

Why Pastors Should Flee the Ministry: A Meditation from the Pastoral Theology of Gregory of Nazianzus

Keith Goad

Pastors, laypeople, and students typically respond negatively to the Church Fathers because they associate them with philosophical baggage, unnecessary arguments, and/or disputes. When we studied them in church history class the focus was upon how they argued for particular words (such as *homoousios* or *monophysite*) and would be considered divisive by today's standards. Those we call the Fathers were pastors who most often entered into these debates because they saw the need to protect their churches from dangerous theology. They were primarily pastoral theologians. There is a deep well of spirituality and pastoral insight that can be gained from the primary writings of the early church pastors. I hope that a short reflection on Gregory of Nazianzus' spirituality and meditation on the character and responsibilities of the pastor will help pastors see the value of reading the Fathers and, most of all, encourage pastors in their vigour for Christ and his church.¹

Overview of Gregory's Life and Ministry

Gregory shares the title 'the theologian' only with John the Evangelist. He was one of the Cappadocian Fathers along with Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa.² His sermons reflect a life that was devoted to the contemplation of God. Gregory is best known for his theological orations delivered in Constantinople as part of the council that ended in AD 381. Many recent works have highlighted his life and his writing.³ He is unique among the Fathers because he has provided us with many sermons, poems, and letters. Many of these are autobiographical, where Gregory allows the reader to see him through his own deep introspection and transparency.

Gregory's father, Gregory the Elder, was a pastor in Nazianzus and provided his son with the best classical education in Alexandria and Athens. Upon return Gregory desired to pursue the life of contemplation alone, but his father appointed him to the priesthood on Christmas Day in AD 361. Gregory

responded to this 'gift' by fleeing. When he returned to Nazianzus many questioned if he was qualified to be a pastor and he responded to them in a sermon, *Oration 2: In Defense of His Flight to Pontus*.⁴ In the sermon he explains the great responsibility, demands, and skills necessary for the pastorate. The purpose of this paper is to provide a vision of the pastorate from Gregory's writing that will challenge pastors to reflect upon the gravity of their office and the responsibilities that are necessary to be faithful to the calling and the one who has called them. The end goal is not to have them flee the pastorate, though this will be tempting in light of Gregory's vision, but to recognize their need for God's grace to fulfill their duty and recommit themselves to the office and its high demands.

Why Flee the Ministry?

Why did Gregory flee the pastoral calling? He gives many reasons. First, he fled because he was caught off guard and it scared him to death.⁵ What we could most liken forced appointment to today is that initial calling to the mission field or pastorate. The very thought brought trembling and fear to Gregory because a whole new way of life was cast upon him. Anyone called to the ministry has dealt with the suddenness and sense of being overtaken by the great, what Gregory calls 'loud', calling. I would argue that the inclination to run from such great responsibility is fruit of it being a genuine calling. If this is the response, it is safe to say the ministry is not pursued for wrong reasons (recognition, power, money, and influence). It also means they recognize the gravity of the office and the one who has called them to the serve.

Second, Gregory fled because he desired the 'calm and retirement' provided by the monastery instead of the life of 'turmoil'.⁶ Gregory was hoping to pursue the life a monk where he was left to contemplate God and life without the burden of others and the busyness of life.⁷ His friends and father convinced him to lay aside his desire for the life of a monk where he would enjoy a life of 'pure communion with God ... with no admixture of disturbance'.⁸ Gregory was convinced that the better option was labouring to draw many to Christ instead of only worrying about how close he was able to draw himself. He reasons, 'as a park is better than and preferable to a tree, the whole heaven with its ornamentation to a single star, and the body to a limb, so also, in the sight of God, is the reformation of a whole church preferable to the progress of a single soul'.⁹ The beauty of his internal wrestling is the recognition of what

is better in God's sight. He would most affect the kingdom of God by adopting the mind of Christ (Phil. 2). Gregory realized that loving others more than himself and seeking their gain was the best way to fulfill the call of Christ.

We live in an age where individualism is our natural disposition and we are trained to expect it in ourselves and others. We are concerned with our own spiritual state with little regard for how we can be assisting others in their walk, or, due to our arrogance, we have no recognition as to how others can assist us in our walk. One of the great mark of the early Fathers is that they all had a deep love and respect for their friends. Gregory loved Basil of Caesarea deeply and gave him credit for much of his theological depth. Reflecting on his friendship with Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus declares:¹⁰

There is nothing in this world so precious as a faithful friend and no scales can measure his excellence. A faithful friend is sturdy shelter, a fortified palace. A faithful friend is a living treasure. A faithful friend is more than gold and much precious stone. A faithful friend is a garden locked, a fountain sealed, to be opened and enjoyed in season. A faithful friend is a haven of refreshment, and if he excels also in understanding, how great a boon that is! ... And if he is besides a child of light, or a man of God, or draws near to God, or a man greatly beloved, or merits any of the kinds of epithets that Scripture applies to those distinguished by their holiness, dignity and eminence, this is truly a gift from God and clearly more than we deserve.

Christians must learn to trust and depend upon one another as friends, or even more so, as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Third, Gregory hesitates to confess the next reason, but sees it as necessary. Gregory is fearful of being like the false teachers who have no real love for Christ and will, therefore, only profane the sacred office and mock its Head:¹¹

those others, who, without being better than ordinary people ... with unwashed hands ... and uninitiated souls, intrude into the most sacred offices; and, before becoming worthy to approach the temples, they lay claim to the sanctuary, and they push and thrust around the holy table as if they thought this order to be a means of livelihood, instead of a pattern of virtue, or an authority, instead of a ministry of which we must give an account.

