

EUSEBIUS PRIZE ESSAY

Theodoret's Theologian: Assessing the Origin and Significance of Gregory of Nazianzus' Title

by OLIVER B. LANGWORTHY

University of St Andrews

E-mail: oblangworthy@gmail.com

This study addresses the lack of critical analysis on Gregory of Nazianzus' title of 'the Theologian'. In doing so it addresses two areas: the origin of the title in the Address to Marcian, and the significance of its attribution to Gregory by Theodoret of Cyrrhus. Alongside Theodoret, this study takes account of a range of usages in Christian and non-Christian authors in order to argue that the title was attributed to Gregory as part of a pre-existing Christian response encompassing Moses, John and the prophets and pagan theologians such as Orpheus and Homer.

In writings on Gregory Nazianzen it is standard practice to assert that he received the title of 'the Theologian', or ὁ θεολόγος, in 451 at the Council of Chalcedon. The reasons for this in popular writing are left unsaid or articulated in various ways, often with reference to John the Theologian and to Symeon the New Theologian. Where explanations are offered they are usually inventive, with suggestions ranging from all these figures having had something to say about the divinity of the persons of the Trinity, to Gregory and John having both proclaimed the divinity of the Son, to bearers of the title being particularly notable examples of what it is to be a theologian in some broader sense. Given their

ACO = *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum*; CSEL = *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum*; NPNF = *Nicene and post-Nicene fathers*; SC = *Sources Chrétiennes*; SSCC = *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*

scope such claims may have some truth to them, but they are not grounded in any body of evidence contemporary with the figure in question. Instead, they reflect either an imposition of modern ideas of what constitutes a theologian onto three figures with a coincidence of titles or a *post hoc* attempt to justify why chronologically disparate figures all bear the same title. Even in scholarly work there is a paucity of reflection on the source and significance of Gregory's title, despite its common use as a demonstrator of his historical significance.

This study addresses the lack of such critical reflection by reviewing the textual evidence surrounding the attribution of the title of theologian to Gregory. It will argue that the most likely motive for the application of the title was Theodoret of Cyrillus' desire to present a Christian alternative to the extant body of pagan theologians. The focus will therefore be on the textual evidence for how the title was used in the third to fifth centuries CE. First, an overview of several demonstrative examples of how Gregory's title of theologian is attested in modern scholarship, rather than popular literature, will demonstrate the pressing need for greater clarity, particularly with respect to where Gregory's title is first attested. Second, an examination of the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon and the *Address to Marcian* will show that while Gregory is styled in the address appended to the acts as 'the Theologian', there is no evidence of the title having been granted, rather than merely attested, in the Greek manuscripts. Third, the works of the likely author of the address, Theodoret of Cyrillus, and those of Gregory, will be considered with reference to how the title of 'theologian' is used in those works. Broader late antique use of the title will also be considered. The attribution of the honorific to Gregory by Theodoret was indicative of a wider Christian undertaking, of which the attribution of the title to John was a part.¹ This was not just an effort to lay claim to the concept of theology, but to cast their own theologians in the model of Homer and Orpheus.² The content of that theology, and the position of a theologian relative to it, is expressed in the simplest sense by the meaning of the word itself. 'O, or the theologian, is one who speaks of God. This can even be a useful θεολόγος translation, as when Athanasius writes of 'τῶν θεολόγων ἀνδρῶν [theological men]'.³ The gravity of such work is apparent when Gregory of Nyssa derides Eunomius as a 'καινὸς θεολόγος [new or novel theologian]', accusing him of introducing novel

¹ Symeon the New Theologian will not be considered as part of this exercise, as he lived between the tenth and eleventh centuries.

² On Theodoret's approach to philosophy more broadly see particularly Niketas Siniosoglou, *Plato and Theodoret: the Christian appropriation of Platonic philosophy and the Hellenic intellectual Renaissance*, Cambridge 2008.

³ *Contra gentes* 35, PG xxv.69C.

teaching.⁴ Ultimately, a theologian is properly concerned with the study of the origins of being. While superficially similar to how a theologian might be described today this belies a milieu in which the assertion of a Christian theology was itself still rather new. Emperor Julian mocked Christian theology as consisting only of ‘whistling at demons’ and ‘making the sign of the cross’.⁵ When Athanasius and others identified John as ‘ὁ θεολόγος’ they were appealing to him as a constructive authority against this kind of caricature. Theodoret amplified this in his presentation of ‘Ἰωάννου τοῦ θεολόγου’.⁶ In the earliest attribution of his title Gregory is Γρηγορίου τοῦ θεολόγου (Gregory the theologian) as well, and not ὁ θεολόγος Γρηγόριος (the theologian Gregory) as in his later commentators. This emphasis, easily missed when the title is glossed, is why Gregory and John are ‘the Theologian’, and not just men who spoke of God. In reviewing the textual evidence surrounding Gregory’s title this study will address the question of the origins and significance of this emphasis.

State of the question

Sigurd Bergmann, in discussing Gregory’s title, wrote that, ‘Over the course of the history of interpretation, Gregory acquired the honorific title “Theologian,” a title otherwise bestowed only on the evangelist John and on Symeon, the latter being called the “New Theologian,” though just when, how, and why Gregory acquired this title is not known.’⁷ He goes on in a footnote to say that ‘Neither in secondary literature nor in private communication have I found even the slightest trace of the history of this title.’⁸ John McGuckin’s 2001 *Intellectual biography* contains a timeline that refers to Gregory’s being ‘cited as a major theological authority at the Council of Ephesus’ in 431, and asserts that he was ‘[d]esignated “Gregory the Theologian” at the Council of Chalcedon’, in 451.⁹ Christopher Beeley’s 2008 *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the knowledge of God* asserts that

It was Gregory, more than anyone before him, who made the Trinity the centerpiece and the cardinal doctrine of orthodox Christianity. In recognition of his

⁴ Hilarion Alfeyev, *St Symeon the New Theologian and the Orthodox tradition*, New York 2000, 1 n. 4.

