

Introduction

The *Thanksgiving Address* offered to Origen by a grateful student is a well-known document, yet one that has been cited far more often than it is read closely. Written on the occasion of his departure from his teacher at the conclusion of an extended period of study in Caesarea Maritima in Roman Palestine, most likely during the period 233–240 CE, the composition provides a highly stylized but also emotionally charged account of the young man’s tutelage under the most prominent Christian theologian and exegete of the third century. One of the very few “personal” accounts by a Christian author to have survived from the period before Constantine, the *Thanksgiving Address* has much to teach us regarding the content and methods of higher education in the early church as well as the atmosphere that surrounded such studies.

The *Address of Thanksgiving* to Origen embraces an hour, a decade, and an age: an hour of rhetorical brilliance, nearly a decade of educational and moral progress, an entire age of Greco-Roman *paideia* as a cultural ideal. As such, the work demands to be appreciated and understood, at one and the same time, as an individual rhetorical achievement, the prolonged spiritual formation of a young man, and the culmination, perhaps subtle transformation, of centuries of cultural

practice. As a record of enduring (albeit shifting) cultural practice, the document provides an extended account of the process of philosophical education in the ancient world. Deeply traditional language and themes witnessed by works ranging over a millennium—from classical Athens through the gradual demise of the Greco-Roman philosophical schools in late antiquity—find striking expression in this description of the school of Origen. Equally striking, though, has been the lack of appreciation of the unique value of our composition in this regard: while studies of Christian education in Alexandria and Caesarea may have regarded the *Address* as an invaluable cultural record, there has been far too little appreciation of its deeply personal aspects, as the author presents the scope of his educational and spiritual journey under the guidance of Origen during the course of almost a decade. Portions of this process are narrated in lively terms and evocative detail, while other aspects, some potentially significant and of enormous interest, are set down in frustratingly abbreviated or indeterminate fashion. Despite its uneven quality, we possess a noteworthy and rare account of an individual's intellectual and moral growth—a literary creation of largely unappreciated interest and value. Finally, these cultural and personal records are preserved within a stylized rhetorical framework. Commonly perceived as a piece of stock oratory—a speech delivered in Origen's presence on the speaker's departure from the city of Caesarea—the text encompasses a full range of performative aspects and affects. Indeed, the author's rhetorical sophistication and highly mannered presentation could leave the reader with the impression that the *Address* is nothing but a patchwork of tropes in the service of an overarching and culturally conservative narrative. The ultimate aim of the present study is to convince the reader just how mistaken and deeply unfortunate this conclusion would be. Read attentively, the work allows us to appreciate how the intersection of rhetorical construction, personal experience, and cultural tradition offers a window into a remarkable episode in the history of education and spiritual tutelage.

HISTORY AND RHETORIC

Every document presents its readers with a peculiar series of challenges, limitations, and frustrations. The *Thanksgiving Address to Origen* is no exception in this regard, and a number of the work's qualities and difficulties deserve some preliminary attention, as they have determined the nature of scholarly discussion thus far and have served as stimuli for the present study.

The *Address* is hardly an unknown or neglected work: we enjoy an excellent critical edition, translation, and commentary prepared by Henri Crouzel, one of the twentieth century's premier scholars of Origen.¹ In the decades since Crouzel's own work, there have been a number of translations into different languages, with varying degrees of annotation and discussion.² While the work has not yet been the focus of either a monograph or extended investigation, it has merited the attention of a number of authors in significant articles and briefer discussions in the course of a wide variety of research projects.³ These have illuminated variegated aspects of the text as well as providing points of entry to the contexts necessary for the understanding of some of the finer details of the work. The problem of recent research, therefore, has not been one of neglect but of the manner of attention that the work has attracted. With very few exceptions, there has been virtually no attempt to *read* the composition as an integral text in order to penetrate and appreciate its own internal logic and meaning. Even those signal attempts to assess the importance of the *Address* have done so largely, or exclusively, in terms of its "contribution" to the understanding of surrounding texts, figures, and contexts.

Clearly, and logically, the principal framework of explanation and reference has been the subject of the *Address* itself: the transcending figure of Origen, his writings, and his thought. Not only have students of the work come largely from the ranks of Origen scholars, but the work itself often has been regarded as either an appendix or an ancilla to the

corpus Origenianum. A number of the most helpful and enlightening readings of the *Address* have been devoted precisely to the question of what the composition can teach us about Origen and his thought. In one of the most incisive treatments of the *Address* in past decades, for example, Joseph Trigg has turned our attention to the distinctive harmony between the *Address*, its author's purpose, and Origen's own broader theological and ecclesiastic perspective.⁴ A number of recent, praiseworthy examinations of Origen as exegete and teacher have turned to the portrait of the educator in the *Address* in their attempt to establish central values and methods of the Caesarean school and its master.⁵ In various other instances, the *Address* has been enlisted to secure one aspect or another of the Origenian heritage.

There remains a strong measure of truth, nevertheless, in Crouzel's judgment dating back half a century: "Le *Remerciement* est constamment utilisé dans les livres et articles traitant d'Origène, mais il a été peu étudié en lui-même."⁶ Two opposing yet interlocked difficulties lie at the foundation of this imbalanced approach, each serving as a stumbling block in approaching the work. On the one hand, there has been an inordinate, if not surprising, focus upon the historical information to be gleaned from the *Address*; on the other, the text has elicited a certain scholarly wariness, almost recoil, as a result of its highly rhetorical nature. The common impulse, accordingly, has been an attempt to rescue the "hard" facts from the composition and give large portions of the composition a wide berth.

