

Theological Methods in Gregory Nazianzen's five Theological Orations

von Radomir Novotný, Zürich

1. Introduction

Gregory Nazianzen composed his five Theological Orations (*STO*) at an important moment both in the Church's and his own life, during his short and turbulent stay in Constantinople around 380.¹ The significance of these orations can be seen by the fact that they are the main reason why Gregory is the only Church Father designated as „the Theologian“ by the Orthodox Church,² and by their widespread reception in the Church throughout its history, born witness to by about 1200 Greek manuscripts, translations into Latin³, Armenian (5th cent.), Syriac, Georgian, Arabic, Slavonic, Coptic and Ethiopian, and many printed versions and commentaries⁴.

But why were these orations so influential and so highly revered? Various reasons can be found for this. Here, we intend to trace the theological method employed by Gregory in order to find its controlling aspect which is likely to shed light on the significance of his theological enterprise. By „theological method“ we mean *the way in which* Gregory does what he does in the *STO*. The orations determine the understanding of „theological“ here. Therefore, „theological“ does not only refer to what Gregory meant by *θεολογία*, i.e. the knowledge of God as he is in himself, apart from creation, but also to Gregory's notion of *οἰκονομία*, God's saving involvement in the history of the world with the Incarnation at its climax.⁵ This enables us to look at Gregory's method from three perspectives: *Hermeneutics* (Gregory's use of Scripture and his critique of his opponents' hermeneutics), *Systematic method* (consistency and logical progression of thought, place of reason), and *Rhetoric* (an important aspect of Gregory's education and thought). Although this threefold approach does not claim to be exhaustive, it does cover major areas of Gregory's methodology.

¹ With „five Theological Orations“ we adopt the common expression for the orations 27-31 in the Maurist edition of Gregory's orations, reproduced in Migne's *Patrologiae graecae* 36. P. Gállay, Introduction, Première Partie: Les «Discours Théologiques» de Grégoire de Nazianze, in: *Grégoire de Nazianze Discours 27-31* (Sources Chrétiennes N. 250), Introduction, translation and notes by P. Gállay (with the collaboration of M. Jourjon), Paris 1978, p. 7.

² He received this title of honour already at the Council of Chalcedon. *Gregor von Nazianz, Orationes Theologicae; Theologische Reden*, (Fontes Christiani, Bd. 22) Translation and introduction by H. J. Sieben, Freiburg i. B. 1996, p. 8, n. 4.

³ E.g. Rufinus' 4th century translation.

⁴ H. J. Sieben, *Gregor von Nazianz*, pp. 56-60.

⁵ Cf. H. J. Sieben, *Gregor von Nazianz*, p. 210, n. 56; D. F. Winslow, Christology and Exegesis in the Cappadocians, *Church History* 40 (1971) 394.

This broad approach has been deliberately chosen, because all too often theologians focus exclusively on the systematic and hermeneutic aspects of Gregory's thought and classical scholars confine themselves to a study of his poetry and rhetoric. To split Gregory's approach into „theological“ and „literary“ aspects is likely to distort our understanding of his thought.⁶

The text of the five Theological Orations

We base our inquiry on the Greek text edited by Gallay and Jourjon in the *Sources Chrétiennes* 250.⁷ Text-critical questions lie outside the scope of this article and we will therefore rely on the decisions made by Gallay.

References to the *5TO* will be in the form „Or.x.y“, where *x* stands for the number of the oration according to the Maurist edition (i.e. 27 to 31), and *y* represents a specific section. The numbering of the sections adopted here is that of the *Sources Chrétiennes* 250-text. The same division can be found in Sieben's, Barbel's, Gallay's and Wickham's translation. (The section-division of the *Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers*-translation does not always correspond to that of *Sources Chrétiennes* 250.)⁸

Authenticity

The authenticity of the *5TO* has been widely accepted. Only two scholars have raised pessimistic voices: Lardiero is sceptical regarding their authenticity⁹, and Weijenborg regards Or. 29-31 as works of Evagrius Ponticus¹⁰. They (especially Weijenborg) have been successfully refuted by Norris.¹¹ Apart from the weakness of Weijenborg's arguments the major reason in favour of authenticity is the rhetorical subtlety and power of the *5TO*, which makes it particularly difficult to attribute them to any other theologian.¹²

⁶ A rare exception is the classical scholar Demoen whose investigation into Gregory's rhetoric led him to an awareness of the close relationship between rhetoric and exegetical/theological typology in Gregory. K. Demoen, *Pagan and Biblical Exempla in Gregory Nazianzen: A Study in Rhetoric and Hermeneutics*, (Corpus Christianorum; Lingua Patrum II), Turnhout 1996, p. 7f.

⁷ P. Gallay, Grégoire. Cf. footnote 1. This text is based exclusively on the ten oldest manuscripts.

⁸ Sieben's translation is more direct and accurate than that in the *NPNF* and more subtle and closer to the text than Wickham's/Williams' translation in F. W. Norris, *Faith gives Fullness to Reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of Gregory Nazianzen*. Introduction and commentary by F. W. Norris, Translation by L. Wickham and F. Williams, Leiden 1991. A further reason for its preference here is the quantity and quality of notes on the translation. There is furthermore a translation by Barbel based on the *PG*-text which attempts to be close to the Greek: *Gregor von Nazianz, Die fünf theologischen Reden, Text und Übersetzung mit Einleitung und Kommentar von J. Barbel*, Düsseldorf 1963.

