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Fthonos as Seen through the Eyes of Gregory of Nazianzus the Poet*

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Envy, just like many other emotions, has accompanied humankind since time immemorial. Modern literature dealing with envy defines it as pain originating in the happiness of other people even if this happiness is well deserved. Envy motivates a person to mar the happiness of others just to prevent them from feeling happy regardless of his or her personal gain.[1] Modern literature also tells us that envy is the only emotion that is always negative because it neither cares about the merits of others, nor can it be excused for pursuing personal goals.[2] We also learn that envy entails the act of comparing oneself to others, and arises only when two other conditions have been fulfilled – the condition of similarity, based on which we only envy people who are similar to us in some relevant way, and the condition of assigning value to oneself, having a sense of relevance.[3] Neither of the above-mentioned statements is new or revelatory. Envy and the two related pre-conditions were discussed already by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* 2, 10 (1387^{b}23–1388^{a}30[4]).

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1 ŠTRBA 2018, 36.

2 KONSTAN 2006, 114–115.

3 PROTASI 2021, 21–23.

4 Arist. *Rhet.* 1387^{b} Kassel: ... ἐστὶν ὁ φθόνος λύπη τις ἐπὶ εὐπραγίᾳ φαινομένῃ τῶν εἰρημένων ἀγαθῶν περὶ τοὺς ὁμοίους, μὴ ἵνα τι αὐτῷ, ἀλλὰ δι᾽ ἐκείνους· φθονήσουσι μὲν γὰρ οἱ τοιοῦτοι οἷς εἰσί τινες ὅμοιοι ἢ φαίνονται. ὁμοίους δὲ λέγω κατὰ γένος, κατὰ συγγένειαν, καθ᾽ ἡλικίας, κατὰ ἕξεις, κατὰ δόξαν, κατὰ τὰ ὑπάρχοντα. καὶ οἷς μικρὸν ἐλλείπει τοῦ μὴ πάντα ὑπάρχειν. διὸ οἱ μεγάλα πράττοντες καὶ εὐτυχοῦντες φθονεροί εἰσιν· πάντας γὰρ οἴονται τὰ αὑτῶν φέρειν. καὶ οἱ τιμώμενοι ἐπί τινι διαφερόντως, καὶ μάλιστα ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ ἢ εὐδαιμονίᾳ. καὶ οἱ φιλότιμοι φθονερώτεροι τῶν ἀφιλοτίμων. καὶ οἱ δοξόσοφοι· φιλότιμοι γὰρ ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ. καὶ ὅλως οἱ φιλόδοξοι περί τι φθονεροὶ περὶ τοῦτο.

Envy is an emotion or mental state, which cannot be overlooked in the wide spectrum of philosophical, rhetorical, historical, dramatical, and poetical texts dating back to classical antiquity.[5] It is an essential part of descriptions of human flaws. Envy was the motivation for the first murder described in the Old Testament in *Genesis* 4:3–8. It gave Cain a weapon against his own blood and resulted in a sevenfold vengeance.[6] Subsequently, envy appears repeatedly in the Bible, rabbinic literature, Jewish moral treatises as well as in the works of Christian and Islamic philosophers.[7] Envy did not disappear from the texts after the advent of Christianity in the late antiquity and, as an emotion peculiar to human beings, it remained a natural part of the works written by both Eastern and Western Fathers of the Church. The writings of Gregory of Nazianzus are no exception.

Gregory was an excellent orator and poet, although his poetry is seemingly secondary to his theological teachings. He understood words, and especially poetry, as possible remedies for soothing grief, anger, or various human passions. This sweet and pleasant remedy is supposed to help young people and himself. [8] In poetry, he presented himself as a theologian and a representative of the church with moral and teaching authority, at the same time, though, he presented himself as a person with desires, flaws and his own view of the world. When writing poetry, Gregory followed the Greek literary tradition and was inspired by its educational impact. He gave the old literary forms new substance, not only to entertain his audience, rather the opposite – to instruct and even convince them by the means of an appealing form. In addition to anger, envy is the second negative emotion that resonates strongly in Gregory's poetry. On the one hand, the author denounces envy, while, on the other, he owns it and fights it, thus descending from a pedestal of ecclesiastical authority and approaching the common people, speaking a language that feels close to him. All this led us to turn our attention away

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5 See e.g. KONSTAN – RUTTER 2003; EIDINOW 2015; CHE 2015, 65–82.

6 HROBOŇ 2019, 216.

7 PROTASI 2021, 161.

8 In his poem II, 1, 39 *In suos versus* – emblematic for Gregory of Nazianzus' works – he set out in verses 34–57 four thematic areas or directions he wanted to follow when writing poetry: 1) to keep a balance (that is, not to write too brief, nor too lengthy poems); 2) to provide the young with more pleasant reading than the austere Christian commandments, to give them a substitute for the great poetic works of pagan antiquity, which kept their charm and value even in the period of early Christianity; 3) to compete with foreign (= non-Christian) poets; 4) to find solace in old age through poetry. In addition, the statement that poetry is sweet and pleasant and causes joy especially to the young was a *locus communis* (MILANOVIĆ-BARHAM 1997) in ancient literary criticism. For example, the famous locus from Lucretius' *De rerum natura* (I, 936–950) states that just as a doctor smears a child's mouth with honey before administering a bitter remedy to make it easier to swallow, he himself touches the doctrine he intends to present with honey of the Muse. Apart from this, the meter also acts as an excellent mnemonic tool – it is a pleasant means of remembering them.

from Gregory's speeches and letters when studying envy, and to focus on his poetry. Moreover, when comparing the frequency of occurrences of expressions pertaining to envy (φθόνος, φθονερός, φθονέω) throughout Gregory's work, poetry surpasses his speeches and letters by a significant margin.[9] In the future, however, we would like to return to this topic and complete the picture outlined in this article.

