CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

The Cappadocian Fathers of the fourth century, Basil of Caesarea, his brother, Gregory of Nyssa, and his friend Gregory of Nazianzus, are best remembered as theologians of the Trinity. However, theologians of their day not only wrote theology, they embodied theology. Wilken reminds us, "The intellectual effort of the early church was at the service of a much loftier goal than giving conceptual form to Christian belief. Its mission was to win the hearts and minds of men and women to change their lives."[1] For the Cappadocians, it was their life, but it was also a lifestyle. This included a lifelong quest to grow in a relationship with, and seek the face of God, intent on becoming more like God. Within the writings of the Cappadocians we discover a unique pathway to their understanding of *theosis*, one which broadens our understanding for it includes the women in their lives. These women, the *Cappadocian Mothers*, both married and virgins, exemplified deification for the Fathers and provided a model for a female restored in the image of God. The result is an optimistic message that provides a road map for pathways to deification for women but even more, a fuller understanding of the Cappadocians' theology when all of humanity is taken into account.

This early Christian theology "is the work of an unparalleled company of gifted thinkers whose lives are interwoven with their thought."[2] These theologians were not necessarily trying to establish something as they were trying to understand and explain what they were personally experiencing. "The desire to understand is as much part of believing as is the drive to act on what one believes."[3] According to Sheldrake, "*Being a theologian* is as much a quality of *being* in relation to the reality we reflect upon as a concern for the technology of a specific discipline."[4] Sheldrake's conclusion is that

1. Wilken, *Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, xiv.
2. Ibid., xviii.
3. Ibid., 3.
4. Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 6.

"some kind of transformation is implied by the search for knowledge."[5] The result is that doctrine traditionally develops because of an embodiment of spiritual traditions within the lives of people and is not simply the result of abstract ideas.[6] The Cappadocians' relationships, involvement in the life of the church, social origins and education all helped to form their theology, which in turn was fundamentally pastoral.[7]

The synthesis of Cappadocian theology "encapsulates an idea of Christian knowledge in which biblical exegesis, speculative reasoning and mystical contemplation are fused."[8] This synthesis included the relationships and sociological world of their families. Basil and Gregory of Nyssa grew up in a Christian family consisting of five boys and five girls. Their Christian roots can be traced back to their grandparents who had been disciples of Gregory Thaumaturgus, missionary to Pontus. The turn of the fourth century had been greeted with the persecution of Christians. Basil and Gregory's grandparents were survivors of this persecution. Their grandmother, Macrina the Elder, taught them sayings she had learned from Gregory Thaumaturgus.[9] Basil, in the midst of the great Trinitarian debates, comments, "Nay, the conception of God which I received in childhood from my blessed mother and my grandmother Macrina, this, developed, have I held within me; for I did not change from one opinion to another with the maturity of reason, but I perfected the principles handed down to me by them. . . . The teaching about God which I had received as a boy from my blessed mother and my grandmother Macrina, I have ever held with increased conviction."[10]

Basil's friend, Gregory of Nazianzus, was also raised in a Christian home. Basil and Nazianzen, both of whom were raised in Cappadocia, studied classical literature but did not meet until their paths led them to Athens. Here while continuing their studies they met and became lifelong friends.[11] While they studied at Athens these two young Cappadocians became known for their "diligence and success in work, their stainless and devout life, and their close mutual affection."[12] Gregory described their behavior while in Athens: "The sole object of us both was virtue and living for

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., 41.

7. Ibid., 46–48.

8. Ibid., 46.

9. Wilken, *Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 138–39. See also Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 3.

10. Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 223.3 (PG 32) (Deferrari, LCL).

11. Van Dam, *Kingdom of Snow*, 5.

12. *NPNF2* 8:xv.

future hopes, having detached ourselves from this world before departing from it . . . our great concern, our great name, was to be Christians and be called Christians."[13] These young men who had been raised in Christian homes, furthered their education and made a mark on their world. Wilken believes this "continuity within Christian families over several generations helped spark the flowering of Christian intellectual life in the late fourth century."[14] In this case, this flowering left us with the writings of the Cappadocian Fathers.

Within the families and writings of the Cappadocians we find seven women: Macrina the Elder, grandmother of Basil and Nyssen; Emmelia, mother of Basil and Nyssen; Macrina, older sister of Basil and Nyssen; Theosebia and an unnamed virgin, both younger sisters of Basil and Nyssen; Nonna, mother of Nazianzen; and Gorgonia, Nazianzen's sister. These women, according to McGuckin, "seemed almost like a new breed—powerful as matriarchs, yet adding a decidedly new twist to that power base, for in their radical espousing of the principle that 'there is no longer male nor female in Christ,' they passed over psychological and social barriers that still contained their pagan sisters within the social mores of an immensely strong patriarchy."[15] The result was that these women, just as the men, were an embodiment of theology.

## Structural framework

The Cappadocian Mothers remained lost within the pages of ancient manuscripts for generations and not until the last century did scholars begin to uncover them. Feminism and Christian feminist writings in the past half-century have helped us to rediscover these women at the same time feminist writings have been brought to the forefront of scholarship. Christian feminism believes that the arc of biblical teachings trends toward equality between men and women; church history increasingly bears out this egalitarian affirmation. Medievalist Allen Frantzen reminds us, "If writing about women was once an innovation, it is now an imperative."[16]

Faced with this imperative, we struggle with the manner or methodology in which we are to confront these women of history. Averil Cameron reminds us, "For early Christianity itself women seem to have been an object of attention in a way which calls for explanation, while clearly any feminist

13. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 43.20–21 (PG 36:493) (SC 384) (FC, 39–41).
14. Wilken, *Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 138–39.
15. McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus*, 5. See also Gal 3:28.
16. Frantzen, "When Women Aren't Enough," 445–71.

in our day, or indeed anyone interested in the history of women, is going to find that understanding their role in Christianity presents a particularly acute methodological problem."[17] This methodological problem must be confronted.