⁹ C. Lardiero, *A Comparative Analysis of Evagrian and Nazianzen Trinitarian Theology*, presented in a seminar on Gregory Nazianzen, taught by Thomas Halton at The Catholic University of America, Winter Semester, 1981. Cf. F. W. Norris, *The Authenticity of Gregory Nazianzen's five Theological Orations*, *Vigiliae Christianae* 39 (1985) 338-339.

¹⁰ R. Weijenborg, *Les cinq Discours théologiques, attribués à Grégoire de Nazianze, en partie œuvre de Maxime Héron le Cynique, alias Évagre le Pontique d'antioche*, *Antonianum* 48 (1973) 476-507.

¹¹ F. W. Norris, *Authenticity*, pp. 331-339.

¹² F. W. Norris, *ibid.*, p. 338.

Unity and order¹³

There are three main reasons (external and internal) why the *5TO* can be regarded as a literary unity. First, they can be found grouped together in many manuscripts. Often, titles expressing this unity were added. There are two groups of manuscripts: the first, group N, contains manuscripts in which the orations can be found in the order 27-31; in the second, group M, Or. 28 is sometimes found after Or. 30, sometimes after Or. 31, and sometimes is omitted altogether.¹⁴ Although the order, particularly the position of Or. 28, remains obscure, the unity of the orations is supported by the manuscript tradition.

Second, Gregory himself intended to present the *5TO* as a literary unity: the beginning of a specific oration usually refers to the oration's direct predecessor. The only exception is Or. 29, which refers to Or. 27 without explicit reference to Or. 28.¹⁵ These links are editorial remarks which would not have been used in a speech, but which were added prior to publication by Gregory as indications for unity and sequence. However, Gregory also provides a further connection which cannot be regarded as a later addition and which strengthens the case for unity: in Or. 29.13 he quotes Prov. 8:25 and suggests that he will inquire into its meaning later on. This he does in Or. 30.2.¹⁶ The order suggested by all these connections seems to be 27-31¹⁷.

Third, internal evidence, i.e. the development of thought in the *5TO*, supports literary unity and also the view that Gregory intended the order 27-31 for publication. Or. 27 and 28 have preparatory character: Or. 27 poses the question: Who can pursue theology? And Or. 28 follows with theoretical considerations regarding the limits of the knowledge of God for those who fulfil the requirements of Or. 27. Or. 29-31 then discuss the Son and the Holy Spirit, the two aspects of the doctrine of God which needed clarification at this point of time in the history of dogma (dispute with the Arians/Eunomians and the Pneumatomachians). There are thus sufficient reasons to regard Or. 27-31 as a literary unit in that particular order. We will adhere to this order for the analysis of Gregory's hermeneutical and systematic method in the following two sections.

¹³ Cf. H. J. Sieben, *Gregor von Nazianz*, pp. 50-55.

¹⁴ P. Gallay, *Grégoire*, p. 23.

¹⁵ Here, we cannot enter into the arguments regarding the position of Or. 28. However, neither Gallay nor Sieben seem to have noticed that it was logical for Gregory to refer to Or. 27 in Or. 29, because in Or. 29 he intends to refute his opponents which he identified in Or. 27. Gregory already showed by its link to Or. 27 that Or. 28 is part of the collection and the successor of Or. 27. He does, therefore, not need to refer in Or. 29 „mechanically“ to its direct predecessor, but is free to make a more meaningful connection.

¹⁶ Cf. H. J. Sieben, *Gregor von Nazianz*, p. 196, n. 43.

¹⁷ Regarding the order, Gallay is even more confident at this point: „... tout le groupe N donne les cinq discours dans l'ordre 27, 28, 29, 30, 31; c'est certainement la disposition voulue par l'auteur au moment de la publication, étant donné le soin qu'il a pris de rattacher le Discours 28 au Discours 27“. P. Gallay, *Grégoire*, p. 23.

2. Hermeneutics

For Gregory, exegesis was no end in itself. It usually served his polemic or dogmatic purposes, as can be seen by the fact that there is only one exegetical homily among his extant works.¹⁸

We will limit our hermeneutical study here to the detection of Gregory's hermeneutics in his use of Scripture in the *5TO* and will not attempt to assess the place of his exegesis, which can be both typological and allegorical,¹⁹ in relation to Alexandrian and Antiochene exegesis as this question is not directly related to our purpose here.²⁰

Gregory's hermeneutical principle is characterised by a strong adherence to the Nicene cause. The Trinity and Christology are the controlling aspects of his hermeneutics. Gregory tries to tackle his opponents' scriptural objections to the Son's deity with his „two natures“ exegesis, a principle which goes back to Athanasius: to assign specific phrases or terms to the appropriate nature (human/divine).²¹ This kind of exegesis can e.g. be found in Or. 30.15, where the Son's lack of knowledge is ascribed to his humanity, in Or. 30.16, where his obedience, his sacrifice and suffering are all attributed to the nature capable of suffering, i.e. the human nature, and particularly in Or. 30.16-21, where Gregory assigns the scriptural titles of the Son to the appropriate nature - divine or human. He interprets Scripture from this perspective, at times reads this perspective into Scripture and shows how his approach is supported by Scripture's „standard of teaching“.²²