The aim of the present paper is to summarise references to envy in Gregory's verses. Since the range of topics he offers in his poems is so wide, the other goal is to find out whether and to what extent Gregory's understanding of envy influences the content of his poems.

The Poetry of Gregory of Nazianzus

The hymns of Gregory of Nazianzus represent the first extensive poetic corpus in Greek Christian literature. He wrote poems with theological content, focusing on dogmatics and ethics, as well as poems which are described as historical and which speak of himself or are addressed to specific people from among his acquaintances.[10] The latter poems, *Poemata, quae spectant ad alios*,[11] are versed letters which describe primarily Gregory's relationships with the people they are dedicated to, but they also include strong theological and ethical elements. In some of these poems, Gregory appears in the role of a critic or judge. In others, he tries to influence the recipients or express his admiration and praise. Gregory then turns his attention on himself in his autobiographical poems. These *Poemata de se ipso*[12] tell the story of his own life. They talk about the rules he adhered to in his life but also about sadness and misfortunes he experienced. In these poems he does not present himself as a perfect human being, rather he offers an insight into his inner world and shows how he experienced various situations in his own life.

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9 In Gregory's letters written in prose, envy is mentioned 19 times, in orations 60 times, and in poems 112 times. If we add to the poems its occurrence in epigrams, the number goes up to 122 times. In orations, Gregory mentions envy explicitly more than once in funerary orations to Basil the Great (*Or.* 43; 5x), to his brother Caesarius (*Or.* 7; 2x) and to his father (*Or.* 18; 2x), also in speeches against Emperor Julian (*Or.* 4; 3x), but also in orations 42 *Supremum vale* (3x) and 44 *In novam Dominicam* (6x). In the poems, envy occurs most often when Gregory writes about himself. They account for almost half of the incidences.

10 The poetry of Gregory of Nazianzus is comprised in volume 37 of the collection *Patrologia Graeca* (*PG*) and is divided into two books (*Poemata theologica*, *Poemata historica*), which are further divided into two smaller parts according to their content: I, I *Poemata dogmatica*; I, II *Poemata moralia*; II, I *Poemata de se ipso*; II, II *Poemata quae spectant ad alios*.

11 *PG* 37, 1451–1577.

12 *PG* 37, 969–1452.

Poems with theological content, *Poemata dogmatica*[13] and *Poemata moralia*,[14] deal with more complex topics. As suggested by their title, the dogmatic poems deal with difficult theological topics and Gregory tries to use a language accessible also to non-theologians. His moral poems present Gregory's perception of Christian values and they reflect issues we all face in our everyday lives. Moral chastity, virtue, anger, greed, wealth, selfishness, these are just a few topics Gregory addresses in his poems. And envy, φθόνος, is one of them.

We are going to analyse Gregory's attitude to envy in all of his poems with the exception of dogmatic poems, which fall within the authority of theologians.

Envy in Gregory's verse letters

Seven of Gregory's verse letters, which differ in length, style, and mood, provide insight into family relationships and premarital counselling, they discuss the struggle between Christianity and paganism as well as tax exemption, they praise monasticism, eloquence, and knowledge.[15] Four of these verse letters mention envy and each of them deals with envy in a different way.

The verse letter II, 2, 1 *Ad Hellenium pro monachis exhortatorium*, addressed to peraequator Hellenius,[16] is a request for tax exemption for monks and, simultaneously, it is a praise of monasticism. Anonymous examples of the ascetic way of life, which Gregory presents to Hellenius, show different groups of monks who, in their own peculiar ways, try to protect themselves from the world and its temptations.[17] Gregory admired their seclusion from the world because he had longed for the same all his life. His words in verses 119–120 (in elegiac distich) thus cannot surprise us:[18]

> Τῶν καὶ ἐμοὶ γένος ἐστὶ φαεσφόρον. Ὄμματα τήκοι
> Ὁ φθόνος. Ἀλλὰ σύ μοι τοῖσδε φίλα φρονέειν (*PG* 37, 1460).
>
> "I also belong to that family that brings light,
> but envy covers my eyes. But I ask you to take a look."

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13 *PG* 37, 397–522.

14 *PG* 37, 521–968.

15 Brodňanská 2012a, 229.

16 Hellenius held high official positions in the civil service together with his brother. He was Peraequator in Nazianzus in 372 (Hauser-Meury 1960, 97; Jones – Martindale – Morris 1975, 413).

17 Brodňanská 2012a, 100.

18 Except for works published in the critical issue, in terms of translations from Gregory's works we referred to Migne's publication of Gregory's works included in *Patrologia Graeca*. If not stated otherwise, the verses were translated from Greek by the author of the paper.

Gregory admits to Hellenius the contemptible emotion he feels towards those who were able to abandon everything and live a life of contemplation. And yet, this in no way hinders his efforts at applying for tax exemption for these monks. That is not the object of his envy.

Gregory mentions envy again in the epilogue of his poem, in which he speaks to Hellenius about the fall in the Garden of Eden, which caused evil in all its forms – moral, physical, and social. Gregory's aim is to lead Hellenius away from his possible desire for more wealth and to guide him towards the right decision regarding taxes (vv. 345–349):

Οὐχ ἅλις, ὅττι βροτοῖσι βαρὺν ζυγὸν ἤγαγε πρώτη
Ἀρχεγόνου κακίη, καὶ φυτὸν ἀνδροφόνον,
Βασκανίη τε δράκοντος, ἀτασθαλίη τε γυναικός,
Γεῦσίς τ' οὐλομένη γνώσιος ἀντιπάλου (*PG* 37, 1476).