James warns that teachers will be given a stricter judgment (James 3:1). I hope that this concern from Gregory and warning from James would only encourage those pursuing ministry and in the ministry to whole-heartedly dedicated themselves to God and diligently serve his people. You should analyze your calling based upon how you are pursuing the calling to godliness first and foremost and then how you are serving the church. Gregory gives exhortation to what churches should value in a pastor in one of his poems:¹²

You have been considering a bishop as you would an account, laying stress on mere rubbish, where I have been concerned with important issues. A priest should have one function and one only, the sanctification of souls by his life and teaching. He should raise them toward the heights by heavenly impulses. He should be serene, high-minded, reflecting like a mirror the godly and unspotted images that he has inside. For his flock he should send up holy offerings until the day when he, too, shall perfect them into an offering. Other matters he should relinquish to those skilled in them.

Fourth, Gregory confesses, 'I did not, nor do I now, think myself qualified to rule a flock or herd, or to have authority over the souls of men'.¹³ Gregory is concerned with how difficult it is to rule over man for three reasons:

1. every man and woman is different
2. each one is deceived by their own sin
3. the shepherd who is to lead is also tempted to be wayward.

Gregory realizes that he is unqualified for the task (as each pastor should). In Oration 9 he reflects on what took place surrounding the events of Oration 2 (AD 361) as he is about to be consecrated as bishop of Sasima (AD 372):¹⁴

I have come at the same time to love and to fear the Spirit. I needed time to collect my thoughts and compose myself, to regain my strength and self-confidence, in order that, once what troubled me fell away, like tares in the sowing, and my mean thoughts yielded to better ones, the Spirit might prevail and keep me safely in its grasp for its service and ministry, for the strengthening of this people, for the governance of souls, for teaching through word, deed, and example, with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left, for the effective exercise of my pastoral office, which tears them away from the world, leads them to God, exhausts their body, adds them to the Spirit, turns away from the darkness, glories in the light, drives away predators, draws together the

fold, guards against precipices and desert solitudes, helps it reach the mountain and high places.

Gregory understands himself to be even more reliant upon the Spirit and has confidence that the power of the Spirit is sufficient. Our response to the great duty is not to flee, but to rely upon the God of grace to enable us to lead his people. Gregory reasons that it seems right for one person to have rule over the church so that they reach ‘their highest purpose—to be free from sin—to attain at least to that which is second best, restoration from sin’.¹⁵

Qualities of the Pastor

No one is truly qualified to lead the church to unity and salvation except ‘Christ Himself, our Head,’ and no one can effectively serve the church without serving Christ and depending upon his grace. Christ prays for our unity and perseverance before his exaltation and sends his Spirit because if we cannot lead ourselves to virtue, how much less can we lead others (John 17).¹⁶ If everyone responded with fear and refused to take upon themselves the responsibility, the church would suffer.¹⁷ What qualifies a man to be the pastor of God’s people? When Gregory considered this question his first response was that he did not have what it takes. This really should be every man’s response because no one is ultimately qualified except the True Shepherd, but in his divine wisdom he has left broken shepherds to care for broken sheep. So what sets the pastor apart?

First, the pastor must excel in purity and holiness. He must be the one who is excelling all in virtue and surpassing all in repenting of vice because he must be the one who is nearest to God. He is only able to drag everyone else closer to God if he himself is closest to him. The duty of the pastor is to ‘perfect’ the church, and therefore the man who is trying to lead others toward perfection must be pursuing the God who perfects more. This qualification fits in with Paul’s exhortation to godliness (1 Tim. 3:1-7). Paul’s qualification for pastors to be godly is not different from the obedience he requires for all Christians in other places. Gregory assumes that what sets the pastor apart is his constant and more intense pursuit of virtue, godly character, and intimacy with God.

The pastor’s nearness to God correlates with unity and healthiness of the congregation. If the pastor is weighed down with sin and he is not drawing

closer to God, he will be unable to draw the church closer to God. Gregory argues:¹⁸

so that it is difficult for anyone, either by a long course of philosophic training, and gradual separation of the noble and enlightened part of the soul from that which is debased and yoked to darkness, or by the mercy of God, or by both together, and by a constant practice of looking upward, to overcome the depressing power of matter. And before a man, as far as possible, gained this superiority, and sufficiently purified his mind, and far surpassed his fellows in nearness to God, I do not think it safe for him to be entrusted with the rule over souls, or the office of mediator (for such, I take it, a priest is) between God and man.

Philosophical training does not mean one must master Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates. Rather, philosophy, according to its original meaning, is the pursuit of the best and happiest life which Gregory connects with the way of Christ.¹⁹ We may differ with his Platonic way of understanding the separation of soul from matter, but it is clear that the believer is to be repenting from the internal sin and darkness that drags him down. Gregory's encouragement to look upward is a call to draw near to God and leave the desires of this world behind.

