

# Gregory Nanzianzen's *Oration II*: A 4th Century Vision of Christian Leadership for the 21st Century

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## Abstract

*Leadership styles in southeast Europe tend to lie at the poles along a line stretched between passivity and authoritarianism. This is a universal problem in the global church, not one unique to southeast Europe. However, the fact remains that the mainstream leadership models in this part of the world need to be appraised and healthier models need to be developed. Unfortunately, the leadership models being imported from the West take as their cue business management, oftentimes focusing on efficiency, productivity, and growth rather than focusing on Kingdom expansion and serving the Bride of Christ. However, a model does exist for servant leadership, a model that emerged from the Eastern Church 17 centuries ago.*

*In this paper, I will examine Gregory Nazianzen's Oration II which presents a spiritual model of leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While written many centuries ago, this text is still able to speak to the modern mind and remains relevant for several reasons. First, this is the first extant extra-Biblical account of an individual's struggle with calling and obedience to Christian ministry. Second, Gregory's model is saturated with Scripture, providing a sound though unique perspective from his brilliant and highly trained mind. Finally, as one of Gregory's primary concerns is remaining faithful during a corrupt public form of Christianity, the context is appropriate to the traditional church contexts of southeast Europe.*

*Following a brief historical background, this paper will look at three elements of Christian ministry and how Gregory addresses their spiritual components. First, the roles of a minister, under the titles of priest, king, and prophet. Second, the challenges that beset ministers who seek to serve. And third, the personal struggles that an individual must face and overcome to be obedient in this calling.*

Keywords: *Gregory Nazianzen, Oration II, Christian Ministry, (Christian) Leadership, Church History*

## **Introduction**

Leadership styles in southeast Europe tend to lie at the poles along a line stretched between passivity and authoritarianism. Another spectrum of leadership focus is that of a binary choice between concentration within the Church (i.e. discipline and discipleship) or concentration on the world outside the Church (i.e. evangelism or social ministry). Both of these spectrums are false choices. Christian leadership is full of spectrums such as these, and the Church has suffered under the leadership of those who have embraced the false choices of those who have abided in the extremes. The alternative to these extremes, to these false choices, is a balance along these poles, alternatively focusing in one area for a season, but not permanently, while consistently seeking to maintain harmony between competing demands.

This lack of balance is a universal problem in the global church and not only a problem unique to southeast Europe. The fact remains, though, that the mainstream leadership models in this part of the world need to continually be appraised and healthier models need to be sought and developed. Unfortunately, new leadership models are most likely to be imported from the West, and as such will often take as their cue business management, focusing on efficiency, productivity, and quantifiable growth rather than focusing on the oftentimes invisible Kingdom expansion and the non-quantifiable value of serving the Bride of Christ. However, a model does exist for servant leadership, a model that emerged from the eastern region of the early Church nearly seventeen centuries ago.

Gregory of Nazianzus's *Oration II* presents a fourth-century model of Christian leadership still applicable for the twenty-first century. While written many centuries ago, this text is still able to speak to the modern mind and remains relevant for several reasons. First, this is the first extant extra-Biblical account

of an individual's struggle with calling and obedience to Christian ministry.<sup>1</sup> Second, Gregory's model is saturated with Scripture, providing a sound though unique perspective from his brilliant and highly trained mind.<sup>2</sup> Third, as one of Gregory's primary concerns is remaining faithful during a corrupt public form of Christianity and a hostile government, the context does bear some similarities to the contexts of southeast Europe today.<sup>3</sup> Finally, Gregory was seeking to discover what it meant to be a Christian leader without many strong role models.<sup>4</sup> In the nascent evangelical world that is emerging in southeast Europe, the same could be said due simply to the brief history of the movement.

In this paper, I will first provide a background to the text, Gregory's history, and the context in which the document was written. Second, I will examine the oration itself, its structure, and primary themes. Finally, I will address the text's relevance to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century ministry of the Gospel.

## 1. Gregory's Defeat

"I have been defeated, and own my defeat" (Gregory 1979, 7:204). So begins the second oration of Gregory of Nazianzus. What does Gregory mean by these intriguing words? What is this "defeat?" Was it his flight to Pontus, or was it his return to Nazianzus? And how has he come to "own" his defeat? Does this mean that he accepts the humiliation associated with this episode, or rather something else?

- 1 While there are other documents from the Early Church dealing with Christian leadership, and in fact the New Testament is full of commentary on the subject of leadership, the unique context of this document and how Gregory addresses this context lead me to this statement.
- 2 There are approximately four hundred Scripture references in this work, or approximately four references per section, meaning that roughly every other sentence of the document has a Scripture reference, though there are sections which are more concentrated and others which are less so.
- 3 The Church at that time could be considered corrupt not only because of rampant heresy, but also due to the syncretism that had occurred as a result of the near instantaneous transformation of the Roman Empire from a paganism that demanded universal worship of the emperor to a state sponsored Christianity promoted by the emperor. Further, Julian the Apostate was sole Roman emperor at the time of this text's writing and was actively seeking to restore paganism and undermine Christianity. Gregory and Julian knew one another personally from their time together studying in Athens years before.
- 4 In the introduction to *Basil of Caesarea*, Philip Rousseau states that one of his purposes in writing the book was to discover why Basil became a bishop, and if able to understand that, to further discover if he was a successful bishop. He concludes that it is nearly impossible to understand if he was successful, as there was no clear understanding, particularly in the minds of fourth century bishops, what it meant to be a bishop in the fourth century. The same thing can be said of Gregory in terms of his own ministry.