The search for solid historical data begins understandably with the problem of authorship and the strong desire to tie the *Address* to an individual, the arc of whose life can both provide context and anchor the text itself. The composition traditionally has been attributed to Gregory, bishop of Neocaesarea in Pontus (Asia Minor) and celebrated as the "Wonder-Worker" (*Thaumaturgus*).⁷ The attribution—found in the manuscript tradition and in (nearly) all modern printed editions of the work—had been widely, almost universally, accepted until strong doubts were raised by Pierre Nautin a half century ago. Nautin's argu-

ments received a vigorous response by Henri Crouzel, and their respective positions laid the ground for the last generation of scholarship, which largely has accepted Crouzel's defense of the traditional attribution.⁸ Italian scholars who have been at the forefront of the most recent scholarship on the work, however, have returned to Nautin's arguments and raised further doubts regarding the ties between the *Address* and the figure of Gregory of Pontus. It would be fair to describe the current status of the question as undecided, with a consensus for the traditional identification, alongside a vocal, unrelenting opposition.⁹

Much attention and the corresponding attempts to discuss the work within a broader framework have focused on the presumed author of the work as Gregory Thaumaturgus. The varied attempts that have been made to link our work with the somewhat shadowy forefather of Cappadocian Christianity have contributed examinations of the *Address* within the larger trajectory of the development of the Christian community in late Roman Asia Minor, yet have done little to dispel the uncertainty regarding authorship. These "biographical" approaches provide interesting and creative readings of aspects of the composition in relation to subsequent presentations of the presumed author (especially the *vita* of Gregory Thaumaturgus by his illustrious fourth-century spiritual descendant, Gregory of Nyssa), but the central core of the *Address* and its significance remain curiously impervious to these readings. Often unstated is the irresistible lack of correlation, in terms of both style and content, between the *Address* and other works attributed (generally with a far larger degree of confidence) to the figure known as the Wonder-Worker.¹⁰ It is uncertain whether the argument can be resolved. I am convinced, however, that even if we were to leave aside the doubts regarding the identity of the author of the *Address* and were to assume him to be identical with Gregory, bishop of Pontus, we would still face a series of questions. Can we establish a literary or theological connection between the *Address* and the other works attributed to Gregory? Is there a compelling link between the portrait of the author of the *Address* and the conglomeration of fact and legend associated with the Thaumaturgus?

Is there any sense in which our knowledge of the career of Gregory Thaumaturgus aids our understanding of the *Address* and our attempt to discern the significance of the work? I have yet to see any indication, whether in the ample scholarship or on the basis of my own examination, that any of these questions can be answered positively.

It is principally for these reasons that the present study has taken a stance of scholarly agnosticism on the question of authorship. Consequently, I shall attempt to divorce these considerations from the body of the study, asking neither how the biography of Gregory Thaumaturgus is reflected in the *Address* nor how the *Address* can further our understanding of the writings and career of that figure. I prefer to regard the testimony of the *Address* as a distinct and integral document, both instructive on its own terms and demanding its own form of analysis and interpretation. The author of the *Address*, for reasons of convenience and convention, I will continue to call Gregory—though without any further attribution or assumption.

Alongside this central concern, other studies have focused on specific details of the text, large and small, for their possible contribution to the understanding (or simple documentation) of contemporary phenomena. A noteworthy example of this “mining” of the *Address* has been the pronounced interest in the spare information offered regarding Gregory’s legal education: students of the history of legal institutions and training in the Roman Empire have enthusiastically embraced the relatively meager details on this score recorded in the work.¹¹ No less striking in this regard has been the fairly extreme concentration of attention on the structured educational program in the *Address* and its broad appreciation as critical evidence for an Alexandrian-Caesarean curriculum of study. As we shall see, there may be ample reason for caution and even some skepticism here.

This disproportionate focus on the presumedly historical (or factual) aspects of the *Address* may be responsible, paradoxically, for an equal measure of scholarly “disappointment” in the face of the profound silence of the work in many other respects. After all, given the

very limited nature of our knowledge of the cityscape of Caesarea in the time of Origen—as well as the truly remarkable silence of Origen himself in this regard¹²—couldn't we have hoped that the *Address* might afford us a glimpse of the city, its monuments, and its institutions? In fact, the work may well indicate that the pupil shared his master's surpassing disregard for the physical reality of the urban context in which he lived for years. Similarly, there are so many details we might have wanted to know about the “school” of Origen: the nature of the physical setting in which instruction took place, the structure of the day, the rhythm of the week, the relationship between the students. Ultimately, the composition hardly advances our efforts to imagine the physical and social conditions under which Gregory spent years of his life in close proximity to his beloved teacher.

Yet the concentration of scholarly attention on these and other questions, whose answers unhappily are not going to be teased from the text of the *Address*, has allowed a series of other issues to go largely unexplored. However disappointing the composition may be in its lack of prosopographical specificity or its relative lack of concern with the “concrete” details of the Caesarean context, Gregory's report must be studied and valued for what it does offer: one of the very richest and most intimate portraits we possess from antiquity of the inner lives of a student and his master. The *Address* allows us rare entry into the world of a deeply impressionable young man, from his initial encounter with the teacher who is to become the sole focus of his intellectual and emotional life, through the prolonged period of tutelage and achievement, and finally to the wrenching necessity to conclude his studies and depart from his master. It is our most “intimate” representation of a late antique school setting and the powerful relationship that stood at its center.

In fact, it is precisely the force and quality of this representation that has given rise to the other stumbling block. Origen received a student carefully groomed in the late antique culture of persuasion. There can be no more telling witness to Gregory's educational background than the *Thanksgiving Address* itself: composed almost a decade following the

conclusion of his formal rhetorical training and subsequent “conversion” to the life of philosophical and scriptural inquiry, the work still reveals the trademarks of the traditional exercises and techniques of the school of the rhetor. The elaborate rhetorical stratagem that opens the *Address*—the injunction to remain silent in the face of the enormity and grandeur of the subject balanced by the danger that such silence might be misinterpreted as ingratitude—presents the sort of theme that might have been carefully rehearsed in any advanced framework of rhetorical training. Though (here too) Gregory provides frustratingly little detail concerning his schooling in the art of rhetoric, we can securely locate him along the arc defined by figures such as Menander and Libanius.¹³ Nor is this impression of polished artistry dependent merely on individual elements of the composition: the elaborate overall structure and symmetry of the *Address* speak equally of its position within the orbit of high literary culture. (In the penultimate chapter of this study, the detailed examination of the closing portion of the text, I will return to the question of the overall structure and integrity of the work as a whole.)