The vitality of the church is dependent upon the purity of the leader and how well he exalts Christ and leads the church to depend upon the Spirit.²⁰ The spirituality of the Fathers was based upon the concept of drawing near to the Triune God who has saved us.²¹ The more one is able to throw off the sins of this world, the more intimate his fellowship with God. Gregory exhorts his church, 'for the pure alone can grasp Him who is pure and of the same disposition as himself'.²² He is obviously alluding to 'blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God' (Matt: 5:8). Gregory gives a challenging allegory of Mt. Sinai in his Second Theological Oration. In it he reasons that the more pure of heart one is, the higher he is able to ascend the mountain into God's presence.²³ The pastor should be ahead of the people ascending so he can help them ascend higher themselves. Sin keeps us at the bottom of the mountain unable to approach God. We are to cast away the sin that hinders us, trust in the forgiveness provided by Christ and rely upon the Spirit (Heb. 6, 12). The ultimate goal is to recognize the great invitation to enter the kingdom that cannot be shaken and enjoy pure worship. We can enjoy purity now, but we look forward to when we will worship him face to face (I John 3:2-3).

Leadership from the pastorate is not just about leading programs that attract people, but it must be a leadership that models godliness, virtue, and piety. The church needs to see what a godly family should look like before they can begin obeying commands from the pulpit to be a godly family. The same goes for discipleship, godly confrontation, and evangelism in the church. The typical layman does not have the courage and boldness to obey the commands of God unless he sees it being done by someone. Gregory considered Athanasius his spiritual mentor commenting on his example, 'it is a great thing for those who have received an example, so to use it as to attach themselves to virtue'.²⁴ The pastor needs to be this kind of example and leader for the church.

Gregory realizes that his call for the pastor to excel the congregation in piety comes with the danger of the pastor comparing himself to others and thinking he is superior. Recognizing this would ruin the pastor's piety, Gregory warns that he must never judge himself in comparison to others. A pastor is 'to measure his success by the commandment and not by his neighbours'.²⁵ All Christians must only judge themselves according to the Law and this applies to pastors most of all. Since the holiness of others is dependent upon the pastor, if he were to become self-righteous and judgmental, the church will follow. He argues that the pastor 'must not only wipe out the traces of vice from his soul, but also inscribe better ones'.²⁶ The growth of the pastor should be marked by his drawing nearer to God by repenting of sin and striving for holiness.

Second, a pastor must have a high view of God. His sermon begins, 'for indeed the very best order of beginning every speech and action, is to begin from God, and to end in God'.²⁷ The pastor's desire for God excels the laity's because he has repented of his sins, drawn close to God in the Spirit, and meditates on the great mysteries of God. The former quality of being pure in heart is in direct correlation with worshipping the Pure and Holy God. What else does the pastor do if he does not pursue pure knowledge of God so that he can proclaim him most effectively to the church? In order to properly lead God's church the pastor must properly take up the study of 'divine things'.²⁸ The pastor must be the one who has mastered the true philosophy meaning he has trained himself to live according to God's way of truth. Gregory correctly recognizes that Christianity is the highest philosophy and the pastor must let it master him.

One particular application that is obvious from Gregory's sermon is that pastors must know and love the Christian God, that is the Triune God. Of course this sounds obvious because a confession of the Trinity is the greatest distinguishing marks of Christianity. What is not so obvious today is a hearty, bold confession of the Triune God in worship, sermons, prayers, evangelism, and discipleship. We easily confess the Trinity in creed, but in practice many churches are nominally Trinitarian. This means we confess to believe that God is Triune, but the way we preach, disciple, evangelize, and worship would not look any different if we were mere monotheists. Gregory was one of the greatest theologians of the Trinity.²⁹ He provides a confession of the Trinity in almost every sermon. Here he argues that a pastor must be a dedicated student and worshipper of the Triune God, 'for both the Unity of the Godhead must be preserved, and the Trinity of the Persons confessed, each with His own property'.³⁰ The beauty of Gregory's emphasis upon the Trinity was that it came from years of meditation and was not an abstract doctrine, but one that was essential to every thought of God and Christian living. His Trinitarian theology is the high mark of the East because it had the fullest confession of the Spirit's deity. This is reflected in how he references the Spirit's leading, calling, convicting, and applying Christ's death and resurrection.³¹

Gregory realizes it is not an easy doctrine to comprehend. He actually says that it is above our thoughts and language to ever perfectly express. This does not mean we remain silent. Gregory believes our every thought should be captivated by God, 'It is more important that we should remember God than that we should breathe: indeed, if one may say so, we should do nothing else besides'.³³ I fear that in our scientific age we shy away from talking about anything we cannot comprehensively explain. If pastors do this, the church will miss out on the greatest mysteries revealed in Scripture. In light of how the Trinity is a mystery beyond us, Gregory establishes a grammar of how one should confess God rightly so that God is confessed boldly. This means he established rules for how the persons could be confessed in a certain manner and how the unity could be confessed so that the three are not reduced to one, become three gods, or are divided in their deity.³⁴ I realize this already sounds daunting, but when dealing with such important mysteries rules of speech are necessary so that we do not blaspheme God. It will give the church confidence to confess God faithfully and properly. We should be motivated to pursue

godliness and repent of sin if we continue to pursue the great mystery of God's Triune nature and know that our knowledge or vision of God will be made perfect when Christ returns.³⁵

Gregory understood that the spiritual vitality of the church was dependent upon living according to the confession of the deity of the Son and Spirit. If the Son is not divine, there is no salvation for men. If the Spirit is not divine, there is no divine light to point man to Christ and carry him to the Father. The Spirit that indwells the convert must be divine in order to apply salvation and carry him to the Son where forgiveness and new life are found.³⁶ The Spirit changes man's desires toward God, mediates on behalf of man to God, reveals the secret mysteries of God, and produces pure communion with God only if he is fully God dwelling in man.³⁷ The Spirit does the work of illumination that is 'the splendour of souls, the conversion of the life, the question put to the Godward conscience. It is the aid to our weakness, the renunciation of the flesh, the following of the Spirit, the fellowship of the Word, the improvement of the creature, the overwhelming of sin, the participation with light, the dissolution with darkness'.³⁸ A key concept for Gregory was that one must see God through God, or as in Psalm 36:9, 'In your Light shall we see Light'.³⁹ The deity of the Son is necessary because the mediator between God and man must perfectly represent both. The Son carries the believer back to the Father where he experiences the nearness to God and abides in intimate fellowship.