Understanding this opening sentence is central to the understanding of this text, as well as Gregory's understanding of Christian leadership. And this is a worthy endeavor, as this understanding, as revealed in this work, applies not merely to the pastor, but also every individual called by God into leadership. *Oration II* should be seen not only as just a handbook for pastoral ministry, though it certainly has much to say on this subject.<sup>5</sup> The work is much broader than this. Rather, it should be seen as a philosophical guide to one's coming to terms with God's call to the ministry of Christian leadership and how best to pursue one's obedience to this calling.

## 2. Background of the Text

Born around the year 325 CE, Gregory would have been about 37 years old when he wrote *Oration II*. Born into a wealthy Christian family in Cappadocia (modern Turkey), Gregory had the opportunity to prove his academic abilities as a young man in Palestine and Egypt before spending nearly 10 years perfecting them in Athens. Gregory left Athens in 356, and the next five years were spent in travel and study with Basil in Pontus.<sup>6</sup> On Christmas day 361, Gregory was apparently "forced" into the ministry by his father and at least a portion of the Nazianzen congregation.<sup>7</sup> In a short time, Gregory fled Nazianzus and made his way back to Pontus, where he spent several months with Basil. He did, though, return to Nazianzus, at least by Easter 362, as he preached a sermon Easter Sunday, which we have as *Oration I*. Upon his return, though, Gregory was faced with questions concerning his sudden departure months earlier. Even more importantly, in light of his departure, his fitness for ministry was called into question. *Oration II* is the response to these questions.

It is questionable whether this should be considered a classic oration, in terms of a publicly delivered speech. *Oration I*, which was delivered Easter 362, consists of approximately 1,200 words, while *Oration III*, delivered a few days later, consists of approximately 1,500 words. *Oration II*, however, consists of more than 19,500 words and would take approximately two and a half hours to present oral-

- 5 The introduction of the text is titled, "In Defence of His Flight to Pontus, and His Return, After His Ordination to the Priesthood, with an *Exposition of the Character of the Priestly Office*." Italics added.
- 6 These years appear to be hazy, some historians stating that Gregory spent years with Basil, while others limit this time to perhaps a few months. Could his father's actions been the result of a sense that his son was wandering aimlessly and squandering his gifts?
- 7 Gregory (1979, 7:1) alludes to two groups within the congregation "according to the hatred or love they bear me, on the one side refusing to acquit me of the charges alleged, on the other giving me a hearty welcome."

ly. Browne and Swallow (Gregory 1979, 7:204) state, "It is generally agreed that this Oration was not intended for oral delivery." Rather than a standard *oratorio*, this work may be considered an *apologia*, a formal defense. I would suggest that perhaps this work was not completed after he returned to Nazianzus, as some scholars suggest.<sup>8</sup> Rather, I believe that it might have been prepared, if not completed, in Pontus, after he decided to return to Nazianzus. Further, I believe that in addition to being a defense, this work may also be considered in terms of a resume, or even a job application; this for a job he already had.

### 3. The Relevance of the Text

In this section, we will examine the relevance of this text, first in terms of the author and second in terms of the text's content. Gregory of Nazianzus has been called "without question, the greatest stylist of the Patristic Age" (McGuckin 2001, xxi).<sup>9</sup> He is recognized as both a gifted rhetorician and influential theologian, and as one of the Cappadocian Fathers, Gregory played a vital role in defending orthodoxy during the second half of the Fourth Century.

Following the Council of Nicaea in 325, which settled the question of Christ's deity, the question of the deity of the Holy Spirit was then raised by those who had sided with orthodoxy during the previous struggle. This group, known as *pneumatomachi*, or "spirit fighters," refused to honor or worship the Holy Spirit as distinct within the Godhead. Basil of Caesarea, the leading Cappadocian Father, wrote the formula which answered this question of the deity of the Holy Spirit in his *On the Holy Spirit*, written around 364. However, he died previous to the resolution of the controversy, probably in 373 (Rousseau 1994, 360). Gregory then took up the mantle of leadership and in 379 was invited to Constantinople where he forcefully preached against the *pneumatomachi* and still ineradicable Arians. In 380 he was made Bishop of Constantinople by Emperor Theodosius I and was charged with presiding over the First Council of Constantinople in 381, which produced the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, settling the issue of the Trinity (Tanner and Alberigo 1990, 84).

- 8 "On Easter Day he delivered his first Oration before a congregation whose scantiness marked the displeasure with which the people of Nazianzus had viewed his conduct. Accordingly, he set himself to supply them in this Oration with a full explanation of the motives which had led to his retirement" (Gregory 1979, 7:204).
- 9 Charles Browne and James Swallow (Gregory 1979, 7:207) in their introduction to Gregory's writings state that his forty-five orations "raise him to equality with the best Orators of antiquity."

*Oration II* has been a recognized work in the historical Church's identity of the pastoral ministry, and rightly so.<sup>10</sup> It has much to say concerning the work of a Christian leader and says it very eloquently. However, I do not believe that this was Gregory's original intention in preparing this text, to write a treatise on pastoral ministry. We cannot take the text out of its context. This is not a theoretical work of Gregory, it is written within a specific perspective and with a specific purpose; this is a practical work, written to serve a very practical purpose *for Gregory*. And while it has justifiably come to be considered a cornerstone in the Church's understanding of pastoral ministry, ironically, many of its strongest teachings on ministry are made not in the positive sense, but rather from the negative point of view. This is a central clue in the search for the meaning of Gregory's "ownership of defeat." Yet, to see this work as having significance only in terms of pastoral ministry misses perhaps its greatest contribution, which I believe to be a philosophical understanding of the call to ministry in general; whether pastoral, proclamation, social ministry, or scholastic ministry. All ministry is leadership, but leadership must be pursued according to the calling of God.

