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THE THOUGHT OF GREGORY THE GREAT

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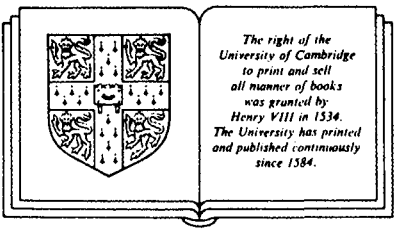

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PREFACE

In reading Augustine we accompany the author on a private journey to a solution which he often finds by making a pioneering expedition into the territory, and where he sometimes strikes the unexpected. Gregory the Great was not a thinker of Augustine's sort. His mind was practical. He wanted to teach men how to live and to pray, and his theology is presented within a framework of spiritual and pastoral instruction. But in his way, Gregory presents us with something altogether more finished. His own theological and philosophical position is so clear and settled for him that he is able to assume it in his writing and preaching and direct his efforts to the task of teaching his flock to live a better Christian life on assumptions he holds to be absolute.

Augustine's struggle with the problems he discusses has borne fruit in a set of settled opinions for Gregory; his threads have become a closely-woven fabric. Much besides Augustine's achievement went into Gregory's picture of things: the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon (451) in particular gave him confidence that things were, doctrinally speaking, settled for all Christians for all time.

Gregory conveys a sense that a preliminary period of discussion and debate and wrestling is now, for all practical purposes, over and, whether or not he proved to be right, that is something new.

He communicated to the mediaeval world a comfortable and, it must be admitted, a dilute Augustinianism, together with something of his own by way of synthesis. He struck a note which was found acceptable. His influence was enormous. But because of the difficulty of pointing to ideas or principles as distinctively his, it has been hard to characterise or weigh that influence. By drawing a portrait of the man in the midst of his preoccupations we can, however, see where he placed a consistent emphasis. It is clear what he thought important.

His sense of the acute difficulty of living a Christian life which is also a busy life full of distractions echoes through mediaeval monastic writers. Gregory, more perhaps than any other early author to speak

on the theme, gave a direction to mediaeval thinking about the relation of the active to the contemplative life – not least because he brought together so much of what had been said by others before him. He also placed an emphasis upon the duty of the Christian who held a pastoral office to preach and interpret the Bible for others. Here, supremely, the contemplative life came forth in action. That had its practical consequences in the Middle Ages, but more importantly if we are considering the influence of Gregory's thought, it made him take stock of Augustine's teaching on the nature of language and of the subject-matter of speculative and moral theology. It made him the complete theologian in a style which he printed firmly on his successors until the rise of the universities altered the picture at the end of the twelfth century: a theology in which discussion takes place in the context of exegesis and exegesis is carried out by expounding aloud to a live audience.

This study concentrates upon the two areas of Gregory's own concentration: his attempt to bring active and contemplative together and his 'theology' in this Gregorian and early mediaeval sense of the term. Gregory the active pastor was also bishop of Rome at a time when that involved him in a great deal of administrative detail of a secular sort as well as within the Church. He took these responsibilities with the utmost seriousness; he found them inseparable from his spiritual duties; he saw them in the context of an overall strategy for the right ordering of life in the world. The practical and political Gregory is, however, treated rather briefly here, for two reasons: Professor Robert Markus' forthcoming book will say what needs to be said on the matter; and here the intention is to allow Gregory's thought to shape the discourse. I have therefore attempted to do no more than indicate where the practical balances the spiritual for Gregory. By approaching him by way of his writings in this manner we can perhaps best see the way in which he himself regarded the duality which was so thoroughly integrated in his life. For in everything he did the unity of his endeavour is plain.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

AMBROSE	
De Jacob et Vita Beata	*De Jacob et Vita Beata*, ed. C. Schenkl, CSEL, 32 (Leipzig, 1897).
De Officiis	*De Officiis Clericorum*, ed. R. O. Gilbert (Leipzig, 1839).
Hexaemeron	*Hexaemeron*, ed. C. Schenkl, CSEL, 32 (Leipzig, 1897).
Isaac vel Anima	*Isaac vel Amina*, ed. C. Schenkl, CSEL, 32 (Leipzig, 1897).
Apuleius, *De Platone et Eius Dogmate*	*De Platone et Eius Dogmate*, ed. P. Thomas (Leipzig, 1908).
Augustine, *En. Ps.*	*Enarrationes in Psalmos*, CCSL, 38–40 (Turnhout, 1956).
CASSIODORUS	
Inst.	*Institutiones*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1937).
Preface to Psalms	*Preface to the Psalms*, CCSL, 97 (Turnhout, 1958).
Variae	*Variae*, MGH, *Auctores Antiquissimi*, XII (1894).
CCSL	*Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Turnhout).
Cicero, *De Nat. Deorum*	*De Natura Deorum*, ed. H. Rackham (London, 1933)
Coll. Cist.	*Collectanea Cisterciensia*
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna).
Dudden	F. H. Dudden, *Gregory the Great: His Place in History and Thought* (London, 1905).

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D	*Dialogues*, *PL* 77 and introduction by A. de Vogüé, *SC*, 251 (Paris, 1978); Book II in *PL 66*.
Ev.	*Homiliae in Evangelia*, *PL* 76.
Ez.	*Homiliae in Hiezechichelem Prophetam*, ed. M. Adriaen, *CCSL*, 142 (Turnhout, 1971).
In Cant.	*Expositio in Canticum Canticorum*, ed. P. Verbraken, *CCSL*, 144 (Turnhout, 1963).
In Reg.	*In Librum Primum Regum Expositionum Libra VI*, ed. P. Verbraken, *CCSL*, 144 (Turnhout, 1963).
J	*Moralia in Job*, ed. M. Adriaen, *CCSL*, 143, 143A (Turnhout, 1979); Books XXIIIff in *PL* 76.
Letter	*Registrum Epistolarum*, ed. D. Norberg, *CCSL*, 140A (Turnhout, 1982).
R	*Regula Pastoralis*, *PL* 77.
Jerome, *Letter*	*Letters*, ed. I. Hilberg, *CSEL*, 54–6 (Vienna, 1910–18), 3 vols.
Keil	H. Keil, ed., *Grammatici Latini* (Leipzig, 1855–80), 8 vols.
Lubac	H. de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale; les quatre sens de l'Écriture* (Paris, 1959), 2 vols.
Macrobius, *Somn. Scip.*	*Commentarium in Somnium Scipionis*, ed. F. Eyssenhardt (Leipzig, 1893).
MGH	*Monumenta Germaniae Historica.*
PL	*Patrologia Latina.*
Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*	*Institutio Oratoria*, ed. H. E. Butler (repr. London, 1969), and ed. M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1970).
SC	*Sources chrétiennes*
TC	*Theodosiani Libri XVI*, ed. P. M. Meyer (3rd edn, Berlin, 1962).

INTRODUCTION

GREGORY'S LIFE

Gregory sometimes speaks of his personal anxieties and preoccupations in contexts where he reveals some details of his circumstances. In the letter he sent to Leander, bishop of Seville, sometime after 595,[1] with a copy of the *Moralia in Job* which he had begun to compose while Leander was with him in Constantinople during the period after 579, he tells him of the difficulties he has been facing. He complains that it is far from easy to live spiritually as he would wish when he has so many responsibilities. He had felt it his duty to obey the then Pope's request[2] that he should come out of the monastery he had founded and live in the world and work for the Church, first as Deacon, afterwards as an emissary of the Pope in Constantinople; and now as bishop of Rome himself; he talks of the loss of monastic quiet, of his experience of the tensions of public life for the Christian; he recollects how he first came to expound the book of Job to the little circle of Latin-speakers who were with him at Constantinople. In the *Dialogues*, written soon after he became Pope in 593–4, he describes how the brothers who live with him in his household (*familiariter*) have pressed him to write for them some account of the miracles performed by holy men in Italy (*D*: I, Prol.9). He had told some stories of this sort in the Homilies on the Gospels which he had preached a year or two earlier,[3] and he had continued to preach to a popular audience on Sundays and feast days.[4] As he thinks about the saintly lives of others, he reflects sorrowfully on the way in which his own pursuit of holiness has been made more difficult by the loss of peace and leisure for contemplation since he became Pope. In the Homilies on Ezekiel, his awareness of the imminent danger of the Lombard invasion is rarely far from the surface of his mind.

[1] On the dating of this letter, see *CCSL*, 143.vi.

[2] J. Richards, *Consul of God: The Life and Times of Gregory the Great* (London, 1980), p. 37.

[3] A. de Vogüé, *SC*, 251, p. 59, n. 15, gives a series of parallels between the *Dialogues* and the Homilies on the Gospels.

[4] P. Batiffol, *Saint Grégoire le Grand* (Paris, 1928), p. 149.

Compared with the wealth of autobiographical detail and the intimacy of Augustine's *Confessions* this is meagre. But it is no less a genuinely felt statement of his feelings on Gregory's part for being in rather general terms and for being frequently repeated in his writings without such reference to time and place. Gregory had a capacity for generalising from his own experiences to what he regarded as spiritual commonplaces, truths of the Christian life which would be useful to others. In this he is closer to Augustine than the lack of a Gregorian *Confessions* would suggest. But while Augustine's interest, active bishop though he was, lay above all in communicating the insights he had gained into the workings of his own mind and heart in the light of his Christian faith, Gregory the administrator and preacher and rector of the Church had his attention perforce turned rather more outward, and his constant theme in these autobiographic passages is the need for a duality of endeavour in the living of a fully Christian life. Except in his letters, he says little beyond this about the events of his life, and the earliest *Vita* was written in the first or second decade of the eighth century by a monk of Whitby in Northumbria.[5]

What follows is a summary of the principal events, intended to serve as a list to be referred to in later chapters. Biographical and historical studies are listed in the Bibliography.[6]

PRINCIPAL EVENTS OF GREGORY'S LIFE

Born in Rome, c. 550, of wealthy parents of senatorial rank, Gregory grew up in his father's house on the Caelian hill, received the education usual for his rank, and became a member of the civil service.

The Lombard invaders were meanwhile passing down into north Italy; by 571 they had conquered the valley of the Po and by 572 they had seized Benevento and Spoleto. By 573 Rome itself was in danger. In 573 Gregory was Prefect of the City, the highest civil dignitary in Rome, president of the Senate with supreme civil jurisdiction within a hundred miles of Rome, in charge of grain supplies, aqueducts, sewers, finance.

In 574 he sold his patrimony in Sicily and founded six monasteries there. He gave the rest of his patrimony to the poor. He kept his father's house on the Caelian and established it as a monastery for himself and some

[5] B. Colgrave, ed., *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great* (Kansas, 1968); see pp. 56–9 on the relation between Bede's account and that of the Whitby writer.

[6] On Gregory's life, see Dudden; P. Batiffol, *St Gregory the Great* (London, 1929); and more recently and for a bibliography, Richards, *Consul of God*.

brothers, dedicated to St Andrew. There he lived not as abbot but as a plain monk.

In 579 Pope Pelagius (or possibly his predecessor) took him from the monastery and made him seventh Deacon, with practical responsibilities for the welfare of the Christian community in Rome.

C. 579 the Pope sent him as his secretary to Constantinople, to try to make the Emperor understand the danger in which Italy stood and to persuade him to send help; the Emperor's Exarch at Ravenna was giving no assistance.

In 586–90 Gregory was still a papal Deacon.

In 590 bubonic plague struck Rome.

In the same year Gregory was made Pope.

It fell to him to protect the people of Rome against the Lombards, since the civil authorities were taking no action. In 590 the valley of the Po was ruled by Arian Lombards and in 593 the Lombards briefly besieged Rome. During 592–3 Gregory concluded a peace with the Lombards, more or less independently of the Exarch of Ravenna, the Emperor's representative in the West, who failed to take a firm line.

During the last decade of his life Gregory found himself for practical purposes more or less on his own in the management of affairs. He appointed governors to the cities of Italy and organised the financing of the war and supplies; he ran the Church's estates; he conducted diplomacy with the rulers of Europe; he kept order while the Byzantine authorities proved themselves weak and unreliable.

Gregory was ill for much of this period; from 598 until his death in 604 he was largely confined to bed by acute pain, although he got up when he could to celebrate Mass. He worked on indefatigably to the end.

GREGORY'S WRITINGS

During his time at St Andrews, Gregory seems to have preached on the first book of Kings, the prophets, Proverbs and the Song of Songs. These lecture-sermons were taken down in the form of notes as they were delivered by one of the monks. Only the material on Kings and two Homilies on the Song of Songs survive.

At Constantinople Gregory began to expound the book of Job; he continued the work when he returned to Rome and the *Moralia in Job* was revised and completed about 591, when he was Pope. At Constantinople he also began to think towards the work which eventually became the *Regula Pastoralis*; the book was finished during the early years of his papacy.

In 591, when he was too ill to deliver them in person, he composed the sermons on the Gospels.
During the period when the Lombards briefly besieged Rome, Gregory was giving his Homilies on Ezekiel.
The *Dialogues* were composed in 593–4.
In 601 Gregory published his Homilies on Ezekiel in two books.
Throughout the period of his Papacy he was writing letters, mostly on practical matters, but containing a great many statements about his position on the issues with which they are concerned.

Gregory speaks of the 'Fathers' of the Old Testament, who saw the Creator with 'uplifted souls' (*J*: IX.xxxii.48, p. 489.8). This vision gives them high authority as prophets (*J*: XVI.liii.66, p. 837; IX.xxxi.47, p. 489). He does not attribute the same standing of Fathers to the Christian writers who had gone before him, but he treats a number of them as having some authority. He had a substantial knowledge of Augustine, whom he recommends to one of his correspondents (*Letter* X.16, *CCSL*, p. 845.30, to Innocent, Prefect of Africa, July 600). Among the Greeks, he mentions the Cappadocians Gregory Nazianzen and Basil; he knew of Ignatius of Antioch, Epiphanius, Cyprian, Hilary of Poitiers, Jerome and Ambrose.[1]

It is difficult to judge how common such knowledge would have been. Gregory says that he searched in vain for Eusebius' *Gesta Martyrum* in the Lateran and other Roman libraries.[2] There were evidently difficulties in obtaining certain works. On the other hand, a full picture of the intellectual life of Cassiodorus' day earlier in the sixth century indicates an active sponsorship of authors who were commissioned to write on suitable texts, the collecting of subscriptions to pay for the copying of manuscripts. Cassiodorus could look to a readership among the administrative class for whom his letters were intended, and the monks for whom he wrote his *Institutiones*.[3] But for Cassiodorus, too, much depended upon his good fortune in finding manuscripts. 'It is said,' he reports, 'that holy Ambrose has composed a commentary on the Prophets in his usual elegant style; but I have not yet been able in any way to find it' (*Inst.* I.vii.2, p. 29). He asks

[1] See O. Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altKirchlichen Literatur*, V (Freiburg, 1932), p. 285; R. Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, III (Leipzig, 1913); L. Eisenhofer, 'Augustinus in den Evangelien-Homilien Gregors des Grossen', *Festgabe A. Knöpfer gewidmet* (Freiburg, 1917), pp. 56–66.

[2] J. P. McClain, *The Doctrine of Heaven in the Writings of St Gregory the Great* (Washington, 1956), pp. 10–11.

[3] H. Kirkby, 'The Scholar and his Public', *Boethius*, ed. M. T. Gibson (Oxford, 1981), pp. 51–3.

his monks to try. He tells them with some triumph that he has discovered an annotated copy of the Epistles of St Paul; the author of the commentary is not named, but it seems to him excellent (*Inst.* I.viii.9, p. 30). Another copy of the Pauline Epistles has been found, which is said to have Jerome's commentary (*Inst.* I.viii.8).

This was a world where the materials of Christian scholarship could not be taken for granted, and where Gregory can be seen to be making use of authorities in a way peculiarly of his time. He takes the Bible as his supreme authority and it provided him with material for the bulk of what he wrote and preached. Beneath it stand statements made by the ecumenical Councils, which he takes as the foundation of catholic formulations of doctrine. For the rest, he draws on whatever has been said by earlier Christian authors as he needs it, but so often without acknowledgement that the question of his knowledge of many individual authors remains uncertain. His method was to write in his own words rather than to quote the words of others, because the earlier Fathers did not yet have the status for him that they were to have for later generations. (He was himself to become one of the last of those to whom it was natural to refer as Fathers.[4]) Yet he was not obliged to do so much pioneering thinking as Augustine, and we do not find him struggling with a problem as Augustine does. There is a calmer air, an air of exposition rather than investigation. Gregory could take for granted, if not a library of source-materials, at least an established body of teaching, a full theology whose principles can safely be subsumed in his writings because he can expect his readers and listeners to grasp their essentials.

Secular learning raised a difficulty for those who were the leaders of thought in the Church. Cassiodorus (c. 485–c. 582) recognised great enthusiasm for it; most people believed that it would make them knowledgeable and advance them in life. It grieved him to think that no Christian teaching went on in the public schools of Rome when secular authors were being given such distinguished exposition (*Inst.* I, Pref.i, p. 3). He himself wanted to see Christian schools where those who studied would be helped to a heavenly not an earthly wisdom. He hoped for a time to be able to raise money by subscription to bring such schools into existence, but he failed to gain enough support. His solution in the end was to set up a school of his own in old age, in

[4] After Gregory, only Bede commonly falls into the class of Fathers for mediaeval authors, until the twelfth century, when a number of *florilegia* include quotations from Anselm of Canterbury, Hugh of St Victor and Bernard of Clairvaux among passages from Augustine, Gregory and other Fathers.

his monastery of Vivarium, where he provided for the study of both secular and Christian materials. For him there was perhaps no real conflict of purpose between the two. He simply wanted to redress a balance and give Christian teaching its proper place, as something far more important than secular learning, and deserving a substantial section of his encyclopaedia the *Institutiones* to itself.

Others – Jerome (c. 342–420) for example in his nightmare picture of himself as not a Christian but a Ciceronian – had seen a danger here. Gregory, too, seems to have had some difficulties. In his remarks on the Song of Songs he describes the wisdom of the world as a wine which makes the mind drunk because it renders it incapable of understanding humility (*quia ab intellectu humilitatis alienam reddit*) (*In Cant.* 16, p. 18.322–5). The philosophers are drunk with this wine, but the Holy Church despises it and prefers the 'most humble incarnation of the Lord's preaching'. In a letter to bishop Desiderius of Vienne, written in 601, Gregory puts forward the same view that secular and Christian learning have different purposes and cannot be reconciled:

> A report has come to us that you are lecturing on secular literature to certain pupils. This fills me with such sorrow and profound disgust that my former opinion of you has changed. . .
>
> For the same mouth cannot sing the praises of Jupiter and the praises of Christ. (*Letter* XI.34, *CCSL*, p. 922.4–9)

Perhaps it was Desiderius' position as bishop which made these literary appreciation classes so intolerable to Gregory, for we find him in more moderate vein in his commentary on I Kings, pointing out that although the learning to be obtained from secular books is not directly beneficial to the saints in their spiritual conflict, yet, when it is united to the study of Holy Scripture, men attain to a profounder knowledge of Scripture itself. The liberal arts ought, therefore, to be cultivated, in order that we may gain through them a more accurate knowledge of God's Word (*In Reg.* V.1, p. 419.13–17). The problem was one of balance, of keeping secular learning which was so much better provided for within the system of education still current in Gregory's Rome, from becoming more seductive to young Christians than Bible reading. There was still much that was pagan in Gregory's Christian world, and he can only have seen his responsibility to keep Christian study alive as a working necessity, a continuing battle.

An example of the care with which this had to be done is his discussion of 'mathematics'. Contemporary *mathematici* were astrologers. Pagan magical practice made use of numbers in various ways.

Writing on the Star of Bethlehem, Gregory discusses what the *mathematici* say about the *virtus*, the power of constellations, to affect men and events, and tries to show how absurd their argument is. He goes through the signs of the Zodiac, pointing out further foolishnesses.

Yet Gregory himself makes free use of number-symbolism; he believes it to be used by the Scriptures themselves. 'What is designated by the number seven except the perfection of active life?' he asks, referring to the text, 'Six years he served and the seventh he went free' (*Ez.* I.iii.11, p. 39.202–5). Thirteen is the 'perfect age' (*aetas perfecta*), the age of maturity and completeness, for at twelve Jesus sat in the Temple asking questions of the elders, and did not preach, for in his human nature he was a child (*Ez.* I.ii.3, p. 18.40–2). Again in the Homilies on Ezekiel he speaks of the perfection of the number six (which is the sum of its parts and also the number of days of creation), of the ten commandments and the way in which 60 (6 × 10) rightly (*recte*) signifies the perfection of works, and so on (*Ez.* II.v.12, p. 285).

What is the difference between astrological mathematical symbolism and that of Gregory? He often notes the 'appropriateness' of a symbolic usage (e.g. *Ez.* I.ii.9, p. 22.176–7), and here perhaps lies the key. In Scripture the Bible teaches by numbers in such a way that the numbers can be shown to be harmonious with events and to bring out points of note in connection with them. Astrologers say that the lives of men depend upon the stars. But men born at the same time do not have identical lives. It is clear that they are mistaken (*J*: XXXIII.x.9); the absurdity of their claim is as obvious as the crudity of their method. They take the numerical harmony of things to be an entailment of consequences. They hold that there is a causative relation between star-patterns and times and numbers, and the events on earth, and they try to see into the future by means of their art, looking illicitly for truths which God has not chosen to reveal to them. Theirs is, in other words, a wrong use of what Gregory believes to be a genuine scientific method.

Gregory allowed his own scientific curiosity some rein in contexts where he thought it a helpful way to enquire into mysteries. His science is the physics-with-metaphysics of the Greek tradition, moving from the spiritual to the physical world. How, for example, can the Spirit which fills all things be mobile and still? There is no difficulty, Gregory contends, if we remember that this description is adapted to our human understanding; the Spirit is absolutely still in himself; he only seems to be in motion in filling all things (*Ez.* I.v.10, p. 61.143–6). How could the resurrected body of Christ be both palpable and able to pass through doors; how could it be both solid matter and incorruptible (*Ev.* XXVI.1,

PL 76.1198)? Here again, the divine power makes things possible for God which are inconceivable to us. Such difficulties can, however, be a stumbling-block to faith. For example, some ask how if Christ raises the dead it can be possible that he died (*Ev.* VI.1, *PL* 76.1096). Others ask how spirits in hell can burn in fire, for fire can burn only corporeal things. Gregory tries to explain the mode of the burning (*D*: IV.29, *PL* 77.396C). He touches on the theory of vision in explaining how the soul sees (*D*: IV.6, *PL* 77.328). He reflects on the comparative density of air and clouds (*J*: XXVII.xli.68). He considers how the air makes the earth fruitful while the heavens govern the air in its turn (*J*: IV.xxix.55, p. 199). He makes an effort to do so not only because these matters interest him, but also because he considers it important that no one should have his faith damaged by puzzlement at these apparent paradoxes.

Greek philosophical ideas entered the Latin West by a number of routes.[5] Roman education had long aspired to the Greek in matters of philosophy (taken in the widest sense to include natural science, astronomy and medicine). Cicero had insisted that Latin was, in his own day, already an adequate vehicle for philosophical discourse, against some who doubted it; he believed that Latin now had a vocabulary to match that of Greek.[6] From at least the late second century, Greek thought was being brought together in a series of handbooks and encyclopaedias.[7] As a result of these developments, some general knowledge of Greek philosophical ideas was the common stock of educated Romans from at least Cicero's day. Groups of enthusiasts, like those in Milan in the fourth century when Augustine met them, sought out platonic writings for study and discussion: Manlius Theodorus gave Augustine some of Plotinus' *Enneads* to read, and Porphyry's *De Regressu Animae*.[8] With the decay of Greek in the West some scholars saw a need for translations; Jerome and Rufinus, and later Boethius, did their best to meet it.[9] The question of the extent of Gregory's knowledge of Greek remains a vexed one,[10] but there can be no doubt

[5] R. Klibansky's classic *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition during the Middle Ages* (London, 1939, 2nd edn. 1950), pp. 21–8, gives a list.

[6] Cicero, *De Nat. Deorum*, I.iv.

[7] P. R. L. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London, 1971), p. 17.

[8] P. Courcelle, *Late Latin Writers and their Greek Sources*, tr. H. E. Wedeck (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), pp. 138, 149–223 and 224–70.

[9] J. Petersen, 'Did Gregory the Great Know Greek?', *Studies in Church History*, 13 (1976), 122, and on Jerome's Greek studies, see Courcelle, *Late Latin Writers*, pp. 48–127. On Boethius, see H. Chadwick, *Boethius* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 69–74.

[10] Petersen, 'Did Gregory the Great Know Greek?', 124–34, perhaps overstates her case.

that he held Christian Greek thought to be important. When he had to combat the Eudoxian heresy he sent to Eulogius of Alexandria, who provided him with extracts from the Cappadocian Fathers who had crushed this heresy in the past.[11] It was at least in part by way of Christian authors that Gregory got his Greek philosophical notions, although he may be supposed to have had access to some at least of the Latin authors who had written about Greek thought: Cicero in the *De Natura Deorum*; Seneca's *Letters* (56, 65); Aulus Gellius' notes in the *Noctes Atticae*; Valerius Maximus' collection of *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*; Apuleius' *De Deo Socratis* and *De Platone et Eius Dogmate*; Macrobius, whose circle in the *Saturnalia* pride themselves on their philosophical culture like the Milan circle of Manlius Theodorus, and whose commentary on *Scipio's Dream* is crammed with Plotinus. Among Christian authors, Augustine was able to describe various philosophical schools in Book VIII of *The City of God*. Claudianus Mamertus can list the great philosophical schools of the Greek past; he mentions Plato's Ideas, the New Academy and its scepticism, Epicurus' atomic theory. Hilary of Poitiers (c. 315–67), too, can readily list the various views held about God by the *antiqui*. Ambrose of Milan, adapting Basil's *Hexaemeron*, talks about Plato's three *principia* (*deus*, *exemplar*, *materia*), in his own *Hexaemeron*. From the Greek Fathers Rufinus imported into Latin Origen's Christian Platonism and parts of the *Orationes* of Gregory Nazianzen.[12]

Gregory was not as important as Augustine in transmitting neoplatonic and other Greek philosophical notions as assumptions often held without question in the mediaeval centuries to be self-evident truths; but he conveyed a great many of them nevertheless. It may be that he did so the more effectively because he was far from uncritical of the philosophers. He speaks of the 'error of the Academicians', who tried to establish the single certainty that nothing is certain, and who required their disciples to believe the truth of their assertion that nothing is true (*J*: XXXIII.X.19). He points to the many who have

[11] Courcelle, *Late Latin Writers*, p. 412.

[12] For Latin authors on Greek ideas, see: Cicero, *Academica*, ed. H. Rackham (London, 1933), I.iv.17–19; Cicero, *De Nat. Deorum*, I.i, and x–xiiiff.; Seneca, *Letters*, ed. O. Hense (Leipzig, 1914), 56 and 65; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, ed. J. Hoskins (Leipzig, 1903), 2 vols., I.9.9–10, II.5, II.8, XIV.3, VII.10, VIII.8; Valerius Maximus, *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*, ed. C. Kempf (Leipzig, 1888); Apuleius, *De Deo Socratis* and *De Platone et Eius Dogmate*, ed. P. Thomas (Leipzig, 1908); Macrobius, *Somn. Scip.*, II.14; Claudianus Mamertus, *De Statu Animae*, ed. A. Engelbrecht (Vienna, 1885); Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate* I.3.4, I.5, *PL* 10.27–8; Ambrose, *Hexaemeron*, I.i, p. 3.1–17; Rufinus, *Orationum Gregorii Nazianzeni Novem Interpretatio*, ed. J. Wrobel and A. Engelbrecht, *CSEL*, 46 (Leipzig, 1910, repr. 1965), pp. 3.10ff and 275.14ff.

believed that if they behaved in a way that was honourable among men, they would be saved, and that they needed no Mediator between themselves and God (*J*: XVIII.xlv.73, pp. 937–8). But where the philosophers have taught a principle which is sound for Christians, he gives them credit.

There are some, he says, who have thought it a very high achievement of philosophical fortitude to feel no pain at the severest discipline; others feel the blows so deeply that they cry out uncontrollably. But he who strives to be truly 'philosophical', that is, to be a Christian philosopher, must hold to a middle way between these extremes, for true virtue is not dullness of heart and insensibility, any more than it is indulgence of weakness and fear. Job observed the 'rule of true philosophy' by keeping himself from either extreme (*J*: II.xvi.28–9, pp. 132–4). Gregory takes the teachings of philosophers or rejects them, as he does other secular learning, according to their usefulness to the Christian.

Accordingly, Gregory's systematic theology is shot through with Greek philosophical assumptions at the points we should expect: where he deals with the divine nature and attributes, with the Trinity and with the natures of created beings. These are the areas where Boethius had found it natural to bring philosophy and Christianity together not long before, in dealing with the subject-matter of *theologia* as he defines it.[13] It is an area in which Gregory does thinking of his own, over and above anything to be found in Augustine.

The most conspicuous example of independent work of this kind is Gregory's treatment of problems concerning the soul and the life to come in Book IV of the *Dialogues*: it is unique in his writings in its sustained treatment of a single chain of theological questions and in the way it brings together ideas gleaned from a variety of sources, Christian and secular, not as a ready-made confection, but as a dish made up from its ingredients before our eyes. And it does so in a way characteristic of the Gregorian synthesis: designed to instruct at a popular as well as a serious and scholarly level.

It must be said that Gregory's achievement in making his own way through the task of bringing together Greek philosophical thought and Christian thought on the subject of the soul appears strikingly crude in comparison with his treatment of matters where others have given him a lead (and it helps to make it plain how much he owed to

[13] For Boethius on *theologia*, see the opening of his *De Trinitate*, in *Theological Tractates*, ed. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand and S. J. Tester (London, repr. 1973).

Augustine in areas where he could follow him). But if we make allowance for his intention to make himself popularly understood, the result looks rather different. Gregory addresses himself to the questions put to him by Peter the Deacon in the person of the simple man who does not find abstractions easy to grasp. We may suppose them to be questions Gregory had actually been asked. If so, they were clearly put by men with a strong sense of the nearness of the supernatural world, good and evil, a sense almost universal in Gregory's day, among Christians as among pagans, and among the educated as among the simple. Peter's thrill of horror or excitement as he exclaims at the stories Gregory tells him is intended to echo in every reader.