For Gregory, Scripture points beyond itself to an ultimate and ineffable reality, God. He characterises his approach to Scripture by stating that he considers „meanings rather than words“, i.e. „if I hit upon something meant, though not mentioned, or not stated in clear terms, by Scripture, ... I should give expression to the meaning“.²³ This is also reflected in his strong criticism of those who interpret Scripture too literally and who do not attempt to take into account the subtleties of language, i.e. that expressions can be used in various ways depending on the context.²⁴ This difference between Gregory's and Eunomius' use of Scripture is characteristic of the fourth century. Hanson rightly characterises Arian exegesis as „wooden and unimaginative“²⁵ and that of the pro-Nicenes as an attempt „to read their doctrine into the Bible by hook or by crook“.²⁶ Scripture is sometimes dissected by Gregory and made to fit into categories, for which it was not written. And Gregory's accusation of his opponents,

¹⁸ K. Demoen, *Pagan and Biblical Exempla*, p. 252.

¹⁹ Gregory's reference to Jacob in Or. 28.18 employs both kinds of exegesis in one section. K. Demoen, *Pagan and Biblical Exempla*, p. 277.

²⁰ For a thorough study of Alexandrian, Antiochian and Gregory's exegesis, cf. K. Demoen, *Pagan and Biblical Exempla*, pp. 237-288.

²¹ H. J. Sieben, *Gregor von Nazianz*, p. 208, n. 54.

²² Cf. J. Pelikan, *The 'Spiritual Sense' of Scripture: The Exegetical Basis for St. Basil's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, in: J. P. Fedwick (ed.) *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*, Toronto 1981, p. 340.

²³ Or. 31.24. F. W. Norris, *Faith*, p. 292.

²⁴ Gregory's difficulty with people who interpret Scripture too literally can e.g. be seen in Or. 31.3: „Yes, some people, very eager to defend the letter, are angry with us for introducing a God, the Holy Spirit, who is a stranger and an intruder. ... They must recognise clearly that their love for the letter is a cloak for irreligion, ...“ F. W. Norris, *Faith*, p. 279.

²⁵ R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, Edinburgh 1988, p. 848.

²⁶ *ibid.*

that they ignore the subtlety of scriptural language, can equally be applied to his instances of *eisegesis*. This happens especially when Gregory defends his two-natures-Christology.

Gregory's scriptural realism, i.e. his understanding that language - and therefore necessarily Scripture - is not capable of fully expressing the ultimate reality to which it points, can also be detected in his preference for OT expressions of God, particularly the „he who is“, because it expresses God's being without diminishing his incomprehensibility. Gregory is realistic in regard to our limited cognitive and linguistic capabilities.

There is certainly no hint of Marcionitism in Gregory, who is very fond of the OT. He regards Scripture as „a vast continuous drama illustrating over and over the same basic pattern of meaning“²⁷. Sometimes one wonders whether he emphasises the continuity of OT and NT too strongly, particularly in regard to his understanding of God's incomprehensibility which is in contrast to e.g. the fourth Gospel, where Jesus is depicted as the one in whom the Father can be seen. However, one has to bear in mind that Gregory attempts to refute Eunomius who regarded the being of God, the *ἀγεννησία*, as fully comprehensible. Neither Gregory's nor the NT's understanding of God is compatible with that of Eunomius. The reason for Gregory's emphasis on „incomprehensibility“, rather than on an attempt at explaining how Eunomius' understanding differs from the scriptural, may lie in his fear to make concessions to Eunomius.

Gregory's insistence on Trinitarian hermeneutics, refined by his metaphysical categories such as Christ's divine and human nature, and rounded off by an anthropological (i.e. taking human limitations and dependence into account) as well as scriptural (i.e. Scripture points to ultimate reality) realism is grounded in his understanding of *οἰκονομία* and *θέωσις*. God the Son became man in order that we might become God.²⁸ God the Holy Spirit deifies us and brings us into communion with the ineffable God.²⁹ Generally, Gregory's hermeneutical method is consistent in providing an interpretative framework which insists on a particular understanding of God which guarantees that we can have communion with and knowledge of God, while maintaining a particular understanding of humanity which has to rely on God's action in order to be able to enjoy the benefits of this communion.

3. Systematic method

In the *5TO* Gregory presents us with an astonishingly exhaustive treatment of questions regarding systematic method which includes amongst others limitations of reason, pre-conditions for theologians and their audience, and the close relationship between theology, soteriology and worship (Or. 30.21). It is not only this extensive spectrum of aspects which is so remarkable but also, and even more so, the organic

²⁷ R. R. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Rhetor and Philosopher*, Oxford 1969, p. 102.