Any methodological approach involving women necessitates a consideration of feminist hermeneutical principles. These must include their application in the midst of a shifting historical context where radical women's studies have given way to a more inclusive gender studies model. In an effort to tackle this methodological problem, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza developed a series of four interdependent hermeneutical principles providing us with a remarkable model for feminist biblical and historical studies.[18] These include the *Hermeneutic of Suspicion*, the *Hermeneutic of Proclamation*, the *Hermeneutic of Remembrance* and, finally, the *Hermeneutic of Creative Actualization*.[19] According to Schüssler Fiorenza, these principles assist us in a "critical feminist theology of liberation."[20]

The *Hermeneutic of Suspicion* allows us to recognize where the text is androcentric and patriarchal. Therefore, one approaches the text with caution, asking what or whose purposes are being served.[21] Schüssler Fiorenza reinforces the importance of this feminist hermeneutic and its relationship to contemporary society.

> This critical insight of feminist hermeneutics has ramifications not only for historical scholarship but also for our contemporary-political situation because the Bible still functions today as a religious justification and ideological legitimization of patriarchy.
>
> To speak of power is to speak of political realities and struggles although we might not be conscious of this when we speak of the power of the Word. The Bible is not simply a religious but also a profoundly political book as it continues to inform the self-understandings of American and European "secularized" societies and cultures. Feminist biblical interpretations therefore

17. Cameron, "Virginity as Metaphor," 181.

18. O'Donovan, "Doing It Differently," 161. While Schüssler Fiorenza describes her principles in relation to biblical studies, Sheldrake and Coon utilize her principles in relation to Christian historical study through the centuries therefore not confining her concepts to biblical studies.

19. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 1–22.

20. Ibid., 15.

21. Kassian, "History of Feminism."

> have a critical political significance not only for women in biblical religion but for all women in Western societies.[22]

The *Hermeneutic of Suspicion* highlights as fact the historical texts have been written by men and generally for men, permitting us to move beyond what may have traditionally been a singular interpretation.

Schüssler Fiorenza's *Hermeneutic of Proclamation* allows us to recover texts which permit us to proclaim freedom and liberation for the oppressed women of our day.[23] In other words, the ancient texts are interpreted so they inform the present day. Within more extreme feminism, the texts which "promote sexism or patriarchy [are] no longer to be proclaimed in the worship assembly."[24] However, it is within the *Hermeneutic of Remembrance* we are able to "search the texts for traces of women's history."[25] Not only have these women of history been found, but their struggles, too, are identified. Determinated by the written text or by their obvious absence within the text,[26] the end result is the proclamation of good news for today's women.

Finally, there is the *Hermeneutic of Creative Actualization* whereby we reactualize the challenge given by the text, the personalities and communities encompassed therein.[27] Here feminist theologians may "read into, embellish or augment" the text.[28] According to Kassian, this final hermeneutic has enabled feminist theologians "to open up the door for a usable feminist *future*."[29]

While Schüssler Fiorenza has developed this hermeneutic model, at the same time, there have been major concurrent changes occurring within academia and different fields of study affecting our methodology and these must be included. Elizabeth Clark, church historian, provides us with a framework of understanding the three phases of development within the historical study of women. The first phase came to be known as *Women's Studies*. This was the "more innocuous task of merely describing women's

22. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, xi.

23. Kassian, "History of Feminism."

24. Barbara Reid, *Choosing the Better Part?*, 10. This would raise serious questions as to whether feminist theologians accept the canon. Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *Women's Bible* is an example of this revisionist writing for suffragettes, and her version of the Bible was met with limited success.

25. Kassian, "History of Feminism."

26. Reid, *Choosing the Better Part?*, 10.

27. Doohan, "Scripture and Contemporary Spirituality."

28. Kassian, "History of Feminism."

29. Ibid.

activities."[30] This recovery of women became political as it became celebratory in lauding our foremothers.[31]

As the focus of recovery became more political, it developed into the next phase, *Feminist Studies*. Because of its politically charged nature, at its most extreme, *Feminist Studies* developed the goal of the "final eradication of women's oppression."[32] This phase is waning as the focus on *Gender Studies* emerges. "At the most simple level, gender studies *lets men in*—both as subjects for discussion and as authors."[33] Of course, historians focused on a feminist agenda have been critical of this shift toward gender, contending it undercuts the power of women. "For them, privileging gender and language seemed to signal a retreat in the wider historical discipline in which the battle had not yet been won for *women's* history."[34] At the same time, Frantzen is very positive about the shift to gender. In his opinion, gender has become a "tool for reconceptualizing male as well as female roles, reconfiguring the power struggles between the sexes, and merging sexual distinctions founded on reproductive difference. Gender studies, where those reconceptualizations are carried out, examine how males and females choose to think and act in reference to the conventions expected of the men and women of their ages."[35] It also leaves room for the relationship between males and females and, subsequently, the influences of each on historical writings.