Gregory attempts to fashion all this into an account of the life to come in which heaven and hell are brought alive in the mind's eye and men will be encouraged to live for heaven. He approaches the task in the early chapters of Book IV by two routes: discussing the nature of the soul like a philosopher and sketching the invisible as visibly as he can with pictures and images and signs. His starting-point is the insistence that saving faith requires a belief in invisible things; unless he accepts that such things exist, no man can grasp spiritual truths (*D*: IV.1, *PL* 77.317–18). He explains, in the Hermetic tradition,[14] that there are three kinds of created spirits: angels, men and beasts, and he explains the difference between the soul of a man as it inhabits his body, and the soul of a beast, which dies with the animal, while a man's soul is immortal. As he proceeds he never moves far from a Scriptural text or an illustration. The philosophical and theological passages are kept brief.

Peter's first challenge is an account of his own witnessing of a death (*D*: IV.5, *PL* 77.328A). He did not see the soul leave the dead man. Gregory meets this with philosophical theology. He compares the modes of God's creating and movement of the world by pure spirit, unseen, with the way in which a human soul moves the body. This leads him conveniently into a discussion of the relation between visible and invisible, inward and outward, and a chapter on dreams later enlarges on the way in which the invisible is perceived (*D*: IV.6, *PL* 77.328–9 and *D*: IV.48, *PL* 77.409). Within this framework the deaths of holy men and women provide examples of the way in which visible signs may speak of the invisible and demonstrate the going-out (*egressus*) of the soul which is invisible in itself. (*D*: IV.7–17, *PL* 332–49). The dying often cross the boundary of perception and see angels about

[14] See C. H. Dodd, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (1953), pp. 10–53.

their death-beds (*D*: IV.19, *PL* 77.352). Those who are going to die sometimes foresee their deaths (*D*: IV.26, *PL* 77.357). Thus Gregory discusses the modes of signifying which God uses to teach us about the invisible by the deaths of good men.

These foundations laid, he is able to consider a variety of popular theological questions: infant baptism as a guarantee of entry into heaven (Peter asks whether heaven is not full of little children, since they are less sinful than grown men, *D*: IV.18, *PL* 77.349–50); whether the souls of the just are received in heaven before the resurrection of the body (Gregory says yes, and Peter asks what in that case is their reward at the Last Judgement; Gregory tells him that when they receive their bodies again they are able to rejoice in both body and soul, *D*: IV.25, *PL* 77.356–7); if souls go to hell, how are they able to burn in a corporeal fire? Gregory explains that as Matthew 25.41 makes clear, hell fire is intended for the Devil and all his angels, and so surely it can burn human souls (*D*: IV.28–9, *PL* 77.365–8); where is hell, on earth somewhere or below? How many fires are there in hell? (Only one, but it burns in different ways); how is the soul said to be immortal if we must die (*D*: IV.45, *PL* 77.405)? At each point the answer is tested against Scripture, against orthodoxy and against philosophy where appropriate. But above all it is designed to be understood by every Christian of the day.

Gregory's world of thought is, then, that of an educated Roman, but it is also – as far as he was able to enter into their difficulties – that of every Christian in his charge. In presenting Augustine's ideas in a framework of stories or pictures he sometimes diminished him. But he made him available to many. He did the same for the philosophers. And he brought popular superstition up to a level of commonsense piety.

PART I

CONSIDERATION

In the early Homilies on the Gospels which Gregory preached at the Roman basilica and in the Homilies he gave on the Book of Ezekiel when he was deeply afraid of a Lombard invasion, the fearsome happenings of the times occupied his thoughts constantly. 'We see groaning everywhere,' he says; 'cities are destroyed, fortifications overthrown, the fields bare of men . . . almost no one remains in city or countryside . . . we see some led into captivity, others beheaded, others slain' (*Ez.* II.vi.22, pp. 310.524–311.532). The Tiber is flooded; there is plague and pestilence (*Ev.* I.1, *PL* 76.1077C–8B). There has been nothing like this in recorded history. Gregory believes that these were happenings which Christ foretold in his description of the end of the world (Luke 21.25–32), so that the people will not be distressed when they occur, just as he told the disciples in advance about his crucifixion so that they would not see it as the end of their hopes. Christ instructed his faithful to rejoice when they saw these signs, for it would mean that the redemption they sought was at hand (*Ev.* I.2, *PL* 76.1079A).[1] They were to learn something from them by an exercise which Gregory describes as *consideratio*: 'If we consider, dearest brothers, what and how great are those things which are promised us in heaven, everything which happens on earth seems of little importance' (*vilescunt animo*) (*Ev.* XXXVII.1, *PL* 76.1275A), he says. *Consideratio* meant for Gregory the exercise of an introspection which examines not only the inner man, but also his outward actions, balances the demands of the spiritual life with the pressures of life in the world. It was not a new idea; there is a clear Stoic influence. But it had a particular working importance for Gregory because it spoke to his condition.

It is not difficult to point to a Latin source. Ambrose of Milan, a

[1] On contemporary thinking about the coming of the end of the world, see J. McClain, *The Doctrine of Heaven in the Writings of St Gregory the Great* (Washington, 1956), and P. Fredriksen, 'Tyconius and the End of the World', *Études augustiniennes*, xviii.1–2 (1982), 59–75.

bridge for Gregory and others between the Cappadocian Fathers and the Latin West, makes use of the term in his *Isaac vel Anima* (II.2–3). There he discusses the *consideratio* which holds a right relation between body and soul in man; he sees in *consideratio* a way of self-knowledge. In the letters, too, he urges 'consideration' or invites his correspondent to set something reflectively before him and look it over judiciously.[2] In *De Jacob et Vita Beata* he suggests that if virtue can be taught it is best done not by plain speaking, though that is useful enough, but by the more persuasive method of applying the *consideratio* of the right reason (*ideo adhibenda est rationis rectae consideratio*) (I.i.1).

Gregory tried to think like a monk, even and especially when he was most distracted by the affairs of the world. The conception of a balance between inward and outward, contemplative and active, which is watched over by *consideratio* is, for him, monastic at root, and here, too, he would have found the word used in his sources.

Among the monastic writers of the West, Cassian, a contemporary of Augustine (c. 360–435) envisaged the purpose of monastic life much as his Eastern predecessors had done. He had spent time in Egypt learning from those he found living a cenobitic or eremitical life there. The sixth century saw the beginning of something new: a conception of monasticism bred in the West and suited to the communities there. The *Regula Magistri*, possibly of Southern French origin and of the early sixth century, and the *Rule* of Benedict of Nursia (c. 480–c. 550), share many points of detail and expression, and it is by no means clear which way any borrowing of one from the other may have gone.[3] Gregory certainly knew Benedict's *Rule* by the time he wrote Book II of the *Dialogues*, in which he brings together numerous stories of Benedict into the first *Life* of the saint. He praises the *Rule* for its 'good judgement' and its clarity (*D*: II.36, *PL* 66.200). There is no way of knowing whether he was familiar with it at the time when he himself was setting up a monastic community. It was not in general use in Italy in the sixth century.[4] But there is, perhaps, something to be gained by looking at the teaching of the *Rule* and related documents as a

[2] Ambrose, *Letters*, VI.27, 5 and 11, VI.29, ed. M. Zelzer, *CSEL*, 82 (Vienna, 1982).

[3] On the relationship between the *Regula Magistri* and Benedict's *Rule* see D. Knowles, *Great Historical Enterprises* (London, 1963), pp. 135–95; G. Penco, *Sancti Benedicti Regula* (Florence, 1958); A. Mundo, 'L'authenticité de la *Regula Sanctii Benedicti*', *Studia Anselmiana*, 42 (1957), 105–58. See also C. H. Lawrence's review of the question, *History* (1982), and further references there.

[4] It seems not to have been in general use in Roman monasteries until the tenth century. G. Ferrari, *Early Roman Monasteries* (Rome, 1957), p. 386, but see J. Chapman's (erroneous) picture in *St. Benedict and the Sixth Century* (London, 1929), pp. 194–204, that the *Rule* was somehow 'promulgated' earlier.

background to Gregory's own thinking. The flavour of Italian monasticism is consistent at some of the most important points for an understanding of Gregory's own thought on the matter.

The *Regula Magistri*, like Benedict's *Rule* and Jerome's letters of advice to holy women, includes both notes on the inward, higher and overall purposes of monastic life and detailed attention to practical considerations. The monk looks both upward as the soul is taught to do in its inner life[5] and outward to work in the outward world, in which man must take action of some sort while he lives in the body. Monastic life is an *ars*. The heart ought to pursue a trivium, just as the student in secular studies learns the trivium of grammar, logic and rhetoric. The trivium of the heart (and *cor* in Vulgate and patristic usage is of course normally the seat of thought rather than of feeling) is this: to put the *ignorantia* of sin behind one; and to go ahead in keeping the commandments to love God and to love one's neighbour as oneself.[6] These are mental exercises. They involve not *contemplatio* or contemplation of God only, but *consideratio: per considerationem mentis ambulando in trivium cordis; et consideremus ipsas.*[7] *Consideratio* requires a balancing exercise as a *contemplatio* does not. In contemplation the monk presses towards the vision of God singlemindedly, with no distractions. In *consideratio* he tries to keep the distractions which unavoidably surround him in their place, to manage his life to that higher end he will one day reach. Benedict's *Rule* is even more emphatic if anything that abbot and monk alike should cultivate an intellectual spirituality. The abbot is to 'remember', to bear in mind, the duties of his office. The monk is given a list of things to do which includes both actions and inward habits: he is to keep the ten commandments; he is to avoid anger, bearing grudges, pride, sloth, and so on, dread hell and fear the Day of Judgement; and to desire eternal life with profound longing (Chapters II, IV).

The same general notion of *consideratio* as a balancing of the spiritual and physical sides of human life is to be found in Gregory's own discussions of preparing himself to speak in his Scriptural commentaries (*Ev.* XXXIII.7, *PL* 76.1243). On the Song of Songs he says that 'since natural *consideratio* does not lead to perfection unless there is first good conduct, Ecclesiastes is rightly placed after Proverbs'. And, since contemplation does not see the heights unless these deceptive things

[5] *Regula Magistri*, ed. A. de Vogüé, *SC* 105 (1964), Prologue, pp. 288.9–12, 290.28–292.43, 304.90–3, Chapter 3, p. 368.38–40.

[6] *Ibid.*, Prologue, p. 290, 18–21; Chapters 3–4, pp. 364ff.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 290.16–23.

below are first despised, the Song of Songs is rightly placed after Ecclesiastes (*In Cant.* 9, p. 12.208–10). The implication is that *consideratio* involves thinking about both temporal and spiritual, with a view to finding a correct balance between them, while *contemplatio* looks solely heavenward. That is borne out by Gregory's next words: 'First comes behaviour', and then 'to consider everything present as though it were absent' (*omnia, quae adsunt, tamquam non adsint considerare*) (*In Cant.* 9, p. 13.212), before moving onwards and upwards to contemplation. This intellectual exercise places *temporalia* and *spiritualia* in a right relation by training the mind to consider the things of this world, but to do so as if they were of no account.

Although Gregory certainly felt the tension as a monk – how could he not, coming as he did from public life – the place of outward things for the monk remains a subordinate one, an unfortunate necessity. But Gregory had a great sense of public responsibility bred into him. Where Cassian praises a priest who will not exercise his priestly functions and encourages his monks to regard bishops, like women, as dangerous and to be avoided, because they will seduce them from their total concentration upon God, Gregory speaks reprovingly of those who will not take on responsibilities in the administration of the Church (*R*: 1.5–6, *PL* 77.18–20). It was a decision he himself had had to take, and had taken with reluctance, when, after he had founded St Andrew's, he was summoned probably by Pope Pelagius to leave it in 578 or 579, ordained a Deacon and made one of the senior administrators of the Church. Augustine, too, thought that those who consider themselves too weak and frail to undertake service in the world deserved some censure; 'They do not tackle mighty deeds,' he says, 'but pray to God, as it were on a bed of sickness' (*En. Ps.* 36.i.2).

Consideratio comes much more to the front of Gregory's preoccupations; however much he might have liked in principle to give himself up to the inward life, when he became Pope he found himself almost perpetually engaged in a struggle to keep the right balance. 'When I was in the monastery,' he says, 'I was able both to restrain my tongue from idle speech and keep my mind almost constantly intent on prayer. But since I have put the shoulder of my heart (*cordis humerus*) beneath the pastoral burden, my mind cannot maintain its concentration' (*colligere se ad semetipsam assidue non potest animus*). It cannot collect itself, because it is divided (*Ez.* 1.xi.6, p. 171.99–100). The mind is *scissa ac dilaniata* (*Ez.* 1.xi.6, p. 171.108).

The tension is worse for a bishop than for an abbot, the practical demands greater, the distractions more numerous, the responsibilities

larger. But the principle holds: he who is in a position of authority over his brothers (*quisquis regendis fratribus praeest*), cannot cut himself off completely from temporal responsibilities (*a curis exterioribus*), but he must not be too much involved in them (*Letter* 1.24, *CCSL*, p. 31.324–5, to the four Eastern Patriarchs, February 591).

Gregory has this balance consistently in mind. One bishop neglects his pastoral duties because he is too fond of the pleasures of society (*Letter* II.17, *CCSL*, p. 102.3, to Natalis, archbishop of Salona, March 592). He allows the spiritual to take second place to the temporal. Another man, who would make an excellent bishop, clings to his retirement and the devotional life, and refuses to undertake the *pastoralis cura* (*R*: 1.5–6, *PL* 77.18–20). He ignores the temporal for the spiritual.

In Book II of the *Regula Pastoralis* Gregory explores a series of aspects of the bishop's behaviour in which he balances one extreme against another: the bishop is to be discreetly silent and at the same time speak for the benefit of others; to be humble in company with those who live good lives and to stand up against evil-doers with a fierce zeal for righteousness; he is not to neglect the inner life because he is concerned with external affairs, and not leave outward matters undone because he is wrapped up in his inner life. Again, Gregory describes the exercise of this balancing judgement as *consideratio* (*J*: XL.xvii.20).

The term occurs in this sense not only in the opening discussions of the *Regula Pastoralis* but frequently in Gregory's letters when he is writing about the difficulties of episcopal office. To bishop Dominicus of Carthage he writes in July 592 to congratulate him on his appointment. But sorrow weighs heavily on him, he says, when he thinks what his orders involve (*ex consideratione huius ordinis mentem meam, fateor, transverberat vis doloris*), 'for the weight of priesthood is heavy'. The priest must be both humble and self-effacing, and at the same time able to set a clear example as a public figure (*Letter* II.40, *CCSL*, p. 128.27–31). To bishop John in Illyrica he sends the pallium with instructions to think about his task. 'If we think with correct consideration about the prerogative of priesthood (*sacerdotii praerogativam si recta consideratione pensemus*) . . . Amongst these things careful thought (*deliberationis cura*) should principally constrain you from giving way to the temptation to make illicit ordinations . . . ' (*Letter* V.16, *CCSL*, p. 283.23–4 and 34–5, November 594). In a long letter to John, Patriarch of Constantinople and the Patriarchs of the East, written in 591 soon after the completion of the *Regula Pastoralis*, Gregory insists that a bishop must bear it in mind in his thinking about his task. A black cloud of depression settles on him when he considers (*consideranti*

mihi) how unfit he is, and how wholeheartedly unwilling, to carry the weight of pastoral care. He wonders how a sinner can intercede with confidence for the sins of others, and he is anxious lest his flock perish. 'I think (*perpendo*) that all care must be taken to ensure that the *rector* is pure in thought (*cogitatione*) and outstanding in his actions' (*Letter* I.24, *CCSL*, p. 22.26–7); 'Again, when I consider the duties of a pastor (*cum me ad consideranda debita pastoris opera confero*), I think (*perpendo*) (*ibid.*, p. 23.55–6); 'Again, when I bring myself to consider' (*rursum cum me ad considerandum*) (*ibid.*, p. 25.124); 'And it must be considered too that when the ruler prepares himself to speak' (*sed considerandum quoque est ut rector cum se ad loquendum praeparat*) (*Letter* I.24, *CCSL*, p. 27.176, to the Eastern Patriachs, February 591).

Gregory's *Regula Pastoralis* belongs with Gregory Nazianzen's *Orations* and *Discourses* and John Chrysostom's *On the Priesthood* in its attempt to defend the author's strong desire to escape the office which has been thrust upon him.[8] There can be no question about the genuineness of Gregory's expressions of deep disinclination for the task. These are not conventional disclaimers. He says that he fears that he will be unable to sustain the burden, but that he has undertaken it as an act of obedience to God's will (*Letter* I.26, *CCSL*, p. 34.1–11, to Anastasius, archbishop of Corinth, February 591). 'I undertook the burdens of the office with a sick heart' (*Letter* I.20, *CCSL*, p. 19.7, to Natalis, January 591). With 'burning zeal' he tried to escape the load (*Letter* I.4, *CCSL*, p. 4.4–5, to John, bishop of Constantinople). It emerges again and again that his dislike for the work is the result of the unprecedented demands it makes upon his powers of keeping that balance between temporal and spiritual whose tension he had felt already long before – upon his capacity for *consideratio*. His peace has been taken from him. He has been dragged back to the world and lost the sublime joys (*alta gaudia*) of contemplation (*Letter* I.5, *CCSL*, p. 5.9, to the Emperor's sister Theoctista, October 590). He is wretched (*Letter* I.6, *CCSL*, p. 7.6, to Narses, October 590). He is hungry and thirsty for peace and weary to the point of exhaustion because his soul has no rest (*Letter* I.7, *CCSL*, p. 9.2–3, to bishop Anastasius, October 590).

The theme is a commonplace simply because it was so frequent a thought with Gregory, and mountingly so under the pressures of office. In the opening passages of his *Dialogues*, written in 593–4, not long after his elevation to the Papacy, he describes how profoundly

[8] John Chrysostom, *De sacerdotio*, [or *Sur le Sacerdoce*], especially II.7–8; VI.i, v; VI.8, ed. A.-M. Malingrey, *SC*, 272 (Paris, 1980), especially Gregory Nazianzen, *Discors*, II, ed. J. Bernardi, *SC*, 247 (Paris, 1978), especially II.6, p. 95.

depressed he became under the demands of office; he found it impossible to keep a balance between his duties and his spiritual life (*D*: 1.1, *PL* 77.149B). His experience was the exact reverse of that which Cassiodorus describes when he says that when he put aside the duties of his public life and read the Psalms he 'tasted the honey of heaven' (*Preface to Psalms*, p. 3.1–3).

Peter the Deacon, an old friend and companion in his explorations of Holy Scripture, came upon him when he was sorrowing over the loss of the peace he had had when he was a monk (*tam pulchram quietis suae speciem*). 'I think of what I have lost' (*perpendo quod amisi*), he says (*D*: 1.1, *PL* 77.149B–152A). It adds not a little to his sadness to recollect the lives of certain men who have left this world behind in their minds (*praesens saeculum tota mente reliquerunt*) (*D*: 1.1, *PL* 77.152B), because he sees their lives as so far from what he can himself attain in his present position. Again, the problem is one of *consideratio*. It is a mental balance which has been upset, a balance of judgement. In the *Regula Pastoralis* the same mental disturbance is a constant theme: 'Often, under the care of rulership' (*cura regiminis*), he says, the *cor* is distracted when it is divided by many demands (*dum confusa mente dividitur ad multa*) (*R*: 1.4, *PL* 77.17C). Lack of *consideratio* results in such disasters – not only inwardly but also outwardly – that Gregory writes to Serenus, bishop of Marseilles, that the end of his letter is so at variance with the beginning that he could think that more than one person had written it. 'It is clear how inconsiderate you are' (*Letter* XI.10, *CCSL*, p. 873.4–7, October 600). We must always be vigilant, maintaining the tension so as to keep our balance, he writes to Conan, abbot of Lérins; the carefulness of persons in authority on this matter is, in both bodily and spiritual things, the safeguard of their subjects (*Letter* XI.9, *CCSL*, p. 871.3–6, October 600).

PART II

TALK OF GOD

GREGORY'S WORLD OF DISCOURSE

Gregory was born into a wealthy and aristocratic family. He would have been given the formal education of his kind – along the traditional lines of the education of earlier generations of well-born Romans, but by now noticeably somewhat debased even from the standards of Augustine's day. The schools of Rome had received state support in Imperial times, but the war against the Goths had created such disturbance that many of the teachers went elsewhere (to Constantinople or Berytus) and the Emperor Justinian (527–565) had to attract teachers to Rome by paying salaries to professors of grammar, rhetoric, medicine, law. He needed administrators and the emphasis was accordingly put upon achieving competence in the Latin language and a knowledge of the law, rather than the rhetoric with philosophy of Cicero's Rome or the rhetoric with rather less philosophy of Augustine's Carthage and Milan. But academic syllabuses die hard, and there is no reason to think that Gregory got no grounding in rhetoric, or that he learned no philosophy. On the contrary, it is clear that he had a good grasp of both.[1]

The foundation of Roman education had always been the study of Latin grammar. Like Augustine, Gregory seems to have been deficient in Greek, but whereas in Augustine's case that was the result of a lack of aptitude and application, in Gregory's case it is likely that the teaching was simply not available when he was young.[2] Even his time in Constantinople failed to teach him Greek, although he was aware

[1] See H. Kirkby, 'The Scholar and his Public', *Boethius*, ed. M. T. Gibson (Oxford, 1981), pp. 44–69, and especially p. 48 on the traditions of the secular schools of grammar and rhetoric; and P. Courcelle, 'S. Grégoire le Grand à l'école de Juvenal', *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni*, 38 (1967), 120–4; T. Delforge, 'Le *Songe de Scipion* et la vision de S. Benoît', *Revue Bénédictine*, 69 (1959), 351–4; L. Weber, *Hauptfragen der Moraltheologie Gregors des Grossen* (Freiburg, 1947), pp. 57, 66; P. Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West*, English trans. (Columbia, 1976), pp. 146–7.

[2] But see P. Courcelle, *Late Latin Writers and their Greek Sources*, tr. H. E. Wedeck (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), and J. Petersen, 'Did Gregory the Great Know Greek?', *Studies in Church History*, 13 (1976), 122–34.

of the meaning of some important terms. (*Paraclitus* is *advocatus* or *consolator* in Latin, he explains (*Ev.* XXX.3, *PL* 76.1221C).) In one letter he begs to have a translation made for him from the Greek 'not word for word but sense for sense' (*non verbum ex verbo, sed sensum ex sensu*) (*Letter* 1.28, *CCSL*, p.36.10, to Aristobolus, February 591).

Grammatical studies in Latin had always rested on a double base: the mastering of parts of speech and rules of syntax, and the study of poets and prose writers as models (Virgil, Horace, Terence, Statius, Claudian, Sallust, Pliny, Cicero). Priscian, who was to become one of the standard authors for the study of grammar in the Middle Ages, composed one of the textbooks current in sixth-century Rome.[3] Cassiodorus speaks of him (*Inst.* I.i and Keil, II and Preface p. vii). In pursuit of simplicity, Cassiodorus prefers to make Donatus his source rather than Priscian, because he knows that Donatus has proved the best help to beginners. Donatus has the following list of aspects of the study of grammar: sound, letter, syllable; the eight parts of speech; punctuation; scansion; accents; figures; etymology; spelling (*Inst.* I.). For his own part, Priscian explains that he has put the aspects of the art of grammar as it was taught in the Greek world into Latin, and supplied examples from Latin authors to replace the Greek ones. He arranges the books of his treatise in a way which takes the student from the simplest elements of language, letters, sounds, syllables, words, to the constructions which may be formed from them. His grammar course, like that of Donatus, sophisticated though it often is in its investigations of the structure of the language, and fully though it repaid the efforts of mediaeval scholars who used it as a starting-point for their own studies in the functioning of language, was primarily designed to teach correct usage.

In his *Institutio Oratoria* of the first century AD, Quintilian is able to treat grammar as only one part of a three-fold discipline. The classical orator needed mastery not only of grammatical accuracy, but of skills in speaking clearly and with elegance (the logic and rhetoric of the mediaeval trivium, *Institutio Oratoria* I.v.1). As the study and practice of oratory declined, some aspects of rhetoric became attached to grammar. Cassiodorus defines grammar as a skill in speaking not only correctly, but elegantly (*pulchre loquendi*), which is learned from the study of the poets and prose authors who have provided the best models. But beauty lies principally in correctness, it seems, for he says that the

[3] See V. Law, *Insular Latin Grammarians* (London, 1982), on the early Latin grammars, and for an up-to-date bibliography. See, too, L. Holtz, *Donat et la tradition de l'enseignement grammatical* (Paris, 1981).

purpose of grammar is to enable the student to compose prose and verse without error (*sine vitio*).

A younger contemporary of Gregory's, and brother of the Leander to whom, as bishop of Seville, Gregory sent his *Moralia in Job*, Isidore of Seville (b. c. 560) compiled another encyclopaedia, in which he made use of Cassiodorus' work and added to it from other sources. He brings out more clearly still the aspects of grammar which overlap with rhetoric and which, in some cases, remained in the syllabus to enrich the study of grammar after the full course in rhetoric was no longer attempted. He speaks of prose and metre and fable and history. He also mentions figures of speech used for ornament only (*schemata*) and those which are modes of expression in their own right (*modi* or *tropi*), such as irony and enigma.

Some elements of logic survived in the training Gregory received, too. He uses a syllogism with comfort and security:

> What is just is the Lord's pleasure
> We can suffer nothing but what is the Lord's pleasure.
> Then everything we suffer is just (and we are unjust if we complain about a suffering which is just). (*J*: II.xviii.32, p. 79)

Gregory's education, then, bred in him a concern for accuracy in the use of words, precision in argument and a knowledge of figurative uses of language. It also, and not least, gave him a sense of style. Of this especially he was conscious in his own writing. The other elements proved to be important in his study of the Bible's language and we shall come to them later in that connection.

When Gregory speaks of the *rusticanus usus* he does so with all the well-born Roman's disdain for inarticulateness and infelicity (*D*: I, Pref., *PL* 77.153). Cassiodorus prefaced his collection of letters, the *Variae*, with apologies for lack of polish in what he has written. Fine writing takes time, he says; 'our diction must be somewhat rude when there is not enough leisure for the speaker to be able to choose words which will express his meaning exactly' (*Variae*, I, Pref., and cf. Pref. to *Variae*, Book IX). Even the comparatively inelegant Gregory of Tours (c. 540–94) apologises in case he has made grammatical mistakes.[4]

Cassiodorus refers to the doctrine of the three styles which was taught in classical rhetoric, and which survived into the Middle Ages through the study of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and more forcefully through

[4] *Historia Francorum*, ed. W. Arndt and B. Krusch, *MGH, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum*, Book I (1885).

the imitation of respected models – so much so that many authors begin by commenting as self-consciously on their style as Gregory or Cassiodorus did centuries before them. Cassiodorus can point to good reasons why 'the prudence of antiquity' defines three ways of speaking.[5] They serve different purposes. The humble style expresses straightforward thoughts by creeping meekly along the ground. The middle style has bounds which prevent its being either swollen with self-importance or shrunk into insignificance. The fine style is the highest pitch of oratory, employing every device in striving for elegance of expression. Cassiodorus' own view of what was necessary in the *Variae* is decided by the needs of those who have to write letters: and whom he finds often careless or unaware of the proprieties. He provides two books of standard letters on various subjects and designed for a variety of occasions.

Gregory was a bishop and a prodigious letter-writer. He (or his clerks) made use of *formulae*.[6] Only four times does he say specifically that he has dictated or dictated and signed letters.[7] But even within the confines of the genre he sometimes rises to a high style when he is greatly moved, as when he is bewailing his elevation to the Papacy:

> Epistulas beatitudinis vestrae ut fessus requiem, salutem aeger, fontem sitiens, umbram aestuans accepi. . . et quem prius spiritualiter diligebatis, post, ut aestimo, temporaliter amantes, usque ad terram me superposito onere depressistis, ita ut mentis rectitudinem funditus perdens contemplationisque aciem amittens, non per prophetiae spiritum, sed per experimentum dicam. . . fluctibus quatior, et tumultuosae vitae tempestatibus affligor. (*Letter* I, 7, *CCSL*, p. 9.2–13, to Anastasius, Patriarch of Antioch, October 590)

Even when we allow for the use of stock phrases (such as the opening), the patterning of *diligebatis*, *depressistis*, *spiritum*, *experimentum*, *quatior* and *affligor*, and of *salutem*, *fontem*, *umbram*, *aeger* and *aestuans*, seems clearly devised to heighten the mood. Nevertheless, a count of

[5] *Variae*, Preface and *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, IV. And see Kirkby, 'The Scholar and his Public', 47, on the lack of 'moral conflict' in an intellectual life which embraced Cicero, Aristotle, Plato, and the early Greek philosophers, as well as the theological problems of the soul and the Trinity.

[6] See M. B. Dunn, *The Style of the Letters of Gregory the Great* (Washington, 1931), pp. 9–10, and her account of the long passages of repetition in Gregory's letters and their relation to the *Liber Diurnus*, pp. 10–53; see, too, W. M. Peitz, *Liber Diurnus*, Beiträge zur Kenntnis der ältesten päpstlichen Kanzlei vor Gregor dem Groszen, Sitzungsberichte der Wiener Akademie, *CLXXXV* (Vienna, 1918), pp. 1–140.

[7] For example, at the end of IX.98, p. 651.8–9: 'Hanc autem Paterio secundario nostro scribendam dictavimus cuique subscripsimus'; cf. V.26, *CCSL*, p. 293.10–11; VI.12, *CCSL*, p. 381.39–42; IX.98, *CCSL*, p. 108.4.