Preaching from texts such as Romans 8:11, Matthew 3 and 28, and Ephesians 2 will give pastors opportunities to help the church see that all three are at work for their salvation and sanctification. Confessing boldly the three in their distinct acts is the first step. The next is to confess the three according to their unique attributes: unbegotten Father, begotten Son, proceeding and anointing Spirit.⁴⁰ Other ways to introduce Trinitarian thought to the church is to confess creeds together, implement their content into the sermon, emphasize the persons in texts instead of glossing over them. The most important thing is to confess the Trinity with humility by stating that you do not understand it completely and confess it boldly because God's Word is clear that there are three and these three are one. The key to doing it well is starting with the concrete actions and titles revealed in Scripture and then giving them 'rules' as to how the three are understood together.

I have mentioned Gregory's rules so I will now provide a sample.⁴¹ The rules of speech, or grammar, are simply seeking to affirm what Scripture affirms and protect the church from confessing something contrary. An excellent example of Gregory's confession is found in Oration 6.22:⁴²

guarding the truth that we have received from our fathers, revering Father and Son and Holy Spirit; knowing the Father in the Son, the Son in the Holy Spirit, in which names we have been baptized, in which we believe, and under which we have been enlisted, dividing them before combining them and combining them before dividing them, and not regarding the three as a single individual (for they are not without individual reality nor do they comprise a single reality, as though our treasure lay in names and not in actual fact), but rather believing the three to be a single entity. For they are a single entity not in individual reality but in divinity, a unity worshipped in Trinity and a Trinity summed up into unity, venerable as one whole, as one whole royal, sharing the same royal throne, sharing the same glory, above space, above time, uncreated, invisible, impalpable, uncircumscribed, its internal ordering known only to itself, but for us equally the object of our reverence and adoration, and alone taking possession of the Holy of Holies and excluding all of creation, part by the first veil, and part by the second.

Notice that the action Gregory espouses is not explaining the Trinity, but guarding it. He is also not seeking to reinvent the wheel, but to continue the confession of the church. When he addresses heretics, he argues from Scripture but has a healthy respect for what has been handed down as the 'rule of faith'. We also appreciate the mood of the confession because it is doxological, not scientific. There is an appreciation for the God who is beyond our capacity and who mysteriously condescends to reveal himself.

The first rule concerning how we talk about God is that we know God's Triune nature because of who God is for us. Notice that the beginning of this confession starts with how we know the Father—it is through the Son, and we only know the Son through the Spirit. We confess a Trinity because all three persons accomplished distinct acts for us to complete our salvation. We believe the Son and Spirit to be fully God because they carried out the work that only God could accomplish. Only God can create and save, and these three are revealed in Scripture as being agents of both creation and salvation. Since all

three persons are acting inseparably for our salvation, all three must be divine. This places the Trinity at the heart of the gospel, or rather, says that the gospel is the Trinity. One cannot proclaim the gospel without referencing the persons unless you say the Father died on the cross. Following John 3:16, you must say the Father sent his Son to die for us and while doing so you know that the Spirit who is like him is moving wherever he wills to bring the Father's people to the Son (John 3:8; 14:15-17). When you baptize the convert you reassure the gospel by baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁴³

The second rule is God's essence is unknowable, meaning there is no way of classifying him like anything in the created order. Knowing God's essence perfectly is impossible, but knowing the three are of the same essence is possible because they all participate in divine activities together. I may have a golden retriever named Luke that belongs to the canine genus. There are two classifications for Luke. He is a golden retriever and a canine, and we know this because there are other golden retrievers and canines we can compare him to. There is nothing, or no one, like God to compare him to or any class of which he belongs. He is completely unique as the Creator and Saviour of the world. Our knowledge of him is imperfect because our finite minds and hearts cannot fully grasp his infinite wisdom, love, knowledge, etc. We do have trustworthy knowledge of him because he has revealed himself.⁴⁴ His Word and actions reveal him truly, but only partially.

The third rule is that the unity or singleness of God must be guarded against so that the essence is not divided or multiplied.⁴⁵ Gregory considers the possibility of three gods, but denies any difference with regards to substance among the three persons.⁴⁶

The fourth rule is that the relations between the persons are what best distinguishes them. The name 'Father' and the description of being unbegotten are not substance terms, but relational terms.⁴⁷ The Son according to his essence has no cause or beginning like the Father according to his essence. His sonship and begottenness are terms that distinguish him from the Father according to their relation. The names by which the persons have been revealed are relational. Gregory guards the Son's begottenness by arguing that it cannot be considered according to carnal natures or with any reference to time. The names reveal the Father is as dependent on the Son for his identity just as the Son because they are

dependent upon one another for their specific identity. Gregory argues, ‘when did the Father come into being? There never was a time when the Father was not. And the same thing is true of the Son and the Holy Spirit’.⁴⁸ Concerning the Spirit, Gregory exercises what is today considered biblical theology and argues that in the Old Testament the Father is clearly proclaimed and the Son is obscure while in the New Testament the Father and Son are clearly revealed and the Spirit is obscure. The Spirit is clear now in our age because he lives in believers and testifies to the divine life without obscurity.⁴⁹

The fifth rule is that we cannot emphasize the unity over the threeness or the essence over the persons.⁵⁰ This is seen in the quote he is most known for:⁵¹

No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three I think of Him as the Whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that One so as to attribute a greater greatness to the Rest. When I contemplate the three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out of the Undivided Light.