This artistry has proven a significant complication. Prior to his arrival in Caesarea and confrontation with Origen, Gregory had been launched on that highly prized educational path that extended from primary instruction in the rudiments of grammar through the advanced study of rhetoric in its diverse branches. This was, of course, the great educational and cultural system that provided the infrastructure of that “archipelago of *Paideia*,” in H.-I. Marrou’s admirable image, which spanned the later Roman Empire. Despite its classical origins and foundation in Greco-Roman literature and values, this system was shared by upwardly mobile Christians, and some of the most notable figures of both the pre- and post-Constantinian church were its fully fashioned products. One of the possible extensions of this higher rhetorical training was the study of Roman law, and it was precisely this pursuit that was interrupted by Gregory’s meeting with Origen.

This thoroughgoing rhetorical training poses a problem for both the author and the (modern) reader on a series of intertwined levels.¹⁴ From

the outset of the work, Gregory expresses recurrent concern over his inadequacy to address the task that he has undertaken. Although he initially agonizes over the deficiencies of his Greek as a result of his concentrated exposure to the study of Roman laws (in Latin), his anxiety quickly shifts direction: it is precisely his deep training in rhetorical style that is likely to compromise his ability to present properly the revered object of the composition. The problem has become one of the appropriate restraint and the fitting level required of the language in which he represents his teacher. This issue recedes into the background for large portions of the composition but remains unresolved, only to assert itself forcefully at the close of the work:

Let my address draw to a close here—overly bold where it ought not to be, but reasonably expressing gratitude, I think, in accord with our ability, and while we have said nothing worthy, at least we have not fallen totally silent. And besides I have uttered a lament, as those who depart from dear ones are accustomed to do; it may be affected, but it contains no manner of flattery and is neither overly archaic nor elaborate. Indeed, I know for certain that it is fitting for him and not fabricated, truthful in every way, of sound intention, and pure and whole in purpose. (18.203)

It is difficult to escape the feeling that Gregory protests too much, too artfully. Further complicating the extended expression of concern that opens the work, moreover, is the inescapable fact that this very concern and its highly ritualized confession is itself a well-known rhetorical theme, one that Gregory would have carefully studied and internalized in his earlier studies of the art of composition and speech. Does this reduce his anxious concern to nothing more than an opening gambit in a developed literary exercise? Speaking against this conclusion is the inescapable fact that Gregory's studies in Caesarea were, in no small measure, an extended exercise in reversing many of the lessons and effects of his earlier rhetorical education. Among the most powerful aspects of the description of his training under Origen are the stages in the forceful unraveling of the orator's tricks and manners, which he had acquired and internalized during years of schooling. His narrative, the

unmistakable product of that education and artistry, dwells at length and with expressiveness on this facet of his reeducation at the hands of a philosopher. The reader is asked to accept the implicit assertion that the rhetorical commitment and orientation of the author who composes the *Address* after years of intensive tenure in Caesarea are essentially different than they were at his point of arrival.

Does this complex and deeply self-conscious interplay between shifting levels of rhetoric drastically undercut our ability to accept Gregory's work as a representation of his experience under Origen's tutelage? One of the primary aims of this study is to convince the reader that the *Thanksgiving Address* is not only a work of high rhetorical skill—for it is surely that, and perhaps even to its own detriment—but also a vibrant portrait of the relationship between a teacher and a pupil. To secure this conviction, however, requires our ability to regard Gregory's work as more than simply a rhetorical exercise, to understand its textuality as a passageway rather than a barrier, as a window rather than a reflective mirror. Yet we cannot simply pass around or through the rhetorical status of the work: the reader must ask how to proceed from Gregory's text (and its often extravagant textual character) to the engagement with an underlying reality, personal and social. In what manner can we hope to approach the teacher, the pupil, and the myriad concerns that occupy their years together when our knowledge of all of these is mediated by a literary work that not only creates distance through its language and style but is also keenly aware of its own status as a rhetorical display.

The *Address*, in this regard, provides a striking instance of a much broader problem, one that has become paramount in the last generation of historical scholarship. The very concept of the text, a fortiori the self-conscious literary text, has become a stumbling block in the path of our project of understanding and representing the past. Currents in scholarship of the past decades have raised very real concerns about our ability to penetrate the irreducible textuality of all of our written sources from the past. Whether in the practice of certain forms of cultural history or through the more general embrace of the "linguistic turn," the text itself

came to be perceived as far more than a distorting or retarding filter but as a potentially impenetrable border between the contemporary reader and the past. A widening chorus concluded that only a naive and misplaced confidence allowed that the “reading” of compositions would actually bring us closer to the reality of the past. So thoroughgoing was this pessimism that eminent figures within the historical community—and hardly those who could be suspected of attempting to resurrect an old-fashioned positivism—felt the need to call upon colleagues to resist the conclusion that “a text is only evidence of itself, of its own order.”¹⁵ Among the variant voices that maintained a measure of optimism coupled with a renewed sensitivity and understanding of the inherent permeability of the textual structure was that of Gabrielle Spiegel, a historian of medieval France. In a series of articles, distinguished by strong theoretical underpinnings together with straightforward examples of historical practice, Spiegel sought a way out of the methodological morass born of “textual reductionism,” and offered a fresh proposal for embracing the textuality of our records—not an obstacle but an opportunity to glean precious historical information. In her formulation of the “social logic of the text,” Spiegel pointed to the deeper connections between the nature of a text and the historical and cultural context that gave birth to the work and in which it flourished.¹⁶