In his introduction to *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations* Lionel Wickham (2002, 20) makes an interesting point, stating, "...much in the Cappadocian theology is not new but gives the impression of being just Eunomian in reverse." He continues later within the same paragraph, "the Cappadocian doctrine of God, to repeat, is not explicable historically, nor indeed is comprehensible, without reference to the Eunomians" (Wickham 2002, 21). I believe that this is an important point. Gregory's views on the Trinity in general and the Holy Spirit, in particular, were not inventions, but were rather critiques of the false, and therefore heretical, views of others. The Cappadocian Fathers were theologically conservative, not innovative; it was the heretics who were the innovators. Before these false views were expressed there was no need to examine certain aspects of God's nature. However, when confronted with a view that was novel, but which was not consistent with the Scriptures, this nature had to be delved into deeper, to be defended according to the Scriptures, for the sake of the Church. This is

10 "[H]e [Gregory] has supplied an exposition of the obligations and dignity of the Priestly Office which has been drawn upon by all later writers on the subject. S. Chrysostom in his well-known treatise, S. Gregory the Great in his Pastoral Care, and Bossuet in his panegyric on S. Paul, don't have little more than summarize the material or develop the considerations contained in this eloquent and elaborate dissertation." (Tanner and Alberigo 1990, 84). This work continues to be cited in works on pastoral ministry, with contemporary books with reference to Gregory's *Oration II* including books by such varied contemporary authors as William Willamon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*, John MacArthur, *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry*, and Eugene Petersen, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*.

apophatic theology, or “theologizing negatively,” concluding what something *is* from the point of view of what it *is not*.

And so, it is with Gregory’s expression of ministry in *Oration II*. This did not occur in a vacuum but rather was created out of the violent storms of inner conviction and the deplorable state of ministry in his day into which he brought those convictions. Without either of these influences the document that we have today as *Oration II* would not have been created. Further, it cannot be fully appreciated apart from this context. This is not a document to be used simply as a manual for pastoral ministry. This is a devotional document before which our calling may be challenged and confirmed.

After having come to the point where he “owned his defeat,” Gregory set down to explain his flight, but even more so, to defend his return. Gregory knows that there are three kinds of people awaiting him in Nazianzus: those who will always look on him positively, those who will always look on him negatively, and those who are “sitting on the fence.” This last group will judge him on the words of the previous two groups, as well as by his actions. *Oration II* was written for the latter two groups, seeking to win them over to accept him back as their pastor. For the first group, no words were necessary.

The length and passion of the text reveal how seriously Gregory took this mission of convincing those who resented his departure and doubted his return. He was not going to be content to merely return on the coattails of his father; something had happened to him in Pontus. He was not interested in holding a position of ministry in the Nazianzus church-based simply on the fact that his father was the head of the local church. Rather, Gregory was writing to win the hearts of the Nazianzus church members. He was convinced that he was right to return that he had no other choice, and so sought to convince them just the same; that they had no choice but to receive him back willingly. This I believe is the central clue to understanding Gregory’s statement, “I own my defeat,” which is itself the key to understanding the entire text.

#### **4. *Oration II***

*Oration II* is a work rich on so many different levels it will be impossible to do its true justice in the context of this paper. Due to the focus, I have chosen there are many issues that I will have to gloss over, and others that I will have to ignore entirely. That being stated I will examine the work in the following manner. I will begin with an overview of the text and then examine what I have found to be the four major themes of the work which provide insight into understanding Gregory’s opening line.

Before proceeding, reference must be made to Gregory's style and turn of a phrase. I do not believe that one can read this work and not be awed by the power of his use of words. Based on this work, Gregory's years spent in Athens studying rhetoric were not without fruit. One can only imagine the effect of Gregory's spoken sermons when they still carry such weight on paper, translated into a second language, and separated by more than a millennium and a half. Due to the limited scope of this paper, there are many beautiful sections of text which I will not examine, however, I feel that it deserves to be noted that this is a work that often blurs the line between prose and poetry.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4.1. Outline of the Argument

The first part of the oration, running from the introduction (paragraphs 1-5) through paragraph 51 deals with the roles that a true minister must play as well as three challenges to a minister's meeting of these demands. As the theme of the ministerial roles will be covered in a later section, I will not discuss them here. The first challenge discussed is that of the pervasive nature of sin and the necessity, in Gregory's view, that a minister must be holy, so as not to "undertake to heal others while ourselves are full of sores" (Gregory 1979, 7:13). The second challenge is that of the nature of the congregation, which is not monolithic, but rather highly varied in their needs.<sup>12</sup> The third challenge is that of the limited age and experience of those called into the ministry; how does one gain the necessary ministerial experience, without, in the process, risking damage to the very people one would use that experience to benefit?

The second part, running from paragraph 52 to paragraph 70, provides biblical precedents for the role of minister, using Paul as a positive example, and the warnings of the Old Testament prophets against kings and priests as negative examples. This section begins to develop the question, which is answered in the third section, of whether anyone is truly ready or adequate for the ministry. After

11 And clearly Gregory was not unconscious of this fact, as revealed by an account later spoken of by Jerome in his Epistle 52, where they disagreed on the interpretation of a phrase in the Gospel of Luke. "Gregory told him he would understand the point best if he heard it in the midst of one of Gregory's orations where the applause would persuade him, even against his will, or he would feel the fool" (Norris 1991, 16).