⁵ ‘ἡ γὰρ ἄκρα θεολογία παρ’ αὐτοῖς ἐστὶ δύο ταῦτα, συρίττειν τε πρὸς τοὺς δαίμονας καὶ σκιαγραφεῖν ἐπὶ τοῦ μετώπου τὸν σταυρόν’: *ep.* xviii, in *The works of the Emperor Julian*, ed. and trans. W. Wright, London 1923, 52–3.

⁶ Commentary on Isaiah, 1.91, SC cclxxvi.318.

⁷ Sigurd Bergmann, *Creation set free: the Spirit as liberator of nature*, trans. D. Scott, Grand Rapids, MI 2005, 50.

⁸ *Ibid.* n. 97.

⁹ John McGuckin, *St Gregory of Nazianzus: an intellectual biography*, Crestwood, NY 2001, p. xi.

magisterial achievement, the Council of Chalcedon in 451 deemed him ‘the Theologian,’ a title that he shares only with St. John the Divine and the Byzantine monk St. Symeon the New Theologian, who was being compared to Gregory.¹⁰

Susanna Elm writes in a 2000 article that, ‘Gregory of Nazianzus, bishop of Constantinople from November 27, 380 to July 9, 381, honored with the title “The Theologian” by the council of Chalcedon in [451] (a title until then only given to John the Evangelist), was one of these men.’¹¹ A similar claim is made in her 2012 monograph *Sons of Hellenism*.¹² In her article it is accompanied by a footnote: ‘See Hermann Sieben 1996.8 concerning Gr. Naz.’s acclamation as “The Theologian”.’¹³ Sieben’s 1996 translation and commentary on Gregory’s Theological Orations notes that ‘For the Greek Church Gregory is not only an incomparable rhetor, but also “the Theologian.” The reason for this is the five Theological Orations presented here.’¹⁴ He includes a footnote that provides a source for this claim: ‘Gregory is the only Church Father to be awarded the title of ὁ θεόλογος, admirably, by the Council of Chalcedon (ACO 2.1.3, 114).’¹⁵ Andrew Hofer’s 2013 monograph *Christ in the life and teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus* makes a similar claim to the effect that ‘The first record of Gregory being called “The Theologian” comes at the Council of Chalcedon (451), about six decades after his death, and has been repeated in successive generations.’¹⁶ Hofer goes on to discuss the two excerpts from Gregory cited in the acts of the council and their somewhat problematic use as support for the two nature Christology of the Council, in both cases referring to ACO 2.1.3.¹⁷ A much older authority, Otto Bardenhewer’s *Geschichte der altkirchlichen literature*, ii, which was reissued in 2008, makes a more developed claim that ‘The Orient adorned Gregory with the title ὁ θεολόγος, which Chalcedon quickly confirmed

¹⁰ Christopher Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the knowledge of God: in your light we shall see light*, Oxford 2008, p. vi.

¹¹ Susanna Elm, ‘A programmatic life: Gregory of Nazianzus’ orations 42 and 43 and the Constantinopolitan elites’, *Arethusa* xxxiii/3 (2000), 411–27.

¹² Eadem, *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church: Emperor Julian, Gregory of Nazianzus, and the vision of Rome*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 2012, 4.

¹³ Eadem, ‘Programmatic life’, 412 n. 1.

¹⁴ ‘Für die griechische Kirche ist Gregor aber nicht nur der unvergleichliche Rhetor, sondern gleichzeitig auch “der Theologe”. Diesen Ehrentitel trägt er aufgrund der hier vorzustellenden fünf Theologischen Reden’: H. Sieben, *Gregor von Nazianz: orationes theologicae*, Freiburg 1996, 8.

¹⁵ ‘Als einziger Kirchenvater wurde Gregor mit dem Titel ὁ θεόλογος ausgezeichnet, so schon vom Konzil von Chalcedon (ACO 2.1.3, 114)’: *ibid.* n. 4.

¹⁶ Andrew Hofer, *Christ in the life and teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus*, Oxford 2013, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 3.

officially, as it were. No doubt this was borrowed from his orations on the Trinity, which Gregory himself named τῆς θεολογίας λόγοι [the theological orations].¹⁸ A footnote appended to this reads, 'Mansi, SS. Conc. Coll. 7, 468. Das Ephesinum sagte ó μέγας statt ó θεολόγος. Mansi, 4, 1192 [Ephesus used ó μέγας, rather than ó θεολόγος].'¹⁹ While there are many others, these examples provide a cross-section of the kind of discussion of Gregory's title of 'the Theologian' that dominates scholarship. It is largely concerned to argue that the Council of Chalcedon was when Gregory was 'designated', 'given' or 'honoured' with the title of 'Theologian'. Hofer is something of an anomaly in that he acknowledges it as merely the first instance, and Bardenhewer even more so in that he asserts that the title preceded Chalcedon and was simply being attested in documents from that time.²⁰

The significance of Chalcedon in particular is not without some ambiguity. Despite their specificity in citing Mansi, SSCC 7 and ACO 2.1.3 the extent of this ambiguity is understated by Hofer and Bardenhewer. Andrew Louth, in a chapter in *Re-reading Gregory of Nazianzus*, is clearly aware of this ambiguity when writing that 'St. Gregory's title as "Theologian" therefore refers to him preeminently as an exponent of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is found relatively early – in the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon – in 451.' He goes on to cite ACO 2.1.3.²¹ Louth's careful reference to the title being found in the acts alludes to a part of the problem at hand, but without expanding on it. Simply, the problem is that while Gregory is referred to as 'the Theologian' in the documents collectively known as the acts of the Council of Chalcedon, he is not referred to as such in the minutes of the Council itself, and did not have the title bestowed on him in any official capacity.