In the case of the *Address*, therefore, the challenge is neither to evade nor to ignore the high rhetoric of the composition but to reckon with and profit by it. While scarcely a transparent window through which the reader should expect to gaze unimpeded, the style and purpose of Gregory’s work serve as a refractive lens that demands our active participation and continuous critical engagement. In this regard, it is crucial to recognize still further the likelihood that rhetoric neither conceals nor distorts but actually casts a new light, enhancing certain features of an underlying reality. First, and most immediately striking perhaps, is Gregory’s own consciousness of both the problem and the prospect of rhetorical entrapment. His sophisticated use of the tools of rhetoric is complicated, as we have seen, by his transformed attitude

toward his own past, and especially his prior education in this art, as well as by his acute awareness of the complexity of the specific context: a formalized, public expression of gratitude toward his teacher, the very man whose instruction and example demanded this intellectual reorientation and reevaluation. In a very real sense, therefore, Gregory undercuts his own rhetoric and warns the reader of its potential effects. Closely related is the paradoxical presence of rhetoric in Gregory's own training in philosophy. His recurrent warnings regarding the dangers of stylistic manipulation are effectively compromised by his harsh confrontation with the highly persuasive, even "forceful," speech of Origen, particularly in the early stages of Gregory's initiation to philosophical studies in Caesarea. The reader, together with Gregory, is faced with the role of a transformative art of persuasion in the hands of his new guide and master. In these complex circumstances, the enduring presence of rhetoric serves neither as an external trapping nor as a textual hindrance but rather as a privileged point of entry to the understanding of an essential aspect of the relationship between student and teacher.

No less fascinating and revealing is the student's own struggle with his rhetorical past in light of this training and his new purpose. We become witnesses to Gregory's continual struggle to escape the limits and inclinations of his earlier education in the attempt to give clear and accurate formulation to the substance and measure of his new intellectual and spiritual formation. The reader encounters, not infrequently, the student's seeming inability to provide precise and unembellished expression of his newly, and presumably painfully, acquired philosophical learning. In these instances, Gregory's rhetoric, both as stylistic quality and formative intellectual ballast, provides a uniquely revealing vantage on the challenges and limitations of his educational journey. In corresponding fashion, we are able to enjoy privileged evidence of those contexts and themes that allow Gregory's individuality (of thought and expression) to emerge—at times despite his earlier training and at others with the additional power afforded by his rhetorical

background. In these instances, especially in the concluding sections of the *Address*, the work's artistry actually enhances and heightens the essence of Gregory's message.

PAIDEIA AND PLATONISM

Two principal areas in which the *Address* has left an uncertain and variable imprint on scholarship thus far have been assessments of the status of Greco-Roman "higher education" and research into the more particular conditions of advanced philosophical and theological studies in varied Jewish and Christian contexts of an Alexandrian milieu. In the one case, the full potential of our text to illumine a field of study has not been appreciated sufficiently; the other, somewhat paradoxically, has been the object of excessive attention, perhaps even serving as something of a distraction. This has determined certain modes of reading of the text and inhibited other possible approaches, inevitably serving to mask a number of the work's peculiarities and promises.

It is noteworthy that the significance of our composition for the understanding of the history of education in late antiquity has not been given its due. Studies of education, primary and advanced, in the Greco-Roman world have flourished in the past decades, as has research into the multiform intellectual context of the early Christian centuries.¹⁷ But there has been too little interface between these fields of investigation. Students of Greco-Roman educational theory and practice often have been content to either overlook or acknowledge only in passing the relevance or importance of Christian sources. For example, a recent collective volume offering a comprehensive and detailed survey of "education in Greek and Roman antiquity" includes, in the course of fifteen chapters and nearly five hundred pages, not a single reference to either the school of Origen or the *Thanksgiving Address*.¹⁸ Similarly, numerous studies of the intellectual and social formation of "upwardly mobile" Christians of the early centuries dutifully speak of the encounter with Greco-Roman *paideia* but in the most general terms and without full benefit of

our newly enriched understanding of the processes and contexts that inform that word and its underlying institutions.

Gregory's *Thanksgiving Address* to Origen provides an opportunity to correct that imbalance. It offers us a unique vantage on one of the most promising points of cross-fertilization and mutual illumination: the arena of philosophical education. Gregory describes in vivid terms and arresting detail his transition from the study of rhetoric to induction into the world of philosophy under the guidance of Origen. His progress in the different areas of philosophical inquiry is marked, and the text provides us with one of the more elaborate surviving descriptions of a curriculum of advanced study. At the center stand the field of ethics and the question of moral character, anchored by the image of Origen himself, teacher in both word and deed. Far too little work has been accomplished, however, in deciphering the precise details of Gregory's intellectual and spiritual "formation" and its relationship to contemporary accounts, particularly among Platonist circles. While many of the elements of this educational program are well attested, and the process as a whole would seem to cohere closely with contemporary curricula and with what we know of philosophical training in the Greco-Roman world, especially in the Platonic schools and academies, the presentation is highly personal in tone and affords us a far more vivid and experiential description of the arduous path toward advanced knowledge. Once again, one observes the very limited range of reference to the *Address* in recent scholarship on the "schools" of the late ancient philosophical traditions. While the account of the study circle of Plotinus, as preserved in Porphyry's *vita* of his teacher, has been combed meticulously for every hint of the underlying educational process, Gregory's account has been virtually ignored.¹⁹