12 Gregory (1979, 7:19) compares the work of a doctor, with all the varied maladies and treatments they face, with the minister, however, making the point that for the doctor, their patients wish to be healed! "But in our case, human prudence and selfishness, and the want of training and inclination to yield ready submission are a very great obstacle to advance in virtue, *amounting almost to an armed resistance to those who are wishful to help us.*" Italics added.



providing the archetypal role model of Paul, he states his fear that “in comparison with them [i.e. Paul and those who came before] we [i.e. Gregory and those of his day] may be foolish princes of Zoan,” alluding to Isaiah’s reproach of the Pharaoh’s counselors (Gregory 1979, 7:56).<sup>13</sup> He then continues in the same vein with an extended list of prophetic indictments against the ancient priests of Israel and Judah. References are made to Hosea, Micah, Joel, Habakkuk, Malachi, Zechariah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. He then closes this section by comparing the indictments of the prophets to the indictments of Jesus against the Pharisees and scribes.

In the third section, beginning in paragraph 71 and running to 99, Gregory reaches the crescendo of his argument, which is that no man is truly qualified to meet the demands of the ministry. He begins by stating that the testimony of Paul and the *Old* Testament prophets “depress my soul,” (Gregory 1979, 7:71) when compared with the following daunting vision of true ministry: “A man must himself be cleansed, before cleansing others; himself become wise that he may make others wise; become light and then give light; draw near to God, and so bring others near; be hallowed, to hallow them; be possessed of hands to lead others by the hand, of wisdom to give advice” (Gregory 1979, 7:71). This is similar to what he stated earlier:

But the scope of our art is to provide the soul with wings, to rescue it from the world and give it to God, and to watch over that which is in His image, if it abides, to take it by the hand, if it is in danger, to restore it, if ruined, to make Christ to dwell in the heart by the Spirit: and, in short, to deify, and bestow heavenly bliss upon, one who belongs to the heavenly host (Gregory 1979, 7:21).

He then lists two more challenges that face the minister, that of factionalism within the Church, particularly but not exclusively in terms of doctrinal controversy, and that of the insecurities of those who are to be raised “above the multitude.”<sup>14</sup> The force that drives this section is found in four “who is the man”

13 Isaiah 19:11 NIV reads, “The officials of Zoan are nothing but fools; the wise counselors of Pharaoh give senseless advice. How can you say to the Pharaoh, ‘I am one of the wise men, a disciple of the ancient kings?’” This statement is made in a context where God is about bring judgment upon Egypt.

14 “But Moses actually went up and entered into the cloud, and was charged with law, and received the tables, which belong, for the multitude, to the letter, but for those who are above the multitude, the letter.” This echoes an earlier section where he states, “God has ordained... 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 in the body, and of the intellect in the soul...” (Gregory 1979, 7:92).

challenges found in paragraphs 95 to 99. These arguments spring from the following statement, “Since then I knew these things... how could I dare?”<sup>15</sup> This then becomes the pivot of the entire argument of the oration and becomes the foundation of his defense. He follows these four “who is the man,” statements by asking a seemingly rhetorical question if these are the demands and requirements of the ministry, who is the man foolhardy enough to accept it? And in paragraph 99 he finally answers the question in the following manner, “No one, if he will listen to my judgment and accept my advice!” (Gregory 1979, 7:99).

This then is Gregory’s conclusion as he turns to the final section. It is in this final section, paragraphs 100 to 114, that Gregory reveals how, against his judgment and advice, he has come to accept the role of minister, and so to return to Nazianzus. And it is this which forms Gregory’s primary appeal for the Nazianzen church to accept him upon his return. Rather than summarize his conclusion here, I will address it through the remainder of this paper.

#### *4.2. Themes of the Argument*

Now that we have viewed the work as a whole, I will examine what I consider to be four major themes that drive the work. By examining these themes, and the order in which they are presented, we may more clearly grasp Gregory’s purpose. These themes are 1) the personal issues of Gregory, 2) the challenges of the ministry, 3) the various roles that a minister must perform, and 4) biblical precedents which support Gregory’s arguments. The total work consists of 117 paragraphs and I have divided the themes among the paragraphs as follows. Excluding the

15 “Since then I knew these things, and that no one is worthy of the mightiness of God, and the sacrifice, and priesthood, who has not first presented himself to God, a living, holy sacrifice, and set forth the reasonable, well-pleasing service, and sacrificed to God the sacrifice of praise and the contrite spirit, which is the only sacrifice required of us by the Giver of all; how could I dare to offer to Him the external sacrifice, the antitype of the great mysteries, or clothe myself with the garb and name of priest, before my hands had been consecrated by holy works; before my eyes had been accustomed to gaze safely upon created things, with wonder only for the Creator, and without injury to the creature; before my ear had been sufficiently opened to the instruction of the Lord, and He had opened mine ear to hear without heaviness, and had set a golden earring with precious sardius, that is, a wise man’s word in an obedient ear; before my mouth had been opened to draw in the Spirit, and opened wide to be filled with the spirit of speaking mysteries and doctrines; and my lips bound, to use the words of wisdom, by divine knowledge, and, as I would add, loosed in due season: before my tongue had been filled with exultation, and become an instrument of Divine melody, awaking with glory, awaking right early, and laboring till it cleave to my jaws: before my feet had been set upon the rock, made like hart’s feet, and my footsteps directed in a godly fashion so that they should not well-nigh slip, nor slip at all; before all my members had become instruments of righteousness, and all mortality had been put off, and swallowed up of life, and had yielded to the Spirit?” (Gregory 1979, 7:95). This one sentence forms the entire paragraph!

eight paragraphs which form the introduction and the conclusion of the oration, 33 paragraphs are concerned with issues personal to Gregory, 32 are concerned with challenges to the ministry, while only 28 can be considered as a guide to the would-be pastoral minister. All 28 of the paragraphs dealing with the role of a minister are located in a block together in the first section of the work, paragraphs 16 to 43. The remaining 16 paragraphs form the biblical foundation of Gregory's argument, dealing with Paul and the Old Testament prophets. From this, it can be seen then that the majority of the work is not directly concerned with the specific roles of the pastoral minister, but rather themes first related to Gregory's issues and second to the challenges that threaten the minister, both of which serve to support Gregory's overall defense.

