

A HISTORICAL-CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE PLAY  
CHRISTUS PATIENS,  
traditionally attributed to Gregory of Nazianzus

by

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ABSTRACT

A historical-critical evaluation of the play  
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Scholarly discussion of the *Christus patiens* (Χριστὸς πάσχων) has been dominated for decades by a dispute between defenders and opponents of the notion that its author was Gregory of Nazianzus. No specific alternative suggestion has enjoyed general acceptance; yet the opinion seems to persist, that the play is a product of the 11th or the 12th century. Even after the detailed defence of the play's authenticity by A. Tuilier (1969), the opponents of Gregorian authorship keep reiterating the same arguments which have for so long been feeding the dispute, and there seems to be a total lack of consensus concerning the relative validity of different kinds of arguments pertaining to this question.

In this study, a conclusion regarding the issue of the play's authenticity is based on a detailed examination of evidence gained from parallels between the play and different Byzantine authors. This examination of parallels, though, does not provide an illustration of the general literary features of the play. Therefore, the chapters dealing with these parallels are preceded by others, in which different aspects of the play's literary character are illustrated and discussed. These chapters reveal that the author of the *Christus patiens* adheres (though not slavishly) to the basic conventions of the Attic theatre; that he has knowledge of

Euripides going beyond the mere copying of scattered lines of verse; is well versed in rhetorical technique, and exhibits a sensitivity to poetic balance and harmony; draws on Scripture for his subject material, while expressing this in poetic language quite distinct from the phraseology of his sources; is careful to adhere closely to the canonical version of the Passion, though allowing himself sporadic excursions inspired by apocryphal sources; and uses poetry as the medium for expressing his own faith and theological insight.

These observations do not constitute independent proof of the authenticity of the play; but they also do not argue against the probability that Gregory of Nazianzus may indeed be the author of the *Christus patiens*, as the manuscripts attest.

External evidence - which is supposed in this study to take precedence over internal evidence regarding the play's (in)authenticity - independently witness to the fact that the play existed, and was known, long before the 11th century. Thus the opinion which was popularized through the authority of Krumbacher, is revealed to be a flight of the imagination.

Romanos explicitly attributes the play to "the Theologian". However, this does not irrefutably prove the authenticity of the *Christus patiens*; it seems to prove only that the attribution of this play to Gregory of Nazianzus was accepted without suspicion by Romanos.

Accordingly, the final conclusion of this study is that the earlier (i.e. 4th century) dating seems certain, while the authorship of Gregory of Nazianzus seems quite probable.

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## SAMEVATTING

'n Histories-kritiese beoordeling van die tragedie  
*Christus patiens*,  
wat toegeskryf word aan Gregorius Nazianzenus.

deur

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Kritiese bespreking van die *Christus patiens* (Χριστὸς πάσχων) word vir dekades reeds oorheers deur 'n dispuut tussen die voorstanders en teenstanders van die gedagte dat die outeur Gregorius van Nazianzus was. Hoewel geen spesifieke ander voorstel algemene aanvaarding geniet het nie, blyk dit dat baie kritici vas glo die drama dateer uit die 11de of 12de eeu. Selfs ná A. Tuilier (1969) se breedvoerige verdediging van die outeurskap van Gregorius, hou die teenstanders van hierdie gedagte steeds vol met dieselfde argumente as wat so lank al die dispuut aan die gang hou. Boonop lyk dit nie of daar enige konsensus bestaan oor die betreklike geldigheid van verskeie soorte argumente i.v.m. hierdie vraagstuk nie.

Die gevolgtrekking oor die outentisiteit van die drama wat in hierdie studie bereik word, berus op 'n noukeurige ontleding van die getuienis wat verkry word uit ooreenkomste tussen die drama en verskillende Bisantynse outeurs. Hierdie ontleding van parallelle bied ons egter nie 'n duidelike beeld van die algemene letterkundige eienskappe van die drama nie; daarom word vooraf eers 'n paar hoofstukke gewy aan die bespreking en verduideliking van die letterkundige aard van die *Christus patiens*. Uit hierdie bespreking blyk dit dat die outeur die grondliggende konvensies van die Attiese teaterwese navolg,

hoewel nie slaafs nie; dat sy kennis van Euripides verder strek as die blote oorskrywe van 'n aantal versreëls; dat hy bedrewe is in die retoriese tegniek, en 'n fyn aanvoeling het vir poëtiese ewewig en harmonie; dat hy Bybelse materiaal as roustof gebruik, maar dit tot uitdrukking laat kom in digterlike taal wat opmerklik verskil van die woordkeuse en styl van sy bronne; dat hy hom versigtig hou by die kanoniese weergawe van die Lydensgebeure, hoewel hy hom dit hier en daar veroorloof om apokriewe materiaal te integreer in die drama; en dat die poësie die natuurlike medium is waardeur sy eie geloof en teologiese insigte tot uiting kom.

Hierdie waarnemings is geen onafhanklike bewys van die drama se outentisiteit nie; maar dit staan ook geensins in die pad van die moontlikheid dat Gregorius van Nazianzus wel die outeur van die *Christus patiens* kan wees nie.

Eksterne getuienis - wat volgens 'n voorveronderstelling van hierdie studie die swaarste weeg wanneer dit gaan om die outentisiteit van die drama - bied onafhanklike aanduidings dat die *Christus patiens* bestaan het, en ook bekend was, lank voor die elfde eeu. Dus blyk dit dat die mening wat op gesag van veral Krumbacher algemeen aanvaar is, bloot 'n vlug van die verbeelding was.

Romanos het die drama in soveel woorde toegeskryf aan "die Teoloog" - oftewel Gregorius van Nazianzus. Dit bewys egter nie onteenseglik die outentisiteit van die drama nie; slegs dat Romanos geen bedenkinge gehad het oor die outeurskap van Gregorius nie.

Gevolgtrek is die slotsom van hierdie studie dat die vroeë datering van die stuk - d.w.s. in die vierde eeu - beslis korrek lyk, terwyl Gregorius heel waarskynlik die outeur was.

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