By contrast, in discussions of one of the most intriguing "institutions" of the early Christian world, an Alexandrian school or academy that functioned from the final decades of the second century CE, the influence of the *Address* has been overwhelming. Scholars have debated the character and purview of such an Alexandrian school for more than a

century.²⁰ Though there is currently a clear consensus that such a school must have existed and that the youthful Origen served as a pivotal figure, virtually everything else remains uncertain or the subject of argument. While some are inclined to regard the school as an ecclesiastically oriented institution, devoted to advanced catechetical instruction, others envision a thoroughly personal establishment, dependent largely on the personal charisma of its central figure and to varying degrees estranged from local episcopal authority. The very idea of the school as an institution is prone to debate, as is the question of the line of succession of those who stood at its head. As to the origins of the school, the shadowy figure of Pantaenus looms large in this regard as a sharp reminder of how little we actually know about the initial stages of Alexandrian Christianity. Even more conjectural is the suspicion that the school of Alexandria is actually a Christian version of an earlier Jewish academy, dating back to the time of Philo and probably still earlier.²¹

The *Address*, with its extended and often detailed description of the educational curriculum that Gregory encountered, has become an important piece in these discussions. The evidence of the composition naturally has been the central testimony for the existence of a comparable academy in Caesarea under the direction of Origen, newly relocated to that city.²² The broad scholarly assumption has been that the relative largesse of detailed information regarding the Caesarean institution could be read back to inform our knowledge of its Alexandrian forerunner. It is crucial that we also recognize the potential circularity of the argument, particularly in light of the very special character of the evidence drawn from the *Address*. Gregory describes the intimate pedagogical relationship with his revered master Origen: the educational process described is intensely personal, and it would be parlous to draw institutional conclusions. The present study will not take up directly the broader, thorny questions surrounding the Alexandrian and Caesarean “schools,” though themes discussed here will be, I hope, of relevance for those investigations. Similarly, two closely related areas of investigation regarding Origen’s activity fall outside the scope of my discussion: the

establishment of the library in Caesarea²³ and Origen's relations with Jewish teachers and the Jewish community there.²⁴ Fascinating in themselves, as well as for our broader understanding of the figure of Origen, neither receives a substantial contribution from our reading of the *Address*.

The present study also does not propose to engage directly in the perennial controversy surrounding Origen's "Platonism"—its nature, extent, or very existence. This concern surrounded the Alexandrian thinker in his own lifetime and continued to accompany his legacy, a permanent factor in the polemics regarding his orthodoxy during the fourth through sixth centuries. In a very real sense, this argument remains woven into the fabric of modern scholarship on Origen, from the divide between German (Protestant) and French (Catholic) scholarship of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the rather different fault lines of current research.²⁵ The recent claims of M.J. Edwards (*Origen against Plato*) in this regard, as well as the counterclaims of his critics, have brought the question back to the center of scholarly discussion.²⁶

Without directly tackling the question of Origen's Platonism, however, the study of the *Address* contributes some perspective on the issue. What is undeniably apparent from any engagement with the work is that, scripture aside, the primary "classical" texts for our appreciation of Gregory's account are drawn from the dialogues of Plato. Similarly, among the contemporary authors who most profitably illumine the *Address* are those broadly representative of second-century Platonist thought. Nor can it be coincidental that the most important contributions of modern research in illuminating certain aspects of Gregory's account are provided precisely by scholars who have explored the complex and rewarding ramifications of second- and third-century Platonism. To identify echoes or reverberations of Middle Platonic (or nascent Neoplatonic) themes and concerns in Gregory's *Address* is not intended, of course, to rule out other sources of influence, philosophical or otherwise. Indeed, as already emphasized, the nature of intellectual experience under Origen's direction was wide-ranging and comprehensive in nature, consciously rejecting a tendency to any form of

narrow allegiance or parochialism. Yet we do well to remember that this inclusive attitude was also a characteristic of imperial Platonism, yet another factor that certainly made that philosophical tendency particularly attractive for Origen and his students.

Ultimately, the heart of the issue for this study is the indelible presence of Plato and his writings within the *Address* itself. I will argue that the Platonic influences on the work are varied in nature—some subtle and carefully nuanced, others marked and unmistakable. On the one hand, the reader encounters quite explicit echoes, allusions, and references to Platonic imagery and argument, as well as to the figure of Socrates himself; on the other, there are more general presentations of philosophical positions that are in accord with Platonic concerns yet remain somewhat elusive. Certainly the most significant Platonic presence in the *Address* is the overarching model of education and intellectual progress, dependent in large part on the dialogues of the so-called middle period.²⁷ Indeed, a largely unappreciated aspect of Gregory's account has been the centrality of both the erotic paradigm of ascent (*Symposium*, *Phaedrus*) and the model of the Cave (*Republic* bk. 7) in his presentation of the totality of his educational experience with Origen. Read in this fashion, the work offers vivid testimony to the inescapable tension between the commitment to intellectual and spiritual growth—as “embodied” in the life of the master and in the intimate relations of the study circle—and the wider ethical obligations of the individual within his society.

STRUCTURE AND THEMES

This study presents a new approach to the *Address*, attempting to take account of its deeper literary structures as well as its salient themes. The four central chapters (1–4) follow the flow of the composition, offering a form of running commentary on the text, while providing detailed examination of the principal issues and concerns that arise during the course of Gregory's education and its literary representation. The closing chapter (5) expands on certain themes of this study

and assesses the *Address* as a vantage point on seminal issues in Christianity of the fourth century.