"Isn't it enough that a great burden was imposed on people,
By the original sin of our ancestors, by the tree which brought us death,
By the serpent's envy and deceit, and by the woman's vanity and fallacy,[19]
The foul taste of the sinister desire to be equal to God?"

In the context of these verses, it is necessary to point out the phrase *serpent's envy* because it intensifies the connotation of evil considerably. Envy was the name that Gregory and other writers often gave to the devil. It was the devil's grudge which gave rise to death and every evil. Simultaneously, the question of who the talking snake is has always been asked in relation to the story of the fall in the book of Genesis. There have been several possible answers to this question; however, several biblical texts from later Jewish and Christian authors saw the serpent as the devil.[20] Devil-serpent and devil-envy in a single phrase thus becomes a powerful statement with a negative charge. It is also necessary to add that Gregory used the word βασκανία instead of the term φθόνος, whereas βασκανία can carry the connotation of envy as well as of malice and deceit. Similar approach can be observed in his poems *de se ipso* and his moral poems, which refer to the devil as the serpent tempter or fallen angel – Ἑωσφόρος.

Similarly to his verse letter to Hellenius, in his letter II, 2, 3 *Ad Vitalianum*, Gregory tries to exert his influence over the rich and noble Vitalianus[21] who got carried away by his anger and banished his sons from his house, not allowing

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19 Comp. *Gn* 3.

20 Dubovský 2008, 146.

21 Vitalianus was Gregory's friend. He was wealthy and of noble descent, he was a member of a prominent family, but was also known for his generosity and hospitality. For more see Hauser-Meury 1960, 179–180; McLynn, 1998, 229; Brodňanská 2012b, 128–129.

them even to attend their sister's wedding.[22] The fictitious writer of the letter, in dactylic hexameters, is one of Vitalianus' sons. Verses 11–71 search for the reasons of the father's anger[23] but they also point out the consequences of anger and envy (vv. 42–45[24]) by means of a legend about Polycrates, the tyrant of Samos from the 6th century B.C. Polycrates provoked the envy of the gods. Although he gave up the one thing he loved the most, he could not avoid his bitter end. His loss was supposed to help appease the gods, nevertheless, he could not escape his fate.

In relation to the abovementioned legend, the sons ask their father, why he's rejecting them, and they emphasise the following (vv. 46–49):

Ἡμῶν δ' οὐδὲν ἄποινον ἔχει φθόνος. Οὐ μέγα θαῦμα,
Εἴ τι δόμοις καὶ βαιὸν ἐπήχλυσεν ἡμετέροισιν.
Ἀχλὺς γὰρ τόδε γ' ἐστὶν ἐτήτυμον, ἠέ τις ὄρφνη
Ἱσταμένη τεκέων τε μέση καὶ πατρὸς ἀρίστου (*PG* 37, 1483).

"We do not have any of the things that Envy longs for. Why?
Our home is soon surrounded by dark clouds.
But the real clouds, like midnight darkness, is everything that stands
Between us, everything that distances the sons from their dear father."

The sons do not understand their father who does not treat his children equally. And yet, they are not eaten by envy. What is eating them are the unanswered questions and lack of understanding (vv. 163–165):

Ἄλλοις μὲν τεκέεσσι πατὴρ καὶ ἤπιος ἐσσί,
Τόσσον, ὅσον τ' ἐπέοικε Θεοῦ Πατρὸς ἐκγεγαῶτα.
Οὐ φθόνος· οὐ γὰρ ἔοικε κασιγνήτῃσι μεγαίρειν (*PG* 37, 1491–1492).

"To your other children you give so much love,
As a father created by our heavenly Father should.
This is not envy! How could we envy our own sisters?"

In relation to envy, the verse letter to Vitalianus compares the character of those who have nothing, sons who suffer from the lack of attention from their father and yet they are not jealous of their sisters who receive plenty of their father's affection, and the character of those who have everything, who are gods and yet they are envious of the happiness of ordinary mortals.

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22 Brodňanská 2012a, 129.

23 Towards the end of the poem, Vitalianus' sons admit a kind of general disobedience to their father. As a major reason for their estrangement, they see their father's considerations of himself and the sons: Vitalianus was angry with his sons because he thought they were worse than him (II, 2, 3, 333–337; *PG* 37, 1504).

24 *PG* 37, 1483.

Criticism of ancient gods, who are so envious of humans, is present also in Gregory's verse letter II, 2, 7 *Ad Nemesium*, which is addressed to a high-ranking official, Nemesius, and which attacks paganism with the aim to guide Nemesius towards conversion.[25] Gregory points out the pettiness of pagan gods by enumerating their flaws and negative qualities. In verses 70–74 he reproaches Nemesius:

Ἤδη καὶ στυγεροῖσι σεβάσμασι γούνατ' ἔκαμψας,
Δαίμοσιν ἀψύχοισι, κακούς τ' ἀγαθούς τ' ἐκάλεσσας,
Οἳ πάντες τελέθουσι κακοί, καὶ πλάσματος ἐσθλοῦ
Δυσμενέες, φθονεροί, φιλοδαίμονες, ἀγριόθυμοι,
Σαρκοχαρεῖς, κνίσσῃσι γεγηθότες, ἰλυόεντες (*PG* 37, 1556).

"You bended your knee to honour idols which have no soul,
You call demons good, although they are all scoundrels,
They dislike good creatures, they envy the humans,
They are bloodthirsty and mercilessly wild in their anger,
They are wicked, they love the body and enjoy the smell of sacrifice."