¹⁸ 'Der Orient schmuckte Gregor mit dem Titel ó θεολόγος, den das Chalcedonense sich beeilte, gleichsam offiziell zu bestätigen. Ohne Zweifel war er jenen Reden über die Trinität entlehnt worden, welchen Gregor selbst den Name τῆς θεολογίας λόγοι gegeben hatte': Otto Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen literatur*, 3rd edn, Darmstadt 2008, 164. I am unclear if Bardenhewer has specific earlier examples in mind. Gregory is called 'Theologian' in some spurious works once attributed to John Chrysostom.

¹⁹ Ibid. n. 1.

²⁰ Ibid. 164.

²¹ Andrew Louth, 'St. Gregory the Theologian and Byzantine theology', in Christopher Beeley (ed.), *Re-reading Gregory of Nazianzus: essays on history, theology, and culture*, Washington, DC 2012, 252–68. Mention should also be made of Paul Gallay who writes that 'Ce titre de "théologien" est attesté des le v siècle, dans les Actes du Concile de Chacleoine [The title of "theologian" is attested in the fifth century, in the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon]': SC ccl. 7.

The acts of the Council of Chalcedon

Mansi, SSCC 7 and ACO 2.1.3 refer, respectively, to Joannes Mansi's 1762 *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, vii, and Eduard Schwartz's 1903 *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum*, series 2/1, volume iii. Both texts cover the Greek text of the acts of the Council of Chalcedon.²² However, the acts, and especially the later Greek edition, are more than merely the minutes of the sessions of the council. They also contain documents appended after the council had ended, in an effort to provide clarity on or reframe the proceeding minutes. The reference to 'Gregory the Theologian' occurs in one such document, the Address to Marcian.²³ In the address's *florilegia*, two documents by Gregory are cited under the name 'Gregory the Theologian'. The sole named reference appears in full as 'Τοῦ μακαρίου Γρηγορίου τοῦ θεολόγου ἐκ τῆς πρὸς Κληδόνιον.'²⁴ The works associated with the title are Gregory's *ep. ci* to Cledonius, presented in the address as ἐκ τῆς πρὸς Κληδόνιον and oration 30, Gregory's second Theological Oration on the Son, titled as τοῦ περὶ υἱοῦ δευτέρου λόγου (the second oration on the Son).²⁵ No ceremony attends this attestation in an anonymous document appended to the minutes of the council after it had closed. This problematises the language in scholarship that implies that Gregory had the title bestowed on him in a determinably official capacity, and even merely 'gleichsam offiziell', but more pressingly it compromises the claim that this was attested at the Council of Chalcedon.²⁶

If the attribution of the title 'theologian' to Gregory in 451 is to be understood properly, it is necessary to better understand the address in which it actually appears. The problematic nature of this anonymous document, composed after the end of the council, is discussed by Schwartz and in the modern English translation by Richard Price and Michael Gaddis. Schwartz is confident of an attribution of authorship to Theodoret.²⁷

²² Mansi has the Latin in parallel, while Schwartz provides a critical apparatus in the footnotes.

²³ This should not be confused with the address by Emperor Marcian delivered on Monday 22 October during the fifth session of the Council.

²⁴ 'The blessed Gregory the Theologian from [the letter] to Cledonius': ACO 2.1.3, 114.

²⁵ This problematises Bardenhewer's assertion that the title may have been taken from that of the Theological Orations. I have seen no indication that Theodoret knew them by that title.

²⁶ Bardenhewer, *Literatur*, 164. While what would constitute an official attribution of the title is disputable, the progression envisioned by Bardenhewer of notable Fathers referring to Gregory as the Theologian before the title appears in the minutes of a significant council would certainly qualify.

²⁷ 'florilegium ex dialogis quos anno fere 447 scripsit ... nemo enim nisi ipse Theodoretus addidit locum ex Procli sermone quodam excerptum et uerba

Price and Gaddis acknowledge this argument for Theodoret's authorship without entirely affirming it, but provide some additional evidence that may provide some clarity on the title 'Theologian': 'Note that John of Asia, a miaphysite historian of the mid-sixth century, asserted that the "final decree" of Chalcedon was written by Theodoret.'²⁸ If later reception came to see the address as a decree of the council, the use of Gregory's title would gain commensurate authority.

In the immediate context of the council no such claim to authority can be made. Price and Gaddis highlight that Theodoret was viewed with suspicion by the principal of the council, and that 'it is not a plausible document to have been agreed by "the holy council": it must have been issued by bishops, such as Theodoret and John of Germanicia, who represented the Antiochene School'.²⁹ The reason for the inclusion is less significant to the question at hand than that the address was not the work of the council, but probably of Theodoret. While not from the council itself, the address does seem likely to have been contemporary with it, being composed and appended soon after the close of the council in November 451.

This dating does not necessarily apply to the title of 'Theologian' as attributed to Gregory. A further complication arises from a disagreement between the Greek and Latin texts of the address. While the Greek has τοῦ θεολόγου (the theologian), the Latin has only *episcopi Nazianzeni*. The acts were originally transcribed in Greek and then translated into Latin later, and so preference would normally be given to the Greek. There is, however, evidence of later alteration of the Greek manuscripts. These alterations usually take the form of the truncation of certain canons that are complete in Latin. It would seem unlikely that the title would be supplied in only one instance, when other opportunities to include it are present in the acts. Yet balanced against this is the fact that the *florilegia* of the address are a nearly exact match for those of Theodoret's *Eranistes*, as noted by Schwartz. In those *florilegia* Theodoret identifies Gregory as '[τ]οῦ ἁγίου Γρηγορίου ἐπισκόπου Ναζιανζοῦ [the holy Gregory, bishop of Nazianzus]'.³⁰ This would make *episcopi Nazianzeni* as found in the Latin address a nearly direct translation. Compounding this, the use of 'theologian' as a descriptor or title is not well attested anywhere else in the Greek acts, except for a letter of Cyril of Alexandria to John of Antioch – known sometimes as the Formula of Reunion – read during the second session, which contains 'τοὺς θεολόγους [the theologian]'.³¹

Amphilochii quae in dialogo I, 66, et in lobrorum contra Cyrillum quarto plena posuerat, in breuius contraxit': ACO, p. xiv.

