

FROM A WAY OF READING TO A WAY OF LIFE:  
BASIL OF CAESAREA AND GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS  
ABOUT POETRY IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Andreas Schwab

It is unlikely that anyone would doubt the presence of a certain relationship between reading and education. However, perhaps not everyone would accept the following definition of the educated person as a reader:

The educated person is a reader. . . . He knows to read books in such a manner that they transform him. . . . It is an infallible sign of education that one considers knowledge neither a mere accumulation of information, nor an amusing pastime or social-décor, but rather something which can signify an inner transformation and expansion, which will have an effect on one's actions. This is not only relevant if it concerns significant ethical values. The educated person will also become a different person by means of poetry.<sup>1</sup>

This definition is part of a valuable and rich discourse of the Swiss philosopher and novelist Peter Bieri (also known under the alias Pascal Mercier) about education. The last sentence in particular would meet with ready agreement from the two intellectuals and church fathers of the fourth century A.D., Basil of Caesarea, also known as 'the Great', and his friend Gregory of Nazianzus, 'the Theologian', both originally from the great region of Cappadocia in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, in Western Anatolia, today Western Turkey.<sup>2</sup>

The role of poetry in the context of Christian religious education in the second half of the fourth century is the main interest of my study, although it will be limited to the two influential thinkers of Cappadocia.

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<sup>1</sup> Bieri 2005, 4 (my translation): "Der Gebildete ist ein Leser. . . . Der Gebildete weiß Bücher so zu lesen, dass sie ihn verändern. . . . Das ist ein untrügliches Zeichen von Bildung: dass einer Wissen nicht als bloße Ansammlung von Information, als vergnüglichen Zeitvertreib oder gesellschaftliches Dekor betrachtet, sondern als etwas, das innere Veränderung und Erweiterung bedeuten kann, die handlungswirksam wird. Das gilt nicht nur, wenn es um moralisch bedeutsame Dinge geht. Der Gebildete wird auch durch Poesie ein anderer." For Peter Bieri, the concept of the educated person as a reader is, of course, only one aspect of an educated person.

<sup>2</sup> For the life and works of Basil see Rousseau 1994. For the life and works of Gregory see McGuckin 2001, Bernardi 1995 and Schwab 2009, 17–30.

Poetry as well as philosophy and rhetoric were not only the main components of the concept of *paideia* in Classical Greek Antiquity,<sup>3</sup> but they continued to play a major role in the Imperial Era and Late Antiquity, especially in the context of the institution of the school and rhetorical training in the Graeco-Roman Empire.<sup>4</sup>

Why is it useful to study the position these two men held on poetry? Both were highly talented orators and received their extraordinary intellectual education among other places in the great metropolis of Athens. Neither was alone in having an official role as bishop and being a representative of the early church engaged in and concerned with questions regarding education in the second half of the 4th century. They also had another thing in common: both addressed young people. However, there is one interesting difference. While Basil addresses the young people in a fine and profound exhortation about the use of non-Christian literature<sup>5</sup> and especially poetry, Gregory explicitly declares in one of his poems that he uses the medium of poetry to address young people.<sup>6</sup> So while the one speaks theoretically about the use and value of poetry, the other uses the various metres of Greek poetry as a medium of education.

It therefore appears useful to first study the main advice concerning poetry given by Basil in his “Address to Young People on the Right Use of Greek Literature”.<sup>7</sup> After presenting an overview of his address, I will further scrutinise some special aspects of Basil’s reflection. A summary of his advice on reading poetry will be presented in four principles, which serve as a kind of reading guide. The right use of Greek literature and especially poetry is finally illustrated by the famous ‘parable of the bees’ (see below). The second part focuses on Gregory of Nazianzus and the four reasons he gives in his poem “On His Own Verses” for writing poetry. Both analyses will finally show that poetry plays an important role in Christian religious education.

<sup>3</sup> See Jaeger 1933–1947 and Jaeger 1961.

<sup>4</sup> See Hose 2004 and Hose 2006.