²⁸ Cf. for example Or. 29.19. This is, according to Sieben, basically Athanasius' argumentation in *Ar.* 1.39; 2.70 (PG 26,93A/296B). H. J. Sieben, *Gregor von Nazianz*, p. 280, n. 15.

²⁹ Or. 31.4. Cf. D. F. Winslow, *Christology*, p. 393. A similar understanding of the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work and the corresponding relation between *θεολογία* and *οἰκονομία* can also be found in Basil's *On the Holy Spirit*. Cf. J. Pelikan, *Spiritual Sense*, p. 356f.

unity which can be detected underneath the surface. A unity not limited to aspects of thought, but one which encompasses both reflection and life.

Gregory's realism is expressed in his understanding of humanity, which is limited in its linguistic, cognitive and rational capacities (Or. 28.21). These limitations apply to the knowledge and articulation of both the visible and the invisible world (Or. 28.5). He can therefore conclude that God is in his nature incognoscible (e.g. in Or. 31.8). Gregory not only criticises his opponents explicitly for their claim to know God's nature, but also implicitly because they display a naive and too optimistic understanding of human nature, not taking into account its all too obvious intellectual limitations.³⁰ Nevertheless, although we cannot know God's nature, God was and continues to be salvifically involved in the world and can be experienced as such. In order to reveal himself God has to prepare humanity. This he does by a progressive revelation in which the Father is recognised first (OT), then the Son (NT), and finally the Holy Spirit (cf. Or. 31.26). However, in contrast to Gregory's theory it is worth remembering that the question regarding the Spirit was settled within decades in the fourth century (leaving the *filioque*-issue aside, of course), whereas Christological controversies went on beyond the seventh century (Monothelist and Monergist controversies).³¹ Gregory might have modified his theory had he known that Christological matters were not as clear as he had thought.

To investigate who God is, is for Gregory the prerogative of those who have the „Spirit of God“ (*νοῦς Θεοῦ*) and who have progressed in their vision of God.³² According to Gregory, vision, *θεωρία*, requires purity of heart (cf. Mt 5:8) and includes *paideia*³³ and contemplation³⁴. However, even those who fulfil these requirements have to acknowledge that they attempt to gain knowledge by employing a small tool, human wisdom, compared to the size of the object. And the articulation of this knowledge is particularly difficult due to God's perfection. Gregory not only recognises the limits of our rational inquiry but also the linguistic difficulties to express reality accurately.³⁵

This revelation-process involves people with an increased responsibility, who could perhaps be called „mediators“ of revelation and „imitators“ of God (both aspects are intrinsically connected in Gregory): e.g. Moses in the OT (cf. particularly Or. 28.2,3), Peter in the NT and the theologians in the church since the apostles. These people are required to lead lives advanced in purification which is epistemologically necessary in order that they are able to fulfil (and survive, cf. Or. 28.2) their visionary role. Furthermore, they have to imitate God by communicating in a way which considers the audience's preparation, because God also revealed himself in an appropriate way at the right time (OT, NT and now).

For Gregory, reason is functional. It is the means by which knowledge can be gained, assessed, ordered and coherently integrated into a „system“ of thought. It is also a useful tool for finding logical errors in opponents' views and can thus be em-

³⁰ Cf. F. W. Norris, Faith, p. 157.

³¹ J. Pelikan, Spiritual Sense, p. 337.

³² Or. 28.9. H. J. Sieben, Gregor von Nazianz, p. 110.

³³ I.e. philosophy, rhetoric and theology. Cf. F. W. Norris, Faith, pp. 17-39.

³⁴ F. W. Norris, Faith, p. 115; H. J. Sieben, Gregor von Nazianz, p. 72, n. 23.

³⁵ Or. 28.21.

ployed as a weapon. And it can serve as a means to establish its own limitations, as Gregory's illustrations from the visible world show, and the limitations of the theological endeavour, as Gregory expresses in Or. 27.5:

*We must not be like fiery, unruly horses, throwing Reason our rider and spitting out the bit of Discretion which so usefully restrains us, and running wide of the turning post. Let us conduct our debates within our frontiers, and not be carried away to Egypt or dragged off to Assyria.*³⁶

In theology, reason can only operate correctly when it is grounded in faith, which gives it the required direction (Or. 29.21).

At the heart of Gregory's systematic method is communion with the triune God, a communion of worship established by baptism in the triune name and signified by the Spirit's deifying activity (Or. 31.28). This is the core of the faith which gives fullness to reason. Therefore, for Gregory theology is, in McGuckin's words, „ultimately not a speculative *theoria* that produces knowledge from deduction, rather a personal communion with God which initiates by intimation or sanctification“³⁷.

4. Rhetoric

Gregory is regarded by Kennedy as the „most important figure in the synthesis of Greek rhetoric and Christianity“ and „as the greatest Greek orator since Demosthenes“³⁸. To view the description of the complex relationship of rhetoric and Christianity in Gregory as a „synthesis“ could be considered slightly misleading and inaccurate.³⁹ However, Gregory's importance is rightly emphasised by Kennedy.

Gregory's extensive studies in rhetoric are noticeable in his orations. He does not simply employ rhetoric for „special effects“, it is the method which he employs very skilfully throughout to clarify his aims, to structure his arguments, to formulate his thoughts by employing figures of language, figures of thought, imagery. The length of the orations does not prevent Gregory from arranging his material systematically.⁴⁰

³⁶ F. W. Norris, Faith, p. 219.