None of the examples previously mentioned defines envy in more detail, nor do they offer guidance on how to fight it. Envy seems to be a natural emotion evoked by making comparisons between oneself and others. Verse letter II, 2, 5 *Nicobuli patris ad filium*,[26] however, offers both (vv. 214–216):

Μῦθοι καὶ πλεόνεσσιν ἐπ' ὄμματα πικρὰ φερούσης
Βασκανίης τελέθουσιν ὑπέρτεροι· οὐ γὰρ ἀρίστοις
Ὁ φθόνος, οἷς δ' ἀδόκητος ἔβη τύφος, οἶδε παλαίειν (*PG* 37, 1537).

"Words are more powerful than envy which views others
With a harrowing look: jealousy cannot control
The best ones, it controls those who let pride in."

One should note that in these verses envy and jealousy go hand in hand. These two emotions are often interchanged because both of them are painful emotions

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[25] Nemesius was Gregory's friend. Gregory wrote him four letters in prose – *Epp.* 198–201, in which he addresses him mainly as governor and judge with recommendations to clients (*Epp.* 198, 199), but the letter 200 shows that they also discussed matters of faith. The poetic letter in dactylic hexameters is subsequently a summary of their conversation. For more see Hauser-Meury 1960, 128; Demoen 1997, 9–10; Brodňanská 2012c, 53–66.

[26] This poetic letter was written by Gregory on behalf of Nicobulus, husband of his niece Alypiana, in response to an equally fictional letter he wrote on behalf of his son, also Nicobulus. Both Gregory's poetic letters (in dactylic hexameters), to Nicobulus father and son, are largely appraisals of learning. The father's letter is a response to his son's request to depart for his studies. For more see Moroni 2006; Hauser-Meury 1960, 128–133; McGuckin, 2001, 6; Brodňanská 2012a, 152–186.

towards one's competition, they are both centered on goodness, and they often occur simultaneously. Envy is associated with potential or real lack of goodness, whereas jealousy is associated with potential or real loss of goodness, as defined by S. Protasi.[27] In any case, Gregory believed in the power of words and considered them more powerful than these emotions. For him, words were a gift as well as a cure and a demonstration of thought, and he emphasised that human words get their power from the divine *Logos*.[28] This context allows no doubt that words are capable of overcoming and defeating envy.

Envy in Gregory's moral poetry

Gregory's gnomic poems I, 2, 32 and I, 2, 33 also refer to God's might in the struggle with envy, however, the first of the two poems is not considered to be authentic.[29] The said poem tells us that *envy becomes powerless if one leaves everything in God's hands, however, if one fails to do so, not even drudgery can help him* (I, 2, 32, 127–128[30]). These words are confirmed in a couplet in the poem I, 2, 5 *Ad monachos in monasterio degentes*, in which Gregory, addressing the monks, emphasizes the value of living in seclusion: when one is detached from worldly things, a life of solitude leads him to union with God (vv. 11–12):

Οὐδὲ γὰρ οἰοβίοισι μόνον φθόνος, ἀλλ' ἔτι μᾶλλον
Πλειοτέροις, πλείων τε κακοῦ μόθος (*PG* 37, 643).

"Envy does not afflict the one who is on his own, but much more
The droves are attacked by the Enemy."

In this spirit, that is, in the spirit of seeking refuge in God, we also want to draw attention to the ethical teaching contained in the quatrain of the poems I, 2, 33 *Tetrastichae sententiae* in iambic trimeters, where Gregory does not explicitly speak of envy (φθόνος), but mentions jealousy (ζῆλος), which is, as pointed out before, an emotion that is often interchanged with envy. In verses 165–168 he writes:

Ἔρως, μέθη, ζῆλός τε καὶ δαίμων, ἴσα·
Οἷς ἂν προσέλθῃ, τὸ φρονεῖν ἐπέκλυσε.
Τῆξις, προσευχή, δάκρυον, τὰ φάρμακα.
Ἥδ' ἰατρεία τῶν ἐμῶν νοσημάτων (*PG* 37, 940).

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27 Protasi 2021, 8–10.

28 Brodňanská 2016, 5–19.

29 For more on the authenticity of the poem, see Davids 1940, pp. 43–72, 137–155; Brodňanská – Koželová 2020, 227.

30 Θεοῦ διδόντος, οὐδὲν ἰσχύει φθόνος, / Καὶ μὴ διδόντος, οὐδὲν ἰσχύει κόπος (*PG* 37, 926).

"Equal are desire, envy, drunkenness, and rage;
If someone indulges them, his mind is blurred.
Fasting, prayer, and tears are the medicine.
They only cure all of my ailments."

In these verses, Gregory gives his advice and directs attention to elements of asceticism which can bring us closer to God and which are also powerful weapons in fighting human flaws. But he also points at himself. Just like in the poem dedicated to Hellenius, he admits his failures once again, but he can also see a way of overcoming them.

Gregory describes his personal experience with an uneasy attempt to live a virtuous life in approximately forty verses of his poem I, 2, 9 *De virtute* in dactylic hexameters. In one part of the poem, he says (vv. 26–39):

