, of course, the final word that any author has to say about Gregory; but the diversity gives some idea of the different perspectives from which Gregory is approached.

for authorial intention, which is also a mark of much patristic scholarship: could it not be the case that some late antique Christian authors intended their texts to have ambiguous or multiple meanings? Good reception-history also raises questions about readership that some other scholarship does not: in particular, it considers the differences between academic and non-academic readers and analyses what happens when, for example, a poet is interpreted by another poet. A formative part of my training as a classicist was reading poetic translations of, for example, Horace by Alexander Pope and Propertius by Ezra Pound. I now want to ask: what happens if we give Gregory up to a full range of readers, indeed to the sort of readers for which his work was originally intended: theologians, priests, men and women of faith, interested sceptics? This will broaden my survey not only beyond the interpretations of patristic scholars, but also beyond those of systematic theologians, whose concern for theological authority often limits their readings in one way or another. I hope that this broadening of perspective will reveal something about the 'elusive' Gregory—or at least something about the way he writes.

However, the second range of questions I want to ask in this book are to do not with Gregory of Nyssa but with his recent readers. What does the way they read him say, for example, about their conception of tradition in Christian theology? In order to answer this last question, I have deliberately chosen not to investigate what theologians *say about* the concept of tradition; rather I have decided to focus on their actual *use of* tradition. By observing the reading and rereading of Gregory I hope to be able to say something about tradition 'in action', as it were, freed from what theologians may feel compelled to say about it from confessional or theological loyalty, and freed from the sometimes unhelpful layers of theory, which through a desire to systematize often fail to encapsulate the variety of ways in which tradition is used.

Likewise, although what I have to say clearly has implications for theories about the development of doctrine, I am not intending in this study to develop my own such theory.¹⁸ First, whilst I am indeed interested in the way in which early church doctrine has been appropriated by recent writers, doctrine as such is not my only concern. I am also interested in the way in which contemporary theology has received and responded to other more general theological and philosophical ideas from late antiquity, not least ideas about the method of doing and writing theology. This takes my interest beyond the bounds of theories of the development of doctrine as usually conceived.¹⁹ Secondly,

¹⁸ In my conclusions, I suggest three patterns of Christian history; but this is a description of the historiographical assumptions underlying many readings of the early Church fathers, not a proposal attempting to analyse how doctrine did in fact develop.

¹⁹ Thanks are due to my anonymous reader for drawing my attention more carefully to this distinction.

a significant problem with such theories is that discussion often centres on criteria for what counts as a genuine or authentic development.²⁰ For example, debate frequently focuses on questions of continuity: is there continuity in a particular doctrinal development, or is there not? in what does the continuity lie? what is the nature of doctrinal change (e.g. logical explication, organic growth, or reinterpretation)? Furthermore, theories of the development of doctrine tend to look at the most recent expressions of doctrine mainly as if they are at the end of a chain of development. This concept of doctrinal development as temporal sequence tends to imply that each age and each theologian is influenced almost exclusively by the one before. Now, whilst it is practically impossible for any theologian *not* to be influenced by his or her immediate context and the theologians of the immediately preceding generations, I am more interested in the way in which much theological writing ‘loops back’ to engage with more distant periods of the Christian past. Indeed, some of the writing I will examine does so precisely with the motive of *rejecting* the theology of its immediate predecessors.²¹

It has long been accepted that each generation returns to Scripture with eyes conditioned by its own age (and by many other readings of Scripture in the interim); my aim is to ask to what extent a similar dynamic operates in readings of the Church fathers. This, of course, introduces all those questions which are vital to biblical hermeneutics: to what extent does history divide us from the fathers? Can we read Gregory with anything but modern or postmodern eyes? But there is the additional question of whether such problems are more acute with such self-consciously philosophical and literary texts as Gregory’s than they are with the apparently more ‘simple’ or ‘direct’ text of a gospel. Are Gregory’s works ripe for ‘demythologization’? And if not, how can their message be reappropriated today?