³⁷ J. A. McGuckin, 'Perceiving Light from Light' (Oration 31.3): The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Gregory the Theologian, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39 (1994) 16.

³⁸ G. A. Kennedy, A New History of Classical Rhetoric, Princeton 1994, p. 261. This assessment is shared by Guignet: „Le compromis entre le courant grec, d'une part, le courant chrétien, de l'autre, semble un fait accompli. Bien plus, la fusion ne paraît pas devoir être ni plus complète ni plus harmonique. Les deux éléments estimés autrefois hétérogènes se sont compénétrés. ...; le Christianisme s'est moulé dans les formes antiques“. M. Guignet, Saint Grégoire de Nazianze et la Rhétorique, Paris 1911, p. 15.

³⁹ Gregory did not simply attempt to fuse Christian and Greek thought uncritically. He intended to use Greek *paideia* for a defence and better expression of Christianity. This can be seen throughout the *STO*. He also wanted to transform Greek thought in order to bring it to its completion. Delfgaauw provides a good example to illustrate this: Gregory christianised the Neoplatonic neutral *τὸ ἐπέκεινα πάντων* by changing it to the vocative *ὦ πάντων ἐπέκεινα*. This expresses that for Gregory God is a God who, in contrast to the Neoplatonic understanding, can be addressed directly by his creatures. B. Delfgaauw, Gregor von Nazianz: Antikes und christliches Denken, *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 36 (1967) 153-159. For Gregory's critical use of Greek philosophy cf. F. W. Norris, Of Thorns and Roses: The Logic of Belief in Gregory Nazianzen, *Church History* 53 (1984) 455-464.

⁴⁰ Particularly noteworthy is Or. 28 which is considerably longer than the others.

Indeed, without such a careful arrangement the *5TO* would lose much of their persuasive power. The general structure of the *5TO* (conditions for theology, the Son, the Spirit), which ensures a systematic engagement with the relevant theological points of dispute in Gregory's particular situation in Constantinople, is sub-divided into meaningful sub-structures. This can be shown for example in the pattern Gregory employs to tackle doctrinal issues. This pattern, employed for both the Son and the Spirit in the „doctrinal“ orations (i.e. Or. 29-31), consists of three aspects:

1. a positive presentation of his own teaching,
2. a refutation of mainly speculative objections,
3. a presentation of Scriptural evidence in favour of Gregory's position.

Even within sub-structures arrangements can be found. The second Theological Oration provides a good illustration. The rhetorical climax of this oration, and perhaps of the entire *5TO*, can be found according to Kennedy in Or. 28.22-30, who is convinced that there Gregory surpasses his fellow-rhetoricians considerably.⁴¹ This section of the oration, an *a fortiori* argument, is concerned with arguing that if human reason is incapable of understanding the intricacy of nature it is even less capable of understanding God's nature. Stock images (e.g. that of a peacock) are employed for this purpose.⁴² This passage contains a skilful arrangement: the argument begins with observations concerning human nature,⁴³ continues with *land-animals*,⁴⁴ **water-animals**,⁴⁵ **BIRDS**,⁴⁶ plants,⁴⁷ *the earth*,⁴⁸ **the sea**,⁴⁹ **THE AIR**⁵⁰ and concludes with questions related to astronomy.⁵¹ Different font styles are used here to highlight the interesting parallelism that occurs in this sequence. Gregory demonstrates his ability not only to structure his arguments clearly, but also to employ patterns such as parallelism within sub-structures to heighten the rhetorical effect.

One of Gregory's means of persuasion is a demonstration of his advance in purification, which, besides making a theological point about God's nature, is supposed to increase his credibility in matters divine. He does this by identifying his theological and contemplative enterprise with Moses' role at Sinai: the already mentioned mountain-ascent.⁵² Apart from presenting his own theology and pointing out the weaknesses in his opponents' teaching, Gregory also criticises his opponents for their lack of *paideia*. He is not only content to prove them wrong in theological matters but intends to destroy their credibility by showing that they have not grasped essential Greek teaching, e.g. the Aristotelian rules regarding the choice of speaker, time, audience and topic, and by presenting them as people who undermine their verbal skill by a lack of corresponding deeds.⁵³ In effect, Gregory aims at removing his opponents

⁴¹ Cf. H. J. Sieben, Gregor von Nazianz, p. 138, n. 71.

⁴² F. W. Norris, Faith, p. 124; H. J. Sieben, Gregor von Nazianz, p. 146, n. 83.

⁴³ Or. 28.22.

⁴⁴ Or. 28.23.

⁴⁵ Or. 28.24.

⁴⁶ Or. 28.24-25.

⁴⁷ Or. 28.26.

⁴⁸ Or. 28.26.

⁴⁹ Or. 28.27.

⁵⁰ Or. 28.28.

⁵¹ Or. 28.29-30.

⁵² Or. 28.2-3.

⁵³ Or. 27.1. F. W. Norris, Faith, p. 32.

from the theological sphere of influence, hoping this would take place through conversion.