Gregory's figures of rhetoric yields little and it is important not to impute more stylistic deliberation to him than he deserves.[8]

Gregory's adaptation of his style to the purposes for which he is writing is, then, conscious up to a point, but it also displays a naturally strong sense of the appropriate. In his *Dialogues*, the *Regula Pastoralis* and in exegesis, Gregory is clearly writing for his audience. The *Dialogues* were written for simple as well as educated men. On Sundays and feast days Gregory preached to a popular audience.[9] For their benefit he makes the stories simple and the moral plain. Yet he was not ashamed of the lowly style of the *Dialogues*. He copied out a portion of *Dialogue* III.34 for a distinguished correspondent (*Letter* VII.23, *CCSL*, pp. 475.23–476.60). Popular writing is not incompatible with carefully devised and stylistically sophisticated writing. The style of the *Dialogues* is not without its patterning of parallel clauses and endings devised to rhyme with or to echo one another:

Alio quoque tempore, cum oculorum quidam lumen amisisset, ad hunc deductus intercessionis eius opem petiit, et impetravit. (*D*: I.10, *PL* 77.204C) Cumque hoc crebro fieret, et magna eiusdem loci incolas necessitas urgeret, dato studio operis, eum per loca alia derivare conati sunt. Sed quamvis diutius laboratum fuisset, a proprio alveo deflecti non potuit. (*D*: III.9, *PL* 77.233D)

Cum enim magna eius opinio longe lateque crebresceret, quidam diaconus longe positus ad eum pergere studuit, ut eius se orationibus commendaret. (*D*: III.15, *PL* 77.253C)

This is not artless writing, but it is not intended to be high art. Gregory tells his stories, as his audience would expect him to do, in a *sermo humilis*, a plain style suitable for narrative.

In the *Regula Pastoralis* he sometimes wants to evoke a response to his own strong feeling, and he writes in such passages with a more tightly compressed patterning of devices:

Prius ergo appetitum timor temperet, post autem magisterium quod a non quaerente suscipitur, vita commendet. (*R*: I, Pref., *PL* 77.12B)

Si ergo apud hominem de quo minime praesumit fieri intercessor erubescit, qua mente apud deum intercessionis locum pro populo arripit, qui familiares se eius gratiae esse per vitae meritum nescit. (*R*: I.10, *PL* 77.23C)

When Gregory writes about Scripture he does so with a passion which often raises his style to a high pitch; sometimes he prefers a plain narrative style. Compare:

[8] See Dunn, *The Style of the Letters of Gregory the Great*, for a list, pp. 67ff.

[9] *Dialogues*, *SC*, 251, ed. A. de Vogüé (Paris, 1978), I, p. 32; and P. Batiffol, *Saint Grégoire le Grand* (Paris, 1928), p. 149.

Sunt vero nonnulli qui timere Deum nesciunt, nisi cum vel in se experta, vel in aliis cognita adversitate terrentur, quos prospera per audaciam elevant, contraria per infirmitatem turbant. (*J*: VII.XXXII.48, p. 370.31–4)

Herba quaelibet nascendo prius a terra producitur; aura et aestibus tangitur; sole ac pluviis nutritur et tunc demum ad proferendum sui seminis germen aperitur. (*J*: VIII.XLVII.77, p. 442.2–4)

Ille quippe vitae causas examinat, qui has per alienum testimonium non explorat, quia qui districtus quandoque ostenditur illator poenae, ipse diu tacitus exstitit testis culpae. (*J*: IX.XXIII.35, p. 481.3–6)

Gregory was, then, a Christian writer trained in what remained of a classical tradition.[10] Like Cassiodorus he read Augustine. Cassiodorus says in his introductory remarks to his commentary on the Psalms that he found Augustine's writings almost too rich and profuse (he speaks of the *copia congesta dictorum* (*CCSL*, 97, p. 3.10–15)). The change from the comparatively florid writing of Augustine's *eloquentia* to the more sober grandeur of fine writing in the sixth century had carried with it a change of taste. But it had not diminished that persistent awareness of style which implied the idea, important for Gregory as for Augustine, that there are different ways of saying something (*genera locutionis*). The notion was to prove central to mediaeval attempts to penetrate the mysteries of the Bible's speech. In the four books of the *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine discusses first the nature and function of divine and human language, and then the proper use of modes of speaking, figurative language, rhetorical devices, in Christian preaching and writing, and as they are employed in Scripture itself. Cassiodorus agrees that Scripture has many modes of speaking. It is, he says,

succinct in its definitions, beautiful in its ornaments (*schematibus decora*), outstanding in the propriety of its usage, skilful in contriving syllogisms, sparkling in its use of every technical skill (*disciplinis irrutilans*). But it takes from them no outward adornment. Rather, it confers dignity on these devices. The eloquence of Scripture (*eloquentia legis divinae*) is not derived from the beauty of the words (*non est formata sermonibus*). It is not a mere ornament. It comes from the exactness with which the language of Scripture expresses what it says, its *competens et decora locutio . . . ad unamquamque rem.* (*CCSL*, 97, p. 18.2–13ff)

In his prefatory letter to the *Moralia in Job*, written to Leander, Gregory says that his illness has made him like a broken instrument

[10] See Kirkby, 'The Scholar and his Public', p. 48, on the possibility that the development of Christian schools in Rome was retarded by the success of the secular schools.

which cannot play in tune and make a graceful delivery. But in any case, he would think it unworthy to observe the rules of rhetoric as it is 'conveyed by the rules of wordly training'. He does not believe it to be right to constrain the Scriptures by submitting them to analysis according to Donatus; elementary rules, he implies, and proper only to human language (*J*: Ep. Leander v, *CCSL*, 143, p. 7.221–2). Scripture, then, has its own modes of figurative usage, its own grammar, its own ways of using language, which can be identified more or less in terms of the laws of grammar and rhetoric, but which burst those rules and go beyond them on occasion.

LANGUAGE

Gregory describes in the *Dialogues* how certain bishops were brought to trial by the Arians during the Vandal persecution in North Africa; because they would not stop preaching the catholic faith and speaking the truth, their persecutors had their tongues cut out. They went on speaking as though nothing had happened. 'Truly wonderful and utterly astounding!' exclaims Peter the Deacon. Gregory points out that

> It is written of the Only-Begotten of the supreme Father, 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God' [John 1.1]. It is also said of his power, 'All things were made through him.' Why, then, do we wonder if the Word which made the tongue is able to speak without the Tongue? Peter is satisfied (*D*: III.32, *PL* 77.293B)

God is able to make his creation 'speak' in a multitude of ways, Gregory believes, and in Christ he is himself the supreme Word, in himself an act of communication with his creation. When we read 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away', Gregory points to this paradox of the variety of 'words' in created things which are transient, and the absolute permanence of the Word of God.

> For nothing is more durable in the nature of corporeal things in heaven and earth, and nothing passes away so rapidly as a word. When a word is incomplete it is not a word, and when it is completed it is again non-existent (*omnino iam non sunt*), for words cannot be completed except by passing away.

It is as though God were saying, 'Nothing which lasts on earth endures for eternity, and yet everything which seems transient is held fixed and without passing away *apud me*, because my Word, which passes, expresses meanings (*sententiae*) which endure without change' (*Ev.* 1.4, *PL* 76.1080A–B).

This inability on man's part to see God as he is, is the result not only of that creaturely limitation which would in any case make it

impossible for man to know God, but also of a further limitation imposed on the understanding by sin (*J*: IV.xxv.46, pp. 191–2: XV.xlvi.52, pp. 780–1). Sin is an impediment to knowing God (*J*: XXIII.i.7). It is as though a blind man stood in the sun and although he is bathed in its rays, he sees nothing of the light (*J*: II.iv.5, p. 62.19–21). The 'ignorance' is in some sense mutual. In Job 38.2 we read, 'Who is he?' That is a question we ask only of a person we do not know. God's 'ignorance', where the Bible uses the term of him, is a 'not-knowing', a rejection of the thing known; at the Last Judgement God will say to those he rejects: 'I do not know you' (Matthew 7.23).

It is this duality of theological language, its eternal sameness in itself and its impermanence and inadequacy in the mouths of men, which presents itself as a paradox to Gregory everywhere. Because it is trying to do something which is impossible for human language, our speech is obliged to break its own rules in speaking of God.[1] As Bede puts it, 'it neglects the rule of grammatical disposition so as to sing of the glory of the holy and undivided Trinity in a clear voice'.[2] In the twelfth century Hugh of Rouen insists that our words (*verba nostra*) must not be thought to imply action or passion or change in God, as they would as if they were used of created things; for words taken to refer to God (*ad significandum Deum assumpta*) do not belong to the eight parts of speech. They signify *ritu divino* not *more grammatico*.[3] We can know by our own efforts, Gregory says, only what God is not. The soul can attempt to understand God only by examining itself and realising how far it falls short of the divine standard. The soul's diversity, for example, contrasts with the divine unity (*J*: V.xxxiv.62, pp. 261–2). Its changeableness contrasts with his changelessness. 'If it does not grasp what he is, it has surely learned what he is not', Gregory comments (*J*: V.xxxiv.62, p. 262.40–1). Similarly, our language tells us about God more clearly by what it fails to say about him than by what it succeeds in saying. These principles are to be found in Augustine and in Pseudo-Dionysius. They are not Gregory's invention, but he is responsible for a large measure of their transmission into the common currency of exegesis in the Middle Ages, and for their place among the foundations of mediaeval work on theological language.

The Bible's language shows a notable independence of tenses as they

[1] Lubac, II, pp. 77–97 gathers together instances from Gregory himself and throughout the Middle Ages on this breaking of rules.

[2] Keil, VII.i, p. 252.

[3] Hugh of Rouen, *In Hexaemeron*, I.I, ed. F. Lecomte, *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge*, 25 (1958), 240.

are usually understood. In prophetical passages, the past tense is sometimes given for the future and future for past or present (*J*: XXXIV.vii.12). 'Amen, I say to you; before Abraham was, I am'. Here 'before' implies a past tense, but 'I am' is in the present. Because Divinity has no past or present time but always is, comments Gregory, the text says not, 'Before Abraham was, I was', but, 'Before Abraham was, I am' (*Ev.* XVIII.3, *PL* 76.1152). Similarly, prepositions take on new meanings when they are used of God. When an eye, shoulders, a foot, wings, are said to be 'in' God, the effect of his operation is being spoken of, as being like what an eye or shoulder or foot would do. But when a hand, arm or voice is said to 'belong to' God, then it refers to the Son, for the Incarnate Christ is really possessed of a hand, as well as causing effects which, were they brought about in a human way, would require the operation of a hand, but which God can perform directly. Thus it is clear that words cannot be predicated of God as they might of a creature. We may speak of a 'way' or 'place' in connection with God only if no locality is meant. The Son is 'in' the Father, but not as he might be 'in' a place on earth (*J*: XIX.iii.5, pp. 358–9).

God may thus be known in some manner by what he marks with his being; that is, by comparing him with created things. To put the principle in Gregory's language: he so encircles what is without that he yet fills what is within; so fills what is within that he yet encircles what is without; so rules the heights above that he does not depart from those below; is so concealed in his own appearance that nevertheless he is known in his works; so known in his works that he yet cannot be comprehended by the person knowing him (*J*: XVI.viii.12, p. 805.21–34).

Everywhere God helps us by making the comparison clear to us, whether in Scripture or in some other way. In the Bible, God applies to himself 'some very unlikely resemblances', in the bodies of men, in their minds, in birds, even in inanimate objects (*J*: XXXII.iv.7). God is said to have an 'eye' so that we may understand how he can 'see'; 'shoulders' are mentioned because we can grasp the idea of supporting burdens on our shoulders; God can never strictly be said to remember, for he cannot forget, so God is said to 'remember' when he bestows gifts and to 'forget' when he forsakes someone who is guilty (*J*: XVII.ii.2, p. 851); a comparison is made with human feelings when the Bible speaks of God 'having pity' or 'remembering' in this way. But when, for example, a voice or arm is spoken of in God we must take care not to imagine anything corporeal (*J*: XXXII.iv.7).

Examples of this sort are everywhere. What are we to understand

here by the 'face of God' but his visitation?, Gregory asks of one passage (*J*: XI.xl.54, p. 616.10–11). God is called 'jealous', 'angry', 'compassionate', 'foreknowing', although he does not feel torment of mind. All these descriptions are applied to him by deriving them from human qualities, so that he 'descends' to our level in using them in Scripture, employing words which express infirmity (*J*: XX.xxxii.63, p. 1049–34). God's eternity is, in the same way, called his 'days' (*J*: XVI.xliii.54, p. 830.3). In God, who is not confined within the 'figure' of a body, the members of the body, hand, eye, womb, are spoken of in such a way that they represent the effects of his power: he is described as having hands, in that he works all things; in the womb are conceived offspring, and in the 'womb' of God's counsel, we were conceived before time by predestination (*J*: XIV.xlv.53, p. 729.7–9).

Words used of God to help us understand what he is are, paradoxically, precisely not what they would be in ordinary usage. 'There was a day', says the Bible; but in God's eyes the progress of time is never marked by the variation of day or night (*J*: II.xx.34, p. 81.4–5). God's 'face' is not a 'face' like ours; it is merely that we, who recognise a person by his face, find it natural to refer to our knowledge of God's knowledge as his 'face' (*J*: II.x.18, p. 71.30–1, cf. *J*: XXIV.vi.12). God corrects us without emotion on his part, although we read that he was 'moved against Job' (Job 2.4–5; *J*: III.iii.4, p. 116.27–9). When we breathe we draw the air from outside within us; and then breathe out. God is said to 'breathe' when he dispenses vengeance. From outward events he conceives within him the intention of judging and from that inward judgement he sends his sentence out upon those judged (*J*: V.xviii.37, p. 244.52–6). The 'footsteps of God' are his loving visitation (*J*: X.viii.13, p. 545.3); he is 'higher than heaven' in that he transcends all things by the incomprehensibility of his spiritual nature (*J*: X.ix.14, p. 547.3–6). For us, to 'call' is to beg something of God in humble prayer; for God to 'answer' is to grant an answer to prayer (*J*: V.xliii.76, p. 275.6–7). God 'laughs' at the pains suffered by the innocent as long as he does not give the elect their desire (*J*: IX.xxvii.42, p. 485.31–2). God 'hears' by perceiving our longings as they rise up within us, not by hearing what we say with his ears (*J*: XXII.xvii.43, pp. 1122–3). The truths to which the Bible points are solid. The Bible's language itself is slippery with effort as it struggles to express what is beyond framing in creaturely words or by creaturely analogies.

It is thus by comparison with created things, by analogy, that we derive what knowledge we have of God's nature and attributes.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit teaches us directly how to do so. Since the actual 'appearance' of the divine nature cannot be seen while we are in this life, we see him by 'certain resemblances'; we behold God through figures, as Jacob saw God, but only 'in an angel' and even Moses who saw him face to face, as a man might speak to his friend, said to him: 'Show yourself clearly to me that I may see you.' We may infer from that that Moses saw only certain 'semblances' and had no direct sign of the brightness of the divine nature itself (*J*: XVIII.liv.88, p. 952.47–52).

Theological language must always have peculiarities about it. As it attempts both to speak of God as he is in a way appropriate to the divine Word which it incarnates, and to speak in ways proper and possible to it as a created thing, it appears to our eyes both familiar and unfamiliar, both the language we know and a language we do not know, speaking of 'things' in both usual and unusual ways. We can see this happening in Gregory's distinction – also to be found in Augustine and in Boethius – between the predication of accidents, which is the way we describe created things, and the predication of such apparent 'accidents' as substances in the case of God (*essentialiter* or *substantialiter*). That is to say, if we call God 'good' we are not speaking *nuncupative*, of a quality, but of his very substance. God is not 'good' but 'goodness' (*Ev.* XIV.1, *PL* 76.1127C–D; *Ev.* XXI.4, *PL* 76.1171D; *Ez.* I.viii.3, p. 102.48). In God there is no distinction between his simply 'being' and his 'being wise' or 'being strong'. His strength is identically the same as his wisdom and both are identically the same as the very Being of God. So we must consistently revise our notion of an attribute and remember that we are speaking of the actual Being of God when we describe him (*J*: XVII.xxx.46). The act of predicating words of God is more naturally described as 'naming' (*nominans*) (*Ez.* VII.2, p. 84.39–40). Gregory has no developed technical vocabulary: he is feeling his way. But it would not be true to say that he has no words for the technicalities of modes of signifying: 'It is common for many things to be signified (*signari*) although they are called by a single name (*sub unius nominis appellatione*) by the spirit of prophecy' (*Ez.* I.viii.21, p. 112.425).

SIGNS, PROPHECY AND MIRACLES

SIGNS

In Book IV of the *Dialogues* Peter the Deacon takes Gregory through a series of difficulties of a very concrete kind: in fact, difficulties of precisely the sort which can be expected to arise in the minds of beings cut off by sin from a clear sight of heavenly things. Peter, taking as in Ecclesiasticus (*more Ecclesiasticis*) the *persona* or part of those who are feeble in faith (*infirmantes*) asks a series of crude questions about the nature of the soul and its relation to the body – crude because they are posed from the point of view of a 'carnal' man, who cannot 'envisage' the spiritual (*D*: IV.5–6, *PL* 77.325–8). Peter often objects that he cannot 'see' what Gregory is telling him. Gregory tries to help him by means of concrete examples. Imagine, he says, the construction of a great building. What does the actual building? Does the visible body lift those masses of masonry in its hands, or the invisible soul which gives life to the body, he asks (*D*: IV.6, *PL* 77.329B)? What is heaven like for the soul, enquires Peter? Everything is better there, says Gregory. Souls are healed and cleansed when they are out of the body. The working of miracles through relics shows that the souls of the saints live on after death and are able to demonstrate their happier state through their deeds (*D*: IV.6, *PL* 77.329–32). The whole of the *Dialogues*, with its use of examples of the actual living of good Christian lives, may be seen as an attempt to work from concrete human experience (*per experimentum*) to the heavenly and abstract which is beyond ordinary experience. Peter wants to know about the citizens of heaven. Surely most of them must be children, since grown men are so full of wickedness (*D*: IV.18, *PL* 77.349B)? Here again, Gregory tries to meet the difficulty by working from the more easily understood to what is remote from ordinary experience. Though the elect are few in number now, yet in heaven they are innumerably many, in that, though by comparison with the evil-minded they are few, they cannot be 'measured' in their real numbers (*J*: XVII.xiii.18, pp. 862–3). The Bible, Gregory explains,

represents the number of the heavenly citizens as both 'definite' and 'indefinite'. Job 25.3 asks whether God's soldiers can be numbered. Daniel 7.10 says: 'Thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.' The intention is to make it plain that 'that which is incapable of being numbered relative to God may be shown relatively to man to be capable of being numbered' (*J*: XVII.xiii.18, p. 863.5–8). On similar principles a number of points are covered in the *Dialogues* and elsewhere: whether any soul enters heaven immediately after death; whether there are degrees of reward in heaven to correspond with the degrees of suffering and effort the soul endures on earth; what is the nature of the beatific vision. Reality is what God sees; man's perception of that reality falls short because and precisely because of man's corporeal limitations. The very way in which the dying often 'preach' (*D*: IV.25, *PL* 77.357C) shows us that they begin to 'see' into heaven in a new way as their souls move towards it, and what was invisible becomes visible to them. Those who can see them in the body can in some sense follow their gaze; those who see signs understand something of what they signify.

The Bible is full of accounts of signs and wonders, things and events which are so striking that they tell the reader about something which he could not envisage without their aid: as the elect will see 'signs' which will instruct them (*In Reg.* I.193, p. 400.4032; *ibid.* I.iv.191, p. 400.3991–4). This teaching by means of things seemed to Augustine, too, to be a principal means of God's communication with man, as he explains in the first books of the *De Doctrina Christiana*. But it was Gregory's mining of the Scriptures for examples which perhaps did most to pass on to the Middle Ages that detailed awareness of the teaching power of 'things' in the Bible which is so pronounced in the Victorine scholars of the twelfth century, for example.[1]

This teaching power of things is given two particular emphases in Gregory which were of the first importance for their influence on later thinking: the interpretation of prophecy and the signification of miracles.

PROPHECY

A correct understanding of what prophecy is seems to Gregory an indispensable preliminary to the attempt to interpret the difficult book of Ezekiel: 'First I must make plain the times and modes of prophecy',

[1] G. A. Zinn, Introduction to *Richard of St Victor* (New York, 1979), p. 28.

he says, so that when the way of approach (*accessus*)[2] is pointed out, the reader may be able to understand its force better (*Ez.* I.i.1, p. 5.2–3). The first Homily on Ezekiel is a treatise on prophecy, a voyage, as Gregory describes it, on an immense sea (*Ez.* I.i.19, p. 15.383–5).

When Gregory became Pope he expected the end of the world to come at any time. When he answered letters or gave advice, he did so on that assumption (*Letter* III.29, *CCSL*, p. 175, to the clergy of Milan, April 593). He could not let the Emperor Maurice's ruling that state officials must not become monks pass without question, because when the Last Judgement is near, it seems to him unjustifiable to prevent those who wish from becoming monks and fitting themselves for heaven (*Letter* III.61, *CCSL*, pp. 209–11, to the Emperor Maurice, August 593). He reminds Ethelbert, king of the newly converted people of Kent, that he is king at the end of the world, and must act accordingly (*Letter* XI.37, *CCSL*, pp. 931.46–932.60, June 601). The imminence of the end seemed to him a reason, not to relax, but to strive harder on behalf of the Church in her hour of glory. He sent a mission to England, and brought about Ethelbert's conversion. In the *Moralia* he gives a triumphant picture of the Church preaching her way across the world (*J*: XXVII.xi.21). The world is in crisis, but the Church, paradoxically, is coming to her highest triumph in the Last Judgement.

Here Gregory stands on quite different ground from Augustine, to whom the end of the world was a relatively remote reality. Rome was under pressure in Augustine's day, but its decline was not yet so far advanced that any very clear contrast could be drawn between its present decay and its past glory (*Ez.* II.vi.22–4, pp. 310–13). When Augustine surveyed the fall of Rome he saw it as one event in the unfolding of God's vast providential purpose. He concentrates on the individual soul, running its life's course, with its own end in mind rather than that of the world. Although Gregory does not draw any comparison between his own view and Augustine's,[3] this new strong sense of an end to all things coming close governs his thinking in all his work for Church and state. It is especially keen in his Homilies on Ezekiel, given at a time when he was acutely fearful of invasion.

Paradoxically perhaps, it frees him from a sense of brooding futurity into a world beyond time. He emphasises that in approaching the prophet Ezekiel it is first necessary for the reader to free himself from

[2] On the *accessus* and its later history, see R. B. C. Huygens, *Accessus ad Auctores* (Leiden, 1970).

[3] See R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge, 1970), on Augustine's rather different eschatological view.

his normal prejudices about tenses, as we have seen him recommending in his talk about the Bible's language. Prophecy is not necessarily a foretelling of the future. Although strictly it applies to what is to come, there are three 'times' – past, present and future – of which a prophet may speak (*Ez.* I.i.1, p. 5.4–5). Gregory gives as an instance of prophetic utterance in the Bible which does not refer to the future: 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth' (*Ez.* I.i.1, p. 5.13–14). Thus prophecy may refer to the future by telling us about the past, or to the past in telling us about the future (*Ez.* I.i.2, p. 5.6–7 and p. 6.37–9). This is possible because in Scripture, time, or rather the tense of the verb, has no importance; no verb can be used accurately of God, who is outside time and therefore beyond tenses. He who speaks truly about God in the past speaks truly about the future, too (*Ez.* I.i.2, p. 6.41–2). The prophet sees as present what is indeed present to Christ, although it is past or future to us (*J*: XL.XX.31), because he is seeing in the Spirit. Sometimes God puts his inspiration into the hearts of men through the secret presence of angels; he raises them up to sublime thoughts and they set forth as already present events which are still future (*J*: XXVII.i.9). In God's sight, whatever remains to be carried out has already been brought about by predestination (*J*: XXVIII.v.14). This divine independence of the tenses of the verb points us to a deeper meaning of 'prophecy' and helps us to see how it deals not solely with what is to come, but with every sort of *occulta*, hidden things, mysteries (*Ez.* I.i.1, p. 5.26, and *J*: XXVII.ix.15). It is a way of teaching, by things and events brought vividly before us now, even if their importance has to do with what is to come.

The very mysteriousness of the subject-matter of prophecy makes it difficult to know how to proceed in assessing its teaching. Gregory explains that a prophet sometimes knows what is close to him and not what is far off, sometimes the reverse (*Ez.* I.i.13, p. 11); sometimes he prophesies by the Holy Spirit and sometimes by his own spirit. The prophet is not always right in thinking himself inspired (*J*: II.lvi.89, pp. 111–12; *J*: VIII.vi.10, p. 388.99–100; *Ez.* I.ii.11–12, p. 10). Here Gregory differs from Augustine, who thinks that a true prophet must have insight into the meaning of his experience.[4] But when the prophets agree with one another, they provide a sure foundation which will bear the weight of the fabric of the Church (*J*: XXVIII.vii.18).

It is important to notice the actions of the prophets. They speak by deeds as well as by words. Daniel, for example, prophesied with his

[4] *Ibid.*, Appendix A, pp. 193–4.

body as well as in his speaking. He lay on the ground to represent the state of sinfulness; he knelt on knees and knuckles when he wanted to show how a man may be lifted up somewhat from the earth; he stood erect to lift his mind to things above (*J*: XXII.XX.47, pp. 1126–7). And we must also read the prophets carefully, weighing each pronouncement on its merits (*Ez.* I.i.13–16, pp. 11–14), with this double awareness of words and things. There is a 'prophetical way of speaking' (*usus propheticae locutionis*) by which the prophet first describes the person, time and place, and then begins to 'speak the mysteries of prophecy' which are intelligible only against the background of things and events. It is as though he first plants the root of the literal or historical, and then the fruits of the Spirit sprout in signs and allegories (*Ez.* I.ii.1, p. 17.1–5; cf. p. 17.7–18).

The prophetic way of speaking is observable in the smallest details of the process of relating words to things. Ezekiel begins his book with the word *et* (*Et factum est in tricesimo anno*), a conjunction. But there is nothing before it to which it can be seen to be joined. The reason is obvious enough. The prophet sees with his spiritual eyes as we see with our physical ones; he can see what goes before, and what it is to which the *et* refers, although we cannot (*Ez.* I.ii.2, p. 17.25–26). Thus it is that the inward and outward, *exteriora* and *interiora* are joined together (*coniuncta*) in the prophet's mind by a conjunction deeper than *et*. The prophet hears a word within and speaks it outwardly. Prophecy is, in other words, a special form of theological language for Gregory, and its interpretation is a branch of exegesis more difficult than most, and requiring close attention to the signification of both words and things.

MIRACLES

All this goes some way towards removing a difficulty which has sometimes been raised about the apparent crudity of the thought and subject-matter of the *Dialogues*. The wonder-workers set an example of Christian life to the faithful, as it seemed to Gregory, by being themselves signs; teaching by their actions. In Book IV stories of their works prompt some of the most extended theological reflections Gregory permits himself in a single discussion, on the soul and the life to come. But nevertheless they are simple stories which make their point by amazing the reader or listener: by presenting him with something striking and giving him food for thought in that way.

Yet if we see them as stories in which the inward and spiritual breaks

through the surface of the outward and visible, they begin to look more worthy of their purported author. That is plainly how Gregory regarded them. They are examples from life and therefore inferior to Scripture's examples. But they are, like the prophet's bodily actions, a divine means of teaching by means of 'things' which always for Gregory, as for Augustine, runs alongside God's teaching by words. Just as in his exegesis Gregory reads the text in two dimensions – spiritual and literal – so he perceives the world both in its physical appearance as his bodily senses record it, and at a supernatural level, as it operates just – but only just – above the level of sense-perception, breaking through from time to time so that its manifestations can be seen with bodily eyes and heard with bodily ears.

So sturdy was this belief in the possibility that spiritual beings could act in this world on behalf of those they chose to help, that it was necessary for Churchmen to make a continuous effort to wean the people from their habit of looking to demons and spirits for supernatural assistance. Gregory advises that pagan temples should be turned into places of Christian worship so that the hearts of the pagans may move from the 'cult of demons' to the 'worship of the true God' without difficulty, as they find themselves worshipping in a familiar place (*Letter* XI.56, *CCSL*, p. 961–2, to abbot Mellitus, July 601). Constant vigilance on the part of Christian leaders was needed generation after generation if popular resort to the old gods was to be discouraged. Gregory wrote to the Frankish Queen Brunhild in September 597: 'We exhort you to restrain . . . your subjects . . . from making sacrifices to animal heads. We hear that many Christians go to church and . . . at the same time carry on worshipping demons' (*Letter* VIII.4, *CCSL*, p. 521.86–9). In a letter to Januarius, bishop of Carali, he warns the bishop to be on his guard against worshippers of idols and soothsayers (*Letter* IX.205, *CCSL*, p. 763–5, July 599). Cassiodorus pressed his monks to persuade the peasants to stop worshipping sacred trees (*Inst.*i.32), and Gregory himself is concerned about the same practice in the *Dialogues* (*D*: VIII.19).

It is against this background assumption, that the spiritual world is able to cross the barrier and enter the physical world and have effects there in large and small ways, that Gregory set his own strictly Christian thinking.[5] He observed that a breaking through of this sort

[5] See P. R. L. Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 61 (1971), 80–101; P. R. L. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London, 1982). P. Hinchcliff, *Cyprian of Carthage* (London, 1974), p. 24. See on the 'sense of a vast and powerful demonic world lying in wait for the unwary'.

occurred when a good man died and his body became a gateway, so that miracles took place near or at the place where his body lay. Even a small part of the physical remains of a saint were believed to retain this power of conferring supernatural benefits, and to retain it indefinitely, acting as gateways in their own right between the two worlds.

The Western Church early developed a theory of the miraculous, which held for at least a millennium.[6] Augustine, preaching on John's Gospel (VIII.1), takes the miracle at Cana as an example of the way in which God uses miracles to stir us, to wake us up with surprise when we are sluggish and have begun to take the wonders of creation for granted. Water turns into wine every year by a natural process used in wine-making. We do not remark on it. Here, the mode of turning water into wine is startling; it captures the attention. The miraculous is God's work just as the laws of nature are his creation. It is merely unusual, not a breach of natural order. Augustine makes the same point later in the Homilies on John (IX.1) and again when he discusses the miracle of the loaves and fishes (XXIV.1). By forcing us to notice his works, God forces us to turn to him and listen, and he is thus able to render us teachable and so to instruct us by his miracles.