Throughout this study, I have attempted (at times with limited success) to curtail my use of the vocabulary of “stages” or “steps” with regard to Gregory’s progress within Origen’s pedagogical scheme. The further I have delved into the *Address*, the greater my conviction that a number of the most problematic conclusions concerning the work have been the result of the imposition of a simplistic linear approach to its perception and presentation of intellectual progress. That the educational path is in its essence a *gradual* process generally encourages us to emphasize and to reify its *graded* nature: the measured movement from one task to the next, the ascent from the current level—of skill, of knowledge, of achievement—to the proximate and more elevated one. This conception—inevitably reinforced by our own contemporary educational culture of graded progress from subject to subject, from examination to examination—is apt to lead us astray in our attempt to understand the intimate pedagogy of late antiquity. Lessons were slowly and painstakingly acquired; the path was most often circular and repetitive. Skills were acquired and accumulated, and the different disciplines were never simply stepping stones left behind but part and parcel of recurrent areas of training and discipline. While it is tempting, therefore, to read Gregory’s account of his training in dialectics and ethics as (earlier) stages in his ascent to theological inquiry and scriptural exegesis—and these areas of learning are undoubtedly preparatory, in the sense of being both prerequisite and necessary—they are in no sense eclipsed by his accession to those lofty pursuits. The ability to think and speak clearly and critically, the commitment to the strictest level of behavior and inner discipline—these remain active, indeed essential, fields of endeavor and achievement even when engaged in “higher” activities.

Further, Gregory’s account features a concomitant marker of ancient educational theory and practice: a virtually timeless, unbounded quality. As opposed to a modern educational framework, based on a rigidly scheduled program of the timely completion of tasks and stages, there is

no sense of temporal markers within the process that Gregory describes. Indeed, a very important part of the effect achieved by the author in his account of both the dramatic opening and the harsh conclusion of his tutelage under Origen is directly drawn from the fact that only the beginning and the end are sharply demarcated: everything that transpires between them seems to take place with little or no regard for the boundaries of space or time.

Providence, Eros, and Constraint (Chapter 1)

At the very heart of the *Address* lies the complex, fraught, and intimate relationship between a student and his master. This relationship is the very *raison d'être* for the composition, permeates virtually its every sentence, and determines in large measure the structure and cadence of the work. The *Address*, then, is not only born of Gregory's relationship with Origen and conceived as a literary means to preserve, to memorialize, the connection between them; it is itself a testimony whose form and content present a crucial phase in the development of that relationship.

Chapter 1 examines the report of the earliest stages of their association. Gregory's account of the winding path and unseen forces that led him from his homeland in Asia Minor to the port city of Caesarea in Roman Palestine serves as prelude to his dramatic rendering of the early days in the orbit of Origen. That description includes some of the most striking and audacious passages of the entire work, replete with passion and desire. The chapter examines closely the stages of attraction, exhortation, and entrapment by which Gregory is drawn into the world of study with Origen. The process entails three distinct but closely interrelated movements: the motif of providential guidance by which Gregory is led to Caesarea and the initial acquaintance with Origen, the force of erotic attraction that ultimately informs the teacher-student relationship, and, finally, the theme of coercive persuasion through which Gregory is literally compelled to shed old habits of thought and practice.

The conjunction of these elements of guidance, eros, and compulsion—illuminated by a wide variety of Greco-Roman and early Christian sources—raises sharply some very basic perceptions of freedom of will and choice. To what extent does this forceful intervention, whether angelic or human (Origen), whether by verbal coercion or erotic infatuation, impinge upon the ability of Gregory to choose his path freely and to decide autonomously? What are the educational implications of this apparent restriction of the student's freedom? The potent blend of eros and constraint that characterizes this portion of the *Address* (as well as its repercussions throughout the work) is deeply indicative of the actors' thought and behavior. Indeed, recent developments in both moral philosophy and behavioral psychology cast extraordinary illumination on our text. Still closer to the question, as well as to the composition before us, is the role of constraint as a creative agent. Can creativity actually depend upon (perhaps even, flourish under) certain forms of coercion? Can less freedom actually be more conducive to creativity?

Dialectic and the Training of the Mind (Chapter 2)

The practical expression of this pedagogical constraint, an unsettling amalgam of persuasion and coercion, forms the central theme of chapter 2. From the moment that Gregory accedes to this new authority and has given up all thought of escape from Origen's orbit, he finds himself confronting a prolonged and demanding regimen. In part—and this is certainly the part that has drawn much of the scholarly attention paid to the *Address*—this is the curricular regimen that characterized both the study of rhetoric and philosophy in late antiquity: the recognized cycle of study (known precisely by that name, the *enkyklios paideia*) of subjects that prepare the young man for the rigors of advanced training. In quite another sense, however, the overall regimen cannot be reduced to a subject heading nor can its intensity, both intellectual and emotional, be regarded in strictly academic terms.

Gregory was being stripped of a store of bad habits accumulated during his education up until that time. Those first days in Origen's intense, overwhelming presence—as well as the coming years—were to be a prolonged exercise in learning how to think and to speak cleanly, precisely. It was not only the necessity of leaving behind the full bag of easy rhetorical tricks, though that too was part of the process; it was first and foremost the resolution to value truth over appearance, and the devotion to an examination of matters with only that purpose in mind. Learning to accomplish this in a single-minded manner, however, was only half the struggle. Following that came the commitment to giving voice to these new understandings in the least meretricious fashion: in plain language, unadorned and straightforward. To accomplish all this required the ability to free oneself of myriad tendencies and inclinations, an ongoing exercise in the replacement of innumerable, deep habitual tendencies. This is the process Pierre Hadot has described as learning to dialogue, to live dialectically—the central, indeed fundamental, aspect of learning to live a philosophical life. Closely related to this question of habitual inclination is the concern regarding acquired behavior and attitudes that might obstruct the student's progress. Among the prerequisites of the apt student is the ability and willingness to confront, appreciate, and assimilate diverse doctrines from a broad range of sources. Origen is described repeatedly in this long, central portion of the *Address* as an unrelenting guide, constantly on the lookout to uproot intellectual habits and predispositions that might narrow his disciple's intellectual field of vision or impede his deeper understanding.