Gregory is fond of word-plays and puns.⁵⁴ A stylistic means employed by Gregory to emphasise his concern is the use of the same word in different inflexions (*polyptoton*). This can be found in Or. 31.29 in a discussion of the Holy Spirit:⁵⁵

φύσει οὐ θέσει ἀγιάζον, οὐχ ἀγιαζόμενον,
μετροῦν, οὐ μετρούμενον,
μετεχόμενον, οὐ μετέχον,
πληροῦν, οὐ πληρούμενον,
συνέχον, οὐ συνεχόμενον;⁵⁶

In the same section another stylistic device occurs: the use of a series of words without connectives (*asyndeton*). Ruether regards it as „a favourite technique of Gregory's which makes for a kind of 'drum beat' effect“⁵⁷.

... ὁδηγοῦν, λαλοῦν, ἀποστέλλον, ἀφορίζον, παροξυνόμενον,
πειραζόμενον, ἀποκαλυπτικόν, φωτιστικόν, ζωτικόν, ...⁵⁸

This use of stylistic means shows that Gregory does not want to leave any room for doubt as to the deity of the Spirit. He also employs stylistic techniques in his Christological endeavours. A useful device for an expression of Gregory's Christology is *antithesis*:

He was begotten - yet he was already begotten - of a woman. And yet she was a virgin. That it was from a woman makes it human, that she was a virgin makes it divine. All this is part of the Godhead. ...
*He was wrapped in swaddling bands, but at the Resurrection he unloosed the swaddling bands of the grave. ...*⁵⁹

These selected examples show how Gregory is able to use stylistic means to make or to stress doctrinal points. Gregory was of course also fond of imagery. A passage depicting the opponents' destructive activities shows Gregory's mastery in the use of images:

... these keep all too close a watch on us, and they would wish that the spark of our dissensions might become a conflagration; they kindle it, they fan it, by means of its own draught they raise it to the skies, and without our knowing what they are up to, they make it higher than those flames at Babylon which blazed all around [cf. Dan.

⁵⁴ R. R. Ruether, *Rhetor*, pp. 64-65.

⁵⁵ R. R. Ruether, *ibid.*, p. 62.

⁵⁶ H. J. Sieben, *Gregor von Nazianz*, p. 330. This effect is lost in Wickham/Williams' translation: „He is the subject, not the object, of hallowing, apportioning, participating, filling, sustaining;“, F. W. Norris, *Faith*, p. 296. Sieben does more justice to the text, cf. H. J. Sieben, *Gregor von Nazianz*, p. 331.

⁵⁷ R. R. Ruether, *Rhetor*, p. 63.

⁵⁸ H. J. Sieben, *Gregor von Nazianz*, p. 330, l. 10-11. „... who leads, speaks, sends out, separates, who is vexed and tempted. He reveals, illumines, gives life ...“. F. W. Norris, *Faith*, p. 296. Again, the power of the Greek is lost in the translation.

⁵⁹ Or. 29.19. F. W. Norris, *ibid.*, pp. 257-258.

3.20]. *Having no strength in their own teaching, they hunt for it in our weakness, and for this reason like flies settling on wounds, they settle on our misfortunes - or should I say our mistakes? Let us be blind to our doings no longer, and let us not neglect the properties in these matters.*⁶⁰

A major aspect of sophistic use of imagery is verbosity. As we have just seen in the use of fire and flies in the previous example, Gregory is not satisfied with giving a single illustration in order to make a point. He seems to regard an accumulative use of relevant illustrations as a powerful means to silence his opponents. A further example of wordiness is provided in the latter third of the second Theological Oration, already mentioned above in connection with his method of arrangement. It might seem strange to a twentieth century reader that Gregory uses his by far longest oration just to prove the point that God's nature cannot be known. However, we must not forget that it was for Gregory not simply a means of refuting his opponents. It was also a hymn of praise which aimed to express God's majesty.⁶¹

The underlying, and at times openly stated, motivation for this is Gregory's desire to present his understanding of the Triune God - which includes his understanding of how one can think about God - so that he can persuade his audience to worship this God, i.e. to stand in an appropriate relationship with him. For Gregory, the elaborate and rhetorically sophisticated orations themselves are to be appropriate expressions of God's majesty and as such a way to worship the Trinity. By worshipping through the orations Gregory attempts to draw his audience into this worship.

5. Connection between the methods

First, we will consider the main aspects which link the three methods discussed. A description of Gregory's understanding of *theosis* follows. This will provide us with the necessary basis for the suggestion that the coherence of Gregory's methods and purpose in the *STO* is mainly due to the fact that his understanding of *theosis* penetrates all his theological work and serves as his methodological guiding principle.

Anthropology

The three methods we have been looking at are interrelated on different levels. A central link is provided by Gregory's *anthropology*. Humanity is limited in its rational, cognitive and linguistic efforts. These limitations are due to the fact that humanity is created *and* in need of purification. Certain limitations are a necessary, and therefore inextinguishable, component of our created humanity, other limitations are due to our lack of purity or illumination and can be gradually removed, in proportion to a person's advance in purification. This anthropology is reflected in Gregory's systematic method (pre-conditions for doing theology) and hermeneutics (e.g. in the way Christ's human nature is depicted) and is at the same time a prominent aspect of his rhetoric endeavour (e.g. the rhetoric in the second Theological Oration to show that

⁶⁰ Or. 27.5. F. W. Norris, *ibid.*, p. 220.