Recent works have been influenced by post-structural interpretation. This type of interpretation is open to "social and cultural construction of gender, sexuality, and the body."[36] Coon explains: "Historians focusing on these constructions examine the fluidity of gender models and means by which various cultures recreate the categories of 'masculine' and 'feminine' in order to accommodate changing social, political, economic, and spiritual precepts. This methodology also considers more fully the relationship between author and text and between sacred image and didactic purpose."[37] It is then within this context of *Gender Studies* we can examine the writings of the Cappadocian Fathers, male writers, and attempt to understand the role their feminist writings play in their theology. We will attempt to meld

30. Clark, "Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History," 396. See Liz James's introduction to *Women, Men and Eunuchs*, xii–xiv.

31. Clark, "Lady Vanishes," 30–31.

32. Clark, "Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History," 396.

33. Ibid., 419–20. See Frantzen, "When Women Aren't Enough," 451.

34. Clark, "Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History," 417.

35. Frantzen, "When Women Aren't Enough," 445.

36. Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, xx.

37. Ibid.

the hermeneutic model of Schüssler Fiorenza within the world of *Gender Studies*.

Throughout the phase of *Women's Studies*, we find the greatest use of the *Hermeneutic of Remembrance*. This began with a search through history to find the women who had been lost for so long. Sheldrake reminds us, "Who is permitted to have a history and who is not is a vital issue because those who have no memories or story have no life."[38] In the nineteenth century, we hear the prophetic voice of Rev. Dr. Thomas Upham, "One of the results of God's great work which is now going on in the world will be to raise and perfect woman's position and character. The darkest page in human history is that of the treatment of woman."[39] According to Clark, in the past thirty years, the feminist movement has endeavored to recover the history of those who have not had a voice, and hence no memory.[40] Sheldrake contends, "Some historians object to contemporary attempts to retrieve the forgotten women in history by arguing that *significant* women find a place in history as readily as men. Presumably there just happen to have been fewer significant women in history than men!"[41] However, the bias of traditional history has been toward the viewpoint of the powerful, and as a result, elite groups in history have had the greatest exposure.[42]

Traditional historical theory, according to Hayden White, has told us a story about the past but did not provide us with any explanation pertaining to those events.[43] According to Sheldrake, this traditional historical theory has been *teleological*, until recently. "That is, it approached the past in order to explain the results that we supposed that it produced."[44] The danger is, when anticipating a result, certain elements of a story may have been overemphasized, resulting in a misunderstanding of the outcome.[45] Feminism has attempted to correct this traditional approach, yet caution is in order. "Historical revision may conclude that previous accounts reached conclusions for unsound reasons, and yet we cannot simply *assume*, from the start, that the conclusion was undoubtedly false. All that can be said initially is that there are new questions which must be asked."[46] For example,

38. Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 65.
39. Upham, as quoted in Palmer, *Promise of the Father*, 52.
40. Clark, "Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History," 423–24.
41. Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 77–78.
42. Ibid., 65.
43. White, "Question of Narrative," 3.
44. Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 19.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.

by revisiting the history of the Cappadocians with an intentional inclusion of the women about whom they have written, is there anything new to be asked?

The initial period of the *Hermeneutic of Remembrance* involved a rediscovery of patristic hagiography. The Cappadocian fathers, according to Coon,

> combined the simple beauty of Christian parable with the highly stylized rhetoric of late antiquity in *vitae* that immortalized the sanctity of their most intimate friends and family. Patristic hagiography served a variety of purposes, which included evoking the experience of desert asceticism, reinforcing theological orthodoxy, promoting virginity, and sanctifying members of patrician families who would then serve as models for worldly renunciation.[47]

While the Cappadocian hagiographical documents of women could be found in Migne,[48] written in Greek and Latin, they seemed to have been lost until they were republished in English and occasionally French.

In 1916 W. K. Lowther Clarke published Nyssen's *Life of Macrina* in English.[49] The rediscovery and availability of material in English opened the door for further study. A generation later, building on the work of Jaeger, in 1967, Virginia Callahan published a new English translation of that work.[50] Maraval published the critical French version in *Sources Chrétiennes* in 1971.[51] Nazianzen's funeral oration for his sister Gorgonia had been printed in English in Schaff's *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* in 1894.[52] This piece of hagiography provided information on the life of his sister Gorgonia as well as the life of his mother, Nonna. As these works began to appear, they became the objects of further study.

Feminist authors have examined these hagiographic documents in a more critical manner and have tried to determine what, in fact, they are trying to tell us. Elizabeth Clark, beginning in the 1980s, has become one

47. Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, 7.

48. Patrologia Graeca, edited by J. P. Migne, 162 vols. (Paris, 1857–1886).

49. Nyssen, *DVM* (PG 46:960–1000), in Clarke, *Life of Saint Macrina*, 965–66.

50. Nyssen, *Ascetical Works*, trans. Virginia Woods Callahan (FC, 58), 159–91.

51. Grégoire de Nysse, *Vie de Sainte Macrine*, ed. and Fr. trans. by Maraval.

52. Nazianzen, *Or.* 8 (PG 35:789) (*NPNF2* 7). Also to be found in Schaff is Basil of Caesarea's *Ep.* 223 (PG 32) (*NPNF2* 7:599–601), in which we find biographical information regarding Basil's mother, Emmelia, and his grandmother Macrina the Elder. This information is more biographical than hagiographical. Today newer sources exist in English, including McCauley's translations in the Father's of the Church series, and Daley, in *Gregory of Nazianzus: The Early Church Fathers*.

of the more prolific feminist authors in the field of patristics,[53] helping us to examine the documents in a critical manner. Hagiography, however, presents us with a problem because it is a representation of an idealized world and "presents only what the writer wants the reader to believe and to value and what, at the time of writing, is in need of reform."[54] According to Harvey, "Hagiography often showed acute tension in its presentation of women. It portrayed holy women as conforming to established social norms even when their actions contradicted these norms."[55] As a result, Gregory of Nyssa espoused virginity as the path to God.[56] At the same time, his friend Gregory of Nazianzus praised his mother and sister for being godly wives and mothers.[57] Ultimately, the problem with hagiography is it is impossible to separate the factual from the fictional. Sheldrake reminds us hagiographies may "offer some factual insights, but this does not demand that we accept as 'fact' every last, extraordinary detail."[58] We recognize the people of the past understood reality within their context. In studying the past, we attempt to contextualize our understanding, recognizing we will always fall short.