This was exactly the light in which the miraculous appeared to Gregory. He compares the way in which the dry rod of Aaron budded, and the way in which trees grow and sprout leaves as an everyday occurrence (*J*: VI.XV.18, p. 296.16–19). He compares the feeding of the five thousand by loaves miraculously multiplied with the daily multiplication of grains which are sown as seeds and in due course yield more grains. The changing of water into wine at Cana is compared with the changing of water into wine in routine wine-making. God catches our attention by these devices, no more. 'He who invisibly modifies visible things, plants incomprehensibly the seeds of events in the hearts of men' (*J*: XXVII.XXI.41). But we need our attention thus caught if we are not to grow sluggish and unresponsive. Those who despise invisible things can sometimes be moved by visible miracles (*J*: XXVI.XVIII.32; *J*: XXX.II.6). That which has become cheap to us because we are used to it, no longer surprises us. It does not surprise us that new life arises when a child is born; but we are astonished if a dead man is raised to life (*J*: VI.XV.18, p. 296.13–16).

The first characteristic of miracle for Gregory is, then, that it is

[6] B. Ward, '"Signs and Wonders": Miracles in the Desert Tradition', *Studia Patristica*, 18 (1982), 539–40, on the development of the idea that miracles are a *breach* of natural order; also *idem*, *Miracles and the Mediaeval Mind* (London, 1982), pp. 2–9.

startling and captures our attention, wakes us out of spiritual indolence to take note of God's power as it breaks through upon our senses. Its second characteristic is that it is significant. It shows forth a supernatural power by a thing or word; it literally embodies it, allowing it to be outwardly visible to the bodily eye. But if it was perfectly clear to Gregory where the line was to be drawn between the worship of idols and resort to soothsayers on the one hand and the right use of the supernatural aids God gives us on the other, it cannot have been easy for the simpler among his flock to feel sure of their ground. Magic stimulates and captures attention, too. But Gregory puts his finger on the essential difference. Miracles teach us about God; magic does not.

Thus God himself is the great teacher of men in these events beyond the normal run of things where he moves in a wonderful way. The faithful have more merit if they do not have to be moved by miracles (*J*: XXXIV.iii.7), but God takes trouble over his people and those who despise invisible things can sometimes be moved by visible miracles (*J*: XXVI.xviii.32), with their flash and sparkle (*J*: XXX.ii.6).

The persecutors of the Church resisted the words of the preachers of the true faith, but they were put to flight by the miracles which were manifested after their death; they were frightened into ceasing from persecution (*J*: XXX.XXV.76). The Church needed miracles when the tribulation of persecution oppressed her. There are some who, when they hear the wonderful works of the apostles, and now that such miracles no longer happen in the Church, suspect that the grace of heaven has been withdrawn from the Church. They forget that Psalm 9.9 speaks of a 'helper in trouble'. When the Church has overcome the pride of unbelief she has no such need any more (*J*: XXVII.xviii.36). The Church had need of miracles to help her when she was persecuted, but now she needs not miracles but simple good deeds (*J*: XXVII.xviii.36).

Although he recognises this historical change, Gregory never fully separates divine teaching by events in the world since Biblical times from teaching by wonders and even ordinary events in Scripture. It is all an aspect of exegesis for him. Christ himself in the Gospel sometimes speaks in words, sometimes makes a point by an action or by a 'thing' such as the barren fig-tree (*Ev.* XXXI.1, *PL* 76.1228A). Christ himself recognises this teaching power of the things by explaining his own parables, so that his people might know what they were to look for in the significations of things (*rerum significationes*) (*Ev.* XV.1, *PL* 76.1131C; *Ev.* XXXIII.6, *PL* 76.1237A–C). Sometimes in post-Biblical times God has chosen to crush the stubborn powers of

this world not by words but by miracles (*J*: XXVII.xl.20). The preacher of the present day is a channel through whom God describes what he has done and explains its significance, and he, too, is an example, a significant thing. In the same way, like the teaching of Scripture itself, a miracle should not only act as an aid to understanding; it should excite men to emulation.

A miracle serves a double purpose: it teaches the faith and it 'moves' men to live good lives. Peter the Deacon comments in the *Dialogues* on Gregory's story of Paulinus of Nola, that it makes him want to weep when he cannot emulate the example of a holy man (*D*: III.1, *PL* 77.221). Thus a good man goes on after his death to give further and more examples (just as the Bible's teaching has gone on enlarging by interpretation since it was written, and just as a relic continues to do good in the world for centuries). All these teaching-aids instruct in faith and morals alike.

A good man is larger than life in a spiritual sense (*D*: III.15, *PL* 77.256). Gregory speaks rousingly of the 'deeds of strong men' (*D*: III.7, *PL* 77.229A). Again and again, he draws out the moral of an event in a way which brings out both its practical implications and its lesson of faith. A monk took an oath never to see any woman again. A woman who heard of his vow boldly climbed up the mountain where he dwelt. When he saw her coming, the monk threw himself on the ground, pressed his face to the earth and prayed, until she grew weary of trying to attract his attention and went away from the windows of his cell. The same day, as soon as she came down from the mountain, she was struck dead. Gregory explains what we are to learn from this act of God (*D*: III.16, *PL* 77.260). Some of these living examples were not themselves able to teach by word because they were uneducated in worldly skills of public speaking. They may not have been taught by any human master, says Gregory, but the gift of the Holy Spirit is itself a gift of education. 'There are some who are taught inwardly (*intrinsecus docentur*) by the Holy Spirit, so that even if they lack the outward *disciplina* of a human master, the inward *censura* of their greater Master is not lacking' (*D*: I.1, *PL* 77.156). Thus, even without words, the good man becomes a sign. Honoratus, whom Gregory cites as an example of such a man had, he says, very clear signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit within him; virtue and humility which instruct us by example in faith and morals (*D*: I.1, *PL* 77.156).

Just as a miracle startles the unresponsive to take notice, so a truly good man may influence the most hard-hearted by his example. One day the abbot who succeeded Honoratus (Gregory does not name him,

perhaps precisely because he did not set an example for the faithful to hold before them), conceived a violent hatred for one of his monks, Libertinus. Libertinus so impressed him at last by his humility and gentleness that his own harshness and hardness of heart struck him by contrast, and he threw himself down at Libertinus' feet in repentance. 'And so it came about that the Father was led to great gentleness and the humility of the disciple became the mistress of the master (*magistra fieret magistri*).' In just such a way, all priests must set an example to the *parvuli* in the Church (*In Cant.* 43, p. 41.803). Again, Gregory is emphasising the continuity and essential unity of all God's teaching of the faithful by marvellous means in every age, in both faith and good living.

Pursuing the same line of thought, he warns that it would be wrong to conclude that a man who works no miracles is inferior in holiness to a miracle-worker, especially in these latter days when the Church's need for dramatic aids is less because the age of persecution is past. The doing of good deeds and the doing of miracles are all one in their value in the eyes of God, and the emphasis now should be on good deeds. 'The true value of a life lies in good works not in miraculous works' (*D*: I.12, *PL* 77.213C). The author of the earliest *Life* of Gregory, a monk of Whitby, makes the same point. He notes, too, that miracles are granted by God for a purpose: to destroy pagan idols or to strengthen the weak faith of believers, and, most commonly of all, to help those who are preaching to the pagans, because the more miracles they do, the more convincing they become as teachers.[7] Here, too, miracles find their place alongside God's other teaching aids.

Despite his emphasis on the importance of plain good deeds, Gregory was sufficiently attracted by the miraculous to write the *Dialogues* at a time when he himself was in low spirits, and in need of something to lift him out of a certain sluggishness of response to God. 'It is a great edification of life to see men doing such wonderful things and to behold the heavenly Jerusalem upon earth, in her citizens' (*D*: III.35, *PL* 77.304A). Gregory had found that in practice the outward and visible aid of a thing or an example is likely to be more effective than teaching by words (*Ev.* XXXVIII.15, *PL* 76.1290D), and that is why he undertook the 'heavy task' of writing the *Dialogues*. He thought it would serve to spread knowledge of the miracles done by the holy men he describes, and so benefit his readers – spreading abroad knowledge of God's power (*D*: III.38, *PL* 77.317).

[7] *Vita Gregorii, The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, ed. B. Colgrave (Kansas, 1968), pp. 78–9.

To Serenus, bishop of Marseilles, Gregory writes a word of reproach because Serenus had broken images in churches when he saw them being worshipped. Gregory commends Serenus for his zeal. Certainly nothing made with hands ought to be an object of adoration. But he is firmly of the opinion that Serenus ought not to have broken the images. For pictorial representation is used in churches so that those who cannot read may at least read on the walls in pictures what they cannot read in books in words. Serenus should have preserved the images and at the same time prohibited people from adoring them. Just as the images in Scripture teach by presenting 'things' to those eyes of the mind (*oculi mentis*) to which Gregory often refers, with a sharpness and brilliance possible in no other way, so images in churches teach the simple faithful better than words. Gregory writes to Peter the subdeacon of Campania, asking him to send the relics of St Severinus for the consecration of a church to the saint. He would send a cross, or keys containing iron filings from the chains of St Peter – as he did to King Childebert, with the promise that it would protect him from 'all evils', and to Patriarch Eulogius of Alexandria, in the hope that it would heal his eyes (*Letter* III.19, *CCSL*, p. 165, to Peter, subdeacon of Campania, January 593; *ibid.* VI.6, *CCSL*, pp. 373–4, to King Childebert, September 595; *ibid.* XIII.43, *CCSL*, pp. 1047–9, to Eulogius, bishop of Alexandria, July 603).[8]

In all these ways, and with all these variations of emphasis, Gregory extended his notion of the teaching power of things marked out by God for special notice, beyond the miracles of Scripture to all kinds of objects and events and good men. The miraculous properties of relics and miraculous events go beyond nature, but in a manner in keeping with that supernatural law by which God acts. They are, in other words, orderly.

We began with Gregory's account of the nature of prophecy at the beginning of his commentary on Ezekiel. He explains there that when God speaks he can use both words and things in ways independent of their usual fixed reference to time and place. What is important is the meaning of what he says; that is the constant. In a similar spirit it seemed perfectly appropriate to Gregory to report the same miracle of more than one saint. In the *Dialogues* he tells three stories of one Nonnosus: how he could not move a stone from his garden, and it moved in the night when he prayed about it (compare a story of Gregory Thaumaturgos); how, like Donatus, he restored a broken vessel; and

[8] J. Richards, *Consul of God: The Life and Times of Gregory the Great* (London, 1980), gives a list of fourteen such cases, p. 23 n. 73.

like Elijah he performed a miracle and caused there to be ample oil when the monastery had none and monks could not leave the monastery to buy it for fear of the danger to their immortal souls (*D*: I.7, *PL* 77.181–4).

This is a main principle of his exegesis: words and things may be very flexible and have a variety of significations in different contexts, but the truths they conduce to teach do not vary, and we can look for and find consistent links and relationships. There is an underlying order. The overall arrangement falls under the heads of the four senses of Scripture. An example of God's teaching by 'things' is, says Gregory, the tropological sense, when something 'done' in Scripture (*res gesta*) (*Ev.* XXI.2, *PL* 76.1170) signifies something the Christian himself ought to do. We might ask why an angel announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds while a star told the Magi of his birth. The difference between the two 'things' is significant. The angel stands for the promise given to the faithful. It was fitting that a rational being (the angel) should preach to the Jews, as reasonable men; the pagans, who did not know how to use reason, were led to the knowledge of the Lord not *per vocem* but *per signa* (*Ev.* X.1, *PL* 76.1110C). These accounts of the matter teach spiritual truth, by appealing to connected ideas in the reader's mind, in one or more of the four ways appropriate to a literal, allegorical, anagogical or tropological sense of Scripture.[9]

In Ezekiel's reference to a doorway, Gregory finds an image of the incarnate Christ. Someone standing in a doorway is partly inside (*intus*) and partly outside (*foris*), partly visible to those outside and partly hidden. 'And thus our Redeemer, mercifully incarnate for us, stands, to our human eyes, as though in a doorway, for he both appeared visible through his humanity and kept himself invisible in his divinity . . . Men saw him hungry, thirsty, eating and drinking, weary and sleeping, and thought him only a man' (*Ez.* II.ii.15, p. 219.428ff, on Ezekiel 40.3: *Stabat autem in porta*). 'What else is signified by this appellation of "doorway" (*appellatio*), but our Lord and Redeemer who is made a door for us into the heavenly kingdom?' (*Ez.* II.iii.1, p. 237.3–5). Christ himself is both in and out, *intus* and *foris*. This is the supremely apt instance which encapsulates Gregory's theory of signs in a single picture. But elsewhere there are many instructive 'things' which he identifies as images in the same way. The Church is like a royal palace (*In Cant. 26*, p. 27.503–6). We 'run perfectly' when we follow God with perseverance; we run in some sense when we follow him eagerly.

[9] W. F. Bolton, 'The Supra-Historical Sense in the *Dialogues* of Gregory I', *Aevum*, 33 (1959), 206–13.

If we follow him half-heartedly, we amble after him (*In Cant. 25*, p. 25.472–8). The 'kiss' of the Bridegroom's mouth is perfect inner peace (*In Cant. 19*, p. 21.390). All these are outward things which have an inward aspect.

Even when they are conventional, these images are intensely and visually vivid to Gregory. Scripture is like a cool wood into whose shade we come to hide from the heat of the world. 'And there we pick the bright green plants of its meanings, and we chew them by exposition' (*Ez.* I.v.i; p. 57.1–14). Or it is like a mountain to be climbed (*In Cant.* 5, p. 7). He sees the truth within as though it shone or pulsed with life and animated the thing which is outwardly visible. Gregory often says, 'Let us set before our eyes . . .' (*In Cant.* 15, p. 17.305–8). He wants us to gaze on these wonders with solemn wonder, but not to subject them to rational analysis. 'Things that are marvellous are not to be pried into by reason', he says, or 'sifted in intellectual curiosity' (*J*: VI.xv.19). The divine teaching by things is directed at the whole man, intellect and feeling, and he should respond to it with warmth and eagerness and spontaneity because he is struck by its brilliance, and not because he has thought out his response and decided it is reasonable. He is intended to be overwhelmed. Discussion and explanation can come later – and Gregory himself in all his writing, carried over his experience of the miraculous into patient listing and comparing, so as to make sense of it for others. Miracle and philosophy are not incompatible, but the philosophising should follow the affirmation of faith which the miracle is designed to evoke.

Thus the miracles of Jesus are both visual aids to our further and higher understanding and an exact account of what happened. His works both demonstrate his power to rational men and say something deeper by their very mystery. We do not know exactly who the blind man was whom Jesus healed, but we do know what he stands for *per mysterium*: the human race which, after the Fall, could not see the light; by the presence of the saviour it was enlightened so that it could see again. Jericho, in the same story, stands for the moon, which is commonly used in Scripture to refer to human mortality because it wanes or declines as man does in his body. When Jesus took humanity upon him human flesh received the light it had lost like a waning moon beginning to wax again. But again, Jericho is a real place as well as a significant mystery (*Ev.* II.1–2, *PL* 76.1082B–D).

This life is itself an acting out of an image or *exemplum*, in which the elect travel on a pilgrimage to their native country, where they will receive their inheritance (*J*: XVIII.xxvii.48, p. 916.17–19). They are

required to hold all transient things as of no importance and having nothing to do with themselves (*J*: XVIII.xxvii.48, p. 916.20). That is to say, they must understand that they are acting out a story as in a play, where what appears on the stage is a pretence, however instructive it may be, and reality lies with the lives the actors live behind the masks. The actors have a responsibility to perform the play well. But when it is over, they go home. Gregory did not have so vivid and disturbing an experience of theatre as Augustine, and this last is not his image. But he did have as strong a sense as Augustine of the ease with which the watchers of a play could be persuaded that it was real and the difficulty which they found in seeing behind it to the actual reality. Man cannot see his heavenly homeland since he was driven out of paradise and since he does not know the invisible by experience it is hard for him to believe in its reality. Like Augustine, he was well aware that the visible seems more real than what is known spiritually and a man must make a huge and constant effort to render it unreal to himself (*D*: IV.1, *PL* 77.317).

SPECULATIVE THEOLOGY

There are few theological and philosophical ideas current in his day on which Gregory does not touch, but he wrote no coordinated studies of the sort Augustine attempted in his books on the Trinity or Christian Learning or Freedom of Choice. His views are to be found piecemeal in various contexts, where he discusses problems as they arise. He does so chiefly in the course of exegesis, but also, as we have seen, in the *Dialogues*, where there is reflection on the soul, on the nature of death, on resurrection, on the character of the life to come, as Gregory and Peter the Deacon consider what is to be learned by observing the deaths of holy men. The *Regula Pastoralis*, Gregory's only work with a single theme, deals, not strictly with a topic of speculative theology (as Boethius would have recognised the notion),[1] but with the practical and theoretical aspects of the work and responsibilities of a bishop.

Fragmentary though it is, however, there is a very great deal of theology diffused through Gregory's writings, and taken as a whole it forms a complete system. Gregory is a theologian without deep intellectual anxieties. His own active struggle was with the difficulty of maintaining a balance between the demands of this world and his longing for the next, and he wrote accordingly on the spiritual life and on pastoral care. Augustine woke in the night sometimes because an unsolved philosophical or theological problem was troubling him.[2] Gregory took the solutions arrived at by those before him largely for granted. Chalcedon seemed to him a resting-place for the old debates on points of doctrine. This calm and assurance gives Gregory's theology a maturity and a settled air which was new in the Latin West.

Gregory's theology is none the less coherent for being scattered throughout his works. Certain areas of discussion which had a larger importance in the days of the development of the mediaeval *summa* and the system of systematic theology to which it gave rise, have a

[1] Boethius discusses the matter in the *De Trinitate*, in *Theological Tractates*, ed. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand and S. J. Tester (London, repr. 1973).

[2] Augustine, *De Ordine*, I.iii.6–7, ed. W. M. Green, *CCSL*, 29 (Turnhout, 1982).

smaller place in Gregory's account: the doctrine of the sacraments to be found in Gregory is, for example, somewhat undeveloped by comparison. But the key elements of the Creeds are covered fully. Gregory uses his knowledge of doctrinal principles as he uses his philosophical assumptions, as a solid floor on which he walks about, pointing out to his readers or listeners a vista here, a vantage-point there, from which they may glimpse some aspect of themselves or some sight of the divine. It is all preeminently practical: a teaching exercise which takes for granted a knowledge of first principles (or inculcates them indirectly) as assumptions on which we may go forward, and concentrates upon the need to apply Christianity in daily living. We have, at every point, instructions for making the speculative insights of contemplation work out in action.

Hilary of Poitiers (c. 315–67) had pointed out that a list of the divine attributes can be derived from the Bible: God's eternity, beauty, infinity, and so on, are clearly described there. Our knowledge of them is not dependent on the teaching of the philosophers. Scripture has the extra advantage, he says, that its teaching is easier to grasp than that of the philosophers.[3] On the other hand, there can be no question but that philosophical discussion, and especially discussions between philosophers and Christians over several centuries, had encouraged Christian apologists to look for Scriptural evidence that the divine attributes were in fact those felt to be appropriate on philosophical grounds to the Supreme Being.[4] Gregory harvests the results of their enquiries.

Cicero's starting-point in the *De Natura Deorum* had been to ask what we can know about the gods. Do they exist? What are they, and what part do they take in the affairs and the running of the world (*De Nat. Deorum* I.i–ii)? As he discusses the views of earlier philosophers, Cicero makes objections from which his own residual notion of what must constitute the divine emerges by elimination. Anaximander, he explains, said that the gods do not live for ever but are born and perish, albeit at long intervals. To Cicero's mind, gods must be immortal to be gods at all. Anaximenes said that the air is god, infinite in extent and continually in motion; Cicero objects that a shapeless god is inconceivable; god must possess a shape, and the most beautiful shape possible at that. Pythagoras said that the world is pervaded by a divine soul, of which our souls are fragments. Cicero cannot believe this to be true

[3] Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, III.i.5, *PL* 10.76–8.

[4] On this debate, see H. Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford, 1966).

because portions of the divine soul would then sometimes be unhappy (when individual men were sad), and Cicero holds that the gods are always happy (*De Nat. Deorum* I.x–xiii). Something of the same sub-structure of assumptions is still visible in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, written much closer to Gregory's own day. Boethius, here arguing philosophically and without explicit reference to Christian teaching, holds that the world is governed by one immortal, supremely good, tranquil and unchanging, supremely happy and reasonable being.[5]

Gregory refers to the divine attributes in the *Moralia in Job* where they happen individually to be relevant to the commentary, but always on the assumption that they will be familiar to his readers. God is beauty (*J*: XXXII.vi.8), tranquillity (*J*: XXXIII.xxxvii.63), dazzling light (*J*: XVIII.liv.92. p. 954–5), immutability (*J*: III.iii.4, p. 117.35; *J*: II.xx.34, p. 81.7–8). He is present everywhere (*J*: XVI.xxxi.38, p. 821.4–6) although the inaccessible light in which he dwells makes him invisible (cf. *J*: XVI.viii.12, p. 805.5–7; *J*: XXVII.vi.9). He is unimaginably immense (*J*: II.xii.21, p. 71.31–3; *J*: XVI.xxxi.38, p. 821.6–10). He is eternal (*J*: IX.xlvii.72; *J*: XXVII.vi.9). He is power (*J*: III.iii.4, pp. 116–17), omnipotence (*J*: XXIX.xxxi.67; *J*: XXIX.xxxiii.72), omniscience (*J*: VI.xviii.32, p. 307; *J*: IX.iv.4, p. 458). Although he is impassible (*J*: II.xx.34, p. 81.7–8), he is both justice (*J*: II.xviii.31, p. 79) and mercy (*J*: IX.liii.81, p. 512–13; *J*: XVI.lviii.71, p. 840.16–18).

Gregory takes the passage: 'The Lord said to Satan' and asks in what way God can be said to 'speak' to Satan. Men talk through their throats and make actual sounds, because that is the only way in which the soul can communicate from where it stands 'behind the partition' of the body. But if we want to understand how God can be said to speak we need to understand something of his nature. Spiritual natures such as God's or Satan's are not a two-fold compound of mind and body, and their speaking is not of the human sort. Gregory is implicitly appealing to the philosophers' discussions of body and soul and their interrelation, and on the basis of their reasoning, and by finding examples in Scripture, he is able to distinguish the ways in which God speaks to angels, angels speak to God, the saints to God, God to the saints, and the four ways in which God speaks to the Devil (*J*: II.vii.8–12, pp. 64–8).

Gregory makes full use of his tried principles of analysis of Scriptural

[5] Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, in *Theological Tractates*, I, pr.vi; II, pr.iv; III, pr.ix; III, pr.xi and the summary in III, metr.ix (*O qui perpetua*).

language to draw out a picture of God from the words of Scripture in this way. He explains, for example, in connection with the above passage, that the word 'speaks' is used to describe God's communication with Satan, although that speaking is like nothing we know, but rather a direct revelation of his will to Satan's understanding, with no 'voice' needed. Similarly, the Devil 'speaks' to God in replying, not in words, but by those thoughts which God can read in his mind, however hard he tries to hide them (*J*: II.vii.12, pp. 67–8). But the Author of Scripture knows that we can best understand that this is a kind of conversation if the Bible uses the word 'speak', for that is the closest our experience comes to the higher reality. Gregory recognises the limitations of human language in talking about the divine, and does his best to help his listeners see behind those limitations by appealing to what seems philosophically to be self-evident truth.

If the Bible's use of human language presents special difficulties in referring to God, it presents perhaps even greater ones when it attempts to convey the communication of God with the world in the Incarnation. The philosophers had provided a good deal of help with the first of these. That became plain in the course of the discussions which surrounded the Arian controversy and made more urgent the need to explain the relationship of God the Father to God the Son. In the fourth century Marius Victorinus attacked the arguments of the Arian Candidus in this spirit in his *De Generatione Divina*. 'All generation', Candidus had said, 'is a kind of mutation'; but the divine is immutable; God the Father neither begets nor is begotten, for that would involve change.[6] To answer a philosopher in his own terms it was necessary to define and redefine those terms, so that orthodoxy might be preserved without any breach of the philosopher's assumption that there can be no change in God; for that is the Christian assumption, too.

Gregory can be seen at work on just such definitional exercises. It is asked how in the book of Job it is said that the Father was moved by Satan against the Son (since Job stands for and prefigures Christ). The Son is of one and the same nature as the Father; there is no inequality of power, no diversity of will, nothing to break the harmony of Father and Son. We must look very closely at 'moved' and 'against' to make sense of the statement (*J*: III.xiv.26, pp. 131–2). This keen-eyed Christian use of standard philosophical terms is as apparent in Gregory as in Augustine and others among the Fathers. These terms had become the terms of Christian use.

[6] Marius Victorinus, *Opera Theologica*, ed. A. Locher (Leipzig, 1976), p. 1.1–7.

The Son has all the attributes of the Godhead fully. But he is not the Father (*J*: II.xxiv.43, p. 86). Gregory is again alert to the difficulties posed by the attempt to use human language to explain how this may be, and he tests his thinking against the self-evident truths of philosophy once more. 'Our Lord Jesus Christ is born of the Father "before all times".' But to be accurate, because he neither began nor ceased to be, we should say that he was 'ever-born' (*natus*). Yet we cannot say that he is ever being born (*nascitur*) because that would make him seem imperfect. We may, however, say that he is 'ever born' if we take 'born' to describe his perfection and 'ever' to refer to his eternity. In this way that Being which is beyond time may be described in words which involve time (*J*: XXIX.i.1). Thus the 'origin' of his humanity has no before and after. But because the origin of his humanity began and ended, it 'received from time' a before and after (*J*: XXIX.ii.2).

A similar careful handling of the special uses of language against a philosophical background of assumptions is evident in Gregory's descriptions of the Holy Spirit's oneness with the Father and the Son on the one hand, and his mingling with men on the other. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (*J*: I.xxii.30, p. 41), coeternally with both (*J*: XXX.iv.37), from whom he is by an origin to which he is not subsequent; he who is produced by procession is not preceded by those from whom he proceeded. The one is divisibly three and the three indivisibly one (*J*: XXX.iv.37). He abides always with the Son, because he is of the same substance with him (*J*: II.lvi.92). Christ bestows him on his disciples because he proceeds from Christ (*J*: I.xxii.30, p. 41.7–10). But he also descends to all faithful souls, while still remaining in the Mediator. He has never left the human nature of him from whose divine nature he proceeds (*J*: II.lvi.90, p. 112.37–8).

The way in which the Holy Spirit comes to us may be compared to a sound coming out of the Lord's mouth, which breaks through the deafness of insensibility (*J*: XXVII.xvii.34). This 'voice' of the Lord is 'heard' when the 'breathing of his grace' is conceived within the mind (*J*: XXVII.xx.41). When the Spirit of God says, as it were, 'certain words' to us, he intimates what is to be done by his hidden power and instructs us in an instant, without the medium of sound. It would be more accurate to describe these words as 'seen' rather than 'heard'; words we take in sequence, bit by bit, while we 'see' at a single glance when he illumines by his sudden light the darkness of our ignorance. So, God the Holy Spirit communicates with the world.

Christian thinkers could readily make use of a good deal of

philosophical thinking on the divine attributes. But Plato's theory that the world was created not from nothing but by an *artifex* bringing together preexisting matter and forms, presented a substantial difficulty for Christian thinkers who wanted to reconcile the philosopher's account of the origin of this world with that of Genesis. While Seneca discusses it in *Letters* 58 and 65 and Apuleius in his treatise on Plato (*De Platone et Eius Dogmate* 1.5) for its intrinsic convincingness, Gregory Nazianzen classifies it amongst other erroneous philosophical ideas held by Epicurus, Aristotle, the Stoics, the Cynics, because it is incompatible with the Christian account.[7] Ambrose worked the matter out fully to the satisfaction of Augustine in his sermons on the six days of creation. He describes how Plato and his disciples say that there are three *principia* of all things: *deus*, *exemplar*, *materia*, and God acts upon the other two principles as a craftsman working to a pattern shapes a lump of clay. Aristotle, Pythagoras and others have, he says, held equally mistaken views (*Hexaemeron*, *Dies Prima* I.i.1–3). But Moses, foreseeing by the Holy Spirit that men would fall into these errors, began Genesis with the words: *in principio*, so that it should be clear that there was only one beginning, and that God was before matter or anything else, and that he was himself the *initium universorum*, the beginning of all things. Moses in other words, covered in advance in his choice of words whatever the philosophers were to say (*Hexaemeron*, *Dies Prima* I.ii.5).

Yet many of the details of Plato's account and that of other philosophers were acceptable to Christian teachers, and even helpful. Plato says that the world was created according to mathematical rules, as Macrobius points out in the *Somnium Scipionis* commentary (II.14–21ff). It became a commonplace of Christian thought that 'number, weight and measure' underlie creation (*Sapientia* II.1). It also seemed right to believe that because God is rational and intellectual he made beings which resemble him in these qualities, and which are designed to come to their full development by loving and knowing him.

The first of these creatures is the angel, which is the highest work of creation because it is pure spirit; the second is man, in whom there is a joining of soul and body. It was a point of some importance to Ambrose that it should be understood that man in some sense *was* his soul, that his body, indispensable as it was, was not his real self. In Genesis 46.26 we read: *omnes animae, quae descenderunt in Aegyptum*;

[7] Gregory Nazianzen, *De Arrianis*, ed. A. Engelbrecht, *CSEL*, 46. *In Tyranni Rufini Opera* (Vienna, 1910), pp. 265–76.

there the word 'souls' is used for 'men'.[8] Thus man belongs with the angels and God himself, among the spiritual beings.

The hierarchy of spiritual beings in Christian thought is again loosely related – although with important differences – to the hierarchy of lower, middle and higher gods described by Apuleius in the *De Deo Socratis*. In the *Asclepius* we read how human souls may, by the way they live their lives, come to resemble the higher or lower spirits. Some men are like gods because they live lives appropriate to spiritual beings; others become like beasts because of their behaviour. In himself man is a microcosm. He has it in common with stones that he exists, with trees that he is alive, with brute beasts that he feels, with the angels that he understands (*J*: IV.xi.20, pp. 177–8). Gregory knows of the theory that God created three sorts of spirit. The angels are pure spirit. In man, the soul gives life to the body but does not die with the body. In beasts the soul is the life of the body, but dies with it. Man, as a bodily creature, has something in common with both and can resemble angel or beast if he lives like either (*D*: IV.3).[9] There are Biblical parallels which, as he shows, would seem to confirm the view that this picture has a Christian application (Ecclesiastes 3.18–19, for example, is discussed in *D*: IV.4).