²⁸ *The acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, ed. and trans. Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, Liverpool 2005, iii. 107 n. 7. ²⁹ *Ibid.* iii. 107. ³⁰ *Eranistes* 3, PG lxxxiii. 297B.

³¹ ACO 2.1.3, 109.

It seems probable that τοῦ θεολογίου as attributed to Gregory of Nazianzus was original to the address, firstly given that Theodoret wrote in Greek, and secondly that the Latin reception of the Greek language of theology may have problematised the identification of a Christian as a theologian. External to the council, this is most obvious in Augustine's *De civitate dei*. Augustine writes that 'I have not taken up in this work the refutation of all the vain opinions of philosophers, but only those pertaining to theology, which Greek word we understand to signify account or discourse on divinity.'³² Augustine's understanding of theology should be properly understood through the lens of Varro, from whom he derived the tripartite structure of theology against which his arguments in *De civitate dei* are directed. Theology in this understanding is principally a pagan construct against which Christian arguments are to be directed.

In the acts themselves, that same letter of Cyril of Alexandria to John of Antioch has θεολόγους, referring to those attempting to understand the nature of Christ, rendered as *deiloquos* in the Latin manuscript.³³ This does provide support for a reluctance to transliterate θεολόγους directly. However, the existence of such an alternative raises a further question as to why Gregory was not merely rendered as *Gregorio deiloquo*.³⁴ In addition to the understanding implied by Augustine, a possible reason for this may be that the principal source of Gregory's works in Latin, Rufinus' translations, identify Gregory only as 'Gregorium' and with the sees of Nazianzus and Constantinople later in his prologue.³⁵ The Latin translation of the acts may therefore simply be attempting to avoid confusion by conforming to an existing style of reference. Taken together, the evidence from Augustine and Rufinus and the use of *deiloquos* in the acts does provide reasonable grounds for the translators of the Latin manuscript to have chosen not to translate Gregory's title of theologian. Ultimately, no part of the Greek manuscript tradition contains anything other than τοῦ θεολογίου in ACO 2.1.3.

³² 'Neque enim hoc opere omnes omnium philosophorum uanas opiniones refutare suscepi, sed eas tantum, quae ad theologian pertinent, quo uerbo Graeco significari intellegimus de diuinitate rationem siue sermonem': *De civitate Dei* 8.1, *PL* xlv. 225. On other Christian appropriations of Varro's tripartite structure see M. Kahlos, *Debate and dialogue: Christian and pagan cultures c. 360–430*, London–New York 2007, 152–3.

³³ SSCC 6, 670. This reference is part of the Formula of Reunion, a version of which is transmitted by this letter.

³⁴ The earliest example that I have been able to locate is in the eleventh-century work by Peter Damian, *De abdicatione episcopatus*. It is interesting, though rather unhelpful, that Damian refers to 'Gregorius Nazianzus, qui ab historiographis Deiloquus appellatur': *PL* cxlv.427A. This implies that Damian knew of other sources that identified Gregory as such, though who Damian had in mind is not clear.

³⁵ Prologue, CSEL xlvi. 3–4. The ninth- to eleventh-century headings refer to *Gregori Nazianzenii* or *Gregori epi Nazianzenii*.

This places the first attribution of the title 'theologian' to Gregory in the Greek text of the Address to Marcian, appended to the acts of the Council of Chalcedon, in November 451, after the close of the council. If this is so, and Gregory was not granted the title of 'the Theologian' by the Council of Chalcedon the question of why it was attributed to him by Theodoret, and what its significance might be, is even more pointed. With little context in the text of the address itself it is necessary to turn to Theodoret himself for clarity on that part of the question.

'Theologian' in late antiquity

While significant, such an endeavour cannot be an attempt to define what constitutes theology in late antiquity. As Lamberton notes, 'The distinction between "theologizing" by *writing* poetry ... and "theologizing" by *interpreting* the poetry of the ancients in such a way as to bring out these meanings is, in fact, one that seems often to have been blurred in antiquity.' Lamberton, principally concerned with Porphyry and non-Christian sources, continues, 'By the fourth century, however, the verb *θεολογέω* could refer to either activity.'³⁶ This is apparent in most of the works under consideration here. Such a blurring is difficult to navigate, and necessitates that the focus of this study be limited as much as possible to the application of the use of 'theologian' as a title or category.³⁷ It is with this in mind that the following forays into Theodoret's use of 'theologian' should be understood. Any such effort to understand the significance of the title of 'theologian' as attributed to Gregory depends on a consideration of how it is used in Theodoret's works. Unfortunately, in no work but the address does Theodoret attach the title to Gregory's name. It appears in the same manner, attached to an individual name, in only one case. The sole figure referred to as 'the Theologian' in Theodoret's works outside the Address to Marcian is John. Before undertaking any inquiry into Theodoret

³⁶ Robert Lamberton, *Homer the theologian: Neoplatonist allegorical reading and the growth of the epic tradition*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1989, 24.