Interestingly, Coon sees the hagiography of female saints as replicating the process of redemption. "By transforming profane female flesh into a vehicle of grace, women's conversion extends the hope of universal salvation to sinful humanity."[59] She sees holy women as both masculine and feminine, representing the spirit and the flesh. The sum of these considerations lead us to conclude "their sacred biographies both empower and restrain their spiritual activities."[60] Coon argues that the biographies "compelled the faithful to worship the omnipotence of God which manifested itself through the miraculous deeds of the saints."[61] These arguments take us beyond the

53. Clark's works include: *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith*; "Authority and Humility"; "Ideology, History and the Construction of 'Woman'"; "Early Christian Women"; *Women in the Early Church* (this includes a copy of Gregory of Nyssa, *DV* [PG 45:317–416] [SC 119, 1966]); "Holy Women, Holy Words"; "Lady Vanishes" (this article provides an excellent history of feminist studies and provides an excellent road map bringing us current); "Theory and Practice"; "Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History."

54. Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 105–6.

55. Harvey, "Sacred Bonding," 27–57, 31.

56. Nyssen, *DV* (PG 45:317–416) (SC 119) (GNO VIII.I) (FC, 3–75).

57. Nazianzen, *Or. 8*.

58. Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 23.

59. Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, xvii–xviii.

60. Ibid., xviii–xix.

61. Ibid., 9–10.

documents creating a problem for the historian. According to White, the narrative historian's method "consists in the investigation of the documents in order to determine what is the true or most plausible story that can be told about the events of which they are evidence."[62] Unfortunately, it was soon discovered that the women themselves were not uncovered in these hagiographical works. Rather, a number of literary pieces written by male authors were encountered. According to Clark, the *literariness* of the texts presented a theoretical problem.[63]

Nyssen's *On the Soul and the Resurrection* (newly translated in 1993 into English by Roth)[64] is an example of a text posing this theoretical problem. This document is not hagiographic, but rather is a dialogue modeled after Socrates' muse Diotima, with words modeled after Plato's *Phaedo.*[65] This style creates a literary challenge, raising the question as to whether the ideas presented are those of Macrina or simply Nyssen's. Wilken believes the thoughts are truly hers and that Gregory admires her for her "theological acumen as well as her piety. In the treatise it is Macrina who instructs Gregory about the resurrection, not the bishop Gregory who teaches Macrina."[66] On the other hand, Schaff believes Macrina is simply the mouthpiece of her brother Gregory. "Into her mouth he put his theological instructions on the soul, death, resurrection, and final restoration."[67] We are left with a good theological and philosophical piece of work, but we are unsure whether Macrina herself can be found there.

The questions posed by these varying opinions create a problem for feminist historical scholarship in light of post-structuralist critique. Clark argues many feminist historians view the post-structuralist critique of *objectivity* versus *subjectivity* as an encouragement to abandon any evidence which may create a "connection between people of the past and the description of them in historians' records."[68] In other words, categories have become so blurred, according to Clark, "we are forbidden to speak of *women* anymore."[69] In the process, the male subject has become decentered "leaving no space for the female subject, either. Why, many feminists query, are we told to abandon *subjectivity* just at the historical moment when women

62. White, *Question of Narrative*, 2.
63. Clark, "Holy Women, Holy Words," 416.
64. Nyssen, *DAR* (PG 46:11–160), trans. Roth.
65. Plato, "Phaedo," in *Dialogues*, trans. Jowett.
66. Wilken, *Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 139.
67. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 905.
68. Clark, "Holy Women, Holy Words," 416.
69 Ibid.

have begun to claim it?"[70] It appears that precisely when women have been found, the fruit of literary criticism and post-structuralism's labor, there is the possibility that they may disappear. Clark asks, "Why . . . was the 'end of woman' authorized without consulting her?"[71]

Averil Cameron poses this very poignant question, "How then to get beyond the texts?"[72] Her response is that "feminist writers wishing to recapture a positive role for early Christian women must proceed by reinterpreting the texts which provide their main evidence."[73] Clark, speaking for feminist historians, asks how "might they profitably combine literary theorists' emphasis on the role of language in shaping *reality* with more traditional historical concerns for the extra textual world? What, for example, might we be able to claim about *holy women* and *holy words* in late ancient Christianity?"[74] Feminist historians fear "that post-structuralists are apolitical (or worse), that they vastly overrate the place of language in the constitution of the world, are insensitive to issues of gender, and by decentring subjectivity, authorship, and agency, leave no ground on which a feminist politic can be built."[75] The issues that theoretically-informed feminist historians raise are helpful to church historians.[76] Specifically, historians must be able to examine not only the question of *how*, but also *why, what meaning*, and *who*?[77] Spiegel tells us, "It is perhaps to be expected that the current movement away from structuralist and post-structuralist readings of history and historiography is similarly governed by the needs and goals of social history, albeit of a kind quite different from that which preceded the advent of the *linguistic turn*."[78] We are currently in a state of accommodation and revision and looking for a solution.[79] Václev Havel posits it in this manner: "We are looking for an objective way out of the crisis of objectivism."[80]

Clark provides a solution and methodology for this problem. Specifically in the area of ancient Christianity and patristics, Clark notes the

70 Ibid. Influential theorists of structuralism and poststructuralism include Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Derrida.