The first theme is concerned with Gregory's soul-bearing before the Nazianzen church. This relates either to his explanations of the reasons for his flight and return, which will be examined in a later section, or relate to his feelings of inadequacy in the light of the second and fourth themes. I believe that there is a dual motivation behind Gregory's personal hesitancy towards the ministry. The first motivation, I believe, is true spiritual humility, while the second is a very human case of perfectionism. Gregory, well versed in the Scripture and the traditions of the early church and the Church of his day, had a very high view of what we would today call simply the discipleship of the laity; how much greater than must be those who would lead! Born under the rule of the first Emperor to tolerate Christianity, he would certainly have known firsthand of martyrs and those who bore the marks of Christ. If this was the baseline, who was he to attempt something greater? And yet, contrasted with this humility, there was within himself a drive to measure up fully to this high ideal. If he could not succeed brilliantly, he would not attempt at all.<sup>16</sup> Gregory's flight from Nazianzus was then, I believe, fueled by this interplay of humility and perfectionism.

The second and third themes are related to one another, but whereas the third discusses what a minister should do, the positive argument, the second discusses ministry in the negative sense: all the tasks that ministers are called upon to perform, but do not, or perhaps even cannot, complete. As noted earlier, the interplay between these positive and negative viewpoints of the ministry provides a fuller, deeper, and more exhaustive view than if Gregory had simply written about ministry from the positive viewpoint. Had Gregory not been out to "prove"

16 "Let others sail for merchandise, I used to say, and cross the wide oceans, and constantly contend with winds and waves, to gain great wealth, if so it should chance, and run great risks in their eagerness for sailing and merchandise; but, for my part, I greatly prefer to stay ashore and plough a short but pleasant furrow, saluting at a respectful distance the sea and its gains, to live as best I can upon a poor and scanty store of barley-bread, and drag my life along in safety and calm, rather than expose myself to so long and great a risk for the sake of great gains" (Gregory 1979, 7:100).

himself, we would not have the benefit of this insight. Had Gregory been content and secure, had he not been driven by these feelings of inadequacy stemming from his humility and perfectionism, he would not have fled; he would have remained in Nazianzus and adjusted as best as he could. He would have settled for a mediocre ministry. Yet, because he fled, and then felt compelled to return, he *was* forced to “prove” himself.

Based on this examination, I believe that a case can be made that this is not a document primarily concerned with the role of ministry but rather is focused on the qualification of ministers. And with this in mind, the subtitle to the work, “... with an exposition of the character of the priestly office,” I believe, is unfounded (Gregory 1979, 7:204). Gregory is not primarily concerned with the roles and functions of ministry in this text, he is primarily concerned with proving that, because of the required roles and functions, no one, much less Gregory himself, is adequate to this Herculean task.

Why? I believe that this forms his primary defense for his flight from Nazianzus. He cannot be blamed for his initial shock, rather than this action disqualifying him, it rather shows that, unlike others already in the ministry, *only he* had the wisdom to recognize this fact. This then is his defeat, his call into the ministry, a role he feels is not for him; to a calling that goes against his desires and his will. And so here we have the answer to the first question raised by his opening remark. But what about the second? What does he mean that he “owns” this defeat? To answer these questions let us now turn to back the text and test this theory against Gregory’s own words.

## 5. Explanation of Gregory’s argument

“Gregory’s argument is summarized in two explanations, first, the reasonable causes for his flight, and second, the overwhelming force behind his return. It is in the two dueling forces that we find both the dangers facing the pastor as well as the obligations to which a pastor is called to meet. We will first examine the reasons that Gregory gives for his departure from Nazianzus, or as he puts it, the “reason for my disobedience” (Gregory 1979, 7:6). Second, we will examine the reasons he states for his return, “the causes for my submission and tractability” (Gregory 1979, 7:103).

### 5.1. “The Reason for my Disobedience”

In the opening of *Oration II* Gregory gives four reasons for his flight from Nazianzus. The first he provides is simple shock at the situation as it occurred: “First,

and most importantly, I was astounded at the unexpectedness of what had occurred, as people are terrified by sudden noises; and, losing the control of my reasoning faculties, my self-respect, which had hitherto controlled me, gave way” (Gregory 1979, 7:6).

The second, he states, was the desire to live the “philosophic” life, meaning a life of ascetic solitude, where he might focus on his spirituality as well as the study of Scripture and spiritual works:

In the next place, there came over me an eager longing for the blessings of calm and retirement, of which I had from the first been enamoured to a higher degree, I imagine, than any other student of letters, and which amidst the greatest and most threatening dangers I had promised to God, and of which I had also had so much experience, that I was then upon its threshold, my longing having in consequence been greatly kindled, so that I could not submit to be thrust into the midst of a life of turmoil by an arbitrary act of oppression, and to be torn away by force from the holy sanctuary of such a life as this (Gregory 1979, 7:8).

A third reason and one echoed throughout the rest of the text relates to the pitiful state, in Gregory’s view, of his peers ministering in the Church:

I was influenced besides by another feeling, whether base or noble I do not know, but I will speak out to you all my secrets. I was ashamed of all those others, who, without being better than ordinary people, nay, it is a great thing if they be not worse, with unwashen hands, as the saying runs, 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 absolute authority*, instead of a ministry of which we must give account (Gregory 1979, 7:8. Italics added).