Such questions have been dealt with before. However, my aim here is to examine them through a detailed study of one particular theologian who has inspired an unusually wide variety of readings. Consequently, my method is grounded on a substantial amount of empirical, rather than theoretical, study. Thus Parts I–IV contain detailed studies of contemporary theology, including numerous quotations. This approach will perhaps seem unusual, but detailed textual analysis of how current authors, quote, read, and comment on Gregory of Nyssa is helpful in order to demonstrate with clarity exactly *how* Gregory is being used. Nothing but a detailed account will demonstrate, for example,

²⁰ For this kind of criticism, see e.g. Kathryn Tanner, ‘Postmodern challenges to “Tradition”’, in *Louvain Studies*, 28 (2003), 175–93.

²¹ For example, feminist theologians, or readings of Gregory’s doctrine of the Trinity which are intended to oppose either Augustinian models, or—more recently—other readings of Gregory.

how a systematic analysis of Gregory's doctrine of the Trinity can suddenly transmute into the author's own constructive theology; nothing else can demonstrate cases where Gregory is quoted selectively or idiosyncratically; nothing but a literary examination can demonstrate how a reader's opinion of Gregory can be subtly influenced by a contemporary theologian's careful use of a few adjectives to describe Gregory or his theology.

I have of course been selective in my choice of contemporary theologians. An exhaustive account of readings of Gregory of Nyssa in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries would be very much longer. In particular, I have chosen to focus on anglophone readings of Gregory. This is emphatically not because I wish to downplay the influence of continental European theologians: the influence of figures such as Daniélou and Balthasar on theological readings of Gregory has been immense. However, there is increasing diversity between the theological cultures of the anglophone world and those of France, Germany, Italy, Greece, and the other European countries in which the study of Gregory is increasingly common: to have compared readings of Gregory from all these sources would have necessitated a more radical and complex comparison of attitudes to theology, history, and tradition in all the relevant contexts. This would be a valuable study, but is beyond the bounds of my current project. I have chosen to focus on readings of Gregory of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries because there have been important developments in this period which have altered the way in which patristics is studied and in the way in which theologians view tradition—especially the concept of the 'eastern' and the 'western' traditions. Although I occasionally make reference to works before 1950, most are later, and the vast majority have been published in the last twenty or thirty years. I have also been selective among contemporary readers of Gregory of Nyssa. In Parts I (on the Trinity) and IV (on theology and hermeneutics) I have been very selective indeed in order to present a clear view of the principal divergences of interpretation which have emerged over the past decades (and also partly to do justice to the complexity of the thought of both Gregory and his commentators). In Parts II (on Christology and Gregory's understanding of salvation) and III (on anthropology), I have covered a broader ground in order to indicate what I see as some important lines of development in the interpretation of Gregory.

Nevertheless, despite the empirical foundation to my analysis and despite the fact that most of the following text is taken up by a description of various uses of Gregory of Nyssa, this is not just a descriptive reception-history. I have, for example, offered my own critique of many readings, commenting on where they appear to veer too widely from Gregory's texts and using recent patristic scholarship as a comparison. My method here lies between two poles: one, the assumption that modern readings of Gregory have nothing to add to patristic