Πολλάκι ταρσὸν ἄειρα πρὸς αἰθέρα, καί με βαρεῖα
Τηκεδανή τε μέριμνα χαμαὶ βάλε· πολλάκι δ' αὖτε
Αὐγασάμην θεότητος ἀγνὸν φάος, ἀλλὰ μέσον τι
Ἦλθε νέφος, κρύφθη δὲ σέλας μέγα, καί μ' ἐδάϊξεν,
Ὡς φύγεν ἐγγὺς ἐόντα. Τίς ὁ φθόνος; ἢ ποθέεσθαι
Αἰὲν ἐμοὶ ποθέει θνητοῦ νόμος, ἢ τόδ' ἄμεινον
Ἔστιν ἐμοὶ, μόχθῳ μὲν ἑλεῖν, μόχθῳ δὲ φυλάξαι;
Τοῦτο γὰρ ἔμπεδόν ἐστιν, ὃ νοῦς κάμε. Πολλάκι δ' αὖτε
Ἐσθλοῦ τ' ἠδὲ κακοῖο διάκρισιν ἐχθρὸς ἄμερσεν,
Ὡς θὴρ κερδαλέος τις ἐπ' ἴχνεσιν ἴχνια βάλλων
Ὥς κεν θηρητῆρα καλοῦ πλάξειε[31] δόλοισιν.
Ἄλλο τι σὰρξ μὲν ἄνωξεν ἐμοὶ φίλον, ἄλλο δ' ἐφετμή,
Ἄλλο Θεός, φθόνος ἄλλο, χρόνος τὸ μέν, ἄλλο τι δ' αἰών.
Ἔρδω δ', ὃ στυγέω, καὶ ἀμφιγέγηθα κακοῖσι (*PG* 37, 669–670).

"I often lifted my leg, but heavy,
Malign worry pressed me to the ground, often
I saw pure divine light, but there came a cloud,
Obscured the light and disheartened me,
Because the light vanished when I got close. What kind of envy is it?
Does human law want me to suffer endlessly for my desire,
Or is it better for me to guard what was so difficult to gain?
After all, only what the spirit acquires laboriously can last.
The enemy again concealed the difference between good and evil,
Sly like an animal stepping in other footprints,
So he can deceive the one who hunts for virtues.
One thing – so dear to me – my body requests, law asks for another;

[31] R. Palla draws attention here to several variants in manuscript witnesses. In his critical edition he prefers the variant πλάγξειε. See PALLA - KERTSCH 1985, 90.

God wants this, envy wants that, the present stands against eternity.
I do what I hate doing and evil things bring me joy."

Besides the explicit mention of envy which torments Gregory so much, the verses also include an allusion to envy in the part where Gregory speaks of the enemy – the devil, a sly animal, which deceives a contemporary person the same way it once deceived Eve in paradise.[32] Gregory is no exception; he worries that *the one who gave us chaff might in his sleep mix bad seeds in his grains* (I, 2, 2, 376–377[33]). Because he is a human being, he is often tricked, although he knows that *evil is born from good through the scheming of the envious man* (I, 2, 2, 258[34]) and that *envy brings only harm and deceit* (I, 2, 34, 72[35]). This enemy Gregory, in his poem *De humana natura,* calls the envious one[36] and Gregory blames his envy for all his own suffering (I, 2, 14, 55–58):

Πήματα μὲν καὶ πάμπαν ἀτερπέα πόλλ' ἐνόησα,
Τῶν δ' ἀγαθῶν οὐδὲν πάμπαν ἄμοιρον ἄχους,
Ἐξέτι τοῦ, ὅτε μοι πικρὴν ἐπομόρξατο ποινὴν
Γεῦσίς τ' οὐλομένη, καὶ φθόνος ἀντιπάλου (*PG* 37, 759–760).

"I have experienced hardships, I have known grief,
but I have never known a good thing that would not cause sorrow too,
Ever since the moment when bitter punishment overtook me,
brought on by ruinous desire, and by the envy of an adversary."

The poem I, 2, 14 *De humana natura* is an elegy discussing the essence of human existence. This poem is written in a mournful tone and in it, Gregory contemplates his own existence, the origin of man, and he reveals his restlessness and inner turmoil. He struggles with many doubts; but when it comes to the definition of evil, he has no doubts at all. He describes evil very simply and clearly in his poem *Praecepta ad virgines* where he admonishes people and warns them that

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32 Comp. also *Carm*. I, 2, 1, 117–121 (*PG* 37, 531): Ὄφρα μὲν οὖν μήτειρα βροτῶν ἐπεδεύετο γαῖα, / Οὐδ' εἶχεν κόσμον τὸν ὑπέρτατον, ὥσπερ ἔμελλεν, / Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ πρώτιστος ἀτασθαλίη--σιν ἐῆσι, / Βασκανίῃ τε δράκοντος ἀδευκέος ἐκ παραδείσου / Βληθεὶς ἀνδροφόνοιο φυτοῦ διὰ γεῦσιν ἀλιτρὴν. – "At the time when mother Earth did not carry people, / Until it got the greatest ornament it has ever received, / Until the first man, for his vanity / And envy too, was expelled from paradise for the trick of the cruel serpent, / For the bad taste of the kiling tree."

33 Μὴ δέ μοι ὑπνώοντι κακὸν σπόρον ἐγκαταμίξῃ / Ζιζανίων ἀρότης τε κακῶν, καὶ βάσκανος ἐχθρός (*PG* 37, 608).

34 Τίκτεσθ' ἐξ ἀγαθοῖο κακὸν φθονεροῖο δόλοισιν (*PG* 37, 598).

35 Ἡ βασκανία δὲ καὶ βλάβη διὰ φθόνον (*PG* 37, 950).

36 *Carm*. I, 2, 14, 117–118 (*PG* 37, 764): Καὶ σύ ποτ' ἀγγελικοῖσιν, Ἑωσφόρος, ἦσθα χοροῖσι, / Βάσκανε, νῦν δ' ἔπεσες αἶσχος ἀπ' οὐρανίων – "Even you, Lightbearer, once belonged to the angelic choirs, / Now you, the envious, have shamefully fallen down from the heavens."