Gregory’s final reason, which he gives the place of focus, ends up forming the primary defense as he presents it in the work: “Lastly, there is a matter more serious than any which I have mentioned, for I am now coming to the finale of the question: and I will not deceive you; for that would not be lawful regarding topics of such moment. 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” (Gregory 1979, 7:9).

So, while shock and a selfish desire for solitude played a role, from these last two statements, it can be seen that it was primarily the dueling tensions of perfectionism and humility that caused him to flee Nazianzus. And yet clearly something overpowered these two feelings while in Pontus, for Gregory returned. Let us turn to the conclusion of the document to see the reasons he gives for his return, to see what this could have been.

## 5.2. “The Causes of my Submission and Tractability”

As Gregory draws to the end of the oration, he provides three reasons for his return. The first two, to me personally, seem to be formalities. First, he states are that his love for the people of Nazianzus, and his awareness of and concern for the pain he brought about by his departure, caused him to return:

Such is the defense which I have been able to make, perhaps at immoderate length, for my flight. Such are the reasons which, to my pain and possibly to yours, carried me away from you, my friends and brothers; yet, as it seemed to me at the time, with irresistible force. My longing after you, and the sense of your longing for me, have, more than anything else, led to my return, for nothing inclines us so strongly to love as mutual affection (Gregory 1979, 7:102).

Second, he speaks of the duty to his father and the need to honor his mother: “In the next place there was my care, my duty, the hoary hairs and weakness of my holy parents, who were more greatly distressed on my account than by their advanced age- of this Patriarch Abraham whose person is honored by me, and numbered among the angels, and of Sarah, who travailed in my spiritual birth by instructing me in the truth” (Gregory 1979, 7:103).

Finally, Gregory provides a last reason, which, as in the previous list of causes for his departure, the last of which might have been the truest, is closer to the main cause for his return than these previous ones offered: “There is a third reason of the highest importance which I will further mention, and then dismiss the rest. I remembered the days of old, and, recurring to one of the ancient histories, drew counsel for myself therefrom as to my present conduct” (Gregory 1979, 7:104).

Gregory then proceeds with the story of the unwilling prophet Jonah. He mentions on several occasions in the text that this interpretation was provided to him by “a man,” though this man’s name is not mentioned.<sup>17</sup> In any case, in Jonah Gregory finds, oddly enough, the anti-hero role model necessary to accept the call to ministry as it is in Jonah’s example that Gregory’s perfectionism is broken. The following comment is critical:

Jonah then was not ignorant of the mighty hand of God, with which he threatened other men, nor did he imagine that he could utterly escape the Divine power; this we are not to believe: but when he saw the falling away of Israel, and perceived the passing over of the grace of prophecy to the Gentiles- *this was the cause of his retirement* from preaching and of his delay in fulfilling the command... (Gregory 1979, 7:109).

17 This has led to speculation that this “man” was either Origen, speaking to Gregory through his texts, or possibly Basil who spoke to him about Jonah while they were together in Pontus (Gregory 1979, 7:107–108, footnotes to the text).

From this, Gregory concludes that it is God who is the true Prophet in this case, and not Jonah. Jonah was merely the spokesperson, the true action, however, the true power and fulfillment of prophecy come from God. Jonah saw what God was going to do, he knew as a prophet, unwilling perhaps, but still a true prophet, that God would forgive the Gentiles, and that for his people there would be only a falling away, and because of this, he fled, and not for fear of the Gentile's rejection of his message or any physical harm from them. From this conclusion he then makes application to his case, that it is God who is the true Minister in the Church, not himself, so the fact that he does not measure up to the task is irrelevant; ultimately it is not his task. It is at this point that Gregory's perfectionism is overthrown, and he sees that ministry is not primarily the human's task, but rather that it is God's task, though God chooses to perform it through human hands.

For if it be granted, and this alone can be strongly asserted in such matters, that we are far too low to perform the priest's office before God, and that we can only be worthy of the sanctuary after we have become worthy of the Church, and worthy of the post of president, after being worthy of the sanctuary, *yet some one (sic) else may perhaps refuse to acquit us on the charge of disobedience* (Gregory 1979, 7:111).

It is at this point also that Gregory realizes that his only choice is between obedience and disobedience; God has called him. He can play the Jonah or not, but he fears that where Jonah received mercy, he might not. And while he may be judged to one degree for some failure in the role of minister, he is more fearful of the judgment he might receive for having rejected the call altogether. Gregory then chooses obedience, and in doing so "owns" his defeat, rather than following Jonah, who he sees as having "disowned," or refused to accept, his defeat, for the unsavory reason of simple bigotry; he will pursue his decision with his whole heart, and not grudgingly as he did initially.

With this in mind, *Oration II* may be seen as a job application for a job that Gregory had already previously been offered. However, once in Pontus, Gregory recognized that this was not a career offer, but rather a calling, and determined to accept the role of the minister in Nazianzus from the hand of God, rather than the hand of his father or from the congregation. The problem remained though that he had rejected this calling through his flight. Therefore, he saw that he must prove to the congregation, particularly those who are now unconvinced by his father's endorsement, that he was worthy of their respect, as their respect is important if he is to fully complete the job, according to the spirit of the job, and not only according to the letter. He does this by first showing that no one is worthy of the job, and because of this, he's no less worthy. He then seeks to prove though that while no one is worthy, some are called, and those that are called must obey, in which case not only must he accept the role, but they too must accept him in

the role as well. And through it all, as if presenting a resume, he displays his rhetorical talents and knowledge of Scripture; for while they may not be a warrant for the work, certainly they would not be a hindrance.