<sup>5</sup> On the Greek and Latin terms for non-Christians see Opelt 1965.

<sup>6</sup> For the poetry of Gregory see Demoen 1996 and Gilbert 2001.

<sup>7</sup> The Greek Title is: ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΥΣ ΝΕΟΥΣ ΟΠΩΣ ΑΝ ΕΞ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΩΝ ΩΦΕΛΟΙΝΤΟ ΛΟΓΩΝ. See the critical edition of Naldini 1984, the English translation of Padelford 1902 and the French translation of Boulenger 1935/1965.



### 1. *Basil on the Use of Poetry*

In so far as my inquiry focuses on the role and value of poetry in Basil's essay, it seems useful to provide an overview of the ten chapters of his treatise.<sup>8</sup>

#### 1.1. *An Overview of the Ad Adolescentes*

While the first chapter of his "Address to Young People about the Right Use of Greek Literature" deals with a persuasive *captatio benevolentiae*, the second chapter presents the main thesis of his essay. In principle, the reading of non-Christian authors seems useful, if an appropriate selection is made. In chapters three to eight, this thesis is developed and illustrated by various examples, analogies and parables. In chapter three, for example Moses and Daniel are presented as examples of people having both acquired great knowledge of other cultures. Presenting a parable about the behaviour of bees in chapter four, Basil demonstrates to the young people how they should choose and select their reading-passages from the great variety of Greek literature. In chapter five, he explains that virtue (*ἀρετή*) represents one important criterion for the choice of literature. Chapter six sets out the connection of theory and practice: young people should not only read and attentively consider worthy deeds and actions of virtue, they should also imitate them and put them into action. Some anecdotes from non-Christian models are presented in the seventh chapter, including Pericles, Socrates and Euclid. Basil considers their deeds nearly in accordance with Christian doctrine, and regards them as highly worthy of imitation. Basil emphasizes, by some analogies in chapter eight, the efforts and exercises necessary to live a Christian life, then in the following chapter reminds the young to take particular care of their souls (*τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπιμέλειαν*). Although they will become more intimately

<sup>8</sup> The work is extremely difficult to date. See Rousseau 1994, 49–50 and Bräutigam 2003, 154–55. Bräutigam notes that she could not aim for new insights "die eines der unzähligen Argumente für eine frühe beziehungsweise späte Datierung zwingend widerlegen oder bekräftigen würden. Dennoch kann man sich meines Erachtens in soweit festlegen, dass *Ad Adolescentes* nach der Aufhebung von Julians Schulgesetz entstanden ist, also frühestens im Jahre 364 nach Christus. Nach der Aufhebung von Julians Schulgesetz waren die Würfel zu Gunsten eines selbstverständlicheren Umgangs von Christen mit heidnischer Bildung weitestgehend gefallen. Die grundsätzliche Frage, ob ein Christ sich heidnischer Bildung unterziehen sollte, hatte an Aktualität verloren. Vielmehr stand nun die Frage nach dem wie im Vordergrund. Genau dieser Frage hatte sich Basileios in seiner Schrift gewidmet..." (154).

acquainted with the Christian way of life by reading the sacred writings, in the final chapter Basil advises them to, for the present, trace the silhouette of virtue in the non-Christian authors.

### 1.2. *Introductory Reflections*

In his opening words (ch. 1), Basil refers to his own experience in order to gain the attention and confidence of his young audience. The addressed young people are characterized as going to school every day and being in touch (συγγινομένοις) with the learned men of the past through their writings. In contrast to them, Basil describes himself as “so familiarized with human affairs” (ἔμπειρόν με εἶναι τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων) that he would be very able to map out the safest course for those just starting their careers. His *captatio benevolentiae* concludes with an allusion to some verses of Hesiod’s “Works and Days”:<sup>9</sup>

Now if you should receive my words with gladness, you would be in the second class of those who, according to Hesiod, merit praise; if not, I should say nothing disparaging, but no doubt you yourselves would remember the passage in which that poet says: “He is best (ἄριστον μέν) who, of himself, recognizes what is his duty, and he also is good (ἔσθλόν δέ) who follows the course marked out by others, but he who does neither of these things is of no use under the sun” (ἀχρεῖον εἶναι πρὸς ἅπαντα) (ch. 1).<sup>10</sup>

By the mere inclusion of this passage, Basil encourages and warns the young people to listen appropriately to his advice. At the same time, he exhibits the first evidence of his acquaintance with Greek poetry.