³⁷ While some recourse to the use of the language of theology, or theologising, outside of the title is necessary, it should not be taken to suggest that its use as it relates to the title of theologian can be extended to all possible senses of theology. A contemporary example of the complexity of the nature of 'theology' in late antiquity is found in C. Marksches (ed. W. Coppins and S. Gathercole; trans. W. Coppins), *Christian theology and its institutions in the early Roman Empire: prolegomena to a history of early Christian theology*, Waco, Tx 2015, and Josef Lössl, 'Theology as academic discourse', *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* x (2015), 38–72. In both cases there is a concern to demonstrate, with reference to its pagan cultural context, how the Christian undertaking of theology was understood.

it is therefore instructive to consider the attribution of the title to John more broadly.

The enduring association of the name John with the title of ‘theologian’ is often predicated on the presence of such an ascription in the Apocalypse of John, and some critical editions of the text do include it. However, the textual evidence does not suggest a particularly early date for the attribution of the title of theologian to any John. The first identification of John as the author of Revelation, in Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* c. 160 CE, makes no reference to any personal title. The earliest manuscript of Revelation attributing the title is Minuscule 2814, a twelfth-century document.³⁸ The attribution is most likely dependent on the commentary contained alongside the text on the minuscule.³⁹ This commentary by Andreas of Caesarea on Revelation, which only just post-dates Oecumenius’, dates to 611 and includes reference to Gregory and John as ‘Theologian’.⁴⁰ This places the earliest attestation of John, identified with the author of Revelation, as theologian in 611. Andreas is ardently committed to the identity of the author of Revelation as John the Evangelist, and the title of ‘theologian’ was carried over from that association with the putative author of the Gospel of John.

The identification of that John as ‘theologian’ does not have a particularly early date either. Prior to or contemporary with Theodoret, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria all refer to the author of the Gospel of John as ‘theologian’. The earliest such identification in a complete work is c. 318 CE, in *Contra gentes*, when Athanasius cites ‘ὁ θεολόγος’ and quotes from the Gospel of John.⁴¹ The only earlier example in the text record is a most probably spurious catena fragment of Origen’s commentary on John, but that does refer to John as ‘ὁ θεολόγος’.⁴² While not contemporary, 318 and 451 as the dates of respective attribution place far less distance between the attestation of John and Gregory as ‘the Theologian’ than is usually assumed. This also has particular consequences for Theodoret’s identification of John as theologian.

³⁸ The minuscule is notable for being that used by Erasmus in the composition of his *textus receptus*. The name refers to the type of script used to compose the text.

³⁹ More modern critical editions highlight the significance of the commentary for the attribution of the title, for example Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graecum* 26th edn, xvii. 632.

⁴⁰ Eugenia Constantiniou, *Guiding to a blessed end: Andrew of Caesarea and his Apocalypse commentary in the ancient Church*, Washington, DC 2017, introduction at p.16; PG cvi. 218A, 224C.

⁴¹ *Contra gentes* xlii, PG xxv.84D.

⁴² Origen, fragment of Commentary on John 1, in *Origenes werke*, ed. Erwin Preuschen, iv, Leipzig 1903, 483. I base this conclusion on points made by both Heine and Preuschen himself. This fragment deals with John i.1, and yet is not at all parallel to the extant, and complete, book 1 of Origen’s commentary. See Ronald Heine, ‘Can Origen’s catena fragments be trusted?’, *Vigiliae Christianae* xl/2 (1986), 118–34 at p. 120; *Origenes Werke*, pp. lxi–lxxi.

Most significantly, it does not seem that he was drawing on an enduring biblical tradition, but instead on a patristic one.

In Theodoret's work at least John is the author of the Gospel of John, and is referred to with the title as 'Ἰωάννου τοῦ θεολόγου [John the Theologian]' in Theodoret's commentary on Isaiah i.91.⁴³ Perhaps explaining why, Theodoret writes in his *Graecarum affectionum curatione* 2.88 of the 'Ἰωάννου θεολογίας προοίμιον [introduction to John's theology]' before going on to quote from Eusebius of Caesarea's own supposed quotation of Amelius' commentary on the prologue to the Gospel of John.⁴⁴ Entirely passing over the likelihood of a student of Plotinus having made such a commentary, Theodoret's description of a Gospel as 'John's theology' begins to clarify the situation around the title in Theodoret's thought.⁴⁵

In one instructive letter, to John of Antioch, Theodoret wrote that: 'Against the hardihood of this anathematizing, I will say this much, that Paul, the great voiced herald of truth, anathematized those who had corrupted the evangelic and apostolic teaching and boldly did so against the angels, not against those who abided by the laws laid down by theologians.'⁴⁶ Shedding further light both on who these theologians are and why John's Gospel is identified as theology is Theodoret's discussion of Moses in *Graecarum* 2.55 where he describes Moses, here styled as the Great, writing theology, as well as history and law.⁴⁷ Theodoret strengthens the idea of a creative theology in *De incarnatione domini* 1.1 when he writes that 'theology and the economy come together [τῆ θεολογία τὴν οἰκονομίαν συνάπτων]' in that work.⁴⁸

What is to be made of this distinction and connection between theology, history, law, economy and prophecy? It points to an understanding of theology as not merely abstract speculation about the divine or a species of philosophy, but instead as specific revelations of the first things in written works. In this sense, the need to specify a prophetic theology

⁴³ SC cclxxvi. 318.

⁴⁴ PG lxxxiii. 832C.

⁴⁵ See John Dillon, 'St John in Amelius' seminar', in P. Vassilopoulou and S. Clark (eds), *Late antique epistemology*, London 2008, 30–43.