Gregory brought together a similar patterning of Christian and neoplatonic elements in his account of the higher creation. He explains that God made two creations to contemplate himself: the angelic[10] and the human. One had the clothing of the flesh; the other did not suffer from the infirmity of having a body. The angel is spirit alone; man is both spirit and flesh (*J*: IV.iii.8, p. 168.8–9). In his spiritual being the angel is not limited by space and time; no corporeal obstacle stands in his way (*J*: II.vii.8, p. 64). Yet he is not quite like God in being able simultaneously to be everywhere. Just as we are bodily creatures compared with the angels, the angels are, as it were, 'body' when compared with the supreme spirit, God himself (*J*: II.iii.3, pp. 60–2). Nevertheless, the angels are able to be both always in the presence of God and sent upon missions for our salvation (*J*: II.iii.3, p. 61.16–18). It is in something of this way, although there is a limitation upon him beyond what confines the good angels, that Satan can be said to have been 'present' among the angels during the conversations in heaven

[8] Ambrose, *Isaac vel Anima*, II.3, p. 643.4–17.

[9] *Asclepius*, in *Corpus Hermeticum*, II, ed. A. D. Nock and A. J. Festugière (Paris, 1945), p. 2.

[10] On Gregory's angelology, see P. Verbraken's comprehensive study 'Le commentaire de S. Grégoire sur le Premier Livre des Rois', *Revue Bénédictine*, 66 (1956), 159–217.

about Job. Even though he had long before been banished, Satan could be said to 'come before God' in the sense that God beholds him with the eye with which he beholds all spiritual things 'wherever' they are (for they have of course no 'place' (*J*: II.iv.4, p. 62.1–6)).

The good angels are now immutably fixed in their goodness, but that was not always so. They were given free will so that they could stand firm by their own free choice. Those who did so 'overcame' the changeableness of their nature so that they deserved to rise above their natural mutability to a state of immutability (*J*: XXVII.xl.65; *J*: XXV.vi.11). They have merit in God's sight because they clung to him of their own free will (*J*: V.xxxviii.68). They themselves made the 'motion' of their mutability still, and God rewards them in proportion. They now remain unchangeable, although as created beings they admit in themselves the variableness of change (*J*: V.xxxviii.68, pp. 267–9).

The angels are not all the same. They have a hierarchy of 'orders' (*J*: XXXII.xxiii.48). The ten pieces of silver which the woman had in the Gospel story are the nine orders of angels, plus mankind, who was created to complete the number of the elect. Gregory lists these orders from Scripture: angels and archangels (frequently mentioned), and cherubim and seraphim spoken of in the prophets. The others, he says, are listed by Paul (Ephesians 1.21; Colossians 1.16). God designed them thus, so that they could both rejoice together in the sight of their Creator, and serve one another in an orderliness of diversity, according to their ranks (*J*: XXVIII.i.9). The lowlier angels are under the authority of superior angels (*J*: IV.xxix.55, pp. 199–200). Just as in the remainder of creation we learn from things without sense to think more clearly about beings which have sense and understanding; and just as the air is made fruitful by the air above it; and just as the air lies under heaven and is governed by it; so man is above the beasts, the angels above man, and the archangels are set in rank and authority over the angels. Each order of angels has its proper tasks allotted to it, according to its nature (*J*: XVII.xii.17, pp. 861–2).

Greatest of all the angels was Satan. He was unutterably beautiful; and his beauty was the higher for the 'adornment' of the multitude of angels which were subject to him. He was a tree in God's paradise, with many thickly clustered branches, which were the legions of the heavenly spirits. When Satan fell, his condemnation was absolute, because he had been created so great (*J*: XXXII.xxiii.47). It is in keeping with his high standing that he fell by pride (*J*: XXVIII.ii.11) which

proved to be the beginning of many other sins and the means by which Satan subsequently overthrew men (*J*: XXXIV.xiii.47).

Good angels are not like good men, in that good angels have never been evil, while good men have been sinners (*J*: XVIII.xliv.71, pp. 936–7). On the other hand, the angels did not suffer from man's infirmity of being a bodily as well as a spiritual creature (*J*: IV.iii.8, pp. 168–9). There was less excuse for the angelic lapse, and for that reason Satan's punishment, as we have seen, was irrevocable. But God was willing to redeem man.

The process of salvaging mankind involves the angels as closely as the fallen among them are involved in the fall of man. We are helped simply by thinking about them, by the awareness that while we are imprisoned in space and confined by the blindness of ignorance, they are growing in the knowledge of God in a freedom which, although it is imperfect (*J*: XXVI.xii.19), is unimaginably beyond us (*J*: II.iii.3, p. 61); this creates in us in our turn a longing for God.

More directly, they help us at God's command, when he speaks to us by an angel, in the person of an angel, or through 'words' or 'things' or 'words and things together' (*J*: XXVIII.i.2), or by means of 'earthly substances', as when he reproved Balaam through the soul of an ass (Numbers 22.28), by means of 'heavenly substances', as when the voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Matthew 3.17). Sometimes God speaks through angels by earthly and heavenly substances together; in the episode of the burning bush there was both a physical sign and a voice (Exodus 3.2).

Among the angels some stand before God in contemplation always; others also carry out the task of taking messages to men or fighting the 'powers of the air' (*J*: XVII.xiii.19, p. 863.16–29), their fallen fellows.

Into this created universe of higher and lower beings, there entered at the fall of Satan (or appeared to enter, for evil has no real existence), the problem of evil (*J*: III.ix.15, pp. 123–5). And God is able to control its effects by bringing them within his own providential plan. Diversity, which is a sign of defect for both Platonists and Christians, is brought to order in such a way that one man or angel governs another (*J*: XXI.xv.22, p. 1082.14–17). Within his providential purposes God allows the apparent evil of temptation to befall good men, so that they will not become over-confident and will understand that all their good works are really God's works (*J*: XXIV.xi.27). Or he lets something which is good in itself appear a scourge to us, and cause us pain

(*J*: III.ix.15, pp. 123–5; *J*: XXVI.xxvi.44), so that his elect may be purified (*J*: XXVI.xviii.32). Or he may seem to permit evil by not immediately punishing the wicked, although in reality he is acting out of great forbearance (*J*: XXV.iv.6; *J*: XXVI.xx.36).

But orderly as all this is, evil is for the present still a powerful and terrible force, and the working out of the battle between good and evil, although it is ultimately not in question, nevertheless requires sustained and unremitting effort on the part of men and of angels, and the close supervision of divine providence. For Gregory, as for the Neoplatonists, this is both an intellectual and a moral battle.

When he was first created, man had the power to see God in his mind's eye in the light God himself shed upon his mind. After Adam's first sin, he lost that light and hid his face, because he was afraid to look at the God he used to love (*J*: XI.xliii.59, p. 619.8–11). The life of fallen man has continued to be miserable. Every man is now doomed to bodily death (*J*: IV.xxviii.54, pp. 198–9). Man has his origin in corruption and carries his corruption about with him (*J*: XIII.xlv.50, p. 695.7–9). We are stripped naked of the 'robe of innocence given us before in paradise' (*J*: XII.vi.9, p. 633.5–6), and we lose our very flesh, too, by a continuous process of erosion or dissolution. Man's punishment is not only in his soul but also in his body. He has to struggle to get enough to eat, and to maintain health as well as he can (*J*: XL.xlix.66). The body wages war with disease; the soul fights a throng of distracting thoughts and desires (*J*: IV.xxx.57, pp. 201–3), which overwhelm the mind.

More: man's body and soul are divided and at war with one another. The body readily triumphs over the sinful soul and a man becomes enslaved by his body and his desires (*J*: IV.xxx.57, pp. 201–3). Although the just are possessed by no unmanageable 'riot of carnal desires', even they experience the effect of corruption, and every day they fight an inward conflict with themselves (*J*: IV.xxxiv.68, pp. 211–13). Only through the Spirit can the pressing stirrings of bodily desires be subdued, so that it is as though those in whom the Spirit dwells were not 'in the flesh' in the ordinary sense of the word (*J*: XV.lxi.72, pp. 797–8). Conversely, through giving way to sin, man becomes wholly carnal, even in soul, so as to be able to form images of what he can learn through his senses (*J*: V.xxxiv.6, p. 261).

All this, Scripturally based though it consistently is, rests wherever it conveniently does so upon philosophical teachings and assumptions which seemed reasonable to Gregory. So we arrive at a picture of the divine attributes by learning to understand the language of the Bible,

and also by striving to be, as far as we can, what we thus come to understand God himself to be. When we restrain our turbulent thoughts and are tranquil and mild, then we return to the likeness of our Creator (*J*: v.xlv.78, pp. 275–7). We find this difficult to do by our own efforts (*J*: v.xxxii.57, pp. 239.46–51), but God is helping our understanding and our efforts to live good lives. 'As God is the Cause of causes and the Life of the living, so is he the Reason of reasonable creatures.'

Thus Gregory weaves together the philosophers' teaching – especially the Platonic elements – and Biblical material, not in a way which brings him to new discoveries, but in a manner quite new in the confident use he makes of his borrowed philosophical ideas. He spends very little time arguing old issues out; instead he concentrates upon the detailed practical application of God's teaching, by reason, to daily life. Here, too, the philosophers have their place, for they were as much moralists as speculators.

A major difficulty presents itself at the very point where theology moves from the study of God to the consideration of man. If God is impassible and immutable, how can Christ have been truly God, if he was also truly man and suffered and died? In the often pictorially evocative imagery of the *Moralia* Gregory points to the vulture as a striking image of the contrast between God and man. Christ, he says, while remaining in the loftiness of the divine nature, marked out, so to speak, from the height at which he flew, the carcase of our mortal being down below, and he let himself drop from the heavens to the depths (*J*: XVIII.xxxiii.55).

Gregory's solution to the problem has to do once again with the teaching power of images. God made himself into a 'bodily image' when he became man, so that men could understand him. That is not to say that his manhood was an illusion, an appearance only, as some heretics taught. But it was possible (and not demeaning) because it was a means of instructing man and reeducating his darkened mind. Christ is the true and exact image of the Father, an image which is born of itself without beginning (*J*: v.xxxv.64, p. 263.81–90). Through that image we strive to gain some sort of glimpse of God (*J*: v.xxxv.64, p. 263.9–10). It is especially appropriate that this should be so, because Christ is also perfect man and so he can speak to man in his manhood while remaining the Lord of the world before all ages in his Godhead (*J*: XXVII.ii.3).

Gregory labours this point. Christ is fully man, and yet not as any other man. Though a man may become God's Son by adoption, no

man ever becomes 'by nature' God, as God's own Son is (*J*: II.xxiii.42, p. 85). Yet when Christ became man he was not any the less man for being also God. 'He neither lessened the divine by the human, nor swallowed up the human in the divine' (*J*: II.xxiv.43, p. 86). Satan, who did not understand how this might be (for he comprehends only pride) saw Christ's humility as man and thought he could not be God. Because he saw that he was subject to passion as a man he did not believe him to be God by birth (*J*: II.xxiv.43, p. 86.19–22). This human capacity for suffering in the divine and impassible Christ Gregory understands to be 'still present', something he 'even now undergoes, now that he reigns from above over the hearts of the faithful'. For it is he who endures daily all that the wicked do to torment and injure the elect (*J*: III.xix.34, p. 137.1–24). So the communicating power of his humanity is still active even though he can no longer be seen in the body on earth.

Because he is a man, he is able to be in himself an analogy with the created world. We can understand him by comparison with created things, because he joined us in person among created things. That remains in some sense a permanent state of affairs, because Christ continues to offer a sacrifice for us without ceasing (*J*: I.xxiv.32, p. 42.26–43.8). He 'exhibits' his Incarnation to the Father continually for us (*J*: I.xxiv.32, p. 43.2), and while he shows himself to be a man, he is in himself the living intercession that washes out men's misdeeds. The sacrifice he made in dying on the Cross was made once and for all, but it was made outside time, too, and so perpetually and eternally (*J*: I.xxiv.32, p. 43.7–8).

The fact that Christ is supremely and naturally an analogy with created things in himself makes it easier for us to compare him with a wide range of created things. He is indeed a living example. By being made man he 'preached eternal truths' (*J*: XI.xii.19, p. 597.39). The Bible has all sorts of images of Christ, as suckling child (*J*: XVII.xxxii.51, p. 882.28–30); camel (*J*: I.xv.21, p. 35.10); tree (*J*: XIX.i.3, p. 957.42–9); bird (*J*: XVIII.xxxiv.54, p. 921.2); wall (*J*: XX.xxv.53, p. 1042.3); root (*J*: XII.v.6, p. 631.4).

He is both 'lion' and 'lamb' (*J*: XXX.xxi.66), contradictory as that may seem, because while neither epithet can be used 'properly' of him, attributes of each are in some way rightly used of him; he is called a 'lamb' for his innocence; he is called a 'lion' for his wisdom (*J*: XXX.xxi.66). 'We say all these things of him in figures, with the greater latitude the further removed they are from his essence' (*J*: XXX.xxi.66), and yet not without appropriateness because they are

able to help us understand certain things about him by analogy. Indeed, this process can go so far that the Incarnate Lord can be spoken of in the Bible as a 'worm' or a 'beetle' without inappropriateness.

It is often the case that a word used in one sense of Christ is also used in another sense, or several other senses: 'Sun' may mean 'Christ' or 'persecution' or 'the understanding of the wise' (*J*: XXXIV.xiv.25); 'bread' may mean 'the Lord' or 'spiritual grace' or 'the instruction of divine teaching' or 'the preaching of heretics' or 'sustenance for this present life' or 'the agreeableness of worldly pleasure' (*J*: XIII.xxx.49).

The most important of these images are those which speak of Christ as a gate or doorway between God and man (*J*: VI.iii.4, p. 286.10–20). 'Between the immortal and righteous one and ourselves who are mortal and unrighteous, appeared the Mediator of God and men, mortal and righteous, who could at the same time claim death with mortal men and righteousness with God' (*J*: XXII.xvi.41, p. 1121). He is a narrow gate (*J*: XXVIII.xi.26) and only disciplined souls may enter in.

He is equity, too (*J*: VI.xxx.37), a pair of scales or balances who, when he came down to weigh the merit of men's lives, 'brought down with him both justice and loving-kindness together'. By putting the greater weight in the scale of mercy, he lightened our transgressions by pardoning them. For having been like 'scales of marvellous balancing' in the hands of the Father, he hung our woe in his own Person in one scale, and in the other our sins. By dying he proved the woe to be of heavy weight, and by his action the sin proved light in mercy's scale (*J*: VII.i.2, p. 335; *J*: XXI.vi.11, pp. 1073–4). He himself lived a life of perfect balance as an example, doing miraculous works in the cities in the day-time and spending the night in devotion to prayer on the mountain – just as a good preacher, imitating him, should be both active and contemplative (*J*: VI.xxxvii.56, pp. 325–6).

A right understanding of him requires man to try to grasp his duality (*J*: XVI.viii.12, p. 805). Many men think that because they cannot see him in bodily shape and because he is higher than heaven and exalted above the stars, he cannot see from so great a distance what they do. It is, they think, as though he were holding the universe together from outside and did not see its interior (*J*: XVI.viii.12, p. 805).

But he himself does a very great deal to teach his people how to do this. He is the Physician who came to us from above and, finding us oppressed by such great diseases, applied to our case something of a like and something of a contrary nature, as physicians do. For he came to us as a man to men, but as a just man, coming to those who were in sin. He was like us in the truth of his nature, not like us in

differing from us in the power of his righteousness. Only God could mend sinful man. But it was necessary that he should, in healing him, become man so that man could see him. Thus the holy and invisible God appeared before us as a visible man like ourselves. Then while he seemed to be of a like nature, he could teach us by his holiness (*J*: XXIV.ii.2). It helped to repair the blindness of sinful man which makes him like a child born to a pregnant woman in prison, who knows nothing *per experimentum*, by experience, of sun, moon, stars, hills, fields, birds flying, horses running, and is given that 'experience' by Christ himself coming in person (*D*: IV.1, *PL* 77.317D).

This bodily and spiritual duality of perception which Christ makes one had become, Augustine taught, a dichotomy, a divisive barrier of understanding, since the fall of man. Gregory explores the implications of this principle for himself, finding it true as he tests it on passage after passage of the book of Job.

MORAL THEOLOGY[1]

Human free will in man's fallen state can do nothing good of itself. That was the conclusion to which Augustine came after two decades of reflection and writing, and Gregory follows him. We learn, he says, by experience, that we can do nothing without the help of divine grace – prevenient grace (*J*: II.xlix.78, pp. 106–7; *J*: II.lvi.89, pp. 111–12; *J*: XVII.xiv.20, p. 863.2). 'We really learn where our good qualities come from when, by apparently losing them, we are made to realise that they can never be preserved by our own efforts.'

Grace comes first. Good willing and good actions come afterwards (*J*: XXIV.x.24; *J*: XVI.xxv.30, pp. 815–16; *J*: XVII.xvi.22, pp. 864–5), so that we 'give our consent' to God when he delivers us, and only in that sense by a special usage of the term can we be said to 'deliver ourselves' (*J*: XXIV.x.24). In the *Dialogues*, Peter asks why some are chosen by God and others not. He is curious about a story of a group of monks who all died at once with their beloved abbot Anastasius, except one. The last remaining monk, who could not bear to outlive Anastasius, begged to follow him within seven days. Ambrose interceded for him and death was granted him as he asked. Peter suggests that God's plan had been modified at Ambrose's intercession. No, says Gregory, nothing had happened which God had not predestined. Anastasius' prayer had altered nothing (*D*: I.8, *PL* 77.188).

Nevertheless, grace is not an outright gift given once and for all. God keeps a close eye on its working within each individual. He sometimes appears to withdraw it in case the holder of the gift comes to think it is his own and becomes puffed up with pride. As a result the hearts of the elect are firmer and more soundly established for being shaken (*J*: II.xliii.68, p. 100.7–10).

This is possible, and necessary, because such gifts as the Spirit gives are not in man by nature, as they are, in Christ, an integral part of him (*J*: II.lvi.91). 'It is one thing for those born men to receive the grace of adoption [as sons], and another for one by the power

[1] On Gregory's moral theology, see L. Weber, *Hauptfragen der Moraltheologie Gregors des Grossen* (Freiburg, 1947).

of Godhead . . . to have come forth from the very conception' (*J*: XVIII.lii.85, p. 948.41–3).

God takes away in this manner not all grace, for he never withdraws that which the elect need for salvation, the meekness, humility, faith, hope, charity, which all good men possess (*J*: II.lvi.91, p. 113.52–4); but he sometimes withdraws for a time those gifts which are given not for a man's own benefit, but for the benefit of all beholders, such as prophecy, healing, the ability to speak in tongues (*J*: II.lvi.91, p. 113.54–7).

God credits to us by an act of grace the good works grace enables us to do. He gives us righteousness to live as we ought because in his loving-kindness he does not count our past misdeeds against us (*J*: IX.liii.80, pp. 511–12). He counts his own goodness ours (*J*: XVI.xxv.30, p. 816.16) as if it had proceeded only from ourselves. The man who claims the powers of grace in him to be his own is denying God (*J*: XXII.x.21).

The benefits of grace are real indeed, not only in making us good in the sight of God, but in the magnitude of their effects in some men. There are those who, by the gift of the Spirit, 'shine' with virtue, veritably 'flash' in the marvels and miracles they do (*J*: XVII.xv.21, p. 864.16–21). The Church, too, 'shines' with a multitude of miracles like a beacon because the gifts of grace fall upon her (*J*: XVII.xvi.22, p. 864.1–4).

Gregory's doctrine of prevenient grace is, then, clear and unequivocal. And yet he encourages men to work hard to be good, so as to be just in the sight of God. Six centuries later, Bernard of Clairvaux tackled the difficulty directly in the *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*. It had been put to him that he had not explained in his preaching how good works can have value in the presence of grace.[2] This emphasis on good behaviour or 'works' is to be found everywhere in mediaeval monastic writers of every shade of opinion on grace and alongside the exhortations to be inwardly and spiritually good; Martha accompanies Mary, action, contemplation.

How does Gregory reconcile the notion that God counts only that goodness which he himself has given us, with the notion that he counts, in some sense, our own acts for and against us? Gregory says that there are those who are nominally Christians but do wicked deeds; these God does not recognise. There are others who are solidly grounded in the faith, but who do nothing to demonstrate their faith in living their lives.

[2] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Opera Omnia*, ed. J. Leclercq, C. H. Talbot and H. Rochais (Rome, 1957–78), 8 vols, III.165.17–18.

He takes the case of the woman with the issue of blood (Luke 8.45–6); they 'press' the Lord like the crowd, but they do not 'touch' him as the woman did, by living good lives (*J*: XX.xvii.43, pp. 1034–5). Gregory often comments on the outrageous anomaly such people present: those who neglect to do in practice what they are proud to be called as though they did (*J*: XXV.x.26; *J*: XXV.xv.34). They often fall into faithlessness; if they do not believe that strict judgement is hanging over them and think that they can sin without being punished, how can they be called faithful (*J*: XXV.x.27)? On the other hand, when we live well, when we wash our lives clean with tears, and stretch our muscles by good works, we are restored to 'newness' (*J*: XIX.xxx.53, pp. 998–9). We must make sure that we have done enough good works; our good works must be 'pounded' as it were in the mortar of the heart until they are ground very fine, and then carefully sifted by *consideratio* to see if they are really and truly good (*J*: I.xxxvi.54).

Works are also 'internal' in this way, just as faith is also 'external'. Intention is what makes an action good or evil in the eyes of God the Creator and Judge. 'If our intention is pure (*simplex*) before God, our action will not be dark in his Judgement' (*in eius iudicio nostra actio tenebrosa non erit*) (*Ez.* I.vii.2, p. 84.40–2). But the degree of strictness is high, and higher for the Christian than for those under the Old Law. Some things are permitted to the weak under the Old Law which in the New Law are not permitted: for example, in the Old Testament those in a 'weak state' were allowed to retaliate for an injury. That is no longer permissible. The standard of rectitude now expected is so high that even if a man speaks a curse to his neighbour with no intention of cursing him, but only by a slip of the tongue, he is guilty before the Just Judge (*J*: XVIII.iii.7, p. 889).

Gregory's constant concern for the practical aspects of living a Christian life comes into its own when he interprets Scripture tropologically, 'bending' each word or phrase to a moral purpose. But, as always with him, a theory is paired with practice and he develops in various places a moral theology in which he characterises the effects of good and evil in men in general terms and points to the indicators of their presence.

The principles of his system are Augustinian: as he does in treating other subjects, he sums up Augustine for us, bringing out the essence of what Augustine has to say.[3] Good men love the truth. They want to be in line in their thoughts and actions with the Truth which is God

[3] On Augustine's thinking on deceit and lying, see my *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 63–90.

himself. When Job's friends lied to him, they were no comfort to him, for the minds of holy men are pained by deceit. It is true that good men do not like to appear what they really are (*J*: XVIII.vi.12, p. 892.2–16), that is, to appear good, and that may seem a form of deceit. But that is because they know that their goodness is not really their own but God's gift (*J*: XXI.xvii.28, p. 1085.5–6), and they do not want to take credit for it falsely. In this way they offer a direct contrast to the hypocrites, who want to appear before the world as just men, when they are not.

Evil is always full of kinks and twistedness and deceptions. Just as the vices themselves pretend to be virtues (*J*: III.xxxvi.69, p. 157.21–6), so the wicked man lives a 'deceiving appearance'. He sees that other men are praised for their good deeds and so he pretends to be good (*J*: IV.x.17, pp. 174–5), but his goodness is merely 'external'. It is not of a piece with what is within him. And the hypocrite does not realise that the truly good try to avoid the praise he is seeking (*J*: IV.xi.20, p. 178.76–81). He is like a tiger, for he cannot be 'of one colour' if his good deeds are striped with vicious habits (*J*: V.xx.39, p. 245.2–4 and 11–13). His hypocrisy makes him a thief, because he is stealing the praise which belongs to the righteous (*J*: V.xx.39, p. 245.26–8). It also makes him defensive in justifying himself when he sees his carefully constructed edifice of pretence threatened by a thorough search within. When the hypocrite sees his life tottering under Judgement, he tries to prop it up by enumerating his good deeds.

These wicked men will be condemned at last. They are not the object of Gregory's concern and preaching. On the contrary, he holds them up as an example to those striving to be good, so that they can clearly see by contrast what it is that they must avoid. They are not the elect. There is no hope for them. The 'lost' will be tormented outwardly in hell and also inwardly, when they are left to starve for the 'bread' their souls will crave, the sight of God (*J*: VI.xxx.47, p. 318).

Good men, by contrast, are made happy not by the good they do to themselves, but by the good they do their fellow-creatures. In this they imitate God in his mercy and justice and benevolence. When holy men find themselves in positions of authority they take no pleasure in being set over their fellow-creatures. They want to be not kings of men but shepherds of flocks (*J*: XXI.xv.22, p. 1082.20–1). It is in this way that Gregory conceives the good *rector* to rule. So it is that good men are not tainted by their contact with the world. Its rewards mean nothing to them, and they do not need to show off their good works.

Thus they are able to live amongst wicked men and hold onto their goodness (*J*: XX.xxxix.76, p. 1059–60).

This is the case, paradoxically perhaps, even though they never allow themselves to feel safe from temptation (*J*: XIX.ii.8, pp.960–1). They are glad when they are rescued from their evil habits by grace but once out of the storm of the moment, they call to mind that they are still tossing on the seas in 'treacherous waves' (*J*: V.xxii.44, p. 249.42). Their fear of danger is an eminently sane one; they do not tremble but rise up to do battle, exulting in the exercise of virtue and rejoicing when they win a victory (*J*: XXXI.xxxiii.69). This may sometimes lead to the sin of pride, but good men do not stay proud for long (*J*: XII.xxxiii.38, pp. 650–1). Nor do they fight in a way which does not befit their virtue. They are silent when others accuse them, remaining inwardly quiet and saying nothing to accuse others in return (*J*: XXII.xvi.37, pp. 1029–30).

Good men are like God; that is to say, they have, so far as it is possible to fallen men, both the 'image' and the 'likeness' to God in which they were created (Genesis 1.26). This is not, of course, the same as Christ's likeness to the Father. Gregory comments that in Scripture words such as 'like' and 'as if' are sometimes used not to signify likeness but to signify the reality; for example in John 1.14, Christ's glory is said to be 'as of' the Only-Begotten of the Father. Here 'like' and 'as' may be seen as making an affirmation rather than a comparison (*J*: XVIII.vi.12, p. 892.16–17). Morally and spiritually the strongest mark of this resemblance of good men to God is the inward stillness and calm they display. They are tranquil in the midst of earthly turmoils. Even busy administrators can, if they are 'holy men', remain free inwardly while outwardly doing their duty (*J*: XVIII.xliii.70, pp. 935–6). When their enemies attack them, holy men are not angry. They pray. And if their detractors could be brought to see reason, they would rather talk to them quietly than argue with them (*J*: XIV.li.59, p.733.2–6; *J*: XIII.iv.4, p. 670.1–11). When the wicked speak ill of good men, the holy are not disturbed; they do not answer back; the righteous never return abuse, even when they are made to hear things of themselves which they know to be false. In their way, they are impassible like God.

Good men are also like God in their sweetness and simplicity. If a good man does not encounter adversity he may seem insipid and characterless. But when he is persecuted he instantly gives forth warmth and fragrance, and what before seemed weak or contemptible becomes a fervour and piety which everyone can see (*J*: I.v.6, p. 28.3–20).

Similarly the simplicity of the good may look like the innocence of the simple-minded or slow-witted. But in reality it is an intelligent simplicity. The good must have the craftiness of the serpent if they are to know where to put their feet without going off the path as they walk (*J*: I.i.2, p. 26.1–20). As in God, so in their lesser degree in good men, sweetness and simplicity are deep and rich and contain in their unity a very great deal.

The resemblance is more than spiritual. A good man should be not only 'moulded' inwardly in the image of God but 'fashioned altogether round about' in his flesh in a Godly way (*J*: IX.xlix.74, p. 509.2–4). In his relation to creation man is intended to learn from and come to resemble the good creation of God as well as God himself. Man has not been a good pupil. God created him and he neglects to think about his Creator. God gave man precepts and he refused to obey them. He gave man examples and he did not imitate them (*J*: Pref.ii.4, p. 10.7–9). Man has become more like a beast than like his God, Gregory comments, in another echo of the Hermetic tradition.

If a good man is marked by his likeness to God (*similitudo*; *imago*) (*J*: XXX.vii.55), the wicked man is marked by his differences from him. 'She who is beautiful among women knows herself' (Song of Songs 1.8). Every elect soul remembers that it was fashioned in the image of God and in his likeness and lives in accordance with the likeness it has perceived (*J*: XXX.vii.55). By contrast, the wicked man has lost this perception and he is hard of heart and persists in his wrong behaviour, 'For they who are first knowingly rebels are afterwards blinded so as not to know that they rebel' (*J*: XVI.lviii.71, p. 839.2–3). He presents the shield of his pride against the darts of truth, so that he may not be struck in the heart for his own good (*J*: XVI.lvii.70, p. 839.5–7). He builds the roof of earthly prosperity above him, piling up wordly goods with anxious industry, until he thinks he is safe and proof against whatever is to come (*J*: VIII.liv.91, p. 453.1–14).

Gregory takes Augustine's notions of the deceptiveness of evil, the power of habit, the utter contrast of good and evil in every respect, ideas he would have found in other sources, too, but nowhere so fully worked out and so repeatedly discussed as in Augustine. He couples them with Scriptural passages and draws out of them a series of vivid and memorable images. He shows us good and evil working in men graphically; it is this power of imagery which makes his account so striking to mediaeval readers and helped to bring home to them the implications of what Augustine had said.

THE ART OF PREACHING

If a preacher does not denounce the wicked, he himself will be reckoned guilty, says Gregory (*Ez.* I.xi.22, p. 179.382–3). Augustine of Hippo would admonish his congregations and they would applaud.[1] Preaching was a lively and even theatrical business in the late Roman world; the preacher engaged his audience by encouraging them to respond aloud.