Basil emphasizes that he stands in the same relationship to them as their parents do and that he, too, is concerned about them. Therefore, he will give them his counsel. His advice concerns the relation of a young Christian towards non-Christian literature. In Basil’s opinion, the young people should not give over their minds completely to the learned men of the past, but rather, while receiving (δεχομένους) what is useful (χρήσιμον), also learn to recognize (εἰδέναι) what they should ignore (παριδεῖν) in their writings. The author explicitly states that he will teach them (διδάξω). On the one hand, they will learn which writings these are, on the other hand, how (ὄπως) they can discriminate (διακρινόμεν) between them.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 293–97.

<sup>10</sup> The English translation is that of Padelford 1902, ch. 1.



### 1.3. *Some Basic Convictions or: The Preparation for "Another Life"*

The second chapter of Basil's treatise reveals some of his basic convictions as well as of his addressed audience. Here, Basil briefly names some of the orientations and values for a Christian life. At first he emphasizes—in the first person plural (ἡμεῖς)—that he and the addressed young people hold that "this" human life (τὸν ἀνθρώπινον βίον τοῦτον) is not in every way (παντάπασι) a benefit (χρήμα). Neither do they consider anything wholly good (οὐτ' ἀγαθὸν τι νομίζομεν ἄλλως), nor do they call (οὐτ' ὀνομάζομεν) anything "good" if its use is only limited to this life. This basic conviction is further illustrated by the following sentence, which enumerates some negative examples:<sup>11</sup>

Neither pride of ancestry, nor bodily strength, nor beauty, nor greatness, nor the esteem of all men, nor kingly authority, nor, indeed, whatever of human affairs may be called great do we consider worthy of desire, or the possessors of them as objects of envy (ch. 2).<sup>12</sup>

Instead of being orientated towards these values, Basil declares at first that he and the addressed young people place their hopes upon greater things (ἐπὶ μακρότερον). Secondly, he remarks that all things they do (ἅπαντα πράττομεν) they should do in preparation for "another life" (πρὸς ἑτέρου βίου παρασκευήν).

According to these basic convictions, the author adds two important aspects: (a) on the one hand, he holds the opinion that whatever helps toward achieving this kind of "another life" they should love (ἀγαπᾶν) and follow (διώκειν) with all their force; (b) on the other hand, those things which have no bearing upon it should be ignored, as if they had no value (ὡς οὐδενὸς ἄξια παρορᾶν).

One might ask why Basil starts with this kind of elementary reflection, and why he mentions these deep convictions in this context, speaking about the value of Greek literature. From Basil's perspective, reading texts or listening to them are highly important actions which affect the one who listens or reads—especially if young people and students are concerned. In the fifth chapter, Basil remarks on the souls of young people:

Since we must needs attain to the life to come through virtue, our attention is to be chiefly fastened upon those many passages from the poets, from

<sup>11</sup> For this enumeration see also Plato, *Rep.* 491c.