There is much more depth in his rules, but I hope these basic rules will give an example of how one can talk about the Trinity with boldness. I also hope this gives pastors a desire to read theologians like Gregory and Augustine on the Trinity to understand and establish these rules for their churches.

Third, the pastor is to be a *physician* to the soul and a guide for sinners. The metaphor of physician is a theme found throughout the sermon, and has influenced pastors ever since.⁵² Gregory calls this our sacred art that is more demanding than that of a M.D.⁵³ A friend of mine once said that when he goes to a M.D. he wants a type-A perfectionists and I think most of us would agree. My question for my friend was why should he expect something less from his pastor since the condition of the soul is more important than the condition of the body. We expect a great deal from our doctors because our health is at stake. They need to be up on the latest diseases, medicines, procedures, etc. There will always be an amazing amount of advancement in medicine. Why do we expect little of ourselves as pastors or why does the church expect little of a pastor when it comes to an understanding of the soul, sin, Scripture, the Son and Spirit? We could argue that it is because there are no great advancements

in sin—nothing new under the sun. Well, yes, but damage cancer or AIDS can do to the body is nothing compared to the damage sin can do to the soul. Gregory recognizes that most physically sick patients desire treatment, but most spiritually sick despise correction. The skills necessary to apply the proper cleansing are great and so are the consequences as the salvation of souls is at stake.⁵⁴

Gregory considers the patient of the pastor much harder to treat than the patient of the doctor. First, the pastor's patient is more difficult because the bodies of most people (male and female) are basically the same.⁵⁵ The same organs, tissue, muscle, etc is the same for all people so the doctor only needs to be able to treat two kinds of people—male and female. The pastor does not treat the body, but the soul which is different for every individual. It is much harder to discern the personality of each person and to what type of counsel they will respond:⁵⁶

some are led by doctrine, others trained by example; some need the spur, others the curb; some are sluggish and hard to rouse to the good, and must be stirred up by being smitten by the word ... some are benefitted by praise, others by blame, both being applied in season ... some are set by right encouragement, other by rebuke; some when taken to task in public, others, when privately corrected.

In order to know how to best treat the patients from the pulpit or in counselling, pastors must be interacting with them and desiring to know them. This may not be what the pastor considers his gifts and he may not desire it. Regardless, following the reasoning that a church is more significant than a single soul, the pastor must do what is required to know his church, love them, and care for their particular needs.

Second, not only is the patient of the pastor different in every case, but the condition that the pastor must cure is one that is by nature deceptive and luring. Gregory understands the sinful condition of man as a difficult case to cure because the pastor is called to meet the 'hidden man of the heart' so that 'our warfare is directed against that adversary and foe within us, who uses ourselves as his weapons against ourselves, and, most fearful of all, hands us over to the death of sin'.⁵⁷ There are a number of things that takes place within us that make the pastoral treatment difficult. Satan perverts God's good gifts and deceives us

into thinking that our sinful tendencies are natural and right. Vice is something that is always available and luring the patient away from the cure. Gregory recognizes that a desire towards vice is naturally superior, and that opportunities for vice present are more attractive and available than that of virtue.⁵⁸ Our own internal warfare causes our passions to drive us to sin and deceive us so that we think there is nothing truly wrong with our souls.⁵⁹ The self-deceptive nature of sin makes it powerful and drives the patient to refuse the cure.

Gregory mentions three ways in which our sinful desires fight against 'laying bare our souls', the physician himself, and the treatment that is for our own interest that alone will save our souls.⁶⁰ The first option is to hide our sin away 'as if by escaping the notice of men we could escape the mighty eye of God and justice'.⁶¹ This is an obvious first response to being convicted of our sinful behaviour. Believing we can hide our sin and avoid God's judgment is dangerous because the hidden sin will continue to do damage to our souls, our relationships, and our ministry. I believe it was Lloyd-Jones who said every time he came across a Christian wrestling with doubt he would ask them what sinful action took place around the time the doubt began. Harboring sin will destroy the soul's confidence, love for others, and desire for God's purposes.

The second option is to find excuses for our sins.⁶² This was the response of Adam and Eve in the garden, and if there has been advancement in sinful behaviour it would be here. Modern psychology has given us many options for how to place blame either on our family upbringing, our socio-political position, or personality disorders. Often times some categories of personality and family background can be helpful for the pastor to understand how to best care the person in their particular needs. The problem is the patient often times finds a way to make himself a victim so that someone else's actions were really behind his sinful behaviour.

The third option is to simply flaunt our sin or 'shamelessly brazen out our sin before those that might heal it'.⁶³ This is the response of those who have hidden it away, given themselves excuse, and have become so hardened that they no longer sense the conviction of sin. Sinners who refuse the proper treatment either deceive themselves to think the way they feel and live is natural, or they refuse the treatment because they have become too dependent upon their sinful behaviour.

