

## Review of Nazianzuslu Grigorius ve Kutsal Ruh'un Tanrılığı Meselesi by Elif Tokay

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**Philip C. Dorroll**

Doç. Dr., Wofford College, ABD

[dorrollpc@wofford.edu](mailto:dorrollpc@wofford.edu) & <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3403-6154>

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Dr. Elif Tokay's recent book- *Gregory of Nazianzus and the Issue of the Divinity of the Holy Spirit*- is an important milestone in the study of Christian theology. This book is the first study of Gregory of Nazianzus ever to be written and published in Turkish. It is an insightful, accessible, and thorough examination of Gregory's profound theological vision, the central argument of which is that the triune nature of God is revealed through God's plan of salvation for humanity. Because his Trinitarian theology was fundamental to the development of Christian doctrine in general, Gregory's importance in the history of Christianity cannot be overstated. In addition, his spiritual vision is particularly significant in Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Gregory's spiritual vision argues that humanity is created for the purpose of union with its Creator, and that the ascetic, contemplative, liturgical, and moral labor of the human individual all work in free cooperation with God's saving plan. This theological anthropology is foundational to Eastern Orthodox spiritual teaching. Gregory's works have for centuries been among the most widely read in the entire Eastern Orthodox tradition, and his theology of *theosis* (which Tokay discusses in detail) has played a key role in Eastern Orthodox religious practice and identity. Tokay's analysis demonstrates that Gregory's theology is best understood as a synthesis of doctrine and spirituality, where God's saving role in history is the key to understanding God's triune nature as disclosed to humanity in revelation.

The first chapter of the book surveys the history of the Cappadocian region, with particular attention to the history of the development of Christianity there up to the time of Gregory in the 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E. This section provides important historical context and detail about this region's ancient Christian heritage. At the beginning of the second chapter, Tokay also provides informative background on Gregory's life, family, and social context. The first chapter and the beginning of the second chapter help the reader appreciate the importance of the historical presence of ancient Christianity in this region and help prepare the reader for the complexity and profundity of Gregory's own thoughts.

The rest of the book, from the second half of the second chapter to the final fourth chapter, explores the main features of Gregory's theology and focuses, in particular, on how they cohere into a single whole. The two main themes of the book's analysis are Gregory's theology of *theosis* (or "divinization") and the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The doctrinal elaboration of the second point completes the full Christian understanding of the revelation of God's nature as Trinity and is, therefore, crucial for the whole of Christian history. The first point possesses particular importance for the

Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition. Tokay thoroughly demonstrates how these two points are, in fact, deeply intertwined for Gregory, for whom "God's salvific role" [*Tanrı'nın kurtarıcı rolü*] is the key to understanding God's own nature and our relationship with God (77). Tokay effectively highlights the crucial role of soteriology in Gregory's theological vision, demonstrating throughout the book how Gregory sees God's plan of salvation as the key that unlocks the most profound truths of revelation. We know God is triune because of how God acts in the world to accomplish the salvation of humanity.

The second half of the second chapter presents an overview of Gregory's understanding of salvation and the role that *theosis* plays in this understanding. God created humanity with a plan for its salvation. This salvation is realized through humanity's union with God, which Gregory calls "divinization" or *theosis*. In a particularly eloquent formulation, Tokay writes: "God came to humanity so that it could return to Him" [*Tanrı, kendisine geri dönebilmesi için insana gelmiştir*] (107). God's incarnation in Jesus Christ is the divine plan for the salvation of humanity, for all of human nature is sanctified when it is assumed by its Creator. Tokay's analysis makes accessible Gregory's own theological principle: "what is not assumed cannot be healed, but the one who is united with God is saved" [*deruhte edilmeyen iyileştirilemez, fakat Tanrı ile birleşen kurtarılır*] (108).

God's plan of salvation is fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who, by thus defeating death itself, frees humanity from all that separates it from union with its Creator. For Gregory, "God who created us is at the same time the one who will restore us to a new creation" [*Bizi yaratan Tanrı aynı zamanda bizi yeni bir yaratılışa kavuşturacak olandır*] (107). This is the theology of *theosis*: God created us for union with God, and God's actions make this possible for each human individual, who is called to actively and freely participate in this plan of salvation through the sacramental life of the church, ascetic discipline and contemplation, and growth in virtue (108-113). Gregory's theology of *theosis* is rooted in his integrative reading of the ancient Christian tradition, including scripture, communal liturgical practice, and individual spiritual aspiration (109).