<sup>12</sup> Padelford 1902, ch. 2. Cf. this passage with *Matthew* 6:25–33.

the historians, and especially from the philosophers, in which virtue itself is praised. For it is of no small advantage that virtue become a habit with a youth, for the lessons of youth make a deep impression, because the soul is then plastic, and therefore they are likely to be indelible (ch. 5).<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, Basil states that the “Holy Scriptures” (Ἱεροὶ Λόγοι) lead through divine words to this “other” life. In its literal meaning: the Holy Scriptures “will educate us” (ἐκπαιδεύοντες) “through ineffable words” (δι’ ἀπορρήτων) to this other life.<sup>14</sup>

#### 1.4. *The Training of “the Eye of the Soul” and a First Hermeneutical Principle*

Although Basil underlines the great educational value of the Holy Scriptures for this “other life”, he must mention one crucial aspect: there is an important condition concerning the young people and their understanding of the Scriptures. As long as anyone is unable to listen (ἐπακούειν) to the deep thoughts (τοῦ βάθους τῆς διανοίας αὐτῶν) of Scripture—because of his age and immaturity—, he should exercise (προγυμναζόμεθα) “the eye of the soul” (τῷ τῆς ψυχῆς ὄμματι) in other writings (ἐν ἑτέροις) which are not altogether different and in which he will be able to perceive the truth “as it were in shadows and in mirrors.” It is remarkable that the young people should concentrate their attention on these “other writings”—the Greek, non-Christian literature—which seem not altogether different from the Christian writings. By this assertion, Basil formulates a first hermeneutical principle which can be paraphrased as follows: first, the young people should be initiated in the non-Christian lore and pay attention to the writings outside Christian literature (τοῖς ἔξω δὴ τούτοις), then they should, at length, give special attention to the sacred and divine teachings (τῶν ἱερῶν καὶ ἀπορρήτων ἐπακουσόμεθα παιδευμάτων).

#### 1.5. *The Engagement in Life and Literature*

To illustrate this attitude towards non-Christian literature, Basil explains that they should imitate (μιμούμενοι) those who perform the exercises of military practice, for in this way they acquire their first experience (ἐμπειρίαν) in gymnastics and in dancing, and then in battle (ἐπὶ τῶν

<sup>13</sup> Padelford 1902, ch. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Equally literal the French translation of Boulenger 1935/1965: “C’est à cette vie que nous conduisent les Saints Livres par l’enseignement des mystères” (ἐκπαιδεύοντες δι’ ἀπορρήτων).



ἀγώνων) reap the reward of their training (τοῦ ἐκ τῆς παιδείας ἀπολαύουσι κέρδους). By this analogy and the use of the term ἀγών (competition, battle) Basil illustrates the behaviour and engagement required of anyone who—from his perspective—tries to follow the Christian path; in addition, he alludes to Saint Paul.<sup>15</sup> He underlines that the greatest of all battles lies before them. In preparation for this battle they must do and suffer all things to gain strength.

Now, in this context of the outlined “battle” condition, Basil turns back to the topic of Greek literature. He gives two important and lucid pieces of advice concerning the treatment of Greek literature:

We must be conversant (ὀμιλητέον) with poets, with historians, with orators, indeed with all men who may further be useful (ὠφέλειά τις) for the concern about the soul (πρὸς τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπιμέλειαν) (ch. 2).<sup>16</sup>

Secondly, he concludes (ch. 2) with the thesis that if they wished to indelibly preserve the idea of true virtue, they should first be initiated in the non-Christian lore, then extensively give special attention to the sacred and divine teachings. Illustrating again this thought with an image in allusion to Plato he remarks: “Even as we first accustom ourselves to the sun’s reflection in water, and then became able to turn upon the very sun itself” (ch. 2).<sup>17</sup>

### 1.6. *The Four Principles of Reading*

The four main pieces of advice which Basil gives to the young people in his essay shall be summarized. They all concern the reading of poetry, but they are not limited to it. They can be designated as ‘principles of reading’. After a short explanation I will give an abridged version of the principle which shows its importance to the process and act of reading.