71. Clark, "Holy Women, Holy Words," 416. Miller, "Text's Heroine," 118, discussing Foucault's essay, "What Is an Author?"

72. Cameron, "Virginity as Metaphor," 187.

73. Ibid.

74. Clark, "Holy Women, Holy Words," 417.

75. Clark, "Lady Vanishes," 2.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid., 10.

78. Spiegel, introduction to *Practicing History*, 4.

79. Ibid., 24.

80. Havel, "End of the Modern Era."

numerous historians who have played the role of anthropologist and yet have not paid attention "to the ways in which *woman* or *the female* becomes a rhetorical code for other concerns."[81] Her criticism in the area of patristics stems from those historians who wish to reject theoretical incursions into the field. Clark argues, "Now we should register more fully that the written materials surviving from late ancient Christianity are almost exclusively *texts*, not *documents*."[82] Averil Cameron reminds us, "Language is one of the first and most fundamental elements in the construction of sexual identity."[83] As a result, according to Clark, patristic historians must pay greater attention to the manner in which they construct the concept of *woman*.[84] While we cannot recover woman in a pure and simple way, we can find traces of her in our exploration because, according to Clark, women are "imbedded in a larger social-linguistic framework."[85] As we explore this framework, we will find them and their influence. *Women's studies* in religion have appropriated the social model for study, while *gender studies* have, according to Clark, "begun to adopt the hermeneutical paradigm of historical studies."[86] Her suggestion for methodology is to utilize both models, with the final result being a more enriched study.[87]

Clark is not alone. Sheldrake, as well, believes the time has come for analysis and historical enquiry to become more analytical with a greater emphasis placed on the interrelationship of events.[88] This interrelationship of events allows us to explore the theological concepts anticipated within the texts. The feminist theorist Irigaray encourages us to take up the theological question. Her work allows space for the Divine, and as a result, has freed us from having to accept the antireligious bias, which is often found in modern feminist theory.[89] Ursula King declares feminist scholars have become frustrated because historical study has become so text-oriented it has become over-intellectualist and "thus often excluded women from serving

81. Clark, "Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History," 423–24.

82. Ibid. This is in the sense that we have tried to prove the role of a particular document, such as a letter, an epitaph, or a panegyric, rather than examining the very words, or texts for the meanings to be found in the writings themselves.

83. Cameron, "Sacred and Profane Love," 17.

84. Clark, "Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History," 423–24.

85. Clark, "Lady Vanishes," 31.

86. Clark, "Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History," 397.

87. Ibid.

88. Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 27.

89. Jones, "Divining Women," 42–67, 44.

as subjects of study."[90] It is time to give attention to religious experience and its interrelatedness.[91]

This brings us to a new way in which to examine the text. Gabrielle Spiegel devises the phrase *social logic* "to register both social and formal concerns"[92] within a text. The *social logic* of a text begins to emerge when we view it from the *theological perspective*.[93] The *social logic* of the text, according to Clark, "has less to do with *real women* than with an elaboration of theological points that troubled their authors."[94] Clark, playing on Spiegel's words, encourages us to expand the concept of *social logic* to include the *theological logic* within a text as well.[95] She provides us with an example from *De Vita Macrinae*, noting "even though we retreat from the project of locating the *real Macrina* in this and other treatises by Gregory of Nyssa, a reading that attends to the social and theological context of these works reveals that the character of Macrina here plays a role in the contemporary controversy that tried to secure the place of a modified Origenism for *orthodoxy*."[96] In this regard, Macrina becomes "a tool with which Gregory can think through various troubling intellectual and theological problems that confronted male theologians of his day; in a special way, she exemplifies the claim that Christian males, as well as other ancient men, used women to *think with*."[97] Therefore, one function of Macrina in this text is to "serve as a spokesperson for Gregory's revised Origenist theology."[98]

Certain concerns must be mentioned in regard to subjectivity because criticism has developed against feminist writing in regard to experience. Several factors are at play, including the fact that much of the writing seems to present a picture of white middle-class women, which has been "represented as if it were the experience of *all* women."[99] Historians who are responsibly aware of the potential cross contamination during research readily admit they bring their subjectivity with them to the text. Goldstein speaks of this quite openly:

90. Clark, "Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History," 407.
91. Ibid.
92. Clark, "Lady Vanishes," 13.
93. Ibid., 23.
94. Ibid., 24.
95. Ibid., 31.
96. Ibid.
97. Ibid., 27. See Brown, *Body and Society*, 153.
98. Clark, "Lady Vanishes," 27.
99. Clark, "Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History," 407.

