

„AL. I. CUZA” UNIVERSITY, IAȘI  
FACULTY OF LETTERS

**Constantin Simiraș**

*THE POETRY OF SAINT GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS  
A LITERARY AND THEOLOGICAL STUDY*

**Summary of the PhD Dissertation**

**Scientific coordinator**

**Professor Traian Diaconescu, PhD**

## POETRY OF SAINT GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS

### Literary and theological study

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**Volume II: *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus: Carmina*.** Translated poems into Romanian in the XX-XXI centuries (Greek text and translation accompanied by commentaries and notes), 300 p.

**Key words:** Gregory of Nazianzus, poetry, literature, theology, ἄλγος

## **Summary of the PhD Dissertation**

The importance of the poetical creation of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, the lack of reference studies regarding his poetry in our culture, as well as the wish to offer the Romanian reader a synthesis of information about the beginning of the European Christian poetry are the main reasons that urged us to elaborate this dissertation.

The thesis *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus's poetry. Literary and theological study* is structured in six parts: *I. Preliminaries; II. The fourth century A.D. – the golden age of the Christian culture; III, St. Gregory of Nazianzus' life and work; The hypostases of a Christian mind; IV. St. Gregory of Nazianzus' poetry between tradition and innovation; V. Analytic itineraries and liturgical expression; VI. St. Gregory of Nazianzus's perception in the European and Christian culture. The most quoted author after The Bible in The Manuscript Tradition.*

In *Preliminaries*, after showing *The purpose of the study*, we presented *The stage of the research*. During our investigation we consulted numerous works regarding the personality and the thinking of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, as well as his rhetorical and epistolary works – speeches and letters – with the aim of interpreting his poetical creation. We present our contribution with respect to the research stage within the Romanian culture in chapter *I. 3. The innovation of the current approach*. This consists of a rich documentation of the study, synchronic exegesis with the European studies, as well as of the translation of some representative poems from St. Gregory of Nazianzus's poetical creation. The poems we translated will be included in the second volume of this dissertation. This volume will render accessible to the public, for the first time, all the translations into Romanian of St. Gregory of Nazianzus's poetry. Through our contribution we hope to supply a useful and necessary starting point for future exegeses. In the second chapter – *The fourth century AD – the golden age of the Christian culture* – we made an overview of the poetical creation in the fourth century, emphasizing the fact that poetry has an ambiguous status in this century, being cultivated both by pagans and Christians. The hostile attitude towards the profane culture, which was still persisting with some Christians, was due to the fear that the new Christian culture might be tinted with the pagan philosophies of the time. St. Gregory's education enabled him a privileged access to poetry and he studied the works of several poets. His knowledge of Grammar and Prosody enables him to compose poems in the traditional prosodic forms. In addition, the poetical biblical works influenced his

religious poems as well as those of personal inspiration. The fact that it is very difficult to acquire an exact perspective on poetical works during St. Gregory's times finds its justification in the fact that poetry was present both in the profane and in the religious world: in this respect, St. Gregory's preference for writing poems is not at all atypical for the fourth century. St. Gregory perused the poetical works of his contemporaries and made the most of their poetical art in his own writings although numerous critics speak about a decline of the poetical genre in the favour of the rhetorical one, in this period.

After presenting St. Gregory's life in chapter III, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus's life and work. The hypostases of a Christian mind*, we considered suitable a systematic presentation of his work aimed at integrating his personality within the Christian culture and spirituality. A theologian who contemplates the highest divine mysteries, an ascetic who gives up the world in order to live in spiritual spheres, a bishop who supports the Eastern Church during hard times, and in the same time, a writer, a poet and a clear-sighted moralist, a vehement satirist – these are all hypostases of the Cappadocian writer's personality.

The thematic and innovator universe of St. Gregory's inspiration is presented in the fourth part of the dissertation *St. Gregory of Nazianzus's poetry between tradition and innovation*. St. Gregory's Christian poetry is characterised by an aesthetics of abundance and richness. St. Gregory's writing is very variegated and the poet uses terms both from informal register and from the language of the sublime, he piles up motifs, expressive images, he employs paradoxes, allusions, ambiguities, the multiplicity of connotations and symbols. St. Gregory the Theologian was a prolific and profound writer. He had a special sense of Attic Greek and skilfully used Rhetoric. The variety of stylistic devices, artistically employed (*hyperboles, elliptical expressions, metaphors, apostrophes*), the subtle philological meanings, turned his writings into an exciting and clear piece of reading for the next generations. And this in spite of their profoundness. St. Gregory devoted himself to poetry for many years and the creation of poems was a constant preoccupation towards the end of his life. St. Gregory endows the theology of the Church with a new way of expression, he uses terms which were rarely employed in the theological writings up to him, but which the Church will take over from then on.