⁶¹ Or. 29.31.

God's nature is incognoscible). It is strongly linked to Gregory's understanding of language as something belonging to the created/creaturely part of reality. Language reflects human cognitive and rational limitations. However, it is capable of pointing to higher realities. For Gregory language (in both his hermeneutics and his systematic method) does not univocally represent reality but enables discussion and therefore knowledge of realities outside the created realm.

Oikonomia and worship

If we turn to the question how rhetoric is related to the other methods we note an affinity between Gregory's soteriological notion of *oikonomia* (God's salvific involvement in the world) and the rhetorical notion of *oikonomia* as defined by Kustas:

*Οἰκονομία, then, in the larger sense has to do with the fittingness of things in a process looking to human benefit. Fittingness, however, could take many forms. In addition to right social relationships and to the coherence of the physical world, there was also an all-important temporal factor.*⁶²

It is interesting to note the proximity of the rhetorical understanding of *oikonomia* and Gregory's understanding of progressive revelation, which takes into account the fittingness of God's revelation in Salvation history, a beneficial activity for humanity.

The above-mentioned soteriological aspect found in Gregory's systematic method, *oikonomia*, provides another link to his rhetoric because its aim is to bring humanity into an appropriate relationship to the Creator and Redeemer: worship, the ultimate purpose of the orations. This theme is also reflected in Gregory's „sacramental“ understanding of his orations as discourses (*logoi*). As responses to God's *Logos* they perform the double function of worshipping God and, at the same time, drawing his audience into this worship.

Refutation of opponents

A further purpose of the orations - for which all three methods are employed - is the removal of his theological opponents from the theological sphere of influence. For this he employs rhetoric (e.g. undermining their credibility by exposing their lack of *paideia*), hermeneutical statements (showing how selective their use of Scripture is and pointing out that they are not faithful to the different linguistic nuances found in it) and systematic considerations (e.g. reason is even incapable of providing us with a full understanding of the created world, how can we claim to know God fully?). A major reason for Gregory's wish to refute his opponents' teaching is the use of the given opportunity for an elaborate statement of his own (and the pro-Nicene Church's) position as a motivation for worship of the Trinity.

⁶² G. L. Kustas, Saint Basil and the Rhetorical Tradition, in: J. P. Fedwick (ed.), Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic, Toronto 1981, p. 229.

The Trinity

A further and very significant connection between systematic method, hermeneutics and rhetoric is Gregory's Trinitarian understanding of God. The God who revealed himself progressively as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in history (as testified to by Scripture and Tradition) is the ultimate reality to which Scripture *points* (note Gregory's understanding of Scripture which is closely related to his already discussed understanding of language). This understanding of God not only serves Gregory as a structuring aid in the systematic development of his argument in the *5TO* (general considerations regarding God [Or. 28] are followed by reflections on the Son [Or. 29-30] and on the Holy Spirit [Or. 31]) and as a hermeneutical framework but also identifies the object of worship to which Gregory attempts to draw his audience's attention through his rhetoric.

Theosis

A useful preparation for the discussion of the aspect which gives Gregory's methods its coherence is a brief description of Gregory's understanding of *theosis*. Gregory was the first Christian theologian to use the term and the idea *theosis* with such a frequency and consistency. Winslow states, „..., both terminologically and conceptually Gregory went far beyond his predecessors in his sustained application of *theosis*.“⁶³ In what follows we will give a brief description of Gregory's understanding of *theosis*.

Theosis is a fulfilment of our creatureliness - an attainment of the life God intended us to live - not its abandonment. It expresses a change which does not alter the fact that we are creatures of God.⁶⁴ The distinction between God, the creator, and ourselves as created beings is never eliminated.

Theosis cannot be regarded as a statement about humanity or about God in separation from each other, rather, it describes a relation between God and humanity.⁶⁵ This relation is dynamic, expressive of the increasingly intimate relation into which humanity can grow and which is dependent upon God's creative and sustaining initiative.⁶⁶

Theosis is a growth-process and not an immediate event. This growth towards our ultimate destiny is neither „violent, instantaneous, nor mechanical“. ⁶⁷ As a process, *theosis* refers, or can refer to, the past (its initiation), the present and the future (its completion) of a continually changing relationship and is therefore fluid, escaping definition.⁶⁸

The term *theosis* is a metaphor which Gregory used in various ways:⁶⁹ as a *spatial* metaphor („ascent to God“), as a *visual* metaphor (reflection of the divine light, illumination in baptism), as an *epistemological* metaphor (advance in knowledge of God, contemplation). These three ways are closely related, expressing our divine destiny

⁶³ D. F. Winslow, *The Dynamics of Salvation: A Study in Gregory of Nazianzus*, Cambridge MA 1979, p. 179. For a thorough analysis of Gregory's understanding of *theosis* cf. pp. 179-199.