> I am a student of theology; I am also a woman. Perhaps it strikes you as curious that I put these two assertions beside each other, as if to imply that one's [gender] has some bearing on his theological views. I myself would have rejected such an idea when I first began my theological studies. But now . . . I am no longer as certain as I once was that, when theologians speak of *man*, they are using the word in its generic sense. It is, after all, a well-known fact that theology has been written almost exclusively by men.[100]

The feminist must be aware of her own subjectivity, because without this awareness there will be the potential for abuse in interpretation.[101] Leclerc warns us: "When the feminist agenda becomes so *apologetic* as to force patristic rhetoric in certain, perhaps even contrived directions, the integrity of the interpretation can be legitimately questioned."[102] One direction, which may potentially be forced, is the search for early Christian feminism within certain texts, which Cameron asserts are "in the main highly misogynistic."[103] Christian feminist theologians stress that the gospel brought the good news to all people, including the poor and uneducated, and presumably, this included most women. Therefore, no matter what the text itself may imply, the assertion remains that "there was once a golden age of early Christianity in which women played a role they were scarcely to enjoy again until the rise of the feminist movement."[104] This argument will affect the manner in which a feminist historian or theologian approaches the text.

We must accept that historical knowledge can never be completely objective and will always be subjective in relation to our interest and use of the material.[105] "What remains after events have been explained is both *historical* and *meaningful* insofar as it can be understood. And this remainder is understandable insofar as it can be *grasped* in a symbolization, that is, shown to have the kind of meaning with which plots endow stories."[106] The historian tells a story in order that he or she eventually reveals a plot symbolic of the meaning of the text.[107] In the wake of the contemporary focus

100. Goldstein, "Human Situation," 25–42. Leclerc, *Singleness of Heart*, 5.

101. Leclerc, *Singleness of Heart*, 6.

102. Ibid.

103. Cameron, "Virginity as Metaphor," 184.

104. Ibid. See also, e.g., Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, and Ruether, "Mothers of the Church," 30–70.

105. Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 29–30.

106. White, *Question of Narrative*, 29.

107. Ibid., 28–29.

on *gender studies* and utilizing Schüssler Fiorenza's *Hermeneutic of Creative Actualization*, we can take the time to find the theological rhetoric existent within the text. It is within this last period of time that we have shifted our approach in theology "towards a greater reflection on human experience as an authentic source of divine revelation."[108]

Therefore, we adopt concepts from the area of gender studies allowing both the male and the female figures to be represented, asking questions regarding their interaction. The *Hermeneutic of Remembrance* allows us to reveal the Cappadocian Mothers, both through biography and hagiography. Using the *social logic* of this melding we then begin to ask theological questions related to the presence of the Cappadocian Mothers within the writings of Basil, Gregory and Gregory. Specifically, then we look to the question of *theosis*, or *deification*, in the writings of the Cappadocians and how the presence of these women informs their theology.

## Theological framework

This study will include an examination of the Cappadocian Fathers' texts in which we gain understanding of their doctrine of theosis. In Cappadocian thought, the goal of the Christian life was theosis: to become like God or union with God.[109] This concept of theosis signaled a return to the *telos* of humanity, a humanity that was made in the image and likeness of God. People are saved through their participation in theosis, culminating in their growth in holiness, love, and Christ-likeness. Throughout their lives, the Cappadocians worked toward this salvific goal. They believed that theosis involved a synergistic activity, one between God and people. For the Cappadocians, life and doctrine were always one and the same.[110] Scholars identify Gregory of Nazianzus as the first Christian theologian to utilize the term theosis frequently and consistently.[111] Origen utilized the term in a Christian sense, but according to Winslow, "Difficulties inherent in Origen's

108. Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 41.

109. Finlan and Kharlamov, *Theosis*, 1.

110. Wilken, *Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, xviii.

111. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 180. According to Winslow, "Theophilus of Antioch was the first to use the vocabulary of *theosis* but restricted its meaning to that of immortality. Irenaeus was the first to relate the incarnation of the Word to the deification of man, postulating a 'double metathesis' whereby God became man that man might become God" (*Adv. Haer.*, 3.19.1). "Clement of Alexandria was the first to use the word Θεοποιέω to indicate this 'deifying' action brought about by the incarnation, relating it to the contemporary Hellenic concept of 'assimilation to God'" (*Paed.* 1.12).

*system* tended to detract from the ultimate validity of the term."[112] Gregory of Nazianzus makes constant use of *theosis* or the doctrine of deification within the Christian context. While the term was not yet normalized within the Christian community, his use carved out a permanent place for the doctrine.[113]

The theological framework of the Cappadocians included the influences of Origen and Neoplatonism. However, this was not the only basis for their thought. While the Cappadocians and those before them utilized classical philosophies in an effort to explain their beliefs, the foundation of their beliefs was not found in those philosophies, but in the Bible, or Holy Scriptures. "Gregory [Nyssen] begins not with Plato nor Plotinus nor their followers, but the Hebrew Bible, or the Septuagint, and the collection of first-century writings that would come to be called the New Testament."[114] Winslow believes that this approach is also the case concerning Nazianzen's writings. "We see here in Gregory's language a recognizable conflation of two views, the biblical and the Platonic. . . . Gregory in no way indicates that these two views are incompatible, but blends them together in such a way as to draw, as he sees it, upon the best from each of the two traditions."[115] Gregory of Nyssa was considered the deeper thinker over his brother, Basil. He "gave greater attention to philosophical difficulties posed by the biblical narrative."[116]

At the same time, Basil made it clear that he based his faith and life in the Scriptures. In his *Preface on the Judgement of God*, he tells us, "I was reared from the very beginning by Christian parents. From them I learned even in babyhood the Holy Scriptures which led me to a knowledge of the truth."[117] The theological framework of the Cappadocians shaped daily life. A follower of Christ was expected to live life in a holy manner. Basil defines this holy life in his *Ascetical Works*.

> Knowledge of holy living is knowledge of meekness and humility. Humility is the imitation of Christ; highmindedness and boldness and shamelessness, the imitation of the Devil. Become an imitator of Christ, not of Anti-Christ; of God and not the

112. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 180.