"envying good people is like loving the evil ones" (I, 2, 2, 359[37]). In his poem I, 2, 34 *Definitiones minus exactae*, he presents fundamental theological truths and philosophical questions in the form of concise definitions. Envy is defined in verse 71[38] as follows: *Being tormented by the happiness of your neighbours, that is envy.* In another poem, I, 2, 30, which is an acrostic,[39] he says (v. 22[40]): *Envy is pleasing, they say, but remember, it is despicable.*

The poem I, 2, 8 *Comparatio vitarum* is one of Gregory's moral poems, first published in 1568 in Antwerp by Johannes Sambucus, a humanist, whose life was closely connected with the territory of present-day Slovakia.[41] This poem is a dialogue between the worldly life and the God-centered life. Before a judge they argue which of them is better and more bearable for reasonable people. The argument addresses also the celibate life and the life in poverty, i.e. the life of monks and the one of people living in the world.[42] Sporadically, they mention envy; always in relation to the rich and their wealth. While the worldly life praises envy and mentions it just once, the spiritual life criticises it several times:

Κοσμ. Ἐμοὶ τὸ πλουτεῖν δυσμενεῖς βάλλει κάτω,
Φθόνῳ δὲ τήκει τοὺς κακούς, ποιεῖ φίλους,
Θρόνους δίδωσιν, ἐν πόλει φυσᾶν μέγα.
Πν. Ἐμοὶ δὲ πενία μηδὲ δυσμενεῖς ἔχειν
Χαρίζετ', οἶκτος δ' ἀσφαλέστερος φθόνου (*PG* 37, 652–653).

Ἐμοὶ δ' ἅπας συνέρχετ', ἢν θάνω, βίος,
Οὐδὲν φθόνῳ τε καὶ στροφαῖς λελείψεται (*PG* 37, 654).

Οἳ μήτ' ἔχουσιν, ὧν ἔχουσιν ἡδονὴν,
Ζητοῦσί θ', οἷς λείψουσιν[43] ὄγκον, πολλάκις
Ζηλοῦντες εὐεκτοῦντας ἀσθενεστέρους·
Πάντων ἔρημοι, δυστυχεῖς εὐδαίμονες (*PG* 37, 658).

Φθονεῖς ἀρίστοις καὶ κακοῖς, οἰκτίζομαι·
Κακῶν γὰρ οὐδέν ἐστιν ἀθλιώτερον (*PG* 37, 661).

WL: "Wealth crushes my enemies,

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37 Τὸ φθονέειν ἀγαθοῖς ἶσον, στέργειν τε κακίστους (*PG* 37, 606).
38 Φθόνος δὲ τῆξις εὐροούντων τῶν πέλας (*PG* 37, 950).
39 *Carm.* I, 2, 30 *Versus iambici acrostichi secundum omnes alphabeti litteras sic dispositi, ut quilibet iambicus in adhortationem aliquam desinat.*
40 Χάρις φθονεῖσθαι, τὸ φθονεῖν δ' αἶσχος μέγα (*PG* 37, 910).
41 GRUSKOVÁ 2011, 114.
42 BRODŇANSKÁ – KOŽELOVÁ 2020, 67–68.
43 H. M. Werhahn, in his critical edition, changed the subjunctive to the correct indicative. See WERHAHN 1953, 26.

And torments the bad by envy, turning them into friends,
And in town it takes pride in posts and titles.
SL: I am poor and have no enemies,
So, pity is more reliable than envy" (I, 2, 8, 46–50).

"When I die, everything dies with me,
So, there will be nothing left to deceive or envy" (I, 2, 8, 72–73).

"They (= the rich) cannot enjoy the things they own,
They search for those who don't have plenty,
And then, when on their own, they, the happy unhappy,
Often envy[44] the poorer people who are healthy" (I, 2, 8, 130–133).

"You envy the best, I feel sorry for the bad.
There is nothing more pitiful than evil people" (I, 2, 8, 169–170).

These few verses in iambic trimeters indicate clearly that Gregory of Nazianzus stands on the side of living a life which is centered around God and which is lived in poverty and modesty. The rich live in constant fear of losing their possessions. They suffer from illnesses caused by overeating, excessive debauchery or lack of physical activity. They are eaten by envy and pride. They are an easy prey to sin because they do not search for help or protection from God. They themselves become a living target of envy as it is pointed out in the verses of a poem directed at those who love riches (*Adversus opem amantes*; I, 2, 28, 96–98):

Λαμπρὸν φυσᾶσθαι καὶ μέγιστον ἐν πόλει
Ὑψαυχενοῦντα, καὶ θρόνων αὐχεῖν κράτος,
Θρόνους, φθόνου πάλαισμα καὶ τυραννίδος (*PG* 37, 863–864).

"You can be proud, you the magnificent, the greatest in town,
You can hold your head high, you can brag about your power,
You have your position, a target of envy and tyranny."

Gregory of Nazianzus' moral poems look at envy from three different perspectives – envy as an ever present and inevitable part of the lives of those who are wealthy, envy as a metaphor of the devil, and envy as one of Gregory's own shameful qualities. But they also provide ways of overcoming envy.

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[44] In Greek, there is a present participle of the verb *to be jealous* (Ζηλοῦντες), which, however, can also be translated into Slovak as *to envy*. When translating, we used this equivalent, because we considered it more concise in the context of the poem. However, the verse can also be translated to mean that the rich are often jealous of the ones who are poorer but healthier.