Gregory (1979, 7:115) sums up his defense with the following words:

I held my peace, but I will not hold my peace for ever: I withdrew for a little while, till I had considered myself and consoled my grief: but now I am commissioned to exalt Him in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the seat of the elders. If my former conduct deserved blame, my present action merits pardon. What further need is there of words. Here am I, my pastors and fellow-pastors, here am I, thou holy flock, worthy of Christ, the Chief Shepherd, here am I, my father, utterly vanquished, and your subject according to the laws of Christ rather than according to those of the land: here is my obedience, reward it with your blessing.

Gregory (1979, 7:117) then concludes the text with a call upon God to:

[H]old me by my right hand, and guide me with His counsel, and receive me with glory, Who is a Shepherd to shepherds and a Guide to guides: that we may feed His flock with knowledge, not with the instruments of a foolish shepherd, according to the blessing, and not according to the curse pronounced against the men of former days: may He give strength and power unto his people, and Himself present to Himself His flock resplendent and spotless and worthy of the fold on high, in the habitation of them that rejoice, in the splendour of the saints, so that in His temple everyone, both flock and shepherds together may say, Glory, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to Whom be all glory for ever and ever. Amen.

## 6. Contemporary Application

In this final section, I will seek to apply Gregory's vision of Christian leadership to the current context of southeast Europe in the twenty-first century. First, the essential primacy of a call to ministry will be discussed. Second, the challenges that beset ministers who seek to serve, both within the Church and within the world will be briefly examined. And third, the personal struggles that an individual must face and overcome to be obedient in this calling will be examined and a solution will be offered.

### 6.1. *The Call to Ministry*

Gregory's understanding of Christian leadership exists in tension between his high view of ministry and his low view of humanity's virtue. His entire argument



for his flight to Pontus is based on the rational view that no one is up to the task; its demands are too much for a man to meet. His entire argument to the Nazianzen is that his obedience to Christ demands that he return, and so too their obedience to receive him back is likewise demanded. In the space between these two arguments lies the call of God.

The call of God is a prerequisite for the Christian leader, regardless of which sphere or in what capacity they may serve. No one should seek to lead who is not called and likewise, no one should shun leadership who has been called. God is sovereign. He is the one who decides, and he is the one who will grant the grace, gifting, and the necessary blessing to go beyond the human condition and to make an effective impact in the world. No one is worthy, but some individuals are called. These individuals must be obedient to the call.

All Christians receive a call to salvation, but only some receive a call to leadership. Christian leadership should only occur under a calling that is sensed internally, through the Scripture and prayer, and confirmed externally, by the Church. Those who seek to lead by their initiative will find either only disappointment or frustration in the “Mart of Souls,” as Gregory refers to the ministry in one of his orations from some years later.<sup>18</sup> Leadership without calling will create only internal and external tensions, as it will not be operating within the providence of God.

At the same time, though, leadership according to the call of God will likewise produce tension. The call of salvation places an individual within a state of tension with one’s ego and with the world. The “old man” lingers after regeneration to hound the “new creation,” and the one born again faces a world with which he or she may no longer fully cooperate, and at times must seek to confront and alter. The call of ministry, however, places an individual within a state of tension with one’s ego, the world, and also the members of the Church. For, the Christian leader will find times when they may not fully cooperate with certain members within the Church, and it is their duty at times to confront and alter the Church. This can be a challenging and at times seemingly unrewarding task, however, it is a worthy task, as Gregory writes: “ But we, upon whose efforts is staked the salva-

18 “On one point I blame you both, and pray do not take amiss my plainspeaking, if I should annoy you by expressing the cause of my pain. When I was disgusted at the evils of life, and longing, if anyone of our day has longed, for solitude, and eager, as speedily as possible, to escape to some haven of safety, from the surge and dust of public life, it was you who, somehow or other seized and gave me up by the noble title of the priesthood to *this base and treacherous mart of souls*” (Gregory 1979, 7:283). This oration was actually presented at the funeral of his father, and one can still sense the lingering resentment of having been forced into the ministry. Italics added.

tion of a soul, a being blessed and immortal, and destined for undying chastisement or praise, for its vice or virtue, – what a struggle ought ours to be, and how great skill do we require to treat, or get men treated properly, and to change their life, and give up the clay to the spirit” (Gregory 1979, 7:28).

## 6.2. *The Challenges of Ministry*

The stark challenges facing the minister are well described by Gregory. In sections 10-15, Gregory talks about the pervasive nature of sin in the world and within the minister. In sections 44-45, Gregory describes the great varieties of needs that a minister must seek to meet. In sections 46-51, Gregory discusses the lack of experience that most ministers have to draw upon. And finally, in sections 78-86, Gregory confronts the factionalism and careerism that hinders the work of ministry and at times paralyzes the minister. These challenges are not relics of the past, they are the daily anxieties and burdens that the contemporary Christian leader faces.