#### (1) *The Hermeneutical Principle*

This first principle (ch. 2) is the most important in Basil’s essay, because it contains a clear statement about the value of non-Christian literature and poetry in Christian education. The young people are advised to dedicate their time and attention to this kind of literature. The daily practice of

<sup>15</sup> See *Hebrews* 12:1 (δι’ ὑπομονῆς τρέχωμεν τὸν προκειμένον ἡμῖν ἀγώνα) and *I Corinthians* 9:25 (πᾶς δὲ ὁ ἀγωνιζόμενος πάντα ἐγκρατεύεται, ἐκεῖνοι μὲν οὖν ἵνα φθαρτὸν στέφανον λάβωσιν, ἡμεῖς δὲ ἄφθαρτον).

<sup>16</sup> Padelford 1902, ch. 2.

<sup>17</sup> See Plato *Rep.* 516b.

reading and listening to it will prepare them for an understanding of the deeper sense of the Holy Scriptures. In this way, reading non-Christian literature has a propaedeutic function for the comprehension of the holy and mysterious doctrines. Formulated as a short piece of advice:

For the comprehension of the Holy Scriptures, first read non-Christian literature.

### (2) *The Principle of Selective Reading*

This second principle for the reader (ch. 4) is formally a sort of restriction of the first principle. The readers should neither dedicate their whole attention (προσέχειν τὸν νοῦν) to everything stated in poetry, nor to all the poets. This is not a form of general censorship; the students are rather encouraged to be attentive in their use of literature. The young reader should be fully aware of his choice and selection of what he reads. Formulated as a short piece of advice:

Pay attention to your choice of passages.

### (3) *The Principle of Moral Discernment*

This principle (ch. 4) advises that attention should be paid to the moral aspects in texts. Basil makes a clear distinction between the representations of different subjects in poetry. On the one hand, the representations of actions and speeches of good men (τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν πράξεις ἢ λόγους) should be loved (ἀγαπᾶν) and imitated (ζηλοῦν) with the greatest effort; on the other hand, the young people should take care in the case of the representations of “bad guys” (μοχθηροῦς ἀνδρας). In the latter, they should follow his counsel: “you must flee from them and stop up your ears, as Odysseus is said to have fled past the song of the sirens, for familiarity with evil writings paves the way for evil deeds.” Formulated as a short piece of advice:

Read and imitate the good, flee from the evil.

### (4) *The Principle of Precaution*

The selection of passages with regard to moral aspects rests upon the conviction (ch. 4) that the “familiarity (συνήθεια) with evil writings paves the way for evil deeds.”<sup>18</sup> Because of this, Basil also draws attention to the

<sup>18</sup> *Ad Adolescentes* 4.11–13: Ἡ γὰρ πρὸς τοὺς φαύλους τῶν λόγων συνήθεια ὁδὸς τις ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τὰ πράγματα. Διὸ δὴ πάσῃ φυλακῇ τὴν ψυχὴν τηρητέον. . . .



aesthetical attraction of literature: the reader should guard (τηρητέον) his soul (τὴν ψυχὴν) with much care (πάσῃ φυλακῇ) that his soul does not receive unknowingly—through the pleasure for letters (μὴ διὰ τῆς τῶν λόγων ἡδονῆς)—some contamination like those who imbibe poison with honey. This point of attention could be called the principle of precaution. It deeply reflects the fact that reading affects the soul of the one who listens or reads. Formulated as a short piece of advice:

Always take care of your soul, while you are reading.

Basil illustrates his opinion that poets should not be praised for several reasons as follows:

We shall not praise poets when they scoff and rail, when they represent fornicators and wine drinkers, when they define blissfulness by groaning tables and wanton songs. (ch. 4)<sup>19</sup>

Finally, he mentions some important theological aspects. They concern the representation of the gods (ch. 4). The young people should not listen to the poets when they portray the gods as being many and not at one among themselves, for that is the case when at one time brother is represented at variance with brother, or the father with his children, or when at another the children engage in war against their parents.<sup>20</sup> Basil warns also against the representation of divine adulteries and amours, and especially those of the god whom they call Zeus.