Gregory challenges pastors not to be physician of the soul while they themselves are full of sores.⁶⁴ How can we possibly heal others when we cannot heal ourselves? The power has been granted to God's anointed pastors to bring healing by proclaiming the gospel of Christ to ourselves and to others. We heal only when we are able to expose the sins of Christians and non-Christians and show them how the Head of the church is the perfect mediator and healer of their souls.

The demanding work of the pastor is to master these sinful desires and cure his own self-deception and then do the hard work of leading others. Gregory provides two reasons why pastors take upon themselves the difficult task of disciplining themselves and leading others.⁶⁵ First, one follows the King's highway and guides man so that he might 'inherit the glory above by means of a struggle and wrestling with things below, being tried as gold in the fire by things here, and gain the objects of our hope as a prize of virtue, and not merely as the gift of God'.⁶⁶ Gregory understands the power of sin and evil in this world and approaches this life not as a playground, but as a battlefield for souls. Gregory is not denying salvation by grace, but properly recognizing the great responsibility one has to choose and cultivate virtue. Second, one fights against the vices of this world so that he 'may draw to himself and raise to heaven the lower nature, by gradually freeing it from its grossness, in order that the soul may be to the body what God is to the soul'. There is some difficulty with Gregory's equating the body with sinful flesh, but his principle stands true that there are two desires that seek to gain our allegiance. One is empowered by the Spirit to choose virtue and the other is our sinful nature that leads us to vice. One must continually repent of the latter so that the former might grow stronger and draw us closer to God.

Leading others in virtue, Gregory thinks, is the most difficult work of all. It is hard enough for a man to submit to the rule of God and it is much more difficult to lead men into virtue.⁶⁷ How then does one accomplish this work? Gregory's uses the image of walking along the King's highway so that the pastor 'guide them according to the proper methods of a pastoral care which is right and just'.⁶⁸ A pastor does not seek to cure men by his own standards and ideas, but according to what God has prescribed in his revelation. Remember also that Gregory was the great theologian of the Spirit. I am not sure which affected the other, but his spirituality and dependency upon the

Spirit is immediately connected to his recognizing that it is the God who indwells the soul that allows man to live rightly and empowers pastors to fulfill their duty.⁶⁹ The pastor's primary duty according to Gregory is the distribution of the Word.⁷⁰ It is not the pastor's thoughts that bring people to God, but only God's Word proclaimed to man.⁷¹ This should challenge the way we preach, teach, live, and counsel.

Gregory concludes Oration 2 by setting forth numerous examples of pastoral care from Scripture, none being greater than the apostle Paul.⁷² Gregory presents Paul as a pastor to be emulated for many reasons. First, he commends Paul for wisely giving laws and instructions to slaves, master, parents, children, etc. A pastor is not called to teach theological concepts, but to provide the church with a theological spirituality that changes the way they live. Second, Paul's is more concerned with the interest of his children than his own well-being. He did not use spiritual authority to his own gain, but had one aim, 'in everything to neglect his own in comparison with the advantage of others'.⁷³ Third, Paul ministers with Christ's glory and suffering as his goal and desire. He glories in suffering like Christ 'as if it were a kind of ornament'.⁷⁴ His attitude was such that he was 'not to be proud of earthly things, or puffed up by knowledge, or excite the flesh against the Spirit'.⁷⁵ Paul served the church with a constant reminder that he is only a steward of the true Head of the church and with a view that the greatest rewarded was ahead of him in heaven and not in this world. This liberated him to give his life to and for the church so that he 'crucified the world to himself, and being crucified to the world and the things which are seen, he thought all things little, and too small to be desired'.⁷⁶ Pastors need reminders and to remind one another of their great responsibility to Christ and the great reward that can be theirs if they deny themselves worldly pleasure and love their church more than themselves.

In conclusion, I hope two things were accomplished. The secondary goal is that pastors will see the great benefit that can be found in reading the Fathers. They were pastors with great insight that can benefit the church today. Their style and culture was different so it may take some work to get used to their writing, but the labour is worth the reward. My primary hope is that pastors are encouraged to pursue God whole heartedly. This means that they desire an intimacy with God that is the result of repentance of sin and intense meditation of God. I hope that the metaphors that Gregory provides such as being a

‘physician of the soul’ or that the goal is to be a guide dragging others up to Christ help pastors reconsider their calling and the great responsibility they have both to the church and its Head.

KEITH GOAD is adjunct Professor for Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA.

ENDNOTES

1. For further study, see Ellen Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (NY: OUP, 1997); *Loving God with Our Minds, The Pastor as Theologian*, ed. Michael Welker and Cynthia Jarvis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Christopher Hall, *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002).
2. Beeley, “Divine Causality and the Monarchy of God the Father in Gregory of Nazianzus” in *Harvard Theological Journal* 100.2 (2007). Beeley, ‘Since the Council of Chalcedon in 451 Gregory has been honoured with the title “The Theologian” for his definitive teaching on the Trinity in the late-fourth century. His influence was then strongly felt in the Christological developments that continued through the eighth century, and his stature in Greek Christian tradition is comparable only to that of Augustine in the West, although his influence is felt there as well’ (199).
3. For a fuller treatment of Gregory of Nazianzus see Brian Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus* (NY: Routledge, 2006); John McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus. An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s, 2001); Christopher Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on The Trinity and Knowledge of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). The former is short and precise introducing major aspects of his thought. He has a particularly helpful chapter on Gregory as priest and provides translations of sermons, letters, and prayers. McGuckin provides the most thorough biography on Gregory.
4. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 2: *In Defense of His Flight to Pontus, and His Return, After His Ordination to The Priesthood, with and Exposition of the Character of the Priestly Office* trans. C. G. Browne and J. E. Swallow in *S. Gregory of Nazianzus, Arch bishop of Constantinople, Select Orations and Select Letters, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series [NPNF2], vol. 7* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 204-227. All quotations are from the Ante-Nicene series unless otherwise noted. This translation was chosen because it is the most available. Concerning his other works, *The Five Theological Orations and the Two Letters to Cledonius (On Christology)* are