113. Ibid.

114. Bassett, *Holiness Teaching*, 1:127.

115. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 173. "To this extent, at least, Gregory's description of the heavenly life parallels his 'theoretical' definition of Paradise in *Oration on Theophany 38.12*" (PG 36:324B–D) (SC 358).

116. Wilken, *Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 144.

117. Basil, *Preface on the Judgment of God* (PG 31) (FC, 37).

> adversary of God; of the Master, not the fugitive slave; of the merciful One, not the merciless; of the lover, not the enemy, of mankind; of the inmates of the bridal chamber, not the inhabitants of darkness.[118]

Basil's words summarize his teaching, "Let us carefully endeavour, then, in every work only to do the will of God, and so by remembering this we shall attain to union with God."[119]

Nyssen believed that this imitation of Christ in our daily lives was part of a salvific process, which helped us become transformed into the image of God. In his writing *On Perfection* he states "that we may become the Image by true imitation of the beauty of the Archetype, as Paul did, who by his virtuous life became an imitator of Christ."[120] This leads us to an important question within the study. Is the image of God present in woman? Is *theosis* possible for women?

## Image of God

Both Basil and Nyssen provide us with thoughts on the topic of the image of God. Basil's *Homily on Psalm 1* provides us with insight into his thinking.[121] Horowitz interpreted Basil as having a "clear-cut declaration that the *image of God* is a spiritual gift shared equally by men and women."[122] Nyssen highlights his thoughts in *On the Making of Man*,[123] revealing he was "hesitant to give an opening to the heretical viewpoint which had seen propagation as a characteristic of the Trinitarian Godhead; thus he did not like the notion that the image was male and female, which to him implied the prototype was male and female."[124] Interestingly, Clark believes that Nyssen's *De Vita Macrinae* paints Macrina as a living example of a human being in the image of God.[125] This would beg the question as to whether he saw Macrina as being asexual, because of her life of virginity. Their thoughts on

118. Basil, *Ascetical Discourse* (PG 46) (FC, 30–31).

119. Morison, *St. Basil and His Rule* (LR 5.3), 27.

120. Keenan, "De Professione Christiana and De Perfectione," 196. Nyssen, *DP* (PG 46:272A–B). English trans., Nyssen, *DP* (PG 46:249), in Bassett, *Holiness Teaching*, 127–36.

121. Basil, *Homily on Psalm 1* (PG 29:216D–217A).

122. Horowitz, "Image of God in Man," 196.

123. Nyssen, *DHO* 16 (PG 44:185b–c). Cf. *DHO* 22 (PG 44:204–9) (*NPNF2* 5:747–830).

124. Horowitz, "Image of God in Man," 197.

125. Clark, "Holy Women, Holy Words," 428. See also Nyssen, *DHO* 22 (PG 44:204).

this subject appear, at first glance, to be contradictory and will need further consideration.

For the Cappadocians, asceticism plays a special role in *theosis*, which included specific biblical practices. Many young people in the fourth century chose the life of asceticism. Specifically, young women left the world for a life of virginity as the *bride of Christ*. Nyssen expresses his view in *De Virginitate*.[126] Notably, his sister Macrina dominates the work *De Vita Macrinae* to "represent the ideal of ascetic piety."[127] In his discourse *De Virginitate*, Nyssen paints virginity as "the central virtue through which man perfects himself and reaches his goal which is participation in the purity and incorruptibility of God."[128] Much modern scholarship has focused on the lives of these virgins, and feminist writing is divided over whether asceticism was beneficial for the women or not.[129] Sheldrake's conclusion is that women suffered more than men as a result of this emphasis on ascetic spirituality.[130] Van Dam is concerned that issues such as money and power have so dominated the discussion of female asceticism that we have lost the focus on "true religious piety."[131] "Once these modern analyses of virginity and continence begin to highlight issues of empowerment or suppression, they also become discussions of the cultural construction of gender and sex in antiquity. It is not surprising that modern scholarship has often transformed ancient virginity into an aspect of women's studies."[132] However, when the theological attitude of the Cappadocian Fathers is explored, their attitude is "much more positive than is often imagined."[133]

Macrina becomes the model of virginity in Nyssen's hagiographical document, *De Vita Macrinae*. The biography is written in the form of a letter to his friend Olympius. Here we learn much detail about the life of this distinguished family, as well as the character of Gregory. Nyssen ascribes to Macrina "the secret name of Thecla," thus depicting "his sister's life as following in the tradition of the great virgin saint."[134] While Nyssen has provided us with his philosophical thoughts on virginity in *De Virginitate*,

126. Nyssen, *DV* (PG 45:317–416) (SC 119) (GNO VIII.I).

127. Smith, "Just and Reasonable Grief."

128. Nyssen, *DV* (FC, 4).

129. Leclerc, *Singleness of Heart*, 26.

130. Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 74.

131. Van Dam, *Families and Friends*, 84.

132. Ibid.

133. Beagon, "Cappadocian Fathers, Women and Ecclesiastical Politics."

134. Smith, "Just and Reasonable Grief," 65. For more on Thecla, see Barrier *Acts of Paul and Thecla*; and *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, trans. Jones.

it is in *De Vita Macrinae* that we find practical application. He equates her life of virginity, separation from social obligations and the desires of the flesh, "with the eschatological life of incorruptibility through participation in God's incorruptible nature."[135] Her day-to-day life is a "proleptic participation in the angelic life of the saints at the resurrection."[136]

Derek Kruger examines Nyssen's *De Vita Macrinae*, believing that the text itself becomes a holy relic, "a witness to her saintly life, held in the author's hands. Materializing her memory, text substitutes for body."[137] Through the text itself, we see the relationship to deification, and through the narrative, Gregory brings us to a point of transformation and unification. Macrina has been transformed during her life, and is now united to Christ. As she reaches the point of death, she says her evening prayers. Macrina quotes Psalm 141: "Let my prayer be counted as an incense offering before your face, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice."[138] So her life, that of a virgin, has been and is a sacrifice to God.