### 1.7. *The Parable of the Bees*

By using the beautiful parable of the bees in chapter four, Basil summarizes his advice as a whole. The parable once more illustrates, among other things, his thesis that Christians could indeed learn many useful things from the Greek authors, be it from poets, from historians or especially from philosophers, if they praise virtue:

For just as bees know how to extract honey from flowers, which to men are agreeable only for their fragrance and color, even so here also those who look for something more than pleasure and enjoyment in such writers may derive profit for their souls (εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν). Now, then, altogether after the manner of bees must we use these writings, for the bees do not visit all the

<sup>19</sup> Padelford 1902, ch. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Since Xenophanes of Colophon these are the classical *topoi* for the criticism of the immoral and anthropomorphic representation of the gods; see Diels/Kranz [21] B11, B12 and B14.

flowers without discrimination, nor indeed do they seek to carry away entire those upon which they light, but rather, having taken so much as is adapted to their needs, they let the rest go. So we, if wise, shall take from these writings<sup>21</sup> whatever befits us (οἰκείον ἡμῖν) and is allied to the truth (συγγενές τῇ ἀληθείᾳ), and shall pass over (ὑπερβησόμεθα) the rest. And just as in culling roses we avoid the thorns, from such writings as these we will gather everything useful, and guard against the noxious. (ch. 4)<sup>22</sup>

For the reading of Homeric poetry in particular, Basil formulates an important rule (ch. 5), which he has heard “from one skilful in interpreting the mind of a poet”—probably one of his teachers in Constantinople or Athens. It reads as follows: the whole poetry of Homer is a praise of virtue (ἀρετῆς ἔπαινος) and with him all that is not merely accessory tends to this end. So once more he concentrates on the aspect of virtue which has to be seen against the important background of the concern for the soul (τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπιμέλεια).

## 2. Gregory and His Use of Poetry

The attention Basil pays to the education of young people can also be found in the reflections of his colleague and friend Gregory of Nazianzus. Gregory, who is known as one of the most educated writers and talented orators of the 4th century A.D., was also one of the greatest theologians of his time. Regarding the question of the value of poetry and its place in Christian religious education, he merits special attention, because not only did he write about poetry, but he also wrote poetry himself. About 18,000 verses of his poetic oeuvre survive, written in various metres and addressing a great range of topics.<sup>23</sup> Not only did he use dactylic hexameters, but he also wrote in elegiac couplets, epic dialect, rare Homeric forms, iambic trimeter and so on.<sup>24</sup> My study will only focus on a few aspects of this abundant work, in order to determine to whom he addressed his poetry, and for what reasons he wrote it.

<sup>21</sup> I have modified the translation of Padelford 1902 (“from heathen books”) in accordance with the Greek text (παρ’αὐτῶν) “from these writings.”

<sup>22</sup> Padelford 1902, ch. 4.

<sup>23</sup> See Wyss 1983 and Bernardi 1995, in particular, *Chapitre XIV Un Poète Chrétien*, 307–27, for some of the theological poems see Moreschini and Sykes 1997 with a rich bibliography. For an analysis of one of the theological poems (I.I.V. On Providence) see Schwab 2009.

<sup>24</sup> See McGuckin 2006.



For this purpose, we should direct our attention particularly to one poem, which is entitled “On His Own Verses” (Εἰς τὰ ἔμμετρα).<sup>25</sup> This poem, written in iambic trimeters, contains some reflections about his writing. In some ways, it could properly be called “a piece of writing about writing, a work of literary theory or criticism.”<sup>26</sup>

This interesting poem provides some indications about Gregory’s motivation to write ‘in meter’. The four reasons Gregory explicitly names are: (1) to moderate his ‘unmeasuredness’, (2) to write for young people, (3) competition with foreigners in literature and (4) his own consolation. Among these reasons it is noticeable that again—as in the case of Basil—the young people and their religious education play an important role.<sup>27</sup> A fifth reason is mentioned indirectly.

The four reasons will be presented in the order in which they occur in the poem:

(1) The first reason (lines 34–37a) Gregory mentions is to control his own ‘unmeasuredness’ (τὴν ἐμὴν ἀμετρίαν). This can be seen as an ascetical exercise. He does not write as much when he has to respect the meter.