Moral Formation and the Path to Scripture (Chapter 3)

In his now classic delineation of the fundamental distinction between our modern conception of “higher education” and that of the late classical world—Marrou's “civilization of the *Paideia*”—Peter Brown described the ancients' “overwhelming tendency to find what is exemplary in

persons rather than in more general entities.... No student ever went, as we do, to a university conceived of as an impersonal institution of learning.... He would always have gone to a person—to Libanius, to Origen, to Proclus. The most poignantly expressed relation in the ancient and medieval worlds was that between teacher and pupil.”²⁸ Despite the salience of his observation and its wide acceptance, we have had the benefit of few detailed investigations of this uniquely defining master-pupil relationship. While the significance and ubiquitousness of the “spiritual guide” often have been remarked—and in a series of classic studies by Ilsetraut and Pierre Hadot placed at the very forefront of scholarship²⁹—we still suffer from a dearth of detailed case histories of these relationships.

At the very heart of this relation lies the question of moral preparation. The final approach to the study of scripture is not only the result of intellectual preparedness but equally a result of ethical progress and concomitant spiritual advancement. A series of lengthy and vivid discussions punctuate Gregory’s account of ethical instruction, in order to emphasize the purity of mind and soul required for philosophical inquiry. The attitude and attendant practice would appear closely related to the concept of “purification” (or purgation) as it appears in Origen’s own writings as well as in contemporary philosophical sources. And here, once again, the issue of guidance and instruction arises: progress in the study and practice of philosophy seems to have been accompanied, perhaps shadowed, by the forceful direction and guidance of the spiritual master. The portrayal of Origen’s godlike nature throughout the *Address* resonates clearly with contemporary Middle Platonic speculation on “likeness to God” as the summit of human effort; yet it equally calls up images of the stages of purification preliminary to the approach to things divine.

What is most striking, however, is the extent to which Gregory, despite his reliance upon these formulae and his dependence on a broad range of ethical *topoi*, succeeds in presenting his own precarious status with regard to the strict demands of moral training. The presentation of Origen, his near apotheosis in certain sections of the *Address*, serve consist-

ently not only to pay homage to the master but to emphasize the limits of the progression of his pupil. It is, in fact, the role of spiritual guide, so central to the understanding of late ancient Mediterranean spirituality, that defines the position of Origen throughout the composition. Entrusted by Gregory's guardian angel with the young man's care and nurture, Origen is shown at every juncture to reveal more than human qualities: his ascetic control of the bodily passions, his deep discernment of the needs of his student, his own unparalleled, in fact, unlimited, powers of understanding—all these bring Gregory to speak of his master within a discourse of the practical possibility of divinization. Indeed, the path to scripture in the *Address* is in many respects a discourse on Greco-Roman and early Christian conceptions of the human-divine continuum.

This remarkably elevated representation of Origen would appear to be directly linked to the ultimate goal of the overarching course of study: the attainment of the state of moral and intellectual purity necessary for the study of scripture. Only through active engagement with the varied fields of philosophy—the acquisition of virtue, discernment, and wisdom, as exemplified by Origen's paradigmatic state of being and knowledge—can scripture be approached. Given what we know of Origen's own reflections on varied aspects of biblical hermeneutics—not a few of them compiled in the first fourteen chapters of the *Philocalia*, the fourth-century anthology of the controversial Alexandrian's writings—the reader reaches this point in the *Address* prepared for a signature revelation of his exegetical prowess. Might we not have expected Gregory to provide either theoretical insight into Origen's practice of *lectio divina* or, perhaps, examples of that practice? Yet here, when his account reaches these highest matters, Gregory suddenly (and frustratingly) falls silent. His few observations depart from the rigorously philosophical tenor of the description of his own studies, as he dwells on the unique status of Origen as an inspired exegete. While the interpretation of scripture may be the ultimate aim of the rigorous training in Caesarea, there is no explicit indication of the methods of instruction or of the practice by which this could have been transmitted or inculcated.

Paradise and the Cave (Chapter 4)

The *Thanksgiving Address* to Origen is, in fact, born of a violent rupture in Gregory's life. The conditions that led him into Origen's orbit, the nature of the attraction between the student and his teacher, the manner and substance of the schooling over a period of years, and the wondrous portrayal of his master—the lengthy and highly stylized account of all these ultimately is presented to the reader as a direct consequence of their termination. So long as the pupil thrived and grew in his teacher's presence, his voice was unnecessary, even undesirable. Gregory's departure from the school creates the circumstances that demand his address: he is compelled to break the fitting silence of a pupil before his master and, in strangely novel fashion, speak while his teacher listens. The leave-taking address (*logos suntaktikos*) is a well-documented rhetorical trope and served as standard school exercise of the sort in which Gregory must have been well trained. Furthermore, it may be possible to reconstruct, or at least hypothesize, a *Sitz im Leben*: a discrete occasion behind the composition. I will argue, in fact, that the closing section of the composition almost certainly corresponds to an oral address of appreciation, most likely delivered in the presence of Origen himself.

At the core of the final sections of Gregory's work is this harsh tension between silence and speech. The composition opened with a high rhetorical flourish, emphasizing the inappropriateness, the virtual impossibility, of a speech of praise and thanksgiving—were it not, of course, for the ethical counterweight, the pending guilt of ingratitude. The work as a whole is presented as a discharge of this obligation. Undoubtedly true enough, but the closing pages of the work provide a still more immediate context: a leave-taking ceremony, in which the student breaks his extended role of listener and speaks before his teacher, a gift of sorts, a ceremonial courtesy prior to departure, an assurance that his years have left their indelible impression. It is a “performance”—highly ritualized and yet no less deeply felt—that also serves as the final link in the bond between master and pupil.