Amid the struggle of this task, a Christian leader must seek balance. A leader may not turn one’s focus exclusively inside the Church or exclusively outside the Church. Whether a leader is a teacher or not, he or she must take attention to provide for the discipline and growth of the Body of Christ within their sphere of responsibility, whether by leading or serving or both. Likewise, the leader must also seek to lead the Body of Christ beyond the walls of the Church, and out into the world, which is where the Body of Christ is most needed; in the world, but not of the world. In other words, “to be all things to all people,” as Gregory portrays this balance within the ministry of Paul:

What of the laboriousness of his teaching? The manifold character of his ministry? His loving kindness? And on the other hand his strictness? And *the combination and blending of the two; in such wise that his gentleness should not enervate, nor his severity exasperate?* He gives laws for slaves and masters, rulers and ruled, husbands and wives, parents and children, marriage and celibacy, self-discipline and indulgence, wisdom and ignorance, circumcision and uncircumcision, Christ and the world, the flesh and the spirit. On behalf of some he gives thanks, others he upbraids. Some he names his joy and crown, others he charges with folly. Some who hold a straight course he accompanies, sharing in their zeal; others he checks, who are going wrong. At one time he excommunicates, at another he confirms his love; at one time he grieves, at another rejoices; at one time he feeds with milk, at another he handles mysteries; at one time he condescends, at another he raises to his own level; at one time he threatens a rod, at another he offers the spirit of meekness; at one time he is haughty toward the lofty, at another lowly toward the lowly. Now he is least of the apostles, now he offers a proof of Christ speaking

in him; now he longs for departure and is being poured forth as a libation, now he thinks it more necessary for their sakes to abide in the flesh. For he seeks not his own interests, but those of his children, whom he has begotten in Christ by the gospel. *This is the aim of all his spiritual authority, in everything to neglect his own in comparison with the advantage of others* (Gregory 1979, 7:54. Italics added).

Likewise, the Christian leaders of southeast Europe must find harmony between all of these ministry demands, and yet, at the same time, manage the competing demands and tensions within. Without the confidence of the call, these tensions and demands will either overwhelm and paralyze the minister or will force them to operate “in the flesh.”

### 6.3. *The Struggles of a Minister*

Perhaps the greatest challenge that a minister faces is the challenge within. Every minister brings their personality to the context in which they are called to minister and this personality will often be at odds with the context. Gregory's struggles provide us with a case study. While he felt an affection for lone philosophical contemplation, God called him to minister to a noisy and often messy Church. While he sought solitude to pursue personal holiness, God called him to foster corporate holiness in the as yet imperfect Church. God's calling to Gregory was not based on Gregory's disposition or desires, it was based upon the needs of the Church. The same is true today in southeast Europe. However, once again, without the confidence of the call, these inner tensions and demands will either overwhelm and paralyze the minister or will force them to operate “in the flesh.”

What does it mean to be a Christian leader in the twenty-first century? This is being determined by both what contemporary ministers are doing, as well as what they are not doing. At the core of every choice a minister makes is the question of love. A singular focus on the world, through evangelism or social ministry, says, “I do not love the Body of Christ enough to stay within the walls of the church.” A singular focus on building up the Church, through teaching and discipleship, says, “I do not love the world enough to leave the walls of the Church.” Likewise, passivity says to those needing correction, “I do not love you enough to engage.” And authoritarianism says to those who would seek to partner, “I do not love you enough to listen to you or to compromise.” Love demands that an individual put aside their preferences for the sake of the other, whether in the Church or the world. Love also enables an individual to do so. If love is not the core of the minister's motivation, then in the end the minister's work will be “a clanging cymbal, and will be nothing, and will gain nothing” (1. Cor. 13:1-3, ESV). This kind of love does not come from context or from within, it only comes from the call of God.

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### **Oration II Grgura Nazijanskog: Vizija kršćanskog vodstva iz 4. stoljeća za 21. stoljeće**

Sažetak

Stilovi kršćanskog vođenja u jugoistočnoj Europi imaju tendenciju polariziranja duž linije koja se proteže između pasivnosti i autoritarnosti. To zapravo predstavlja univerzalni problem globalne Crkve i nije jedinstven za zemlje jugoistočne Europe. Ostaje, međutim, činjenica da najraširenije modele vodstva u ovom dijelu svijeta ipak treba stalno procjenjivati te shodno tomu trajno nadalje razvijati zdravije modele. Na žalost, modeli vodstva koji se uvoze sa Zapada, a koji

nerazmjerno naglašavaju poslovno upravljanje, često se usredotočuju samo na učinkovitost, produktivnost i rast, umjesto da se usredotoče na širenje Kraljevstva i služenje Kristovoj nevjesti. Međutim, postoji model za vodstvo u služenju, model koji je izrastao iz istočne Crkve prije sedamnaest stoljeća.

U ovom ću radu razmotriti dokument *Oration II* Grgura Nazijanskog, koji predstavlja duhovni model vodstva za 21. stoljeće. Iako je napisan prije mnogo stoljeća, ovaj tekst još uvijek snažno govori suvremenom umu i ostaje trajno relevantan iz više razloga. Kao prvo, ovo je prvi sačuvani vanbiblijski izvještaj o osobnoj borbi pojedinca s potrebom da se poslušno odazove pozivu u kršćansku službu. Drugo, Grgurov je model zasićen Svetim pismom i kao takav pruža razumnu premda jedinstvenu perspektivu iz njegovog briljantnog i visoko obrazovanog uma. Konačno, budući da je jedna od Grgurovih glavnih preokupacija kako ostati vjeran usred korumpiranog javnog oblika kršćanstva, kontekst je veoma primjeren tradicionalnom crkvenom kontekstu jugoistočne Europe.

Slijedeći sažeti povijesni prikaz, u ovom će se radu razmotriti tri elementa kršćanske službe te kako je Grgur razumio njihove duhovne aspekte. Prvo, koje su uloge pastoralnog službenika, bio on svećenik, kralj ili prorok. Drugo, izazovi s kojim se suočavaju pastoralni službenici koji žele služiti. I, treće, osobne borbe s kojima se pojedinci moraju suočiti i savladati ih kako bi ostali poslušni u svom pozivu.