available in *On God and Christ*, trans. Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Press, 2002). Brian Daley's *Gregory of Nazianzus* provides translations of Orations 8, 14, 20, 26, 38, 39, 42, 44. Orations 7, 8, 18, 43 are available in *Funeral Orations by Saint Gregory Nazianzen and Saint Ambrose*, trans. Leo McCauley in *Fathers of the Church 22* (NY: Catholic University of America Press, 1953). A translation of all Orations not available in the Ante-Nicene series is available in *The Father of the Early Church: A New Translation*, trans. Martha Vinson in *Fathers of The Church 107* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2003).

5. 'I was astonished at the unexpectedness of what had occurred, as people are terrified by sudden noises.'
6. Oration 2.6, 206.
7. 'nothing seemed to me...Spirit.'
8. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 12.4 (*To His Father*), 246. This sermon was a shorter piece reflecting on his appointment.
9. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 12.4 (*To His Father*), 246.
10. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 11.1 (By the same to Gregory of Nyssa, the brother of Basil the Great, who arrived after the consecration) in *The Fathers of the Church* 107, 30.
11. Oration 2.8, 206.
12. Found in Daley's *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 52. He is quoting from Gregory's poem *On Himself and the Bishops* (CARM 2.1.12).
13. Oration 2.9, 207.
14. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 9.3 (*Apologia to his Father, in the Presence of Basil, when he was consecrated bishop of Sasima*) in *The Fathers of the Church* 107, 22-23.
15. Oration 2.4, 205.
16. For a reflection on the unity of church see Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 6 (*First Oration on Peace. On the occasion of the reconciliation of the monks after his silence, delivered in the presence of his father*) in *The Father of the Church* 107, 3-20.
17. Oration 2.3, 205
18. Oration 2.91, 223.
19. Oration 2.3, 205. Gregory comments, 'Others should be pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the church, those I mean, who surpass the majority in virtue and nearness to God, performing the functions of the soul and body, of the intellect in the soul; in order that both may be so united and compacted together, that although

- one is lacking and another is pre-eminent, they may, like the members of our body, be so combined and knit together by the harmony of the Spirit, as to form one perfect body, really worthy of Christ Himself, our Head' (205).
20. He bases the correlation between the pastor and the church in Isaiah 24:2 and Hosea 4:9. Gregory, 'As with the people so with the priest,' (Oration 2.82, 221).
 21. The Father has sent the Son to die for our sins and bring peace between a holy God and sinful men. The Father and Son send the Spirit that changes and convicts the heart so that the convert is drawn to Christ who carries the believer into the presence of God. For a contemporary emphasis upon this see Michael Haykin, *The God Who Draws Near* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2007).
 22. Oration 2.39, 213.
 23. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 29.2-3 (*The Third Theological Oration: On The Son*), 301.
 24. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 21.4 (*On the Great Athanasius*), 270.
 25. Oration 2.14, 208.
 26. Oration 2.14, 208.
 27. Oration 2.1, 205.
 28. Oration 2.5, 206.
 29. He was the first to apply the term *homoousios* to the Spirit in order to secure a certain fully divine Trinity. *Homoousios* is the technical term included in the Nicene Creed to define the Father and the Son as fully God. The Arians desired *homoiousios* so that the Son was deity-like. *Homoousios* was kept from the Spirit because Scripture says less about his deity. Gregory argues that it certainly says enough even if it is not as much as what it says about the Son. Most pastors were describing the Spirit as divine based upon his actions and titles, but were hesitant to apply the technical term to the third person. Gregory, being his typical bold self, did not hesitate seeking to make the confession full. Does this mean the church should apply the term to all three persons in confession.
 30. Oration 2.38, 212.
 31. He is first to refer to Spirit as *homoousios* in 31 and 21.6. Accused Basil of slurring the in the confession of the Spirit because he avoided this strong of an affirmation (See Epistle 58.7).
 32. See Gregory of Nazianzus Orations 27 and 28 where he likens approaching God to Moses ascending the mountain only to see the 'hind' parts of God because we would be overwhelmed if we were to see him 'face to face'. In Oration 28.4 he confesses, 'so we must begin again with this in mind. To know god is hard, to describe him impossible...for language may show the known if not adequately, at least faintly, to