The preacher of the late antique world took his style from the orator. In the high days of Rome and even in Augustine's time, every educated man was trained in public speaking. The emphasis was upon fluency and persuasiveness. The orator had to be able to think on his feet and to that end he was taught outline arguments and made to memorise a large stock of illustrations and comparisons and stories and images. He delivered his speech with appropriate gestures, using his eyes and hands as well as his voice to make his point. He was taught to watch his audience's response and to meet it, working upon their emotions as well as upon their minds. Even if only a pale shadow of this rhetorical education was available to Gregory, his audience's taste for the vivid and graphic, the exciting and surprising, was clearly much the same as that of Augustine's listeners.[2] His preaching retains an air of the live delivery of ideas, filled out and explored before the audience as they occur to the preacher.

Nevertheless, as we have them, they have received attention as written compositions. Gregory describes how one of his monks, Claudius, who heard him preach on Proverbs, the Song of Songs, Prophets, Kings and the Heptateuch, took notes for him because he was ill, so that what he had to say should not be lost; later he would bring the text to Gregory and have it corrected and improved.[3] He

[1] Cf. P. R. L. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (London, 1967), p. 230, on Sermon 24.6, for an account of Augustine preaching to great crowds in Carthage to cheers of 'Down with the Roman gods!'.

[2] If Gregory could not preach for a time, he felt it necessary to apologise. See *Ev.* XXXIV.1, *PL* 76.1246C; *Ev.* XXII.1, *PL* 76.1174C; *Ev.* XXI.1, *PL* 76.1169; *Ev.* I.1, *PL* 76.1075 .

[3] Cf. *J*: Ep. Leander, 2, p. 3.79–83.

sometimes composed his sermons by dictation, ready to be read out by a notarius when he was too ill to preach himself (*Ev.* I.1, *PL* 76.1075A). But he knows that when he is too ill to deliver the sermon himself, and it therefore lacks the added warmth and liveliness of his delivery, the people hear it with less enthusiasm (*minus libenter audientes*) (*Ev.* XXI.1, *PL* 76.1169C). It is for that reason he says that he has taken the unusual step in giving the Homilies on Ezekiel, of speaking in a 'colloquy' (*non dictando sed colloquendo*). He knows that live delivery, the *collocutionis vox*, excites dull hearts (*corda torpentia*) more than the voice of someone reading a prepared text. It is as though he nudged them awake out of concern for them. This account would suggest that the degree of formality with which sermons were composed and delivered varied according to circumstances, but that there was frequently a substantial prepared text, or at least notes. Certainly the sermons grew and developed in subsequent revisions.

Gregory says that at first he had explained the passage in Matthew which describes Jesus' temptation in the wilderness in a way which he later realised might be ambiguous. He then corrected the doubtful passage (*Ev.* I, Pref., *PL* 76.1078A). He made an effort to link each day's sermon with the one before (*Ev.* XXV.7, *PL* 76.1194). He explains that he has dealt briefly with one part so as to have time to deal in a more leisurely way with the next (*Ev.* XXXV.7, *PL* 76.1194). This comment is quite a frequent one with Gregory. He says, for example, that he intends to cover the text of the Gospel as briefly as possible, so that he may have the more time for reflection at the end. Or he says that he has dealt with the reading *summatim* and not taken it a word at a time, so as not to burden his listeners (*Ev.* XXIII.1, *PL* 76.1182B). Or he says that he has 'rushed through' it (*transcurrimus*) so as to make time for a consideration of the feast which is being celebrated (*Ev.* XXII.6, *PL* 76.1177B).

Gregory describes how he left the sermons on Ezekiel just as he had given them for a time (*ut coram populo loquebar*), in note-form (*exceptae*), because he was busy and other matters had intervened before he could work on them further. Eight years later, at the request of the brothers, he asked for his notes, and, looking them over, corrected them and made alterations as far as leisure would allow so that they could have a written record to read (*Ez.* Pref., p. 3.3–8).

Again, in composing the *Moralia in Job*, he began, he says, by giving the earlier parts orally to his brothers at Constantinople. Then, because for a time he had more leisure, he prepared what he had to say

beforehand by dictating it to a secretary. Later, when still longer leisure gave him the opportunity, he made alterations, adding here, deleting there, revising all that had been taken down as he spoke (*excerpta sub oculis*), and arranging the material in books.

Gregory liked to make an overall plan for his finished sermons – to give them literary form. He says that he has had the sermons on the Gospels copied in two codices, in the order in which they were given (*dictae*) and in such a way that the first twenty, which were dictated and are now rendered from Gregory's exact words as he read the prepared text, are distinguished from the second group of twenty, which were taken down as he delivered them (*quae sub oculis dictae*). He wants this order to be retained, even though he is aware that it results in some passages from the Gospel being treated out of sequence (*Ev.* I, Pref., *PL* 76.1078A).[4]

He also paid attention to the style, he says. Those parts he had delivered freely were more colloquial than the parts he had dictated before delivering them. He adjusted the dictated part to make it more colloquial and the other part to make it less colloquial, so as to give uniformity to the style throughout and make the parts into a whole. He did not, he fears, quite succeed, because his brothers drew him off to other work and would not let him correct the text as fully as he wished (*J*: Ep. Leander, 2, pp. 2–4).

Gregory's anxiety over structure and orderliness and his consciousness of the art of composition are clear enough; they are a rhetorician's concerns, adapted to Christian purposes. The same structural considerations are at work in the *Dialogues*, where the long biography of Benedict which forms Book II acts as a centrepiece, flanked by brief examples from other men's lives in Books I and II. These serve the purpose of rhetorical *topoi*; they are, both in the moral and in the rhetorical sense, *exempla*.[5] The pace is maintained and the series of examples held together by Peter the Deacon's questions and Gregory's replies.

To say that patterns of language, thought and imagery from ancient rhetoric are to be found in Gregory's writing is not to make of him a rhetorician of the order of Augustine. His style is of another age; it is also very much his own. The old habits left their traces in the

[4] See P. Verbraken, 'Le commentaire de S. Grégoire sur le Premier Livre des Rois', *Revue Bénédictine*, 66 (1956), 159–217.

[5] A. J. Festugière, 'Lieux communs littéraires et thèmes de folk-lore dans l'hagiographie primitive', *Wiener Studien: Zeitschrift für Klassische Philologie*, 73 (1960), 123–52.

writing of the centuries after the great days of rhetoric, but in a lower key; and here is a mind less ebullient, less roving than Augustine's. Gregory's is altogether a more sober rhetoric. The art of his preaching, though undeniably a rhetorical art, is subordinated to the exegetical purpose in ways that make it more pedestrian than Augustine's use of art in exegesis.

For Gregory, there can be no question of there being any contradiction in God's word, for there can be none in God himself. Yet contradictions and anomalies appear to present themselves: such difficulties as this: by what 'spirit' was Jesus led into the wilderness? Matthew says that 'the Devil' led him (Matthew 6.1). But we cannot believe that the spirit by which Jesus was led was other than the Holy Spirit. The text must mean that the evil spirit of Satan merely found him there, and then tempted him. If we distinguish between the possibility of tempting suggestions being put to Jesus and the possibility of his giving way to them, there is nothing improper in saying that Christ was tempted (*Ev.* I.16, *PL* 76.1135).

Gregory explains that if the literal senses of two passages seem irreconcilable, the contradictions will vanish if the real meanings, the deeper sense, are understood by the reader who makes himself thoroughly familiar with the text (*J*: IV, Pref.). These seeming-contradictions are there to force us to look more deeply into what we read. Christ's own actions are paradoxical: king of heaven, he refused to be made a king on earth. Through events and created things of every sort, and through everything which happens to them in the course of their lives, God teaches his elect to turn from worldly glory, not to fear what they feel to be frightening, to love adversity for the sake of the truth (*R*: I.3, *PL* 77.16C–D). God challenges us constantly in this way by surprising us.

The problem of contradiction in the Gospels in particular, and especially in the apparent disagreements between the accounts the Gospels give of certain episodes, had already been discussed by Augustine in his *De Consensu Evangelistarum*. In the Homilies on the Gospels Gregory comes across such difficulties again and again. 'Is this the same as the episode in Luke?', he asks of one passage in Matthew (*Ev.* XXXVIII.1, *PL* 76.1282). In the passage in John 1.19–28, when the Jews are described as sending to John the Baptist to ask him who he is, 'it seems that John is lying when he says that he is not a prophet' (*Ev.* VII.2, *PL* 76.1100). This is not so. John says what he is; he is 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness'; that is a more accurate description than if he were to call himself a prophet, for he was able

not only to prophesy the coming of the Redeemer, but to point to him and show him to the people.

Gregory's answers to these problems rest upon the foundation principle that we can be certain that in every part of Scripture the author speaks at the prompting of the same Spirit, and that the Holy Spirit cannot contradict himself.

THE PREACHER

When a Christian is ordained to the priesthood he is given an additional responsibility. He is not only to weep for his own sins but also to grieve over the sins of his charges (*In Reg.* IV.168, p. 384.3393–9). This responsibility for other men's sins made Gregory consider preaching the most important of the tasks of a bishop, and perhaps of any priest, although it is to bishops that he chiefly addresses himself.[1] Preaching is, in his view, so fundamentally the function of the successors of the apostles that it is only by preaching that they can fulfil Christ's two precepts, to love God and to love one's neighbour, within the terms of their office. Gregory says that Isaiah desired the *officium praedicationis* so that he could benefit his neighbours by his active life. Jeremiah longed to cling in contemplation to his Creator, and he begged not to be sent out to the active work of preaching (*R*: I.7, *PL* 77.20B). Both were praiseworthy in wishing to avoid the division of heart and mind which would make them less able to perform their chosen task properly. But the modern bishop must try to do both as well as he can, and bear with the discomfort of a divided mind. The Lord sent angels to the Church, and patriarchs, and prophets 'bearing spiritual gifts' (*In Cant.* 12, p. 14.247–8). He sent John the Baptist, too, who, because he could not give the baptism which would save from sin, did what he could by preaching instead (*Ev.* XX.2, *PL* 76.1161B). Christ sent his disciples out to preach and gave them the power to perform miracles, so that they could teach through both words and visible marvels. If they did not cry aloud the world itself would do so, and these wonders would make it plain that their words were to be believed (*Ev.* IV.2, *PL* 76.1090). Now, in our own time, the successors of the apostles are sent to preach to the people. Like their disciples, they earn their keep and deserve to be fed, not as a reward, but so that they may have strength to do their work (*J*: XIX.XIV.22, pp. 973–4).

[1] See C. H. Turner, 'The Organisation of the Church', *Cambridge Mediaeval History* I (Cambridge, 1911), p. 161, on the history of the presbyter's right to preach.

The preacher follows, then, in a tradition which should make him take his work with the utmost seriousness. Only when God has been received into men's hearts is the preacher's work done (*J*: XVII.xviii.27, p. 867.22–6). When preachers speak in accord with one another, that is the harmony of heaven. God himself works so closely with preachers that when he was on earth and visible to us the words of preachers were withdrawn (*J*: XXX.iv.17), but now that he is not present in the flesh they must speak for him. Gregory requires the preacher to make most careful preparations when he is to speak, because he is his people's leader and must not lead them astray by talk which is out of place (*inordinate*: another aspect of his concern for order) (*Letter* I.24, *CCSL*, p. 27.178). Of all the things to which a newly appointed bishop should turn his *consideratio* preaching should be most constantly in his thoughts (*Letter* II.40, *CCSL*, p. 128.31–2).

This is clearly a great responsibility, a great 'load' for the preacher, as Gregory himself found (*In Reg.* I.106, p. 117.2467–8 and *In Reg.* IV.190, p. 400.3985–8). But, arduous though it is, it should be work for which he feels a burning zeal. When hearers are kindled by the word of their teachers, they are like garments which become warm from a living body (*J*: XXVII.xxxviii.64). In the *Dialogues* Gregory describes how one Albinus had such an overpowering longing to collect souls for God that he travelled about everywhere, to churches, villages, individual houses, and stirred the minds of his listeners to love of the heavenly homeland. He was dressed in rags and rode the most broken-down horse he could find, but in his saddle-bags he carried the Scriptures and, wherever he was, he 'opened the fountain of the Scriptures and watered the fields of men's minds'. It was asked in Rome who was this uneducated man (*vir rusticus*) who took upon himself the authority of a preacher and presumed to usurp the apostolic office of our Lord (*D*: I.4, *PL* 77.169–72). Albinus put Rome's Churchleaders to shame because he did the work every bishop should be doing, and with such zeal, putting it first as they should have done themselves.

'Everyone who either by private right rules a domestic household or for the common advantage is set over faithful multitudes, in that he possesses the right of government over the faithful committed to him, what else does he do but hold the land to cultivate it?' (*J*: XXII.xxi.52, p. 1130.16–19). Gregory's emphasis upon the rector's duty of pastoral care for subjects extends in some measure to secular rulers, but Gregory's first concern is for right rule among the *rectores* of Christian souls. If they concentrate upon their pastoral work they

will not want their subjects to fear them or to venerate them (*J*: XXIV.XXV.52). Indeed, the truly 'mighty' in the Church are those who have successfully overcome the desires of this world (*J*: XXVI.xli.75) for themselves and want only the good of those who are their responsibility.

The primary task of the pastor or *rector* is not only to preach but to do so to such effect that his people are righteous; in this lies the true glory of a priest (*J*: XI.xiv.22, p. 598.2–3). A vast progeny of faithful souls is produced by the fertility of holy preaching (*J*: VI.xxxvi.55, p. 324.17–20). It is as though the Church, the Bride of the Word of God, were filled with the Holy Spirit, and became 'with young' by preaching; as though she suffered the pains of childbirth in exhorting her children; and brought them forth at last by converting their hearts (*J*: XIX.xii.19, p. 970.9–13).

Gregory has a number of favourite images of this perpetual work of preaching, and as with so much else in his work, it is these images which persist in the imaginations of mediaeval exegetes and carry Gregory's thought behind them. It is like rain (*J*: XIX.vii.12) watering the land (*J*: XVIII.xxvii.49), or arrows which transfix the hearts of the hearers (*J*: XXXIV.x.21), or clouds sent out all over the world to shower down rain and flash forth miracles (*J*: XVII.xxvi.36, p. 871.20–3). The preachers themselves are like doors (*J*: XXVIII.xviii.38), which the Lord has set as a firm barrier against the force of the swelling sea and barred them himself, so that although persecution might dash upon them from outside, yet it cannot penetrate. These 'doors' open themselves to their followers, by preaching, and shut themselves to those who oppose them, by their authority. They are open to the faithful, closed to unbelievers.[2] They are like cheeks with tears upon them, for they mourn most of all at the adversities of the Church, as they give themselves up to the effort to crush the life of the carnal by preaching (*J*: XIII.xii.15, p. 677.1–19). They are the Church's 'teeth'; they crush up heretics and convert them into the body of Christ (*J*: XI.xxxiii.45, pp. 610.7–611.14).

The voices of preachers are rightly compared to brass, says Gregory, for 'Their sound has gone out into all the earth' (Psalm 18.5). And it is well said that brass is 'sparkling' (Ezekiel 1.7), for the life of preachers both 'sounds' and 'burns'. 'Sparkling brass', then, is preaching when it is kindled. And it is right, too, to speak of the words of the preachers as 'sparks', for they set on fire those whose hearts they

[2] *Ez.* II.v.8–20 deals with the 'door' image, and see C. Butler, *Western Mysticism* (London, 1922, repr. 1927), pp. 98–100.

touch. The sparks are tiny, and that, too, is significant, for when preachers speak of heaven they cannot make their words large enough, as they long to do (*Ez.* I.iii.5, p. 35.79–89).

Above all, preachers are the bases of the Church, carrying the weight of the whole fabric (*J*: XXVIII.vii.17; *J*: XXVIII.v.14; *J*: IX.xvi.25, p. 475.94–5). Severed from the love of this present world, preachers are raised up to bear the fabric of the Church (*J*: XXXIII.xvi.32).

Preaching is various both in its approach and its effectiveness. The preacher must not preach what is too deep to the uninstructed (*J*: XVII.xxvi.37, p. 871.35–50). He must learn to temper his preaching to the capacity of the listener, so that those with weak eyes are not blinded by the full light (*J*: XX.iii.10, p. 1009.125–38). The same exhortation is not suitable for everyone (*J*: XXX.lii.11–12). The 'subtle texture of holy preaching' is a soft resting-place for the faithful, who are refreshed as they rest by the experience of heavenly life (*J*: XXXIII.xvii.33). The preacher rebukes directly the man who is gentle and governable because he will respond at once. The powerful and insolent may become more hard-hearted if directly challenged, and so they must be coaxed in a different way (*J*: XIII.v.6, p. 672.43–60). Thus the preacher must work subtly upon his hearers' minds. 'The talk of the learned ought to be shaped to suit the audience' (*pro qualitate igitur audientium formari debet sermo doctorum*), both so that it may meet the needs of individuals, and so that it may help everyone.

The listeners' minds are like musical instruments upon which the preacher plays; when they are intent upon the preacher's words, they are stretched taut like strings, and as he plucks them he makes them give forth a harmonious sound. He does not pluck them all in the same way. He recognises their differences and reconciles them by his art (*R*: III. Prologue, *PL* 77.49). And so preaching affects different people in different ways, and just as it rains in one part of a city while another part remains dry, so some will have their hearts softened by the 'rain' of the preacher's words, and others will remain arid (*Ez.* X.23, p. 156.409). The preacher is called by the Holy Spirit to go into some parts of the world, but kept from approaching others (*J*: XVI.lxiv.78, pp. 844.1–845.17). He may be granted the power of speech or find it taken from him (*J*: XXX.xxvii.82). Power of preaching is bestowed on different people in different measure according to their capacities (*J*: XX.ii.4, p. 1004.26–7).

Not all preachers are honest and good. Gregory points out certain characteristics of false preachers. They, like true preachers, are 'gates', but they open the entrance to perdition; they, like true preachers, are

'teeth', but they break down from the solidity of truth those they seize (*J*: XXXIII.XXVII.47). They are vain and secretly despise others (*J*: XXXIV.XXI.42). They reprove their hearers even when they see that they are distressed; their desire to appear superior leads them to prefer to chide and reprove faults rather than to encourage goodness with praise (*J*: XXIV.XVI.40). They give themselves away as they talk by some proud or boastful word (*J*: XXIV.XII.36). They show off their scholarship, trying to impress their hearers, but they are not really trying to bring them to eternal life (*J*: VIII.XLIV.72, p. 438.14–26). They address themselves to learned and influential audiences because they want only to display their sentiments to impress them (*J*: XXIV.XV.39). They associate with the rich and powerful (*J*: XVII.III.5, p. 853.46–7). They must be watched for with care, for if they did not give the impression of being good preachers and pretend to innocency of conduct, they would not succeed in leading men astray (*J*: XXXII.XVI.28). The sure test is that they bear no fruit (*J*: XVII.III.5, p. 853.34–5).

Gregory's emphasis on the need to bring the fruits of contemplation out into action is especially apparent here. The preacher should try with all his powers to persuade his people to a right faith, and that means that he should always be preaching to them about the eternal life which Christians are promised (*Letter* I.17, *CCSL*, p. 17.11, to the bishops of Italy, January 591). Christ's Bride, the Church, should raise the 'song of good preaching' (*cantum bonae praedicationis emittat*), because it delights him for whom she longs; the Bridegroom's 'friends' hear: that is, the elect, who desire to hear the word of life so that they may come to live in their heavenly home (*Ez.* II.II.4).

The preacher draws men towards heaven even when he frightens them with the threat of hell (*Ez.* I.X.28, p. 157.477–82). He works upon his listeners by making them see the contrast.

Both he and they must be able in some sense to 'see their way' to heaven. The Lord himself calls the preacher not a *contemplator* but a *speculator* (*Ez.* I.XI.4, p. 170.69). The word describes the preacher's task exactly. He stands like one sent to keep watch on a high place (*in altitudine*) and sees from afar what is to come. He is a 'look-out' for the people of God. The preacher ought, in the same way, to stand on a 'high place' in the way he lives, setting an example to those who see him there (*in alto debet stare per vitam*) (*Ez.* I.XI.4, p. 171.74–5). He must be and do what he preaches. He is not a perfect preacher who either from devotion to contemplation neglects works that ought to be done, or from urgency in business puts aside the duties of

contemplation (*J*: VI.xxxvii.56, pp. 325.1–326.55). The perfectly balanced life of the preacher has active and contemplative in a correct tension within it (*J*: XXXI.xxv.49). A man who expands the 'bosom' of his heart by right living receives eloquence to speak well (*J*: VI.xxxvi.55, p. 324.7–9). The balance can be redressed easily if a man, becoming elated by his own preaching, 'washes the disciples' feet' by wiping away the dust of wrong thoughts by contemplation (*J*: I.xxiii.31, p. 42.10–12) and long meditation (*J*: XXX.iii.44) and then they can speak out of humility, imparting advice not by boasting but by sympathising with others (*J*: XXIV.xiv.38). They cannot keep silent because that would be to convict themselves of the sins they fail to reprove in others (*J*: XXIII.xi.18). They are to go out from their inward meditation to the wide spaces of active life, and then return to contemplation so as not to freeze (*J*: XXX.ii.8). They are visible, and they want to be visible – not so as to be honoured for what they are, but so as to be worthy of imitation by setting an example.

In the hope of becoming fit for this task, the preacher must cultivate a paradoxical state of affairs in himself: a humility which is also an elevation. Samuel is a type of this humility which is also an elevation. He is called *puer* (*In Reg.* II.42, p. 144.908–9) and *magnificatus*; the latter not, however, in the eyes of man, but only in the eyes of God. The elevation is properly an education in high spiritual matters; the humility provides him, by introspection, with his subject-matter. The Spirit seizes (*assumit*) a preacher when he makes his mind recoil from earthly desires, and fills him with a vision of heavenly things (*Ez.* I.x.25, p. 157, ll. 455–7). 'An awareness (*conscientia sancti amoris*) edifies a man for preaching more than an *exercitatio sermonis*, practice in public speaking, can fit him, because by loving things inwardly (*intra semetipsum*) the preacher reads how to persuade others that they ought to despise the world.' 'He who thinks about his own life inwardly and edifies others outwardly, instructing them by his own example, dips the pen of his tongue, as it were, in his heart, and writes outwardly with his hand in words for his neighbour' (*Ez.* I.x.13, p. 150.191–200).

The theme recurs again and again. The preacher ought to go home to the house of his conscience (*domus conscientiae*) after he has been in the fields all day (*Ez.* I.xii.10–13, pp. 188–90).

If he fails to do so regularly, he will not be able to maintain his balance. He will twist his text and lie to his people, whether he intends to or not (*Ez.* I.x.14, p. 150.212–15). If the balance is secure, the preacher may and must speak out with confidence. 'Those who are

good *in mente* but do not have authority in speaking, are not fit to defend the truth (*Ez.* I.x.17, p. 152.281–3). For only he who is not afraid to say what he rightly feels and does not blush to do so ought to be a defender of the truth. The preacher is a *medicus*, a physician, who does not blush to prescribe his medicines (*Ez.* I.x.17, p. 152.283–4 and p. 152.287–90).

EXEGESIS

In the period at Constantinople, Gregory relied a great deal on the group of monks from his monastery who went with him to keep him company, to hold him as by a cable to the 'tranquil shores of prayer', while he was tossed about on the seas of secular affairs. The brothers pressed him – and Leander joined them in this – to interpret the book of Job for them. On a not dissimilar occasion later when Gregory was depressed in the same way by a sense of inward imbalance, a friend put the idea of writing the *Dialogues* into his mind.

The plan for the commentary on Job perfectly encapsulates the correct balance between inward and outward in exegesis as Gregory saw it. Gregory recognises the need to keep a balance between straining for an allegorical and inward interpretation on the one hand, and forcing a historical interpretation on the other (*J*: IV, Pref.). There must always be a weighing of the reading of the text between literalness and mystery (*J*: XXI.i.1).

Gregory explains that he was asked to give an account of the text in which history and allegory and also the moral sense would be brought out. That is, he was to work from the outward sense, the historical, to the inward and spiritual, and then give the allegorical senses the 'turn' (*tropos*) of the tropological sense, and by this moral exercise bring them 'out' again to the external world where the listeners may act upon what they have inwardly grasped. At the end Gregory feels it necessary to 'go back' to himself, and think over what he has said. The mind is easily distracted. He wants to know whether he has incautiously said anything wrong, or said what is right in the wrong way – to bring his actions before himself inwardly, so as to judge them (*J*: XXV.xx.40). The preacher has to make the Bible speak in all the ways it is designed to do, and to make himself a fit channel or vehicle for its speaking.

Gregory is in many ways a highly independent interpreter. He rarely cites his precursors (but see *Ez.* II.i.10, p. 216.336–7 for a reference to the *interpres* Jerome). Sometimes he disagrees with an earlier inter-

pretation: again Jerome, in a passage on the signification of the one and a half by one cubit of Ezekiel 40.42 (*Ez.* II.ix.9, p. 363.274–9), adds one and a half to one and a half to make three and says that the height is one cubit, comparing this to the three in one of the Trinity. Gregory dislikes this explanation because it involves halves, and there are no halves or parts in God. He prefers to think of the one and a half cubits as referring to good men who have a whole cubit in themselves, because they are good, but only 'half' a cubit in God because they cannot fully grasp what he is. He finds support in Philippians 3.15 (*Ez.* II.ix.9, pp. 363.274ff, cf. Jerome *In Ezekiel*, 12.40, *CCSL*, 75, p. 582.998–1002). He approaches Jerome without any sense that he is *prima facie* likely to be right, but simply to see what he says, and then makes up his own mind.

Not all parts of Scripture have a literal meaning. Gregory states roundly that the building described in Ezekiel's vision of the Temple cannot really exist (*Cuius videlicet civitatis aedificium accipi iuxta litteram nullatenus potest*) (*Ez.* II.i.3, p. 208.51–2 and 55–6). There is, he says, evidence for this in the text itself. Ezekiel (40.2) speaks of a *quasi aedificium*. It is only 'as if' it were a building (*Ez.* II.i.5, pp. 210.135–211.141). But in Gregory's exegesis the fundamental division is always between the literal on the one hand and the various spiritual senses on the other, between 'inward' and 'outward' writing. The 'book' Ezekiel saw is written both inside and out, *intus* by allegory, *foris* literally or historically; outwardly in its simple literal sense, which is designed for those who are weak in the faith, inwardly in its spiritual understanding (*Ez.* I.ix.30, p. 139.589–600).

With his characteristic balance, Gregory insists that the lowly historical sense is not to be despised; we must first look for the root of the historical sense and only afterwards let our minds fill with the allegorical meaning (*J*: Pref. x.21). Some, when they are reading the Bible and believe that they can 'penetrate' to its *sublimiores sententiae*, become puffed up and despise the lesser *mandata* or instructions given to the weak in the historical sense. But the right way is to proceed step by step upwards from the bottom of the ladder (*Ez.* I.x.1, p. 145.1–4ff). 'First we lay the historical foundations; next . . . we erect a fabric of the mind . . . the typical sense; and then, as the last step, we cover the edifice with colour.'

For the correct understanding of any of these senses, it is essential that the text be accurate. Here there was a practical difficulty. The Old Latin Translation of the Bible had been made locally and variously, and it differed a good deal from copy to copy. The new, Vulgate text,

which Jerome had made at the Pope's request, had been designed to iron out those differences and to provide a single reliable text. But in Gregory's day it had not entirely superseded the *Vetus Latina* – indeed throughout the Middle Ages authors show a knowledge of the Old Latin version. The Apostolic See used both versions and Gregory, as presiding over the See, wanted to countenance both. 'I comment on the new translation,' he notes at the beginning of the *Moralia*, 'but when a case to be proved requires it, I take now the old and now the new for witness.'

The Old Translation sometimes differs markedly from the new, however, and when that happens he thinks that we should prefer the new, because it depends more closely upon the original Hebrew and Arabic. He points to Jerome's claim to have worked directly from these languages (*J*: IV.ix.14–15, pp. 172–4). The right thing for the interpreter to do is to search into the words of the text with an eye to the fitness of the reading (*J*: XX.xxxii.62, p. 1048.1–21). There is an important principle here, half-submerged under Gregory's talk of exact rendering and of Greek and Arabic. His concern is not primarily for textual variants; he rarely speaks of them. He wants first of all to see a rendering which brings out correctly the things signified by the words. That is more important than finding the correct words. In a passage in the Homilies on Ezekiel he discusses two readings.

> In the Old Translation it says not 'Let your stomach eat' (*venter tuus comedet*), but 'let your mouth eat and your stomach will be filled' (*os tuum comedet et viscera tua replebuntur*) (Ezekiel 3.3). Our 'mouth eats' when we read the Word of God, and our 'stomachs are filled' when we understand and retain those things which we read with care. But 'in the later translation which we believe to be more accurate' (*in posteriori autem translatione quam et veraciorem credimus*) is written: '*venter tuus comedet*'.

That is a better rendering, Gregory thinks, not because it more closely follows the original (he does not comment on that) but because sometimes the word 'stomach' is used for 'mind' in Scripture. He gives a series of parallel examples, including one from Jerome himself, to show the justness of Jerome's choice of the term (*Ez.* I.x.6, pp. 146.64–147.91). Elsewhere he notes that the translator has chosen what seems a more helpful reading in preference to a literal rendering (*J*: XXXV.xvi.43). It is perhaps what we should expect: Gregory's notion of what a text 'means' includes its literal sense and beyond that deeper meanings. So, in judging the qualities of a translation, he looks not only to sound rendering of the original

languages, but to the choice of terms which will signify spiritually or figuratively as they should.

It is also important to avoid misinterpretation, such as he believes the Jews fall into by not reading the words before them correctly. The prophet Habbakuk, for example, says, 'I shall rejoice in Jesus my God.' Here Jesus (the Saviour) is explicitly called God. But the Jews await a saviour whom they do not believe to be God, but only a man. They argue against reason that the good Creator could have nothing to do with birth, suffering and death, but they are so blind that they hear the words of their own Father and do not believe what they say (*In Reg.* II.49, p. 149.1113–9). This is at least in part because their exegesis is confined to the literal sense (e.g. *In Reg.* II.45, p. 146.974–86; *In Reg.* IV.173, p. 388.3535), and they do not see spiritual truths.

Gregory is not quite consistent here. In the *Dialogues* he himself uses examples drawn from the lives of holy men, and in his exegesis he often points to a parallel in the natural world, or explains a Scriptural image by elaborating upon observation of the way the thing described is formed or grows or functions in nature, or draws upon his own experience. But these are helpful explanations only. What is taught is Scripture itself, and it is being taught so that it may teach.