Interestingly, in the Cappadocians' writings about their female relatives, Macrina and Theosebia are the only two who live lives of virginity.[139] Concern exists that the focus on these virgins, or *Brides of Christ*, has taken attention away from the real center of holiness or *theosis*. While there was a growing emphasis on asceticism, according to Brown, "The Christian household and the local church remained the *loci* of the female quest for holiness, as they had been, for men and women alike, in the earlier centuries of the church."[140] According to Sheldrake, we have, for too long, allowed holiness to be defined in the *clerical-monastic* role, or that of virginity, rather than in "the Christian life as a whole."[141] Within the life of the church, a priority was placed on the *spiritual* over *material*, resulting in a suspicion of human sexuality.[142] According to Sheldrake, "The flesh and involvement in material things were associated with original sin. It was difficult to conceive of the possibility of saintliness *through* marriage or labour in the fields!"[143]

135. Smith, "Just and Reasonable Grief," 67.

136. Ibid., 66.

137. Kruger, "Writing and the Liturgy," 504.

138. Nyssen, *DVM* (SC 178) (GNO VIII.I) (FC, 181); (Ps 141:2 NIV).

139. It could be argued that her mother, Emmelia, could be included here, since after becoming widowed, chose to live a life of celibacy and asceticism with Macrina.

140. Brown, *Body and Society*, 262.

141. Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 68.

142. Ibid.

143. Ibid., 70.

Therefore, the position of these married women within the texts of the Cappadocians thickens the plot.

Gregory and Basil's grandmother, Macrina the Elder, as well as their mother, Emmelia, are referenced in their writings. In *Epistle* 204 and 233, Basil refers to the teaching which he received from his grandmother, Macrina.[144] In *De Vita Macrinae* Nyssen tells us of the life of Macrina, and his mother, Emmelia. Gregory of Nazianzus also tells us of the married women within his family, specifically his mother, Nonna, and his sister Gorgonia. In his *Oration* 8, *On His Sister Gorgonia*,[145] we learn much about his sister. As we are introduced to Nonna, we discover exactly how deep an imprint her life made on the family. His father, Gregory, became a Christian specifically from her persuasive and long-reaching influence. As these women have come to the attention of feminist historians, new questions have been raised. Cameron notes that Gorgonia was a wife and a mother and yet says, "She, too, is praised for leading a life of such chastity and restraint that she virtually overcame the taint of the married state."[146] While that may be true, eventually Nazianzen goes on to compare Gorgonia with Solomon's woman of Proverbs 31. In the panegyric, Gregory describes "his sister as the personification of many of the virtues conventionally associated with reputable women."[147]

It becomes obvious that the women were very present in the lives of the Cappadocian Fathers. This brought about challenges for them because, according to Cameron, "There was no simple way in which the Fathers of the fourth century could write about women, and there is no simple way in which the real women can be recaptured."[148] At the same time she also suggests that there is no way for the Fathers' writing not to have been affected by their relationships with real women.[149] These real women become living examples of the theological concepts of the day with which the Cappadocians were wrestling. One of these concepts was theosis, and Winslow reminds us that all of Nazianzen's writing is infused with theosis: "There is no part in Gregory's writings, whether theological, Christological or soteriological, whether contemplative, pastoral or ascetical, in which this constant concern for theosis is not a major motif, a motif by which we today are the more

144. Basil, *Ep.* 204, *To the Neocaesarcans* (PG 32:745) (Deferrari, LCL); Basil, *Ep.* 223 (PG 32:820) (Deferrari, LCL).

145. Nazianzen, *Or.* 8 (PG 35:789).

146. Cameron, "Virginity as Metaphor, 197. See Nazianzen, *Or.* 8.

147. Van Dam, *Families and Friends*, 93. Nazianzen, *Or.* 8.19.

148. Cameron, "Virginity as Metaphor," 200.

149. Ibid.

able faithfully to interpret his thought."[150] This motif of theosis, presumably, would include his relationship with his mother and sister. Finally, Winslow leaves us with this thought:

> Yet we must conclude that the constant reference to *theosis* made by Gregory throughout his writings, be they on whatever subject or in whatever context, indicates that it is more properly understood as a *theological* term. That is, it helps us the better to know (1) who God is, (2) what God has done for us, and therefore (3) who we are and can be.[151]

The three Cappadocian Fathers' theological thought and development was greatly intertwined and therefore one must also conceive that if theosis infused Nazianzen's writing, it infused the writing of Basil and Nyssen as well. The presence of the women within their writings as examples of deification help us better know who God is, what God has done for us, and the hope of what we can become. The women become examples, not just for the Cappadocians, but all of humanity. We are able to agree with Derek Kruger: "Like the bread [of the Eucharist], the *Life of Macrina*, is distributable; and like its consecration, repeatable."[152] It is not only the *Life of Macrina* which is distributable and repeatable, but the lives of all seven of the Cappadocian Mothers found within the writings of Basil, Gregory and Gregory.



150. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 178.
151. Ibid., 199.
152. Kruger, "Writing and the Liturgy," 510.