



# Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light (Oxford Studies in Historical Theology)

By Christopher A. Beeley

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Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390 CE), "the Theologian," is the premier teacher on the Holy Trinity in Eastern Christian tradition, yet for over a century historians and theologians have largely neglected his work.

Christopher Beeley's groundbreaking study -- the first comprehensive study in modern Western scholarship -- examines Gregory's doctrine of the Trinity within the full range of his theological and practical vision. Following an overview of Gregory's life and major works, Beeley traces the central soteriological meaning of Gregory's doctrine in the spiritual dialectic of purification and illumination; the dynamic process of divinization (*theosis*); the singular identity of Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God; the divinity and essential presence of the Holy Spirit; and the interpretation of Scripture "according to the Spirit." The book culminates in Gregory's understanding of the Trinity as a whole -- which is "theology" in the fullest sense -- rooted in the monarchy of God the Father and uniquely known in the divine economy of salvation. Finally, Beeley identifies the Trinitarian shape of pastoral ministry, on which Gregory is also the foundational teacher for later Christian tradition.

Beeley offers new insights in several key areas, reinterpreting the famous *Theological Orations* and Christological epistles within the full corpus of Gregory's orations, poems, and letters. Gregory stands out as the leading ecclesiastical figure in the Eastern Roman Empire and the most powerful theologian of his age, who produced the definitive expression of Trinitarian orthodoxy from a characteristically Eastern tradition of Origenist theology, independent of the work of Athanasius and in several respects more insightful than his Cappadocian contemporaries.

Long eclipsed in modern scholarship, Gregory Nazianzen is now brought into full view as the major witness to the Trinity among the Greek fathers of the

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### Review

"Christopher Beeley's book sheds new light on important aspects of Gregory's theology. But the major contribution of his argument is to show persuasively how all Gregory's doctrinal themes cohere in his soteriological understanding of the Trinity, an understanding that Beeley carefully locates in Gregory's own experience both as a Christian leader in controversial times and as a Christian thinker informed by scripture and by the classical Greek heritage. The book demonstrates how, for Gregory, the Trinity not only frames the entire Christian message of salvation but also functions as the wellspring for the spiritual life and for pastoral care." Rowan A. Greer, Professor Emeritus, Yale Divinity School, and author of *Christian Hope and Christian Life*

"This fine book hones in on the place of the doctrine of the Trinity in Gregory of Nazianzus' theology. Christopher Beeley shows how the Trinity was the glowing heart of Gregory's theology, informing every aspect of it-his understanding of Christ, of the Holy Spirit, his pastoral theology and the place of prayer in the knowledge of God. Everything starts from and returns to the love flowing from 'My Trinity', as Gregory daringly calls it." --Andrew Louth, author of *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology*

"This brilliant book is the first full-length study since the late 1940s of Gregory of Nazianzus's contribution to the development of classical Christian theology. Gregory is sometimes written off by modern Western scholars as unoriginal and lacking in speculative substance, a skillful rhetorician but little more. Christopher Beeley brings together historical erudition, thorough knowledge of Gregory's many writings, and deep critical insight into his creative achievement as preacher, poet, and systematic thinker, in a way bound to change permanently our appreciation of the radical newness and the practical implications of his work. Now it should be clearer than ever why the Greek Christian tradition, since shortly after his death, has called this fourth-century humanist and bishop 'Gregory the Theologian.'" --Brian E. Daley, SJ, Professor of Theology, University of Notre Dame, and author of *Gregory of Nazianzus*

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"A worthy addition...Beeley's holistic approach to Nazianzen is the volume's strength."--*Church History*

## About the Author

**Christopher A. Beeley** is the Walter H. Gray Assistant Professor of Anglican Studies and Patristics at Yale University Divinity School and Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, and an Episcopal priest.

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