scholarship; two, that patristic scholarship is invalidated by developments in hermeneutical theory (such as reader-response theories). Rejecting both claims, I am assuming that there are limits to what Gregory's text can plausibly mean: limits which can be ascertained through the scholarly understanding of his language, and his social, political, and cultural context. The question of whether these limits necessarily constrain further creative interpretation of his writings will be discussed further in my final conclusions. For the time being, my point is to emphasize that although I do on occasion use patristic scholarship in a way which appears to 'correct' other interpretations, this book is *not* an attempt to show that these readers are always getting it wrong, or that they are always out of date. Although this sometimes happens, it is more often the case that they opt for one of several plausible readings: I am interested in the reasons why they make the choices they do. While patristic scholars habitually refer to textual and contextual evidence for choosing one interpretation over another, other kinds of reading refer to a variety of reasons: intellectual cogency, conformity with Scripture and/or the rest of Christian tradition, confessional loyalties, political convictions, and so on. I am interested in how these reasons produce a huge variety of new interpretations of Gregory, especially in systematic theology and philosophy of religion; they might also cause one to reflect on whether they also have a subtle (but usually covert) influence on patristic scholarship. (Indeed, although the primary focus of this book is on modern theological and philosophical readings of Gregory, it is assuming that the dividing-line between historical and theological/philosophical readings is not clear, and that much classic patristic scholarship is highly influenced by various theological and philosophical assumptions, albeit tacitly. Harnack's concept of the Hellenization of the gospel is a good case in point, and in fact its theological edge is revealed rather more clearly when one reads recent Protestant readings of Gregory through the eyes of Harnack, than when one reads Harnack's own scholarship.)

While each part begins with setting out various readings of Gregory, the implications of these readings for understanding both Gregory of Nyssa himself and current conceptions of Christian history and the idea of tradition are dealt with in the final chapters of Parts I–IV respectively. First, the variety of readings will be explained as being due partly to Gregory's readers' different philosophical and theological schools (whilst avoiding the kind of reductive explanation that, for example, X claims x , because his is an 'existentialist' reading of Gregory, and Y claims y , because hers is a 'feminist' reading). In connection with this issue, the conclusions to each part will point out cases where certain 'traditions' or 'habits' of reading Gregory have been established (some of which cross confessional and theological boundaries in surprising ways). They will also comment on the degree to which changes in the way in

which Gregory is read track developments in theology and related disciplines in recent decades.

Secondly, I am also interested in whether the very diverse interpretations of Gregory arise also out of different attitudes to how the fathers should be read. Is it the case, for example, that different interpretations of his doctrine of the Trinity emerge because some writers take his work as illustrative (a useful or telling model) and others as normative (an authoritative reading of the Nicene definition)? Is it used merely in a historical manner to explain how Christian doctrine has got where it is now? Is Gregory's doctrine proposed as a view to which one should revert, or an example of an outdated system which should now be corrected? Is it set in contrast with the doctrine of another theologian in the past in an analysis which suggests that one view is more truthful than the other? Or is the author happy to accept that two contrasting interpretations of a Christian doctrine can be truth-bearing (is it more a question of a difference of perspective than of substance)? Or, finally, is there a more radical attempt to de-emphasize the differences between various interpretations of a doctrine, and consequently to stress the fundamental homogeneity of Christian doctrine? In which case, why revert to a fourth-century example at all? Implicated with all these questions are the issues of how the various authors construct Christian history in their writing and how they address the issue of how to deal with ancient texts, particularly with regard to their context and their philosophical influences.

Finally, however, the sheer variety of readings of Gregory dealt with in this volume raises the question of whether this is due to the character of Gregory's writing in itself. Is it the case that differences in interpretation cannot be explained just in terms of different theological and philosophical influences, or differences of opinion as to how Gregory should be treated as a source? Or could it be that the differences reflect ambiguities inherent in the texts themselves?

The structure of the book as a whole can be seen as covering a development in the reading of Gregory, with the first part discussing some of the most conventional or 'traditional' interpretations. This is perhaps not surprising, since it is most frequently in the context of discussions of the doctrine of the Trinity that Gregory's theology has been invoked as an authoritative source. In Part II, some readings are also concerned with doctrinal norms and others use him as a counter-example to authoritative tradition; still others use him as a source for a variety of reasons other than a simple appeal to authority. As one might expect, the feminist readings in Part III tend to eschew the notion of the tradition of the Church as normative in itself: this part deals both with critiques of his work from those who consider him to be a representative of early Church patriarchy and defences of Gregory which use his writings