After analyzing Gregory's theology of salvation (and the theological anthropology it implies), the third and fourth chapters connect this soteriological frame with Gregory's affirmation of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The third chapter recounts the history of theological debates from the Council of Nicaea in 325 to the Council of Constantinople in 381, including Gregory's role in these debates as a defender of the divinity of the Holy Spirit and his appointment as presider over the council of

Constantinople. As the first chapter and the beginning of the second chapter laid the groundwork for the reader's understanding of Gregory's theology of salvation as presented in the latter half of the second chapter, this chapter lays the groundwork for the reader's understanding of Gregory's theology of the Holy Spirit as presented in the fourth and final chapter.

The fourth chapter fully presents Gregory's Trinitarian theology, focusing on his defense of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. For Gregory, once it is understood that God's plan of salvation is the key to understanding the whole of God's revelation, the complete understanding of God's nature as the Trinity becomes clear. The Holy Spirit is described in Christian scripture as continuing or perfecting the actions of Christ, and because Christ is God incarnate, accomplishing God's own plan of salvation, the one perfecting this plan after Christ's resurrection and ascension must also be God (239-240). Thus, the nature of God as triune- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit- is fully revealed. Tokay's discussion of Gregory's trinitarian theology is precious here, as she effectively summarizes the intellectual nuances of the doctrine, whose ultimately mysterious nature defines the essence of Christian belief. Her analysis also includes a detailed consideration of the Cappadocian elaboration of the monarchy of the Father, or the doctrine of the one God as Father, whose nature is the principle and source of the full divinity of the Son and Spirit (209-213). Because it is revealed that the Son and the Spirit possess a nature identical to that of the Father, they are revealed as fully God, and God is thus revealed as triune. Her discussion demonstrates that for Gregory (and indeed the whole of the Christian doctrinal tradition), the doctrine that the one God is triune is the unfathomable mystery that is the central truth of God's own revelation.

Tokay's concluding reflections offer a particularly insightful interpretation of the dimensions of Gregory's theology that are truly unique to him. She argues that the affective dimension of Gregory's humanity, feelings, and emotional states- are as spiritually crucial to him as any other source of his theology (such as revelation, tradition, or philosophy). Gregory is a person who trusts his spiritual instincts and thereby uncovers the natural tensions that all human beings experience throughout their journey toward union with God. Tokay suggests that his entire theological vision is, in fact, informed by his own quest to resolve his own anxieties about the hardships of life. She notes that the Holy Spirit is "his house of refuge" [*sığınabildiği evi*] amid the terrible storms of human life that Gregory feels intensely (247). Tokay concludes her analysis with a powerful summary of Gregory's personal spiritual sensibility that is a fitting tribute

to his profound vision of the triune God of the Christian faith: "He trembles before the glory and majesty of the Father, contemplates with awe and wonder the salvation of the Son, and seems to feel secure and complete in the presence of the Holy Spirit" [...o Baba'nın azameti ve yüceliđi karşısında titremekte, Ođul'un kurtarıcılıđını hayranlıkla ve şaşkınlıkla izlemekte, Kutsal Ruh'un huzurunda ise kendisini güvende ve tamamlanmış hissediyor gibi görünmektedir] (247).

Tokay's book effectively engages and summarizes the key points of the scholarly conversation on Gregory's life and works, bringing these insights to Turkish readers for the first time. Moreover, her own original reading of Gregory's theology is noteworthy for its analysis of the integral connection between his doctrinal positions and his spiritual sensibility. Indeed, Tokay's emphasis on the role of feeling as a properly theological category for Gregory could have been developed more fully. Her insights in this regard emerge at the end of the work and are brilliantly but briefly rendered. Perhaps future work by Tokay can explore this incipient argument further, which would be another essential contribution to our understanding of Gregory's uniquely compelling theological mindset.