First, by working for others, I wished,  
So to subdue my own unmeasuredness;  
Indeed, though I write, I don’t write much  
When toiling on the meter.<sup>28</sup>

(2) Gregory intends to write for the young people (τοῖς νέοις, lines 37b–46). He specifies the group of young people as “especially those who love to read” (ἄλλοι μάλιστα χαίρουσιν λόγοις). His poetry should serve as some kind of cheering medicine (φάρμακον), “guiding the trustful to things more worthy” (εἰς τὰ χρησιμώτερα). Similar to Basil, Gregory tries to give orientation to young people. The medium of orientation is his poetry, to sweeten (γλυκάζων) “by artful means the tartness of the commandments” (τῶν ἐντολῶν). The direction of his orientation is the contest and competition for the good (πρὸς τὸ καλόν).

Secondly, for the young,  
Especially such as love to read,  
I’d give this as some kind of cheering medicine,

<sup>25</sup> Poem 2.1.39.

<sup>26</sup> Gilbert 2001, 12.

<sup>27</sup> For a more detailed account of the four reasons see Schwab 2009, 26–30.

<sup>28</sup> The English translation is from Gilbert 2001, 153–56.

Guiding the trustful to things most worthy,  
 Sweetening by artful means the commandments' tartness.  
 And the harpstring's tension also likes relaxing,  
 If you want this too: if nothing else  
 take these in place of songs and lyre-tunes.  
 I have given you them for play, if you care to play a bit,  
 Lest some injury should come to you in your contest for the good.<sup>29</sup>

(3) As a third motivation (lines 47–51) Gregory mentions the competition with foreigners in literature (ἐν λόγοις). This motivation, however, is put into perspective: he declares that it was not so important, but nevertheless the desire has influenced him “to see that strangers (τοὺς ξένους) have no advantage over ‘us’ in literature”. It is noteworthy to consider also the two following remarks: that for their sake he speaks in highly-colored language (τοῖς κερχρωσμένοις λόγοις), although beauty for “us” (the Christians) lies in contemplation (ἐν θεωρίᾳ). This explanation amounts to a kind of justification. The reader of this poem gets the impression that Gregory tries to justify that he, as a Christian, writes in poetic language. But the following statement is clear: for Gregory, the real beauty consists in contemplation.

A third thing I know affects me: not so important a thing,  
 Perhaps, but it has influenced me: to see to it  
 That strangers have no advantage over us in literature.  
 For their sake I speak in highly-colored language,  
 Even though beauty, for us, is in contemplation.<sup>30</sup>

(4) The fourth reason (lines 54–57) is a personal one: his consolation. It seems that writing served also as a kind of consolation, when he was stricken with disease.

This fourth I found when stricken with disease,  
 As a consolation: like an aged swan  
 To speak to myself with sibilant wings,  
 Not a dirge, but a song of transition.<sup>31</sup>

Following these four reasons, Gregory addresses himself hereon to “the wise” (οἱ σοφοί) and mentions indirectly a fifth reason (lines 52–53, 58–63).

<sup>29</sup> Gilbert 2001, 154.

<sup>30</sup> Gilbert 2001, 154.

<sup>31</sup> Gilbert 2001, 155.



(5) Concerning this fifth reason McGuckin comments: "His fifth and final reason is an invitation to the wise to enter into Gregory's innermost mind".<sup>32</sup>

It's you, the wise we've played to now.

Let it be given us to play the lion.

...

Besides these, learn, you wise, our inward things.

If then you are persuaded,

It's these words' best use; even those which are in play are words,

So give them room: nothing's too long or overstuffed,

Nothing is useless, as I do believe.

These very words will teach you, if you're willing.<sup>33</sup>

It is easy to see the parallel between Gregory's second motivation (the interest in teaching young people) and Basil's concern for the young people and his educational efforts.