In the *Dialogues* Peter the Deacon suggests that the raising of the dead to life is the greatest miracle. But Gregory contends that the invisible inward miracle of conversion is greater, for the first raises flesh, which will die; the second revives the soul, which will live for ever (*D*: III.17, *PL* 77.264D–265A). The value of miracles lies in their effect in bringing men to God. If God acts directly within a man and turns him into a Christian that is better than his acting on him outwardly by showing him a wonderful event. That is what is brought about by reading the Bible, and by exegesis to make that reading sharper and fuller.

It is then above all the preacher's task, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, to unfold for his listeners the hidden meanings of Scripture. As saliva flows into the mouth from the higher recesses of the head, so the wisdom the preacher speaks comes to him from a knowledge of the Bible which moistens his tongue to preach (*Ez.* I.X.20, p. 154.344–7). This exegetical function of the sermon is of central importance throughout Gregory's homilies. They are first and foremost homilies on Scripture.

In true preaching, he says, the originals of the examples put forward must derive from the sacred page, so that all that is said rests on a foundation of divine authority. Heretics bring out new things, which

are not maintained in the old books of the ancient Fathers and thus it follows that while they desire to appear wise, they scatter seeds of foolishness to their wretched hearers (*J*: XVIII.xxvi.39, pp. 910.4–911.24). But when the several sorts of mystical truth are recognised in the secret words of the prophets by those who believe, what else is it than that 'deep things are discovered out of darkness'? For when by explaining we unravel the mystical knots of allegories, then we as it were 'speak in light what we have heard in darkness' (*J*: XI.xvii.26, p. 601.2–4). Augustine says in his third Discourse on Psalm 36(2) that those who rely upon human examples may go astray, because the examples in the Bible teach in their own way and must be understood spiritually. It may be true that good men are sometimes in want in this life; but the Bible shows us that they are not spiritually in want; we should be misled if we took our evidence only from life.

Gregory recognises three spiritual or figurative meanings of Scripture: allegory, anagogy, tropology. One word may have several meanings: *ignis*, for example, may mean the Holy Spirit or human anger (*mentis malitia*) (*Ez.* I.ii.12, p. 24.229–31). Often the spirit of prophecy will discover several meanings at once in what is said (*Ez.* I.ii.16, p. 26.299–302). It may even be the case that what is not to be imitated if taken literally sets us a good example if taken spiritually or vice-versa (*In Reg.* I.92, p. 107.2071–2, 2084–6 and p. 109.2171–2). Those who are troubled by the notion that the kindness of Job's friends should denote what was to be wrongly done by heretics, must bear in mind that it is often the case that that which is virtue in historical fact is evil in its significance and effect (*J*: III.xxviii.55, p. 148.7–13).

The exegete's principal difficulty lay, ironically enough, in this very complexity of divine teaching in Scripture. In several places Gregory points out how many meanings a single word may have. Depending on the context, he says, 'bread' may refer to the Lord himself, to spiritual grace, to divine teaching, to the preaching of heretics, to ordinary bread, to the agreeableness of worldly pleasure. He is able to give examples of each of these usages (*J*: XXIII.xxx.49). 'Pillars' may refer to angels or preachers, or churches (*J*: XVII.xxix.42, p. 875.2–12). A 'bow' may be the day of judgement, sacred oracles, the plots of evil men (*J*: XIX.xxx.54, pp. 999–1000). A 'cord' may be a measure, or it may mean 'sins' or 'faith' (*J*: XXXIII.x.18). A 'camel' may be the Lord, who bowed humbly down to take on his load (*J*: XXXV.xvi.38). Oxen may be the madness of lust, the hard-working preacher, the humility of the Israelites (*J*: XXXV.xvi.39). Again for each meaning Gregory can give a Scriptural example. There are organising principles here, rules which

the exegete can follow with the assurance that if he does so he will find the right meaning. Old Testament instances, for example, will always point forward to meanings in the New Testament. But the experience is above all an experience for Gregory; he lives in Scripture by reflecting upon it, to the point where he can describe it as a dense wood in which we may hide ourselves from the world, plucking the greenest sayings by reading, and chewing them slowly (*Ez.* I.v.1, p. 57). The rules underlie Gregory's wrestling with difficult passages, but he exults in the exercise of his spiritual muscles; he likes to feel the tug of effort, and to know that he is giving the Holy Spirit the fullest possible opportunity to teach him, and, through him, those for whom he writes or speaks. That is the spirit of Ezekiel 2.9, with its description of the rolled up scroll which was opened before him, and it was written inside and out. This text seemed to Gregory to express the work of the preacher and exegete most elegantly. The rolled up scroll is the obscure language (*eloquium obscurum*) of Holy Scripture, which is rolled up upon the profundity of its meanings, so that it cannot be read by everyone. But the scroll is unrolled in front of the prophet. He stands for the preacher, for whom the obscurity of sacred language is clarified. 'And so the rolled up scroll is unrolled when that which had been obscurely stated (*obscure prolatum*) is opened *per latitudinem intellectus*, through the opening-out of interpretation' (*Ez.* I.ix.29, pp. 138.564–139.588).

This 'opening' requires the exegete to explain analogies and images in detail. Christ is the 'high mountain' of Ezekiel 40.2 because he is both of the earth (*de terra*) and beyond the earth (*ultra terram*); his flesh takes its material substance from below, but it stands up above the surface of the earth; although he is earth in the substance of his humanity, he is beyond grasping in the height of his divinity; some good men are called 'mountains' because they come close to heaven in the merit of their lives (*Ez.* II.i.4, pp. 209.100–210.125). The Son of God is called an 'arm' because by him all things were made (*Ez.* I.ii.7, p. 21.132–4). Clouds are an appropriate image for darkened minds (*Ez.* I.ii.11, p. 23.217).

Fire has a double appropriateness; sometimes and in different contexts it means the Holy Spirit and sometimes the malicious mind (*Ez.* I.ii.12, p. 24.229–31). Amber is nothing else but Jesus Christ, Mediator between God and man. It is made of gold and silver, and when the two are mixed the silver becomes brighter and the gold dimmer. So the incarnate Christ makes humanity brighter and hides

his divine glory behind his humanity so that we are not dazzled by it (*Ez.* I.ii.14, p. 25.273–82).

The topics Gregory points to in his exegesis are always discussed by close reference to Scripture and with the aid of Scriptural parallels. His usual method is to work his way consecutively through the text feeling his way (*restat ergo ut hoc palpando carpamus*) (*Ez.* II, Pref., p. 205.25–6). It is necessary to look carefully into the Bible, to study it assiduously, so as to learn all he can from it (*J*: VI.x.12). Gregory himself was intensely conscious of the effort involved, if the utmost was to be extracted. The Word of God is a pigment (*pigmentum*); the more it is bruised and ground, the more its virtue flows out to do us good (*J*: XXIX.vii.19). Scripture supplies both strong meat, which is hard to eat, and drink, which is easily digested (*J*: I.xxi.29, pp. 40–1). The hard part requires interpretation if it is not to be obscure (*J*: VI.v.6, pp. 287–8). That is why Gregory has ventured to be the first to write on the book of Job (*J*: Pref., II). His flock needs his help as an interpreter. A similar sense of the difficulty which confronted him all but overwhelmed him when he began to preach on Ezekiel (*Ez.* I.ix.1, p. 123.1–9). He attempted the book of Kings, he says, only because the comparative lack of earlier work had encouraged him to feel that he could write something further which would be of use (*In Reg., Prologus*, p. 49.3–13). Thus the preacher is not a mere channel; he is also an interpreter, working actively upon the text. That is why, perhaps, apart from his homilies on various Gospel readings in the Mass, Gregory chose to comment on some of the most difficult and obscure books of the Bible, and those where he could look for least help from other interpreters: their readers had most need of exegetical help.

Gregory's conscientious attention to the difficult parts of the Bible is of a piece with his imagery of feeding on the Word of God. He advises the reader, and especially the preacher, to 'chew' the text minutely and reflectively, so as to draw the greatest possible spiritual nourishment from it. Some will be filled with sorrow for their sins and we shall see them weep. Others are able to feed their neighbours on the sweet pap which they produce by inwardly ruminating on Scripture, and their preaching is the sweeter as their own lives show the mark of their reading. He who does not allow God's Word to work upon him inwardly at its own pace is not fed by it because he does not digest it; nor is he made drunk with the wine of the Word. Scripture is a feast to be eaten carefully and thoroughly, to fill the stomach of the mind and to provide spiritual food for others in preaching. Exegesis

is necessary, then, if the Bible is to do its teaching to maximum effect, and the difficulties of the text give the preacher a necessary function. It is as though he opened a closed book for his listeners.

This teaching by God through Scripture and its interpretation is designed to give man an experience of the truth which he cannot have for himself, or in any other way in his fallen state. When man was in the Garden of Eden, he was accustomed to hear God speak to him, and he shared with the angels a direct vision of God. Now he sees only with the outward eyes of the body, and he cannot even remember how it felt to hear and see God as he once did. It is, for us who are Adam's descendants, as though a pregnant woman were sent to prison, and her child was born there and grew up to know of sun, moon, stars, mountains and hills only from its mother's stories, but not from experience, *per experimentum*. Such a child would believe more firmly in the darkness he had experienced than in the picture which matched nothing he knew. That is why the Son came into the darkness in person, and the Holy Spirit entered human hearts, so that man might be given a direct experience of God (*D*: IV.1, *PL* 77.317C). This is the principle of the teaching God gives in the pages of Scripture. The Bible enlarges our experience by speaking to us inwardly. In the mirror it sets before us we see our deformities and our beauties (*J*: II.i.12). The sins of Daniel and of Peter are recorded in Scripture so that we may learn from their experience not to slip in the same way (*J*: XXXIII.xii.23).

In order to achieve its purpose, says Gregory, the Bible teaches in a marvellous variety of ways. It is its habit to speak in man's way to men (*J*: XVI.xliii.55, p. 831). At one time God alarms us by what he says in Scripture; at another time he comforts us; or he mixes comfort and warnings (*J*: XXXIII.vii.14). It tells us what is true, leads us to heaven, encourages him who reads it to lift his thoughts from earthly desires to the embraces of things above, exercises the strong and speaks gently to the weak (*J*: XX.i.1, p. 1003.5–6). God does not speak to the hearts of men individually in Scripture, but he places in the text answers to all the questions anyone might want to ask. If we look for cases like our own, we are sure to find them described in the Bible (*J*: XXIII.xix.34). It shines on us like the sun when we let it teach us; it is as hard as frost if we approach it with proud hearts (*J*: XXIX.xxx.60). We can support ourselves on the 'horns' of the two Testaments, like goats who regain their balance with the aid of their horns when they stumble.

Thus Gregory explains why the Bible is not written plainly so that everyone can understand it (*Ez.* I.vi.1, p. 67). This is not a weakness in it but a strength. The *obscuritas* of the Bible's words (*eloquia*) exercises

the perception (*exercet sensum*) and prevents weariness, and when the *sensus* is thus exercised, it is able to grasp what it could not grasp when it was at rest. There is a further and more important reason, too. If the understanding of Holy Scripture were open to all, it would grow cheap (*vilesceret*). What it takes hard effort to find will give greater delight when it is discovered. Again: after the human race was expelled from paradise, men's hearts became blind. They had no spiritual understanding (*cor* is for Gregory as for Augustine the seat of understanding it is in the Bible itself; Gregory speaks equally readily of the *oculus mentis* and *oculus cordis*). If the divine voice had spoken directly to him and said: 'Follow God' or 'Love God' – as indeed he did in the Law – man would not have understood what he heard because he was frozen in a *torpor* of faithlessness (*In Cant.* 1.1, p. 3.5–24). That is why God spoke to man obliquely, by means of allegory. Allegory is like a lifting mechanism which raises up to God the soul which is lying far from him. It works by investing things known to us with divine meaning, so that when we recognise the outward words we come to an inward understanding (*In Cant.* 1.1, p. 3.14–15).

PART III

INWARD AND OUTWARD: SPIRITUALITY IN THE WORLD

LIGHT AND SILENCE

Gregory's imagery is always the best means of approach to his thought, and nowhere more so than in his practical spirituality. Gregory writes to one of his correspondents, the Prefect of Africa, about the problem of maintaining an inner life under the pressures of 'secular cares', so that distractions do not take his Eminence 'entirely outside' himself and he is able to bring his heart 'back to itself' after he has dealt with the business of the day (*Letter* x.16, *CCSL*, p. 845, July 600). Paterius, the notary who made a collection of extracts from Gregory's sermons (*PL* 79.6836ff) comments on the clarity of Gregory's exposition (*PL* 79.683A). It was achieved in part by developing certain images of inward and outward life which became familiar to his readers from much use: the notion of those who are 'in' and 'outside' the Church most commonly of all (the elect only are truly 'in' the Church), but also images of the inward and outward in each man, of the soul led outside itself into desire for the world or dwelling within itself where it knows itself, of the conscience or inner judge (*internus judex*; *internus arbiter*) which is God the teacher acting within.[1]

Inwardly peace is to be found. Outside is distress and disturbance. There is a strong parallel in Gregory's mind with the idea that this life is the 'outward' life of distress and change and decay, while the life to come is one of stillness and tranquillity, where nothing will alter. The quiet life of mind and spirit which the monk ought to live prefigures his life in heaven. There is nothing original to Gregory in this, but as with so much else in his writings, his own emphases and above all the cumulative effect of his frequent use and careful development of his favourite images impressed them on the minds of future generations of readers more effectively from Gregory's hand than from that of any other source, except perhaps Augustine. Augustine speaks of the blissful vision of the radiant beauty of God which awaits the souls of the blessed

[1] For a list of references, see P. Catry, 'Lire l'écriture selon saint Grégoire le Grand', *Coll. Cist.*, 34 (1972), 177–201; P. Aubin, 'Intériorité et extériorité dans les *Moralia in Job* de S. Grégoire le Grand', *Recherches de science religieuse*, 62 (1974), 117–66.

in heaven (*En.Ps.* 36.ii.8). To be in heaven is to be set free from this present life of pilgrimage, where we stretch continually towards a goal, and to live with God and through God for ever in a peace which will fulfil every desire (*En.Ps.* 36.ii.12). For Gregory, too, heaven promises rest from ceaseless activity and recurrent disturbance. One of Gregory's imitators, Eribert of Reggio, describes how by the Fall man lost 'the rest of eternal happiness' (*requies felicitatis aeternae amisit*) (on Ps. 37, *PL* 79.567). The faithful soul, contemplating the Sabbath of the eternal life to come in the quickness (*agilitas*) of the Spirit, longs to be snatched away (*eripi*) from all corruption of spirit and flesh and to be led to the rest of endless blessedness at this life's end (on Ps. 37, *PL* 79.567).

This peace is both light and silence; it is the presence of God, who both observes and accompanies us, talking to us in our souls beyond the hearing of the bodily ears and showing us what cannot be seen by the bodily eyes because it dazzles them by its brightness.[2] To 'see what eye has not seen and hear what ear has not heard' is like this (Isaiah 64.4–6, *Ez*, II.i.17, pp. 222–3). Gregory's images are accordingly both visual and auditory, employed in an attempt to make the nature of this higher light and silence intelligible. *Ponamus ante mentis oculos*, 'Let us put before the eyes of the mind', is a favourite phrase with him.[3]

Man first plunged his mind into darkness by an act of his own free will, and then he with all his progeny went on to enslave himself to delights which keep him in darkness (*J*: IV.xiv.25, p. 180). It is a double darkness: the punishment of God which removes the light of life; the voluntary blindness by which a man, of his own free will, lives in inward darkness (*J*: XXV.ix.22). It is not, even for Satan, an unremitting darkness. When Satan came 'before' God to talk to him about Job, the Bible says that he did so 'on a day' because God's eternity is 'light' which is proof against any shadow of darkness (*J*: II.xx.37, p. 82.54–63). In the minds of good men the divine light often breaks through (*J*: V.vii.13, p. 227.47–56). They seek light and try to leave the darkness (*J*: XII.xlviii.54, p. 661.1–6). But the state of man's mind since the Fall is, by his own choice, a state of darkness. What this darkness means is a loss of that direct communication with God which man enjoyed in paradise (*J*: XI.xliii.59, p. 619.2–14). It is a darkness which is a breach of mutual intelligibility. It is, as it were, an epistemological darkness.

The minds of sinful men are clouded, the eye of the understanding is dulled, and then the mind, now a captive, is led helplessly from desire

[2] M. Frickel, *Deus Totus Ubique Simul* (Freiburg, 1956).

[3] E.g. on Ps. 50.1, *PL* 79.582A and *Ev.* XVIII.17, *PL* 76.1148A.

to desire, not seeing where it is going, and so it willingly surrenders itself to the temptations of the body (*J*: VII.XXVIII.37, p. 361.145–54). Sin shuts the eyes of the ungodly so that they stumble; the eyes of the elect are open before they fall, so that they see where they are going and do not fall. The wicked are blinded by their unbelief in the very presence of truth (*J*: VI.XIX.34, p. 308.2–4). Even when the bright light which miracles shine on events is before their eyes, they cannot see them (*J*: VI.XX.34, p. 309.25–30). The ungodly are bound fast by love for this present life, so that they long to live for ever here on earth in the same way. They are too indifferent to think of the future (*J*: XIII.XXVIII.32, p. 686.1–14; *J*: XII.XXXIX.44, p. 655.3–22). The eye of the heart in such men (*oculum mentis; oculum cordis*) is closed in insensible blindness, and is never fixed in the inner light (*J*: VIII.XII.27, pp. 400–1).

God puts this darkness to flight by lighting up the minds of the elect. They come to see that the resurrection of Christ prefigures and promises the resurrection he will one day bring about in themselves (*J*: XIV.LV.68, p. 740.1–5). He does not bestow light all at once, but progressively (*J*: II.XLVI.71, p. 101), adapting his gift to the needs of individuals of every sort (*J*: VI.XVI.21, pp. 298.29–299.35). Thus his wisdom refreshes the mind with hope and assurance of heavenly things; understanding penetrates into the truths heard; it lights up the darkness of the heart; counsel fills the mind with reason and prevents us from acting precipitately; knowledge overcomes the emptiness of ignorance.

The experience of illumination is not without pain for good men. As the mind begins to understand what is above, it suffers very great affliction because it realises its own blindness (*J*: IX.XXXIII.51, pp. 492.84–7).

One effect of the loss of light which is closely related to this is the loss of self-knowledge (*J*: IX.XXXIII.51, pp. 492–3). A good man may wrest himself out of the toils of his low habits of thinking and come to know himself to some extent, 'and by thus thinking of himself' he can in his mind prepare himself a pathway to contemplate the substance of eternity (*J*: V.XXXIV.61, p. 261.20–2). But man remains 'encompassed with darkness' and unable to see himself within; however he burns with longing for heaven, he is ignorant how it goes with him within (*J*: V.VII.12, p. 226.26–7).

The connection between mind and will, clarity of mind and the ability to use the will for good, is explicitly made by Gregory. He identifies a reference to the heart (*cor*: normally the seat of thought in the Bible) with the freedom of the mind (*Et, quia cor suum dicit, quid*

aliud quam mentis suae libertatem asseruit?). The wicked do not possess their hearts (*corda sua non habent*) because the Devil has them, and so they can no more think clearly than they can act rightly (*In Reg.* II.3, p. 121.29–31). Again, 'What is the "hand of the elect" but the power of inner liberty?' (*potestas . . . internae libertatis*). 'What is it for them to "carry their souls in their hands" but to retain the glory of inner freedom?' (*In Reg.* II.3, p. 122.1).

Another effect is the unbalancing of the relationship between mind and body, so that man who was made to be a spiritual being even in his flesh was, when he sinned, made carnal even in his soul; that is why he can form images only through bodily substances. A shadow has the outlines of the object from which it is derived, and these are like the shadow of death (*J*: XVIII.XXX.47, p. 916.2–15). These images always tend to drag the mind down so that it becomes delighted with the 'body' of things and becomes itself gross and physical and loses the fineness of the inward sense (*J*: V.XXXIV.61, p. 261.1–22). While men love only visible things they do not love the invisible, in that they become inwardly carnal as well as outwardly carnal (*J*: XVIII.XXX.48, p. 917.38–41). A man is literally engrossed by love of earthly and created things (*J*: XII.XLIII.49, pp. 658–9). The coveting of good things on earth presses on the eyes of the mind so that they look downwards (*J*: XII.XLIV.50, p. 659.1–11). Man's sense of proportion is distorted. He will endure any discomfort or injury for the sake of earthly gain. But he will not put up with the slightest inconvenience for the sake of a heavenly reward (*J*: XIX.XXVII.49, p. 995.48–50).

God puts this right by bringing man back to the old path of growing knowledge of God he planned for him to follow when he framed the *root* of creation as an educational aid to teach men about God: using those very bodily senses and bodily images best suited to man's level, but using them to help him in a divinely appointed and right way. Knowledge of creatures thus leads us to knowledge of God. 'The divine whispering has as many veins for our ears as the works of creation . . . for while we view all things which are created we are lifted up in admiration of the Creator' (*J*: V.XXIX.52, p. 254.38–59). The five senses of the body derive their operations of perceiving and discriminating from the brain. And whereas there is only one judge that presides within, that is, the intellectual faculty of perception, yet God so arranges things that pathways run from sense to understanding. And so by these arrangements of body and sense we are able to gather interior and spiritual truths.

Less frequent, but nevertheless a companion to the visual imagery,

is imagery of sound and silence. God seems to Gregory to 'whisper' to him within.[4] His presence is a low inward spiritual sound; the outward world of God's creation 'whispers' to him, too. The first whispering sounds almost like silence because in his fallen and creaturely condition Gregory cannot hear God's voice as it really is; the second is a 'whisper' because creation is limited in its capacity to speak of God as he really is (*J*: V.xxix.51–2, pp. 253–4). On the road to Emmaeus Christ talked to the disciples and was present to them bodily and outwardly, but the instruction he gave them was inward, for their bodily eyes did not recognise him at first (*Ev.* XXIII.1, *PL* 76.1181–3 on Luke 24.13–35). The 'grace of contemplation' makes itself known by means of a voice in the mind (*Ez.* II.i.17–18, *CCSL*, p. 142.224) heard in the ears of the heart.

By contrast the wrong sort of noise may be disturbing to tranquillity. Those who 'sleep' without disciplining their minds to silence find their idle heads full of clanging and obtrusive noises (*turba, tumultus, perstrepitus*) (*J*: V.xxxi.55, pp. 256–8).[5] Those who fall asleep to the world under discipline not only 'sleep' but 'dream', experiencing the presence of God in the inward silence of their minds (*J*: XXIII.xx.37). Adam was created in that state (*J*: IV.xxviii.54, p. 198.2). The Fall brings into man's head the noise of unruly desires.

Both silence (or whispering) and noise have inward and outward aspects: heard in the mind and coming from outside the mind to be taken in by the sense of hearing. The objects of undisciplined desires make noises in the head which are the noises of the desires themselves, but prompted by cravings for outward and bodily things. The sound of silence is made not only by God speaking in the mind but also by his creatures outside 'whispering' about him to the ears of the soul.

Accordingly, Gregory speaks of the mind characteristically in terms of a place where we live, but from which we go out every day, coming home to it after work. 'What do we understand spiritually by "houses", except our minds, in which we live through thought?' he asks (*Ev.* XII.7, *PL* 76.1178B).[6] The threshold of the mind is the intention which gives rise to the outward action. We should put blood upon the lintel, for we bear the blood of Christ's crucifixion upon our foreheads, and that is an outward sign which we bear upon our bodily 'houses' (*Ev.* XXII.7, *PL* 76.1178C).

[4] I am indebted to Professor G. A. Zinn Jr for a copy of his forthcoming paper on Gregory's images of sound and silence, from which several of these examples are taken.

[5] Cf. *J*: XXIII.xx.37; *J*: V.xxix.53–4; *J*: V.vi.9; *J*: IV.xxxiii.66.

[6] Cf. C. Butler, *Western Mysticism* (London, 1922, repr. 1927), pp. 91–133 and *Ez.* I.xi.6.

Living thus in their minds, the faithful must learn not only to hear what is said to them, but to hold before their mind's eyes (*mentis oculi*) vivid pictures of reality. They must think of their mortal condition and prepare themselves for the Day of Judgement by setting a picture of it before their eyes (*Ev.* XIII.5, *PL* 76.1126A; *Ev.* XVIII.17, *PL* 76.1148B). They must behave in ways which the eyes of the body can see, in accordance with the mode of their inward life (*Ev.* XXIII.1, *PL* 76.1182C).

It is in terms of this coming and going between inward and outward, heavenly and earthly concerns, that Gregory approaches the question of action and contemplation in the Christian life which was always in his thoughts as he wrote or preached.

CONTEMPLATION AND ACTION

Gregory identifies the inward and outward aspects of the faith which are set out in II Timothy 3.16: its work of teaching and explanation, correction and instruction in righteousness. Inwardly and contemplatively the mind knows 'right things' of the Creator; but it recognises the need to do 'works of faith' to complete the inward faith (*J*: XVII.v.7, p. 854; *J*: XXV.v.26). Gregory, although he finds the first indispensable, cannot think it enough without the second. Just as sin is committed in thought and by coming out from within into action completes itself, so faith goes out from within and shows itself for what it is in good works (*J*: IV.xxvii.49, p. 193.9–34). It is on this base that he erects his account of the relation between action and contemplation.

The commonplaces of Gregory's discussion of the experience of contemplative ecstasy are, for the most part, those of other writers in the spiritual tradition on which he draws. He speaks of the transitoriness of the experience, of its sweetness, of the sense of seeing the sun as through a fog or cloud and knowing that there is more to be seen, and, more clearly, in the life to come; he describes the fervour and love which lessens the tug of concupiscence to which fallen man is constantly subject.

But Gregory's own experience gave him a fresh view of these relatively common experiences. Contemplating God is, for Gregory, an experience of authoritative revelation at first hand, to set beside the revelation the Christian can read in the Bible or see around him in the created world. Like Augustine in the *Confessions*, Gregory remarks on the fact that no one knows who his parents are, but he believes what others tell him about his conception and birth (*D*: IV.2, *PL* 77.320C). Gregory finds that the Christian faith is like that: it rests upon what we are told by someone we trust to tell us the truth. With the experience of God which is gained by contemplation, it becomes more than secure opinion of this sort. It grows into a powerful certainty. To 'conceive' in the mind has for Gregory almost a literal sense. It is like conceiving a child (*In Reg.* II.1, p. 121.1–6). A certainty comes forth

from the conception of faith, rather in the way Augustine describes (writing on Psalm 35.2), 'Suppose a man is trying to find out how the Son is equal to the Father. He has made an act of faith; he tries to understand but he cannot. . . The primary act of faith is what keeps the soul safe until it grows stronger.' In contemplation the soul comes to know God and to be utterly sure of his reality.

Contemplation is, for Gregory, a state attained only by a patient climb. The first stage of the climb is to recollect oneself (*ut ad se colligat*), the second to examine oneself (*ut videat qualis est collecta*) and the third to rise above oneself and fix one's attention intently upon the Author of one's being (*Ez.* II.v.9, p. 281.229–282.1).

God himself helps. Conscience, the *internus iudex* or *internus arbiter*, is the inward monitor of this progression towards knowing God, as it is of the actions of good men.[1] God acting within a man in this way restores in part his lost capacity for self-knowledge.[2] Conscience is an inner Judge of whom the soul does well to be in awe. The more it is 'recalled to the knowledge of itself, the more the soul sees its secret Judge as an object of alarm' (*J*: XVI.xxviii.35, p. 819.7–9). As he assesses what is said to him, a man should have the interior Judge in view (*J*: XVII.xi.15, p. 860.21–34). He will not be proud of his virtue if he is truly good and has an eye to his conscience (*J*: XVI.xxiv.28, p. 815.1–7). Holy men should talk to God their inner Judge now in prayer so that they may 'reason' with him about their lives when he judges them finally at the Last Judgement (*J*: XI.xxii.32, p. 605.1–7; Job 13.3, 'Yet still I would speak to the Almighty and I desire to reason with God'). It would be a foolish man who would rate his present sins lightly because God is merciful to him (*J*: XXXIII.xii.23). Sin is a very serious business; Christ's body, the Church, does not have anything to do with sin, but she judges it in wicked men and chastises them severely (*J*: XIX.xxv.46, p. 993.122–7). It is this very seriousness which, on consideration, will make us slow to judge and always careful to examine what we think to be wrong. God himself set us an example when, though 'all things are naked and open to his eyes', he did not judge the evil deeds of Sodom in a hurry. He said, 'I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to what I have heard, and if not, I will know' (Genesis 18.20–1, *J*: XXIX.xxv.46).

In his doctrine of conscience Gregory has perhaps a faint echo of secular philosophy (Cicero, *De Nat. Deorum*, iii.46), but patristic

[1] C. Butler, *Western Mysticism* (London, 1922, repr. 1927), pp. 113–29.

[2] P. Aubin, 'Intériorité et extériorité dans les *Moralia in Job* de S. Grégoire le Grand', *Recherches de science religieuse*, 62 (1974), 126–9.

teaching on conscience is substantial, and we need not look beyond Christian authority for the direct sources of his ideas.[3]

There is likely to be some slipping back on the way to the attainment of the heights of contemplation. Gregory describes how the mind is often rapt in contemplation so far that it is about to perceive 'What eye does not see nor ear hear' (Isaiah 64.4; 1 Corinthians 2.9), and then sin and the weight of man's mortality drag it down (*Ez.* II.i.17, p. 222.523). But this repeated failure only reinforces the aptness of the image of climbing towards the heights in contemplation.

There is a paradox here, however. Outward things both help and hinder. We are brought back again and again to the tension of outward with inward which Gregory finds necessary and healthy and yet stressful. The state of the blessed soul is one of total attention to God. In such a rapture it is utterly still and tranquil (*J*: VI.xxxi.55), although held strongly to God by its desire for him, and thus in a sense simultaneously pulled towards him and without motion (*J*: V.xxx.53). Whenever we restrain the 'turbulent urges of the mind' under the virtue of mildness, we are trying to return to the likeness of our Creator. Any disturbance shatters that likeness. When anger brings the darkness of perturbation into the mind God hides the ray of knowledge of himself. When we are torn and battered inwardly with anger, we are thrown into confusion; we lose our inward harmony, and thus the force of the 'inward likeness' to God is lost (*J*: V.xlv.78, pp. 254–5). Or to be forced to be busy with duties in the world may disturb. Gregory laments at the beginning of the *Dialogues* (*D*: I.1, *PL* 77.149) that his soul no longer rises above what is transitory to go 'out' in contemplation beyond the bounds of the flesh. When he was a monk he was able to keep his mind almost continuously stretched out in prayer (*in intentione orationis pene continue mentem tenere*) (*Ez.* I.xi.6, p. 171.97–8). This disturbance of mind was something Gregory came to think could and should be got over, because it ought to be possible for a Christian to be fully and perfectly both contemplative and active.