⁶⁴ D. F. Winslow, *ibid.*, p. 186.

⁶⁵ D. F. Winslow, *ibid.*, p. 187.

⁶⁶ D. F. Winslow, *ibid.*, pp. 188-189.

⁶⁷ D. F. Winslow, *ibid.*, p. 190.

⁶⁸ D. F. Winslow, *ibid.*, p. 193.

⁶⁹ This paragraph is a summary of D. F. Winslow, *ibid.*, pp. 193-198.

and God's initiative: „only as God descends, can we ascend; only as God illumines, can we see; and only as God reveals, can we know. All three metaphors ... are used to express his conviction that we were created to be with God, to behold our God, and to know him in his triune majesty.“⁷⁰ Further, *Theosis* is regarded by Gregory as an *ethical* metaphor (imitation of God, ascetic and philanthropic endeavours as means to participate in our own salvation). It is also a *corporate* metaphor expressing an increasing union with God in which the qualitative distinction between creature and creator is not effaced, and a *social* metaphor which stresses the believer's participation in the divine *life* and enjoyment of communion with God.

As Winslow points out, *theosis* is not only a soteriological term, but is better understood as a *theological* term because it not only describes how we can attain communion with God (i.e. who we are and what our destiny is) but also who this God is with whom we can have communion and how God is involved in our lives (creation and salvation).⁷¹

Theosis: the centre of Gregory's methods

We have seen how closely the methods are related in aspects ranging from anthropology to the doctrine of God. Their coherence with the purpose of the *5TO* has also been shown. A comparison of Gregory's methods with his understanding of *theosis* strongly suggests that the theological and methodological centre, i.e. the factor which provides the observed coherence, can be found in *theosis*.

Let us illustrate this suggestion. Gregory's anthropology, as outlined above, is compatible with the anthropology represented in our outline of *theosis* which maintains that our creatureliness and its necessary limitations will not be effaced by the growth of our union with God. The distinction God-humanity will remain even in humanity's state of complete fulfilment in perfect communion with God, at the end of the *theosis*-process.

Theosis as a growth-process, i.e. as a *temporal process* related to a *specific* spiritual state of a human being, corresponds to Gregory's understanding of progressive revelation, a *temporal process* related to a *specific* state of capability of the People of God to receive a certain revelation. This growth-process is also reflected in his understanding of the theologian's „ascent to God“, in which purification, necessary for epistemological reasons, plays a significant role.

There is also a strong link with Gregory's attempt to *persuade* (note: *theosis* is not violent) his audience to worship the Trinity, i.e. to be related to God in an appropriate way. The relational aspect of *theosis* comes to the fore here.

These relations suggest that *theosis*, which is not simply a soteriological but mainly a theological concept, is at the heart of Gregory's *5TO* and informs and shapes his theological method.

⁷⁰ D. F. Winslow, *ibid.*, p. 195.

⁷¹ D. F. Winslow, *ibid.*, pp. 198-199.

6. The coherence of Gregory's theological methods

The three methods we have looked at in the *5TO* display a strong coherence. They are related in various significant ways and also strongly support Gregory's aim in the *5TO*. We noted four main topics which link the methods on various levels: anthropology, *oikonomia*, refutation of opponents, the Trinity.

The major connections between the three methods have been shown to be aspects of *theosis*. *Theosis* touches upon, and defines, matters such as anthropology, *theologia* (the Trinity initiates *theosis*; communion with the Trinity is the destiny of humanity), and temporal process (a parallel of which can be found e.g. in Gregory's notion of progressive revelation). *Theosis* can thus be regarded as the core of Gregory's network of methods. This does not mean that there is no reciprocal influence between Gregory's methods and his understanding of *theosis*, neither does it mean that Gregory's understanding of *theosis* is chronologically prior to all the other theological concepts in the development of his thought. It simply means that *theosis* can be regarded as the centre which provides coherence to Gregory's theological enterprise and thus to his methods. The coherent interdependence of Gregory's different methods, focused in the concept of *theosis*, is an impressive theological achievement.

Concluding remarks

Gregory's theological enterprise in the *5TO* not only intends to present who God is and refute opponents who do not share this theological understanding, it is primarily concerned with the attempt to convince the audience to stand in an appropriate relation with God. Humanity is related to God in Christ (Or. 29-30) and through the Spirit (Or. 31), which expresses that it is God who took the initiative and made it possible for humanity to be related to himself. It is also this God who enables humanity to grow in union with him. The *5TO* present a theology of the possibility of communion with God, the Creator and Redeemer. The methods employed reflect this: they are interrelated in those aspects which are central to *theosis*: the understanding of humanity and of God, and of the ultimate destiny for humanity involved in the process of *theosis*, communion with God. Moreover, Gregory's use of rhetoric intends to ensure that this concept of the ultimate destiny of humanity does not simply remain a concept, he wishes to draw his audience into this relation, transforming the concept into an experience of the Church. The conceptual and methodological coherence of Gregory's endeavour in the five Theological Orations, even though one might disagree with certain aspects (e.g. exegesis), is a remarkable theological achievement, which is aptly reflected in his honorary title „the Theologian“.