⁴⁶ 'Πρὸς δὲ τὴν τοῦ ἀναθεματισμοῦ τόλμαν τσοσῦτον ἐρῶ, ὅτι Παῦλος, ὁ μεγαλοφώντατος τῆς ἀληθείας χήρυξ, τοὺς παραφθειραντας τὰ εὐαγγελικὰ καὶ ἀποστολικά διδάγματα ἀνεθεμάτισε, καὶ τῶν ἀγγέλων κατατολμήνας, οὐ τοὺς ἐμμένοντας τοῖς δοθεῖσιν ὅροις ὑπὸ τῶν θεολόγων ἀνδρῶν': *ep. cl PG lxxxiii. 1413-6D-A*; trans. B. Jackson, *NPNF* 2nd ser. iii. 325.

⁴⁷ 'Ταύτην ἔχει τὴν διδασκαλίαν τὰ Μωϋσοῦ τοῦ μεγάλου ξυγγράμματα: ταύτην δὲ τὴν θεολογίαν καὶ ταῖς ἱστορίας καὶ ταῖς νομοθεσίας καὶ μὲν δὴ καὶ ταῖς προφητείας ξυνέξουξε: καὶ πέντε βίβλους ξυγγράνας, τὴν μὲν τῶν πολλῶν καὶ νομιζομένων καὶ καλουμένων, οὐκ ὄντων δὲ θεῶν ἀπαγορεύει τιμὴν, μόνω δὲ τὸ σέβας τῶ ἀπάντων κελεύει προσφέρειν δημιουργῶ': *PG lxxxiii. 844B*.

⁴⁸ *PG lxxv. 1420B*.

becomes clear. Moses having written a theology and the reference to John having written a theology are sharpened in this understanding. Both the Pentateuch, particularly Genesis, and John's Gospel, especially its prologue, are deeply concerned with first things, which is to say those things 'in the beginning'. Simply put, John is the only example of an attribution of the title of 'the Theologian' in Theodoret's other works, but he was not the only theologian. Moses, the prophets, those who, along with Moses, laid down the law were all theologians who brought to light those first things of the divine that were of such singular importance to understanding the economy. Christian arguments for a true theology, and its attendant true theologians, did not arise in isolation. Instead, Theodoret sought to construct a 'true theology' presented by Christian, and here biblical, authors that could be contrasted with the theology and theologians of wider pagan culture.

Theodoret's own writings, particularly and unsurprisingly *Graecarum*, are concerned with 'the old and miserable myths not only of the poets, but hawked by theologians and philosophers too'.⁴⁹ Though it might be old and miserable, Theodoret acknowledges this as theology. It is not only some wreckage of the past either, but an alternate narrative with which Theodoret saw Christianity in competition. He makes this clear in his *ep.* xxi, when he explains his appeals to Plato, Sophocles, Homer (whom Theodoret identified as ὁ Ποιητής) and more by writing that 'I have quoted what I have to prove how disgraceful it were for the mere disciples of nature to get the better of us who have had the instruction of the prophets and apostles.'⁵⁰ Though later in that letter Theodoret styles the distinction as between 'truth mixed with mythology' and the 'divine words', it is clear in *Graecarum* that he was aware that in quoting Homer he was also quoting from a figure that Neoplatonic pagan philosophers had come to regard as a theological authority.

Theodoret was not alone in his concern that Christianity was being outdone in an intellectual arena and required its own champions. Gregory is perhaps the most singular example of Christian efforts to create a counter-cultural narrative that made use of classical forms and sources while constructing its own. In his *In suos versos* Gregory is explicit in this being the aim of his poetic work:

Thirdly, I know I feel – this may seem petty of me,
but I do feel this – I cannot admit

⁴⁹ 'τοὺς αἰσχροτάτους καὶ βδελυρωτάτους μύθους οὐ μόνον ποιηταῖς, ἀλλὰ καὶ θεολόγοις καὶ φιλοσόφοις ἐνήχησε, ποικίλως μάλα κατασκευάζων τὸν πλάνον καὶ πλείοσι τῆς ἕξαι πάτης χρώμενος διδασκάλοις': *Graecarum* 7.6, PG lxxxiii. 993A.

⁵⁰ 'ταῦτα δὲ τέθεικα, δεῖξαι βουληθείς, ὡς ἄγαν αἰσχρὸν τῶν τῆς φύσεως μαθητῶν ἠττηθῆναι τοὺς προφητικῆς καὶ ἀποστολικῆς μετεσχηκότας διδασκαλίας': *ep.* xxi, PG lxxxiii.1201A, trans. B. Jackson, *NPNF* 2nd ser. iii. 258.

the pagans to have greater literary talent than us.

I am speaking of those ornate words of theirs,

for in our eyes beauty lies in contemplation.

And so for you, the wise, I have produced

this amusement.

Allow us, too, a certain leonine grace.⁵¹

The parallel with Theodoret's sentiment in his *ep.* xxi is obvious. Theodoret and Gregory therefore stood on much the same conceptual ground when it came to the relationship between Christianity and wider culture. The question remains, then, whether their understanding of the significance of 'theologian' and the need for Christian theologians also coincided. In concluding this argument, it is helpful to demonstrate that this impetus was also operative in Gregory himself. Gregory remains a popular source of reference for his own later titling as 'theologian' by Theodoret, predicated on the idea that his so-called Theological orations warranted as much. However, attempting to assess Gregory's contribution to his own reception of the title solely with reference to his own works is not productive. Setting aside arguments such as Bardenhewer's that Theodoret knew Gregory's Theological orations by that title as the address does not employ it, it is Theodoret's, not Gregory's, concept of the title of 'theologian' that is decisive. Nevertheless, it seems plausible that Theodoret would have read Gregory outside of the selections that he quotes in the address. This examination of Gregory will therefore focus on two closely related areas: first, on his use of the title of 'theologian', and second, on how it relates to Theodoret's.