One may claim that from among the Holy Fathers, St. Gregory is the Theologian who frequently uses artistical imagery which grants his poetry a unique expressive strength.

The relation between the thematic universe and its literary expression from the perspective of the poet's conception of the world and art is dealt with in chapter V - *Analytic itineraries and liturgical expression*. We embarked upon this endeavour by dwelling on a dramatic masterpiece, not yet translated into Romanian namely, *Χριστὸς πάσχων*, a defining tragedy for Saint Gregory of Nazianzus's literary vocation. We then focused on a representative topos which covers the entire work of the Cappadocian poet, i.e., *dolor* – existentialist feeling. This defining *topos* of the poetical creation, which we studied with respect to its occurrences and functions in the text, certifies St. Gregory's poetical genius.

This chapter is also devoted to *a synthesis regarding the place and the role of St. Gregory's work in the history of Christian poetry, focusing on the relation between tradition and innovation in the poetic language*, a relationship which has been rarely studied in the Romanian philology. By means of critical judgements regarding the specificity of St. Gregory's poetical creation, and in the light of a number of rhetorical and poetical concepts – *mimesis and fantasia*, literary genres and species, tropes and prosody – we offered assessments which enhance the Romanian critical exegesis and which, more importantly, offer a starting point for future studies.

The last chapter, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus's perception in the European and Christian culture. The most quoted author after the Bible in the Manuscript Tradition*, stresses upon the importance of this patristic author with respect to the following centuries. St. Gregory's works are well-known and were highly influential until the end of the Byzantine Empire. More commentaries and exegeses were written on his works than on any other works of the Holy Fathers. St. Gregory's prestige during the Byzantine period is also attested through his being an object in the Iconography<sup>1</sup> of the time. The beauty and the historical value of the Gregorian poetical works have urged the members of the high clergy to select a part of his hymns for the divine worship. The importance of his work and thinking is proved by the fact that the great scholars of the time tried to bring him to the forefront as a pillar of faith during the times of turmoil in the history of Christianity.

All these hypostases of perception are proof that his personality, well-shaped during the ages as it was, as well as his extensive and varied work are alive and still

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<sup>1</sup> See images from Annex.

present in the memory of humanity in general, and in that of that the Christian Church in particular. In order to make our endeavour more explicit and convincing, we attached at the end of the dissertation images with some of the most representative manuscripts, paintings (frescos and icons) as well as of other creations that have the Cappadocian author at their centre.

As a theologian, a poet, a rhetor, St. Gregory of Nazianzus makes use of various literary genres in an innovative way and together with St. Basil of Caesarea and St. Gregory of Nyssa belongs to the triad of the Cappadocian Fathers. Brought up as a Christian, both by the family as well as in the schools he attended in Caesarea, Alexandria and Athens, he used both verse and prose as a means of writing, combining his Christian intellectual education with the values of the classical culture. The style of his poems and speeches bears the mark of the influence of the second sophistic. The characteristic features of this trend – the symmetry of the sentences, the puns, the use of stylistic devices that render a text more dramatic, the quotations from classical culture, as well as various quotations and biblical allusions grant λόγος, πάθος and ἦθος to the writings of the great Cappadocian author.

The delicate and poetical charm, the passionate eloquence, his power of persuasion, his sensitive and scrupulous consciousness, the abundance and diversity of his talents and skill, and his upright character reveal the spiritual profile of a providential ecclesiastical personality.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus is the first great European Christian poet who puts forth a new poetic language, endowing traditional rhetorical structures with liturgical functions, building upon both the pagan and the biblical heritage, using refined and erudite terms, creating a complex and unitary imaginary universe. St. Gregory is not a classic by temperament, but a romantic *ante litteram* and his poetical turn is mainly Baroque.

Through his creative genius, St. Gregory of Nazianzus is a *demiurge* of the European Christian poetry.