The artistry of this final portion of the *Address* lies in the tension between divergence and harmonization. The body of Gregory's actual "speech" before Origen—a lament and exhortation based on a striking exercise in biblical exegesis—differs stylistically and thematically from virtually everything that has preceded it. At the same time, certain lexical elements within this scriptural address as well as the framework that enfolds it correspond closely with the larger *Address* in a variety of striking ways. In literary terms, this section is an accomplished rhetorical piece, standing on its own in structure and scope, yet also deeply intertwined, lexically and thematically, with the early sections of the work, and especially the description of Gregory's early career and the events leading up to his encounter with Origen. The overall effect is one of carefully designed *inclusio*, as these final passages echo and reverse both the themes and vocabulary introduced at an earlier stage. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that this final piece, while now intricately woven into the overall context of the composition, once had an independent role: perhaps as the core of an actual address delivered by Gregory before his teacher on the eve of departure.

The principal themes and controlling imagery of Gregory's farewell discourse are drawn from scriptural depictions of banishment, loss, and exile: the primordial expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden, gospel portraits of waste and perdition, the captivity of the Israelites in Babylonia. The effect is irresistible, as the student relates his personal loss at having to depart the school in Caesarea to a series of biblical events of truly cataclysmic proportions. The theme and attendant images serve at once to emphasize his former happiness and well-being in sharp contrast to the desolation that awaits him.

A striking problem lurks behind this controlling imagery and argument, however. While the dramatic potential of the expulsion from the garden and associated themes of exile and abandonment are masterfully exploited and lend expressive depth to Gregory's sense of impending loss, the significance of the event remains unclear. Gregory claims (repeatedly) neither to know nor to comprehend the cause of his

“punishment” and attendant woeful condition. Nothing in his account has prepared us for the moment, and we find ourselves genuinely confused by his departure from Origen. If so remarkably fortunate as to have found his way (or to have been guided) into the “paradise of God,” the presence of Origen—what could be sufficiently compelling to cause him to fall away from this paradigm of perfection and to distance himself from the divine? In short, the conditions and rationale underlying this rift are left to our imagination in what would seem to be the sending forth of the pupil by the master himself. What did Origen say to those leaving his study circle? Which words could have prepared or reconciled his disciples to their reemergence in the world of sound and fury? How would he have brought them to accept their obligation to return to a life from which he had so forcefully and persuasively removed them?

This quandary would appear to correspond closely with a problem lying at the very core of classical moral inquiry and at the center of Plato’s *Republic*—and it may well be precisely this discussion that underlies Gregory’s own self-presentation in the *Address*. Just as Plato’s potential philosopher-rulers are constrained (painfully) to ascend from their shadow-like existence and to partake of the dazzling reality of the realm of truth, so are they later *compelled* to descend and return to their former abode and its dwellers. Ultimately, if never explicitly, Plato’s cave is no less an omnipresent figure in Gregory’s work than the biblical paradise. Indeed, two myths construct the arc of the *Thanksgiving Address*, one scriptural-cosmogonic, the other philosophical-educational. The fact that they are held together in tense but fruitful coexistence is in itself eloquent witness to the complexity of the pedagogic experience that Origen offered his pupils.

Paideia, Loss, and Prospect (Chapter 5)

The concluding chapter of this study opens with an attempt to assess the nature of loss, which plays so central a role in Gregory’s *Address*. To what extent do notions of absence, departure, and exile bring us to the very

heart of the work? Is there a manner in which the very existence of the *Address* is determined by these concepts that, in turn, determine our own reading of the text? These concerns then allow one to appreciate the *Address* and its major themes within a somewhat different context: an invaluable point of conjunction, an intellectual and spiritual bridge of sorts, between themes first developed by early Alexandrian authors (Jewish-Hellenistic and Christian) and the formative Christian literature and thought of the fourth century. No less significant, though, are broader issues of continuity. Conflicts between academic and ecclesiastical authority, the flowering of spiritual instruction and guidance, debates over human progress and perfection—these and other central concerns find seminal expression in Gregory's account. Fully appreciated, the *Address* serves as an unexpected but remarkably prescient prelude to a series of transformations in late ancient Christian thought and practice.

Among the most elusive questions facing the student of the pre-Constantinian church is the manner in which certain structures of early Christian life were either modified or radically altered in the wake of imperial intervention and ecclesiastical institutionalization. A particularly intriguing instance of these shiftings of intellectual attitudes between the third and fourth centuries touches upon the figure of the charismatic teacher and his relationship with the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Needless to say, Origen has attracted considerable attention in this regard, precisely because of his deeply ambivalent (and often outspoken) stance on the question of teaching authority and church leadership.³⁰ Gregory's account of the intellectual environment attendant on his studies with Origen both sharpens and lends enormous breadth to the broader discussion of the question. Closely aligned with these concerns are the new models of spiritual and intellectual instruction and discipleship within ascetic contexts, and their representation in the emergent hagiographical literature of the fourth century and beyond. Finally, the *Address* allows some concluding thoughts on its significance as an educational document, both in terms of long-range historical trajectories and in the light of modern discussions and insights.

*Note on the Citation of the Thanksgiving
Address to Origen*

Throughout this study, references to the *Address* are given in parentheses, e.g., (793), according to the accepted divisions of the text into sections and paragraphs. My translation of the text does not attempt to preserve the heights (or, at times, complexity) of Gregory's prose. Rather, its aim is to provide a straightforward English rendering of the work, with an emphasis on the clearest possible reflection of the verbal repetitions and echoes that run throughout the text and that provide our most trustworthy guide to the central themes and concerns of the author. I have regularly consulted and am deeply indebted to previous translators, principally Henri Crouzel and Michael Slusser.³¹ Ultimately, however, neither they nor I have solved the innumerable lexical and syntactic difficulties of the Greek text—much remains to be accomplished in that regard, as in others.