Gregory's use of 'theologian' is more constructive than in Theodoret's works, insofar as he appears interested in describing what a theologian should be and do. Some caution must be maintained as, with so much of Gregory's work, the vividness of his language and clarity of his thought make him seem more contemporaneous than he actually is. In this instance, Gregory is more disciplined than Theodoret in his use of the language of theology. This can make such uses seem familiar to a modern interlocutor. Most obviously, Gregory's use of 'theology' and 'theologian' largely, though not exclusively, refers to Christian contemporaries, and he prefers to adopt the language of philosophy when engaging opponents outside the broadly defined Christian community. However, it is quite clear that Gregory was perfectly aware of the long history of non-Christian

⁵¹ Τρίτον πεπονθῶς οἶδα· πρᾶγμα μὲν τυχὸν μικροπρεπὲς τι, πλὴν πέπονθ'· οὐδ' ἐν λόγοις πλεόν διδομι τοὺς ζένους ἡμῶν ἔχειν· τούτοις λέγω δὴ τοῖς κεχρωσμένοις λόγοις εἰ καὶ τὸ κάλλος ἡμῖν ἐν θεωρίᾳ. Ὑμῖν μὲν οὖν δὴ τοῖς σοφοῖς ἐπαίζομεν. Ἐστω τις ἡμῖν καὶ χάρις λεόντιος': poem 2.1.39, lines 47–52, in *Gregory of Nazianzus: autobiographical poems*, trans. C. White, Cambridge 1996, 5.

use of theology, and that the superficial familiarity of his technical language conceals a radically different milieu. His oration 5.31 provides a striking example to this effect, when he writes of Julian that he should ‘shame finally the books of your theologian Orpheus [αἰσχύνθητί ποτε ταῖς τοῦ Θεολόγου σου βίβλοις Ὀρφέως]’.⁵²

The first part of Gregory’s preamble on theology and theologians in the Theological orations concerns the boundaries of theological inquiry, and reinforces the suggestion in oration 5 that he was cognisant of a pagan theology, against which he wrote. What is too easily overlooked is that in oration 27.9, much as in oration 5.31, Gregory is defending the ‘poverty’ of his own intellectual tradition against the supposed over-indulgence in Greco-Roman philosophy of his Eunomian opponents. His principle contention is that they cast their own theologians in a mould not of Christian Scripture, but of Greco-Roman oracles and philosophy:

But, so be it! So elevated are you, beyond those who are raised high, and even above the clouds, if you will, an observer of the unobservable, a hearer of the unspoken, you are raised high after Elias, you merit a vision of God after Moses, and ascend to Heaven after Paul. You mould these others into saints in a single day, appoint them theologians, breathe into them instruction, and make foolish oracles their councils.⁵³

Gregory, much as Theodoret would later, makes appeal to Moses, but also to Elias and Paul: those who have themselves ascended or been given visions of the divine. He appeals to prophets and lawgivers as the counsel for contemporary theologians – which is to say those who would theologise. At the same time, he says that his opponent’s theologians are counseled by ‘λογίων ἀμαθῶν’ – foolish oracles. While on the one hand an obvious allusion to the theologians of wider society, much as when Theodoret attacked Porphyry’s *Philosophy from oracles*, it is also a pun playing off the difference between divine and foolish words. It is precisely this humour that inflects the remainder of the passage. Gregory enjoins his opponents to attack Pythagorean silence, Orphic beans, the ideas of Plato, the atheism of Epicurus, the superciliousness of the Stoic and the vulgarity of Cynicism.⁵⁴ Taken together with oration 5, it is clear that Gregory was consciously setting up a dichotomy between theologies.

This evidence from Gregory’s works highlights Lamberton’s observation regarding the bifurcated use of ‘to theologise’ by the fourth century. For

⁵² SC cccix. 356.

⁵³ Ἔστω δέ· ὑψηλὸς σύ, καὶ ὑψηλῶν πέρα, καὶ ὑπὲρ τὰς νεφέλας, εἰ βούλει, ὁ τῶν ἀθεάτων θεατῆς, ὁ τῶν ἀρρήτων ἀκροατῆς, ὁ μετὰ Ἥλιον μετάρσιος, καὶ ὁ μετὰ Μωυσέα θεοφανείας ἠξιωμένος, καὶ μετὰ Παῦλον οὐράνιος. τί καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους αὐθήμερον πλάττεις ἀγίους, καὶ χειροτονεῖς θεολόγους, καὶ οἷον ἐμπνεῖς τὴν παιδείυσιν, καὶ πεποίηκας λογίων ἀμαθῶν πολλὰ συνέδρια: SC ccl. 92.

⁵⁴ Oration 27.9.

Theodoret, theologians were those who laid down the laws or composed the Gospels. Simply put, those who created theologies that were then interpreted by others. Gregory, on the contrary, does point to Orpheus, Elias, and Moses and Paul, but his theologians are his contemporary Christians. They are not creators of theology, but interpreters whose quality is marked by their sources, their character and their discernment. In this sense Gregory had a sort of qualified impulse to respond to pagan theologians such as Orpheus not just with historical examples, but by speaking to the contemporary act of doing theology.

However, understanding the title of 'theologian' based on the internal evidence of Gregory's works, rather than their reception, is somewhat misleading. Gregory is not called a theologian in the same sense that he used the word, although he was cognisant of the same externalities and shared some motivations with Theodoret. Gregory is instead cast as one of Theodoret's theologians. Gregory was titled 'theologian' in the Address to Marcian in the mode predominant in Theodoret – as a creative theologian, speaking directly of the first things and the nature of the divine. Whether Gregory would himself have approved of such a characterisation is questionable. In context it is apparent that Gregory saw himself as an exegete of the text, as a theologian among theologians, elucidating that which was there to be known. In the reception of his work by Theodoret it is equally apparent that Gregory was instead a 'theologian', to be numbered alongside not just John but Moses and the prophets in presenting a greater truth than could such theologians as Orpheus, Hesiod, Homer and Plato.⁵⁵