Envy in Gregory's poetry about himself

One would expect to find a similar attitude in Gregory's poems of self-reflection. However, that is not the case. The topic of envy is not absent; however, Gregory is not the one who envies, he is the one who is the object and victim of envy. Gregory's autobiographical poem II, 1, 11 *De vita sua* helps us understand the circumstances and origins of such envy. This poem has the character of apology with regards to the malicious voices commenting on his early departure from the First Council of Constantinople in 381 and its aim is to present a true picture of his life to his descendants.[45]

In Gregory's autobiography, the first mention of the envy can be found in verse 335, where he says that *envy humbles boastfulness*.[46] This verse is preceded by Gregory's account of the inner struggle he wages, hesitating which path to choose – an active or a contemplative life. He longs for the life of a hermit; on the other hand, however, he can see how meaningful an active life could be. In the end, he chooses the middle way – *I decided upon a middle way between the life without ties and the life in a community, one which would combine the serenity of the former with the practical use of the latter* (II, 1, 11, 310–311[47]). But his own father thwarted his plans. He asked Gregory to leave the community of monks and return home to assist him in the administration of the Nazianzus diocese. By elevating his son to the status of a priest, Gregory's father wanted to gain honours for his son even though he was well aware of his son's desire to lead a secluded life. Gregory accepted his ordination almost against his will. He described his father's behaviour as tyranny[48] and found it very difficult to accept it.[49]

Two decades later, he again experienced difficulties, which were marked by feelings of envy, when he spent two years in Constantinople in 380–381. He was invited there to settle the matters of the Church in the capital which had been ruled by the Arians for several decades.[50] During his stay, he had to face many different enemies, not only heretics. He said: *An intense dissension flared up in my group* (II, 1, 11, 679[51]), but he also asked the question: *Envious demon, creator of evil, where did you get the power to contrive so great a wrong?* (II, 1, 11, 738–739[52]).

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45 Jungck 1974, 13.

46 *Carm.* II, 1, 11, 335 (*PG* 37, 1052): ἀεὶ κολούει τὰς ἐπάρσεις ὁ φθόνος. English translation cited from Meehan 1986, 86.

47 μέσην τιν' ἦλθον ἐρημικῶν καὶ μιγάδων, / τῶν μὲν τὸ σύννουν, τῶν δὲ τὸ χρηστὸν φέρων (*PG* 37, 1051). English translation cited from Meehan 1986, 86.

48 *Carm*. II, 1, 11, 345 (*PG* 37, 1053).

49 McGuckin 2001, 8–9, 100–101; Brodňanská 2017, 25.

50 McGuckin 2001, 240.

51 Ἔπειτα δεινὸς τῶν ἐμῶν οἰδεῖ φθόνος (*PG* 37, 1076). English translation cited from Meehan 1986, 96.

52 ὦ τῶν κακῶν πορισταί, δαῖμον βάσκανε, / πῶς ἴσχυσας τοσοῦτον ἐκπλῆσαι κακόν (*PG* 37, 1080). English translation cited from Meehan 1986, 98.

Another, very unpleasant experience which harmed Gregory and which he later referred to in his poetry, was his friendship with the Cynic Maximus. Gregory trusted and admired him. He praised him as an excellent Christian philosopher and a hero in the struggle to defend the teaching of Nicaea.[53] Even before arriving in Constantinople, Maximus was supported by the Patriarch Peter of Alexandria, who hoped to spread the interests of Alexandria in the capital – a claim to primacy in the eastern half of the Roman Empire. Gregory did not notice that Maximus only pursued his own interests and his friendship was dishonest. During Gregory's illness, Maximus was supposed to be secretly ordained Bishop of Constantinople. However, his ordination by the priests of Alexandria was not completed. This was prevented by indignant people and church leaders.[54] The devil's envy, which in Gregory's opinion directed Maximus's actions, is expressed in the poem by the adjective βάσκανος. As mentioned above, it is the adjective which Gregory regularly used to refer to the malicious and deceitful devil.[55]

After the presumed friend's duplicity, as Gregory writes, *the temptress envy was not idle* (II, 1, 11, 1506[56]). At the end of the year 380, emperor Theodosius forced Arian patriarch Demophilus to leave the city and he appointed Gregory Bishop of Constantinople. The office was granted to Gregory by the General Church Council, which met in Constantinople in 381. Gregory of Nazianzus was one of the main theologians of the council and he even chaired the council for a period of time.[57] However, some of the participants protested because in addition to being the Bishop of the capital, Gregory was also the Bishop of Sasima, although he never resumed his post there. In order to maintain peace and unity, he renounced the office of Bishop of Constantinople as well as the post of chair of the Council and he returned to his hometown of Arianzus.[58] But had felt deeply hurt and disappointed

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53 McGuckin 2001, 311.

54 White 1996, XX; McGuckin 2001, 324. A comprehensive description of all the events surrounding Maximus was presented by Gregory in the poem within about 360 verses (II, 1, 11, 750–1112; *PG* 37, 1081–1105). In the end Gregory asks his readers for forgiveness for being naive and for making similar mistakes because of his generosity when estimating other people (McGuckin 2001, 319).

55 At this point, however, the question remains open whether Gregory did not use the adjective βάσκανος instead of φθονερός for metric reasons in order to preserve the rhythm and metric structure of the iambic trimeter.

56 Ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ ἠσύχαζεν ὁ φθορεὺς φθόνος (*PG* 37, 1133). English translation cited from Meehan 1986, 118.

57 The First Council of Constantinople was chaired by bishop Meletius of Antioch. He died during the talks in May 381 and Gregory of Nazianzus became his successor. Gregory, however, failed at mediating unity among various parties present at the meeting regarding both the question of the Meletian schism in Antioch and the question of the *symbolum* (the confession of faith) (comp. Döpp – Geerlings 1999, 263; Drobner 1994, 238).

58 Demoen 1996, 20. Before leaving the city, he gave his speech *Supremum vale* (*Or*. 42), containing explicit references to envy (see note 9).

when the emperor approved his decisions and 150 bishops accepted his resignation without major objections.[59]

The depth of Gregory's pain caused by the aforementioned events and circumstances is reflected in several of his poems. We will discuss five of them (II, 1, 8; 9; 14; 18; 40), which have the word envy in their title because they are intended for those who feel envy – *In invidos* – and they also reveal a whole range of Gregory's emotions. In the poem II, 1, 8 Gregory leaves his readers in no doubt about when envy towards him started to grow. He calls on the Holy Trinity for help. He had a very profound relationship with the Holy Trinity because it was his advocacy and Orthodox interpretation of the Trinity which, according to his own words, brought the envy upon him in Constantinople[60] (II, 1, 8, 1–2):

Τριὰς, σάου με· καὶ πάλιν καλῶ, Τριάς.
Σὲ γὰρ προφαίνων ἠμπολησάμην φθόνον (*PG* 37, 1025).