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- a person not totally deaf and dull of mind.’ (*The First Theological Oration: On God*), 290.
33. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 27.4 (*First Theological Oration: On God*), 285.
 34. Oration 2.36-38, 212.
 35. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 28.10 (*Second Theological Oration: On The Doctrine of God*), 292.
 36. For examples of how Gregory understood the Spirit changing the way he lived see Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 12.1 (To His Father), 245 and Oration 31.29-30 (On The Holy Spirit), 327. Gregory explains that the great difference between an Orthodox reading of Scripture and that which is done by the heretics by claiming the first is Spiritual and the latter carnal. The heretics have no reverence for God or for Scripture. See Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 21.22 (*On The Great Athanasius*), 275. Gregory argues that the Spirit is the one who finalizes our communion with God by perfecting the work of Christ in us. See Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 42 (*On Pentecost*), 378-385.
 37. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 12.4 (*To His Father*), 246. ‘it will suffice to say that it is the Spirit in whom we worship, and in whom we pray’ in Oration 31.12 (*Third Theological Oration: On The Holy Spirit*), 201. See A further argument for the deity of the Spirit is the baptismal creed of the church that is done in one name yet with reference to the three including the Spirit. One is not worshipping properly if practicing baptism in Spirit’s name but denying his deity. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 33.13 (*Against The Arians*), 334. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 3.5 (*Oration on Holy Baptism*), 360-1.
 38. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 40.3 (*On Holy Baptism*), 360.
 39. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 34.13 (*On the Arrival of the Egyptians*), 337. The basis for the Spirit lifting us out of our sin or debased natures and into the higher philosophy of purity and virtue is the Spirit being Light from Light and of the one divine nature. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 21.2 (*On The Great Athanasius*), 270.
 40. See Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 39.31 (*On the Holy Lights*), 361; Oration 31.29 (*The Fifth Theological Oration: On The Holy Spirit*), 328 for these different properties and actions.
 41. Any more than that would have to turn into a paper itself (which I am now currently working on).
 42. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 6.22 (*First Oration on Peace. On the occasion of the reconciliation of the monks after his silence, delivered in the presence of his father*) in *The Fathers of the Church*, 20.
 43. Gregory reasons from the Baptismal formula that all three must be fully divine

- unless one is baptizing in the name of a creature. See Oration 33.17 (*Against the Arians*), 334.
44. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 27 (*First Theological Oration: On God*), 284-288 goes into this in great detail as well as 28.1-5 (*Second Theological Oration: On God*), 288-291. The key is understanding that he is not denying all knowledge of God. We proclaim what he has revealed with humility. He refers to the primary substance which would be understood today as the immanent Trinity or the very substance of God.
 45. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 29.1-3 (*Third Theological Oration: On The Son*), 301. Gregory makes his argument for unity and oneness very strong by emphasizing the one will and single nature. See 42.15 (*The Last Farewell*), 290. Gregory makes his argument for unity and oneness very strong by emphasizing the one will and single nature.
 46. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 31.14-9 (*Fifth Theological Oration: On The Holy Spirit*), 322-24. Here he actually argues against Gregory of Nyssa's analogy of Peter, James, and John. One of the strongest
 47. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 29.12-16 (*Third Theological Oration: On The Son*), 305-306. Augustine picks up this distinguishing mark of relation and, I think, provides some extra rules and articulation that builds on Gregory.
 48. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 29.3 (*Third Theological Oration: On The Son*), 301. The argument here is echoing the Arian confession that 'there was when the Son was not' as an argument that the Son has a beginning. Gregory, as a great rhetorician, uses this confession to show that the name Father implies the Son and for him to be the Father, he necessarily has a Son who is eternal.
 49. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 31.26 (*Fifth Theological Oration: On The Holy Spirit*), 326.
 50. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 33.14 (*On the Holy Lights*), 355. 'When I speak of God you must be illumined at once by one flash of light and by three...for they are divided without division..and are united in division.'
 51. Gregory of Nazianzus Oration 40.41 (*On Holy Baptism*), 375. See also Oration 2.22 (*First Oration on Peace. On the occasion of the reconciliation of the monks after his silence, delivered in the presence of his father*) in *The Fathers of the Church*, 20.
 52. Oration 2.16, 208. The metaphor of physician of the soul continued its influence on pastoral ministry in Chrysostom's *On The Priesthood* 2.3.
 53. Oration 2.18, 208; 2.22, 209; 2.26, 210.
 54. Oration 2.26-28, 210.

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55. Oration 2.30, 211.
56. Oration 2.30-31, 211.
57. Oration 2.21, 209.
58. Oration 2.11, 207.
59. Oration 2.91, 223.
60. Oration 2.19-20, 209.
61. Oration 2.20, 209.
62. Oration 2.19, 209. Gregory, 'we allege excuses in our sins, by devising pleas in defense of our falls, or tightly closing our ears, like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ears, we are obstinate in refusing to hear the voice of the charmer, and be treated with the medicines of wisdom, by which spiritual sickness is healed' (Oration 2.19, 209).
63. Oration 2.20, 209.
64. Oration 2.13, 207.
65. Oration 2.17, 208.
66. Oration 2.14, 208.
67. Oration 2.10, 207.
68. Oration 2.34. He states this in another way in 2.85—'shall anyone contend for Christ in an unchristlike manner, and yet be pleasing to peace for having fought unlawfully in her name'.
69. Oration 2.39, 213.
70. Oration 2.35, 212.
71. Oration 2.71, 219. I am not promoting 'expositional' preaching here, or rather, Gregory is not. Gregory's sermons are profound, deep, and biblical, but they are not what one calls classical expositional. This is a new style that seeks to follow the text. These Fathers were very biblical and proclaimed the Word faithful, but in a different, refreshing style.
72. Oration 2.54-57, 216-217.
73. Oration 2.54, 216.
74. Oration 2.55, 216.
75. Oration 2.55, 216.
76. Oration 2.55, 216.