### 3. *A Way of Reading Leads to a Way of Life*

If we, finally, relate our analytical description of Basil's treatise and the reported reasons of Gregory of Nazianzus for his poetry to the analytical approach outlined in the general introduction to this volume on religious education, we may point out the following conclusions:

(1) Concerning the contents of religious education, i.e. the question what exactly is transmitted in the process of religious education, Basil rather argues for a *method* of careful reading instead of giving concrete instructions of a certain religious content. While Gregory, by the exposition of his Christian poetry, offers certain moral teachings in accordance with a Christian way of life, Basil only admonishes his readers to be aware of the important modus of reading non-Christian poetry. On the whole, both Basil's methodological instruction as well as Gregory's poetic project can be interpreted as the self-positioning of two Christian religious leaders with regard to non-Christian culture in general and to the authoritative texts of its 'Classical literature' in particular.

<sup>32</sup> McGuckin 2006, 210.

<sup>33</sup> Gilbert 2001, 155.

(2) As to the addressees, Basil as well as Gregory aim to religiously educate and socialize the Christian youth. One should also pay attention to the fact that especially by writing down and disseminating their ideas on religious education and formation the two authors were possibly read and their ideas noted by a greater public and, in particular, by non-Christian (and also) later readers. In fact, it is noteworthy that the history of reception of Basil's treatise and its use in the Renaissance, for example, was very influential and so important that Werner Jaeger called it "the charter of all Christian higher education for centuries to come".<sup>34</sup>

(3) With regard to the educational mediators and agents, i.e. both Basil and Gregory, we should point out that Basil presents himself not so much as a bishop with great authority, but rather as a "father" who cares about his children. This aspect emphasizes not only his authority, but also his proximity to young people. More importantly, by his own frequent citing and alluding to classical literature (e.g. Hesiod, Homer or Plato) as well as his ability to deliver a well educated speech, Basil demonstrates his familiarity with non-Christian culture and literature. In this way, he presents himself as a living model—a model of competence and worthy of imitation. While Basil is able to speak rhetorically on rhetoric and learnedly on religious education, Gregory, his friend, tries to serve as a model for imitation with his poetry. The identification and imitation of these 'living models' is an attractive concept in religious education as advocated by both ecclesiastical persons.

(4) Thinking about the educational mediators also requires asking about the media and methods through which the process of religious education are accomplished in our case-study. At first we should mention the importance of the word, language and rhetoric, which play a central role for the educational mediators in our study. With respect to the poetic project of Gregory, one could claim that by studying and reciting his poetry young people would easily get acquainted with the transported contents, be it biblical narratives, prayers or also theological and dogmatic issues. By studying and reciting hexameter verses on God as the father, the Holy Spirit or his divine providence they would be able to gradually deepen their knowledge of and insights into these theological and dogmatic aspects of (orthodox) Christian religion. For this purpose the musi-

<sup>34</sup> See Jaeger 1961, 81 and the study of Schucan 1973.



cal and rhythmical aspect of recited Greek poetry should also be taken into account.

(5) Finally, concerning the intentions and ideals of a religious education as outlined by both authors, we observe that Greek literature in general and poetry in particular play an important role in the religious education of young Christians. But whereas the treatise of Basil remains a theoretical reflection on poetry, Gregory himself is engaged as a poet who undertakes to educate by his poetry, as well as to guide towards a Christian way of life. While Basil is also convinced that his advised study of Greek literature leads to a better and deeper subsequent understanding of the Holy Scriptures, both bishops are highly engaged and involved in a deeper formation of a religious identity of their own, as well as of their addressees. Both demonstrate in an ideal manner how a Christian, who has himself appropriated all the treasures and fruits of the ordinary *paideia*, could make use of it.

The 'right use' of poetry is expressed in Basil's four principles of reading, which could serve as a guide for the religious education of the young Christian students. The counsel of Basil as well as the poetic industry of his friend Gregory rest upon the conviction that at least a certain way of reading will both lead to and support a certain way of life.<sup>35</sup>

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