"Save me, Holy Trinity, I am calling on you, Holy Trinity
After all, for advocating you I was rewarded with envy."

In the poems II, 1, 9 and II, 1, 14 he directly points at those who envy him. They are his fellowmen in priestly service, bishops, participants of the Council of Constantinople (e.g. II, 1, 14, 7–8):

Ἵσταντ' ἀθέσμως ἀντίοι λαοῦ πρόμοι,
Ὅπλοις χόλῳ τε καὶ φθόνῳ πεφραγμένοι (*PG* 37, 1245).

"And the leaders rose against each other viciously,
and anger and envy are their weapons."

Gregory does not understand their motives. In the poem II, 1, 18 he asks why his friends are so malicious and jealous (v. 5), he complains that a wind of envy is blowing against him trying to separate him from God and trap him in darkness (vv. 3–4). In the poem II, 1, 40, similarly to Horatius in one of his verse letters (*Ep*. II, 1, 12), he states that envy was buried with all those who died (II, 1, 40, 6[61]). On the other hand, however, he cannot understand why he, who is dead for the world, who left the capital city and who withdrew into seclusion, is still the victim of envy (II, 1, 40, 9[62]): *Well, even though I am dead, I am still envied*. It is worth mentioning that Gregory did not use the verb φθονέω, but βασκαίνω, which

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59 WHITE 1996, XXIII.

60 In 380, he delivered his famous theological speeches here, in which he explained the Nicene Doctrine of the Trinity.

61 Πᾶσι θανοῦσι καὶ φθόνος συνθάπτεται (*PG* 37, 1337).

62 Ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ τέθνηκα, καὶ βασκαίνομαι (*PG* 37, 1337).

brings us again to the broader connotation of deceit, fraud, malice, and bad-mouthing. In his poems, Gregory is not trying to conceal his disappointment or feeling of injustice. His choice of words clearly identifies the forces of evil whose effect he can feel. However, he does not appear inconsolable in any of his poems. In each poem Gregory eventually turns to God who is his certainty and hope, as is evident from the last verse of his poem II, 1, 40: *No envy will chase me away from him*.[63]

Conclusion

When analysing envy in the verses of Gregory of Nazianzus it is impossible not to notice that Gregory looks at envy from several viewpoints. The greatest difference can be observed in the relation to the object of envy. While in moral poems and *quae spectant ad alios* poems envy is directed at other people, in *de se ipso* poems it relates to Gregory himself – he himself is haunted by envy. This fact has an impact on the overall character of the poems.

Autobiographical poems are marked by self-pity and feelings of injustice and lack of understanding. However, thanks to Gregory's firm faith in God, the poems do not give in to absolute pessimism.

Moral poems and poems dedicated to people whom Gregory knew also partially touch upon Gregory's personality, however, from the opposite perspective. In a few instances, we can see Gregory in the position of a man who envies. He is well aware of the fact that he himself feels this shameful emotion, yet he is searching for a way to fight it. Gregory believes that the most effective weapons against envy are a trust in God and words, which get their power, meaning, and effectiveness from God. In these poems, envy is depicted as evil whereas it is often identified with the deceitful character of the devil, which is also reflected in the choice of words. To express envy, Gregory uses alternate expressions φθόνος, φθονέω (envy as such) and βασκαίνω, βασκανία, βάσκανος (envy with wider connotations of malice and deceit as a metaphor for the devil).

Gregory's verses absolutely confirm Aristotle's definition of envy as well as the definitions of envy presented by contemporary scholars. In Gregory's case, the impact of envy resulted in his feelings of undeserved pain. Gregory showed its negativity in its full extent; however, mainly he also offered a solution how to deal with envy – that is, by relying on God.

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63 *Carm*. II, 1, 40, 33 (*PG* 37, 1339): Τούτου μὲν ἡμᾶς οὔ τις ἐκβαλεῖ φθόνος.

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Abstracts

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Fthonos as Seen through the Eyes of Gregory of Nazianzus the Poet

The paper discusses the mentions of envy in the poetry of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, specifically in his historical (*Carmina quae spectant ad alios*, *Carmina de se ipso*) and moral poetry (*Carmina moralia*). Since the range of themes in Nazianzus' poems is broad, the paper also follows the connection between the overall content of the poems and the views of envy they provide. The theme of envy is present in the poems on multiple levels. It is seen as evil, repeatedly identified with the deceptive character of the devil, but also as an aspect of Gregory's life, be it Gregory as an object of envy or as a person who envies others.

[*Fthonos* očami Gregora z Nazianzu ako básnika]

Štúdia mapuje zmienky o závisti v poézii sv. Gregora z Nazianzu, konkrétne v jeho historickej (*Carmina quae spectant ad alios, Carmina de se ipso*) a morálnej poézii (*Carmina moralia*). Keďže diapazón tém, ktoré v básňach ponúka, je veľmi široký, autorka sleduje tiež súvislosť medzi obsahovým zameraním básní a pohľadom na závisť v nich. Závisť sa vo veršoch predstavuje v niekoľkých rovinách. Ako zlo, pričom je viackrát stotožnené s klamným charakterom diabla, ale i ako súčasť Gregorovho života, či už Gregor vystupuje ako objekt závisti, alebo ako ten, kto závidí.