Ultimately, given the relative historical proximity of the textual evidence for the attachment of 'theologian' to figures such as Moses, John, the prophets and Gregory and Theodoret's familiarity with the works of Eusebius of Caesarea and Clement of Alexandria, it seems that they are so named as part of a response to an existing practice rather than in relation to each other. Eusebius of Caesarea discusses a change in sacrificial practice brought about by 'Seleucis the Theologian' in *Theophania* 2.55.⁵⁶ Seleucis cannot be dated on the basis of this reference, but Hill argues for an identification with a first-century Seleucius noted for his extensive writings on the gods.⁵⁷ Eusebius' *Praeparatio Euangelica* 10.4 identifies Orpheus, Linus and Musaeus as the oldest of Greek theologians.⁵⁸ In the same vein, his *Demonstratio Euangelica* 1.1 is an exercise from what Eusebius calls the Hebrew theologians, identified with the prophets.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Lamberton, *Homer*, 30.

⁵⁶ PG. While not a quotation, the same change is discussed by Porphyry in *De abstentia* 2.55 and it is clear that this is where Eusebius found the reference.

⁵⁷ G. Hill, *A history of Cyprus*, 2nd edn, Cambridge 2008, 65 n. 1.

⁵⁸ PG xxi.782A.

⁵⁹ PG xxii. 20A.

Clement of Alexandria notably refers to Moses and Orpheus as theologians. Moses, in *Stromata* 1.22, is ‘θεολόγος καὶ προφήτης [theologian and prophet]’, while Orpheus is ‘ὁ θεολόγος’ in *Stromata* 5.12.⁶⁰ This is, in effect, a part of Christian appropriation and response to Hellenistic philosophy that is present in much of late antiquity. It is precisely against this that Gregory and Theodoret cast their true theology, and from the same stream of classical thought that Clement, Athanasius, Eusebius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Cyril of Alexandria and Theodoret presented their own ‘theologians’.

This argument, that Gregory’s title was the product of a late antique drive to cast Christian theologians in opposition to existing or newly created pagan theologians, is not borne out in its reception. Despite widespread use in the ninth and tenth centuries earlier examples do not bear out the idea that Gregory’s title was common after Theodoret, or that it was received in this way. It clearly had some currency, considering the presence of references to the theologian Gregory in the commentaries on Revelation by Andreas of Caesarea and Oecumenius’ commentaries on Revelation in the late sixth and early seventh century.⁶¹ Maximus Confessor referred to Gregory as ‘ὁ μέγας θεολόγος Γρηγόριος [the great theologian Gregory]’ throughout his *Opuscula theologica et polemica*. This is also true of John Damascene, who refers to ‘Ἰωάννου τοῦ Θεολόγου [John the Theologian]’ and to ‘ὁ θεολογία Γρηγόριος [the theologian Gregory]’ in his homily on the Transfiguration.⁶²

Nevertheless, a substantial evidence gap exists between the first authentic attachment of ‘theologian’ to Gregory in the Address in 451 and a secondary use by Oecumenius around the late sixth or early seventh century, and these other later uses.⁶³ An explanation for this resurgence of use most probably lies with Price and Gaddis’s reference to John of Asia’s sixth-century characterisation of the Address to Marcian as the ‘final decree’ of the Council of Chalcedon. If, over time, the address came to be seen as an entirely official pronouncement of the council then the title ascribed to Gregory in the address would gain prominence as well. At the same time, if the authorship of the address was lost then any of the significance attached to the original attribution of Gregory’s title by Theodoret would

⁶⁰ PG viii. 896A; ix. 116B.

⁶¹ For Andreas see PG cvi. 220B. For Oecumenius see Herman Hoskier, *The complete commentary of Oecumenius on the Apocalypse*, Ann Arbor, MI 1928, 30.

⁶² Notably John of Damascus’ *De natura composita* 3.

⁶³ Procopius of Gaza’s spurious *Refutatio Procli* refers to ‘ἡμέτερος Θεολόγος Γρηγόριος’ as providing a better account of the nature of divinity than Proclus does from Plato. In addition to greatly narrowing the gap between uses, this would also provide useful support for my own argument. For a discussion of the history of authenticity and its proper ascription to Nicholas of Methone see P. Rorem and J. Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian corpus: annotating the Areopagite*, Oxford 1998, 10 n. 7.

go with it. Lacking a detailed knowledge of the makeup of the acts, the reality is that it is the document as a whole that would be decisive for later interpretation and the particular significance of Theodoret's attribution of the title of 'theologian' to Gregory would be lost.

It is precisely the recovery of this particularity that the foregoing study has sought to achieve. In the first case it has been concerned to demonstrate that many commonly circulated descriptions of the source and significance of Gregory's title are incomplete or incorrect. While it does appear in the acts of the Council of Chalcedon, and does date to 451, the title is used only in *florilegia* in the Address to Marcian. The address is one of several extra-conciliar documents appended to the minutes to form the acts, and is probably attributable to Theodoret of Cyrrhus. Going beyond this, the study has also sought to present a model of why Theodoret may have chosen to apply this particular title to Gregory. If the foregoing is valid, then it suggests two distinct stages for the reception of Gregory's work in the years after his death.

In sum, the attribution of the title of 'theologian' by Theodoret is related to an effort to present Christian alternatives to, in the fourth and fifth centuries, an expanding coterie of pagan theological authorities such as Homer, Orpheus and Plato. While the Apostles, Moses, Paul and the prophets are drawn into this effort, it is the identification of John's Gospel as a theology that more permanently associated the title with him. To this extent modern scholarly reception has failed to appreciate the significance of the title as it was applied to Gregory. Theodoret at least appears to have believed that Gregory's work was of such consequence that it could not only stand against pagan theologians, but that it could also stand alongside the theologies of Moses and John.