There is therefore a distinction to be made between an outer world disturbing and intrusive and disruptive of concentration upon God and an outer world into which a soul at peace may come and shed light and joy upon it by good works. There is a further paradox here. True contemplation hides us in the interior world away from all earthly desires (*J*: VI.xxxvii.56, p. 325.2–5). As the grave is the place where the

[3] For a list of patristic sources on conscience, see H. Chadwick s.v. 'Gewissen', in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, X (Stuttgart, 1978), pp. 1026–7.

body is buried, so heavenly contemplation is a kind of spiritual grave in which the soul is buried. For that is what seems to be happening to us when we bury ourselves in the depths of interior contemplation (*J*: V.vi.9, pp. 224–5). Nevertheless, Gregory insists that there is a way in which it is proper for the Christian to turn his mind outwards to the world. Indeed it is necessary. Action should sometimes interrupt contemplation. When there are not enough to minister to the needs of their neighbours, contemplatives should be willing to help, just as God himself came down to minister to men (*J*: XIX.xxv.45, pp. 991–2). And, conversely, the Christian who has disciplined his mind by virtuous habits has something to 'store' in the 'granary' of peace and rest (*J*: VI.xxxvii.60, pp. 329–30). Indeed that is the meaning of the story of Jacob, who served for Rachel (reason or the contemplative life) and was given Leah (the active life) because it was not the custom of the country to give the younger in marriage before the first-born. Rachel is beautiful but barren; Leah cannot gaze upon the heights, but she is fruitful. So, the mind in contemplation sees further but it is less productive in bearing children for God (*J*: VI.xxxvi.61, p. 330.183).

There seems to be some double-thinking here. Gregory holds firmly to the essential superiority of the contemplative life. Jacob attained to the embrace of Rachel, and everyone who is a complete and perfect Christian must come to contemplation after leading a productive active life (*J*: VI.xxxvii.61, pp. 330–1). Contemplation is higher and more difficult and easier to fall away from than active life (*J*: X.xv.31, pp. 559–60). Gregory's point is that only in the final bliss of heaven will the need to be active vanish, leaving the soul to gaze on God undistracted (*J*: V.xxxi.55, pp. 256–8). The key to his thinking lies perhaps in the reference to the complete and perfect man. He who is whole as a Christian has already done good works and will return to the world to do more.

Gregory was breaking new ground in insisting in this way on the interdependence of contemplation and action in every fully Christian life. He draws upon patristic material[4] and on classical authors who make a separation between the two ways of life. Seneca contrasts the man who engages in public life and is always distraught (*semper inquietus*) and never gives himself time to look about him at earth or heaven, with the man who employs his leisure in unbroken reflection, his tranquillity disturbed by no activity.[5] Cicero speaks of the

[4] Prudentius, *Psychomachia*, PL 60.11–90.

[5] Seneca, *De Otio*, v.6, ed. E. Hermes (Leipzig, 1905).

classification of duties into those which can be regarded as absolute because they serve the highest good, and those which are concerned with the practical rules which regulate daily life.[6] Gregory's picture of the soul's movement from one to the other depends upon a clear distinction of the two. He defines their differences clearly. The contemplative life is to love God with one's whole mind (*tota mente*), to cease from outward action (*ab exteriore actione quiescere*) and to cling solely to love of the Creator with burning ardour. The active life is to feed the hungry, to teach the Word of Wisdom to the ignorant, to correct those in error, to recall the proud to the way of humility, to care for the sick, to give to each according to his need, to provide for those committed to us what they need to live (*Ez.* II.ii.8, p. 230). There is, then, no elision of the two ways of life, but a refreshing and salutary movement from one to the other by those who can rise to contemplation without abandoning good works (*Ez.* I.iii.12, pp. 40.219–41.257).

On the precise activities appropriate to a just man, the Latin moralists are uniformly clear. Although Seneca recommends a life of philosophical retirement, he envisages it as involving a community of like-minded men, whose society will support and benefit one another.[7] Cicero connects virtue with the performance of duties, actions designed to benefit not the doer only, but also and primarily other men.[8] Horace emphasises in his letters how a man's actions should, in sincerity, reflect that which he is inwardly.[9]

Cassian's pairing of 'actual' (a term he prefers to active) and contemplative gives a subtly different emphasis from that of Gregory: on ethical training and self-discipline, rather than practical performance of good works. The difference is not absolute; Gregory, too, speaks of gifts of the Spirit which affect the mind by making it fruitful in Cassian's way at least as much as by leading to action. Wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord are referred to widely in the *Moralia in Job* (*J*: I.xxvii.38; *J*: I.xxxii.44; *J*: I.xxv.48; *J*: II.lvi.88; cf. *J*: I.xxvii.38 and *J*: V.xxviii.50). In keeping with his emphasis upon fitting the soul for good works and with his division of theology into believing right things and doing right deeds, Gregory gives an account of vices and virtues which has to do with

[6] Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.iii.7, ed. A. Holden (Cambridge, 1899).
[7] Seneca, *De Otio*, I.28, ed. Hermes.
[8] Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.i.1, ed. Holden.
[9] Horace, *Opera*, I.i–ii, I.xvi, ed. E. C. Wickham and H. W. Garrod (Oxford, 1901, repr. 1967).

their manifestation in the soul as well as with their application in practical ways.

The system of thought which expects to find that the Highest is one and in him all attributes are of a single divine substance lends a unity to the idea of virtue. In the supreme Good, justice and truth and mercy are also found supremely. In the virtuous man one virtue will be accompanied by others. The virtues are an inseparable family of brothers and sisters (*J*: I.xxvii.38). One virtue without another is either not a virtue at all, or merely an imperfect virtue (*J*: XXII.i.2, pp. 1092–3). It is easy to see how this principle works if we consider the four cardinal virtues (cf. Cicero *De Officiis* I.vi.1). There can be no real prudence without justice, temperance and fortitude; there can be no perfect temperance which does not have fortitude, justice and prudence (*J*: XXII.i.2, pp. 1092–3), and so on. Each virtue is destitute unless it has the support of another (*J*: I.xxxii.45, p. 49.25–6). Wisdom is worth little unless it has understanding (*J*: I.xxxii.45, p. 49.27).

The interconnectedness of the virtues enables us to increase in virtue step by step (*J*: XXII.vii.16, pp. 1104–5; *J*: XXII.xx.49, p. 1128). The Holy Spirit first gives prudence, temperance, fortitude, justice, so that the mind may be made ready to resist every sort of attack. The result is a firm, foursquare structure of virtue, like a house with four corners (*J*: II.xlix.76, p. 106.32–3). Then the Spirit tempers the mind with the virtues which will fortify it: against foolishness, wisdom; against rashness, counsel; against fear, courage; against ignorance, knowledge; against hardness of heart, piety; against pride, fear (*J*: II.xlix.77, p. 106.37–45).

The solidly fortified mind can stand firm when the contrary winds of praise and blame blow upon it (*J*: XXII.vii.17, p. 1105.89–105). It may, when God allows it, be confused and appear to fail, but God will never let it be seriously damaged (*J*: II.xlv.90, pp. 112–13). It is necessary for us to be tested in this way to prevent pride in our very virtue (*J*: IV.xxiv.43, p. 189.33–40).

The vices pretend to be virtues and, worse, they pretend to the unity of the virtues (*J*: III.xxxiv.66, p. 155.2–5). Pride and anger are very close, and remissness is near to cowardice (*J*: III.xxxiv.66, p. 155.4–5). Just as one virtue leads to another, so the man who allows himself to be moved from his firm stand and to give way to one vice finds himself running headlong into evil ways. On the other hand, he who knows how to endure the temptation of the contest boldly exercises and strengthens his virtue. Active fighting is necessary because the vices form armies against us (*J*: XXXI.xlv.87–8). Evil spirits are believed to

attach themselves to particular vices, and they make a man seem to cease from one kind of vice and begin to commit another (*J*: xv.xxvii.33, pp. 768.5–6). The defence of the virtuous is not, however, necessarily always a matter of fighting (*J*: xv.xxxv.67, pp. 791–2). A sad and humbled heart is itself a defence because the vices are repelled by it. They cannot find their way in (*J*: III.xxxv.67, p. 156.2–7).

MONASTIC ORDER

Gregory's influence on the inner life of Western monasticism was perhaps greater than on the outward details of observance and administrative practice. He was, however, obliged to take a view of a number of practical aspects, and when he does so, it is always with a concern for right order. We shall come to that order more fully in a moment, but first something may usefully be said about Gregory's practical concerns in the running of monasteries; nothing brings home harder the gulf of thought and feeling between his ideals for the monastic life and the outward reality it often presented; nothing demonstrates better the magnitude of the task he set himself in trying to create a continuous working relationship between his outward and his inward preoccupations.

Monasticism had been flourishing in Italy before Gregory's day; both cenobitic monasticism and experiments in the eremitical life had been tried by the mid-fifth century. The model was Eastern and austere. The 'rules' of Basil, Macarius, Pachomius, all had their adherents. The Rules drawn up for Western monks in the sixth century by the Master and by Benedict (see pp. 20–1) had a new note, an emphasis on corporate life and on the moderation and common sense which makes it possible for a community to run smoothly. Gregory himself was undoubtedly an important influence in encouraging the wide new spread of monasticism in Italy and Sicily. He always encouraged wealthy and pious noble-women and laymen to endow houses, and he saw to it that monasteries were subsidised, helped with gifts of money or an easing of their dues (*Letter* I.54, *CCSL*, p. 67, to Peter the subdeacon, July 591; *Letter* II.1, *CCSL*, p. 90, to Peter the notary, September 591; *Letter* IX.97, *CCSL*, 650, to Eugene the notary, January 599).

Cassinese tradition told how Placidus, son of the senator who had endowed Benedict's monastery at Subiaco, and himself a disciple of Benedict, helped to bring Benedictine monasticism to Sicily. He had been sent there to recover the eighteen estates situated on the island which his father had given to the abbot of Monte Cassino, but which

the monastery had failed to run efficiently, so that they had ceased to be profitable. Placidus stayed, and in 534, at Messina, he established a house of thirty monks, the first Benedictine monastery beyond Italy.

Such expansions of monasticism presented Gregory with a great many administrative problems and also with questions of principle. It was necessary for him to make rules, to cover abuses or threatened abuses: for example that the novitiate should last two years, not one as the Rule prescribed. The intention was to guard against such misbehaviours as that of a monk of Naples who had been tonsured with no preliminary period of testing at all, and who had subsequently broken his vows and fled. To Fortunatus, bishop of Naples, Gregory writes in April 600:

> Let your Fraternity more strictly forbid all monasteries from taking the step of tonsuring those whom they have received to make their monastic profession, until they have spent two full years in monastic life. During this time let their life and behaviour be carefully tested, in case any of them proves to be discontented with what he has chosen, or to fail to keep to it firmly. It is a serious matter that untried men should be joined together under obedience to any master; how much more serious is it that those who have not been proved should be attached to the service of God. (*Letter* X.9, *CCSL*, p. 835.14–21)

A fundamental problem of the expansion in monasticism lay in the number of wandering monks who were living under neither abbot nor rule. Gregory writes to one of his subdeacons, about some monks in the diocese of Sorrento who are scattered. He would like to see them brought together *ad unum*, in the unity their community ought to have, and located in their own monastery (*collocare*) (*Letter* I.38, *CCSL*, p. 45.6–9, March 591; cf. *Letter* I.40, *CCSL*, p. 46, April 591 and I.38, *CCSL*, pp. 44–5, March 591; cf. *Letter* V.33, *CCSL*, pp. 300–1, May 595). He writes to Dominicus, bishop of Carthage, about monks in his diocese who lead wandering lives, going about just as they wish (*Letter* VII.32, *CCSL*, pp. 495.8, June 597). Such monks were moving from monastery to monastery as they chose, and they were being distracted by the world from their commitment to the rule of their own abbot (*Letter* I.40, *CCSL*, p. 46.5, April 591) and making rules of their own (*peculiaritati eorum singulos studere*). Gregory wanted them returned by force to the monastery where they first took their vows.

This disorderliness took a variety of forms. Some went on frequent journeys. 'Do not leave the monastery often', Gregory instructs abbot John of St Lucy, Syracuse (*Letter* III.3, *CCSL*, p. 149.22, September 592). Some abandoned the religious life altogether. Two monks have

fled from the abbey of St George in Sicily; one has married and the other is living as a layman (*Letter* II.26, *CCSL*, pp. 112–13, May 592). Some wanted to work among the secular clergy (*Letter* I.40, *CCSL*, p. 46.15–20). Sometimes the problem lay in the admission of the world into the monastery in one way or another. Some monks or houses accumulated private property. 'How do they despise the world who seek riches while they are living in the monastery?' (*Letter* XII.6, *CCSL*, p. 975.27–8). Others admitted women. 'It has come to our ears that women are coming to your monastery from everywhere, and what is still more serious, your monks are making women their fellows in the religious life (*commatres*), and as a result are brought into incautious communion with them' (*Letter* IV.40, *CCSL*, p. 261.1–5, to abbot Valentinus, August 594). Certain priests were found to be living with women (*Letter* I.50, *CCSL*, p. 64.26–8) or marrying (*Letter* I.40, *CCSL*, p. 46.21; *Letter* II.26, *CCSL*, p. 112.11). Sometimes the difficulty was the slackness of monastic life which resulted in a failure to keep up the habit of holy reading, for example (*Letter* III.3, *CCSL*, p. 149.26–7, to abbot John of St Lucy, Syracuse, September 592).

Gregory took action when he heard of such abuses. He sent someone to investigate. Sometimes he would commission a local bishop to look into the matter and punish offences. Januarius, bishop of Caralis, is told that 'pastoral zeal' ought to prompt him to keep his flock under his protection and guard them from attack (*Letter* IV.9, *CCSL*, p. 225.2–5, September 593; cf. *Letter* V.4, *CCSL*, p. 269). But he chose other investigators, too. Sometimes the task was entrusted to a *defensor*, or an abbot (*Letter* III.23, *CCSL*, p. 169, to Peter, subdeacon of Campania, March 593).

But he did not want to see bishops become the regular mentors of abbots. On the contrary, he encouraged abbots to refer their problems directly to the Pope and thus he put his stamp on the pattern which monasteries would follow through the Middle Ages. Gregory wrote to one bishop to reprove him because a monastery has been subjected to unreasonable exactions and the bishop has, in an attempt to force payment, forbidden the celebration of Mass there and the burying of the dead. 'If this is true,' says Gregory, 'we exhort you to cease from such inhumanities' (*Letter* I.12, *CCSL*, p. 13.6–7, to bishop John, December 590). The bishop must have a spiritual jurisdiction over his monks, with the right to punish those who fail to live by the Rule. But Gregory would not allow the bishop to interfere in the life of the house by causing his episcopal chair to be placed there, or permitting public Masses to be celebrated.

Gregory's overriding concern was to keep monks apart from the world. He was anxious that they should be free from the disturbing influence of secular business. He preferred to see the monasteries represented – as they must be in their conduct of affairs in the world – not by monks but by salaried agents (*Letter* I.67, *CCSL*, p. 76, to Peter, rector of Sicily, August 591). He tells abbot John of St Lucy, Syracuse, to get a *procurator* to handle the matters of business and the legal cases in which the monastery is involved, and to spend his own time in prayer and reading (*Letter* III.3, p. 149.22–3). He emphasises the importance of poverty, chastity and stability for monks (*Letter* I.40, *CCSL*, pp. 46–7).

All these vows of detachment from the world distinguish the monk from the bishop, who must be in some sense a man of the world. The two callings are radically different, and by removing the administration of the monastic world as far as possible from the geographical organisation of dioceses, Gregory emphasises their separateness. The principle is Jerome's: *alia monachorum est causa, alia clericorum* (*Letter* XIV.8, cf. Council of Chalcedon, 2).

Underlying many of the difficulties Gregory encountered in advising abbots lay conflicts of loyalty and obligation. For example, Imperial law allowed marriages to be dissolved if husband or wife chose to enter a monastery (Codex Justinianus, *Novel*, 123, 40). Gregory strongly contested this principle. He maintained that a man might not put his wife away for any cause but adultery; since man and wife were one flesh, it was impossible for one 'part' of the union to become a member of a religious order and the other 'part' to remain in the world (*Letter* XI.30, *CCSL*, p. 919.16–19, to Adrian the notary, February 601). When he learned in 595 of the edict from Constantinople which decreed that no one in public life should undertake any ecclesiastical office or retire into a monastery, and that no soldier should be allowed to become a monk until his period of duty was over, he found this unacceptable, despite his reservation that men in public life were unlikely to make good monks because of their ambition. In this case he felt that the primary loyalty of a man to God overrode any civil obligation, even if it was a prior obligation. He was firmly of the opinion that men ought in these circumstances to be free to be monks (*Letter* III.61, *CCSL*, pp. 209–11, especially p. 210.48–9 on the question of first loyalty, to the Emperor Maurice). In both instances, Gregory compared the two commitments and decided which was more binding in terms of the law of God.

An acutely difficult area of conflict of loyalty concerned monks who

became priests, or priests who had a wish to become monks (*Letter* I.40, *CCSL*, p. 46.15–20). Gregory was concerned for the maintenance of single-mindedness in the religious life. Monks were usually not priests. They were subject to the same penalties and disabilities as laymen.[1] In houses where none of the monks was ordained provision had to be made for a priest to be available to celebrate Mass. Gregory instructs bishop Victor to ordain for the purpose the man the congregation shall tell him they want; this priest is then to confine his ministry to the congregation (*Letter* IX.18, *CCSL*, p. 578, October 598). The monks then need not leave the monastery to hear Mass or bring in a stranger to celebrate, with the dangers attendant on either course of action. But in general he thought that a monk who became a priest should leave his monastery, because the two duties were too much for most men to carry, unless they were made one by being carried out exclusively within the community and for its welfare. No one can give himself wholeheartedly to both ways of life (*Letter* V.1, *CCSL*, p. 266.6–9, to John, bishop of Ravenna, September 594). Where a monk wants to minister in a parish church, he must obtain his abbot's consent before his ordination. After his ordination he loses all rights in his monastery and can no longer reside there. If the new parish priest is himself an abbot he must choose between his two callings. He cannot be both an abbot and a parish priest (*Letter* IV.11, *CCSL*, p. 229.18–19, to Maximianus, bishop of Syracuse, September 593). In this way Gregory encourages that broad separation of clerical and monastic life which was to continue throughout the Middle Ages.

We must now look at Gregory's conception of right order in the Church and the world. The question was by no means confined in his mind to the sphere of monastic life. He brought his ideas about action and contemplation to this area, too. Just as in dealing with the problem of monastic houses he shows us the practical administrator alongside the spiritual longing of the monk manqué, so the two sides of Gregory struggle to come together into a rightly ordered system in this larger arena.

[1] Dudden, II.189; see R. Rudman, *Mönchtum und Kirchliche Dienst in den Schriften Gregors des Grossen* (St Ottilien, 1956).

RECTUS ORDO

The notion of 'right order' is important everywhere in Gregory's thinking, about the universe at large and within it the community of the Church and the secular community of the State, and also about the right ordering of things within the souls of men. This *rectus ordo* has to do with fittingness, the rightness of that which is in the place or position where it belongs, which is both right and orderly. 'Good order' (*bonus ordo*) in living is to move from action to contemplation and back again, so that actions are done more perfectly in the light of contemplation and contemplation is more perfect because it is founded on good works (*Ez.* II.ii,11, p. 232.260). One 'door' faces another in a man when he comes by the right way (*recto itinere*) from outside to inside (*Ez.* II.v.8–20, p. 281).

These two themes, of order and of a duality of inward and outward, contemplative and active, give both a secure frame of reference and also a lively tension to everything Gregory says about the Church. Gregory, more consciously perhaps than anyone before him, tried to make a unity out of two notions, the first of which he did a good deal to develop in his writing on monasticism: that a man's relation with God might be interior and secret, a journey of his private soul;[1] and that man's relation with God was in the Church, as a member of the Body of Christ. Whatever he knew beforehand of Cassian's or Benedict's teaching, the first had attracted Gregory strongly to the contemplative life and to hold his loyalty throughout his life as a way of living in which he would have liked to go on. It was his task to work in the second way as papal administrator and then as Pope. It tested his powers of intellectual synthesis and practical problem-solving to the limit to bring the two together.

This was perhaps partly the result of a change in the political circumstances of the Church. Since the time of the Emperor Justinian earlier in the sixth century it had been impossible to separate the power

[1] B. C. Butler, *The Idea of the Church* (London, 1962), p. 5, points out that Irenaeus knew nothing of a faith conceived in this way.

of the Church cleanly from that of the state.[2] Indeed, Gregory does not even think of doing so. He had been an administrator in the state system himself; the language of his rule as Pope is the language of Imperial rule; his Christian missions backed, he takes it for granted, by the local secular authorities.[3] The institutional order into which the Church fits is parallel with and closely allied to that of the state.

The Church also fits into place in its relation to God. The Church is the body of which Christ is the head (*J*: IV.xi.18, p. 175.4–5; *J*: XII.xxxvi.41, p. 653.2–3). Gregory placed a good deal of emphasis upon the intimacy of a union which brought Christ and the Church together in this way (*J*: XIX.xiv.22, p. 973.2). He also saw Christ as the gateway or door by which Christians come into the presence of God.[4] In the same way the Church's preachers are 'not improperly called "doors"' because they both open an entrance for the faithful and oppose themselves to the entrance of the unbelieving (*J*: XXVIII.xviii.38). Thus the Church is not only united with God in Christ; she is a way by which men may come to God. She is both in this world and beyond this world, a pathway between the two.

This is a significantly though subtly different emphasis from Augustine's. For Gregory its presence in the world is a central reality of the Church. It is Christ's body not only mystically but in the physical sense that it is made up of men living in the world. Augustine saw the Church as the 'world reconciled to God' (*mundus reconciliatus ecclesiae*),[5] as set apart from the world not so reconciled. In this he travelled, ironically enough, some way with the Donatists of his own day, because that was the African way of thinking: the Church was thought of as a refuge from the society of the world.[6] Its members were the elect, separated off for God and in conflict with the world in all its typical activities. Tertullian and Cyprian had pointed the way to such a position and Augustine adopted it, as the Donatists did in their own way.[7]

For Augustine an important implication of the idea was the view

[2] R. A. Markus, 'Gregory the Great's Europe', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 31 (1981), 22.

[3] *Ibid.*, 24–5.

[4] Butler, *The Idea of the Church*, p. 3, emphasises how astounding are the metaphors traditionally expressing the closeness of Christ's relation to the Church.

[5] R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 105.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

[7] R. A. Markus, 'Christianity and Dissent in Roman North Africa: Changing Perspectives in Recent Work', *Studies in Church History*, 9 (1972), 27–8.

that the state and its institutions have no direct connection with the process of salvation. They cannot bring a man to heaven[8] because the Church is not of this world. The duality of Church and state working in the world as a pair or a team or as rivals, is not therefore so strong a notion to Augustine as the opposition of the two cities of heaven and hell. Nor does he have a strong sense of an antithesis between sacred and profane because the pagans have things which are sacred to them, as Christians do. For him, the ties Christians feel with those fellow-citizens of the heavenly city who have already died and gone before them are stronger than the ties they feel with their contemporaries. For Gregory, too, the significant distinction was between those who are *intra ecclesiam, intra sinum ecclesiae*[9] and those who are outside it. But he sees the members of the Church still living as necessarily and properly active in the world, the state's affairs as a real Christian concern, and his own duties as a *rector* in the Church as extending into political and social matters.

This is in part a reflection of the changed circumstances of the two centuries which had passed between Augustine's lifetime and his own. It is also a reflection of the fact that Gregory was not an African. He grew up in Italy, where the Church's institutions worked more closely with the state. He himself had been an administrator in both Church and state, and he never ceased to be an administrator. If the Church was the gateway to heaven, the doorposts were firmly planted in the soil of the world. If the Church was the body of Christ, it needed taking care of physically, just like any other body. Thus he emphasises the idea of the bishop as *rector*, whose function is to mould and direct an essentially profane world (rather perhaps as Ambrose of Milan already saw it in Augustine's day). Gregory's conception of the Papacy's directive role, its duties in the secular world, was far more closely in keeping with mediaeval thinking than Augustine's ideal of an other-worldly Church.

The Roman Church found itself after the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West confined to the West in its influence and at the same time in a new relationship with the Imperial administration which needed its leaders and its practical cooperation to keep things running.

[8] Markus, *Saeculum*, p. 133.

[9] P. Aubin, 'Intériorité et extériorité dans les *Moralia in Job* de S. Grégoire le Grand', *Recherches de science religieuse*, 62 (1974), 124–6, on what it is to be 'in' the Church in Gregory's mind. On the melting of sacred and secular into one another, see R. A. Markus, 'The Latin Fathers' in *The Cambridge History of Mediaeval Political Thought* (forthcoming).

The Church became proportionately stronger in the relationship for a time, holding up administrative and cultural standards.[10]

Gregory held that the gifts of the Holy Spirit, like his utterances, are subject to no law (*J*: Ep. Leander, p. 7.220–2; *D*: I.1, *PL* 77.156C). But he did not brush aside the binding force of ordinary laws of the state upon Christians living in this world. On the contrary, he went to a good deal of trouble to ensure that the law was kept in every particular, and he used its main principles to determine any problem where he could see that the law had a bearing.

This approach was encouraged by the framework of the law itself. During the fourth and fifth centuries numerous edicts attempted to suppress pagan rites, uphold the Church's position, outlawed heretics and stripped them of their inheritance. In the Theodosian Code of 438, which brought together all laws and decrees issued by the Emperors from the time of Constantine, and which was intended to constitute a definitive body of Roman law, the state supports Christian orthodoxy by promulgating the Creed in the form of law (*TC*: XVI.i.2; XVI.v.38). An attack on the catholic church or its clergy carries capital punishment (*TC*: XVI.ii.31).

The law of the state thus consistently assisted and empowered the Church; conversely, Gregory saw no reason not to run the Church in accordance with the law. The Church gained protection; the state gained the political loyalty of its orthodox Christian members (much as in the old days citizens had displayed their patriotism in their attendance to civil religious observances). That is not to say that the result was any very solid or lasting system of mutual help. But the notion that the affairs of the Church were in some measure the state's business and the affairs of the state the Church's concern gave Gregory no difficulty at all.

That appears clearly enough in Gregory's attitude to Ravenna, from which the Emperor's Exarch ran the Western Empire, and where from the mid-sixth century an archbishop ruled more or less securely under the Pope's thumb as bishop of Rome.[11]

[10] R. A. Markus, *From Augustine to Gregory the Great* (London, 1983), brings together a series of studies on the change involved. We look forward to his forthcoming book. See, too, Markus, 'The Latin Fathers' on the term *rector* as a title both for the bishop and for the Church's agents in charge of its estates. See, too, C. H. Turner, 'The Organisation of the Church', *Cambridge Mediaeval History*, I (Cambridge, 1911), p. 159. On Gregory's living on the border between both the ancient and mediaeval worlds and the Byzantine and Germanic worlds of his own day, see R. A. Markus, 'Papal Primacy in the Early Middle Ages', *The Month*, 22 (London, 1970), 357.

[11] R. A. Markus, 'Ravenna and Rome, 554–604', *Byzantion*, 51 (1981), 566–78.

Thus we have two worlds of Church and state jurisdiction, each taking responsibility for its own, with the state countenancing and supporting the Christian religion and the Christian authorities taking a firm line in affairs which seemed to them their province. Thus Gregory speaks of the *rectores* of both Church and state. Bishop and secular ruler alike are for him the 'bases' on which the people stand (Gregory's etymology draws 'base' from 'basileus', a king (*J*: IX.15.25)).

Gregory exploited the double jurisdiction he enjoyed. He writes to the husbandmen (*coloni*) of the Syracusan patrimony, to tell them that he has appointed a guardian for them (*defensor*). 'We order you to obey him without any reluctance in what he sees fit to do and enjoin on you to be done, for the advantage of the Church', Gregory instructs these laymen. 'We have given him such power as to enable him to inflict strict punishment on those who may attempt to be disobedient or contumacious.' Like a secular ruler, Gregory claims the power to punish; and to recapture those who have been snatched from his jurisdiction: for example, to recover to ecclesiastical jurisdiction any slaves who are in hiding outside their limits, or any by whom boundaries have been invaded (*Letter* IX.30, *CCSL*, p. 591, October 598; *Letter* IX.165, *CCSL*, pp. 723–4, June 599; *Letter* IX.48, *CCSL*, pp. 607–8, October–November 598; *Letter* IX.80, *CCSL*, p. 634, December 598). Conversely, in certain circumstances, he himself was willing to hand over litigation to expert laymen (*Letter* I.67, *CCSL*, p. 76, August 591). Gregory had a clear head in these matters, and a good working knowledge of the law. He kept punctiliously to what he saw as 'right order'. Accordingly, too, he liked to see obedience to secular authority where it was appropriate. 'It is the highest praise of a soldier, among other good merits, to show obedience to what is for the good of the holy republic' (*Letter* I.67, *CCSL*, p. 76, 591).

He was not prepared to see abuse by either authority, for that would be a breach of right order. To Gennadius, Patricius and Exarch of Africa, he writes that a local bishop has told him in great distress how in his city the poor are exploited and overtaxed, and the members of his church are being physically abused by soldiers (*Letter* I.59, *CCSL*, p. 70, July 591). It has come to Gregory's ears, he writes elsewhere, that a certain pious lady, who has a son who is a soldier, has been molested. It is his pastoral duty to take care of widows and orphans (*Letter* I.61, *CCSL*, p. 72.5, July 591). He is equally fierce when he hears of a bishop asking a large sum from a widow to pay for the burial of her daughters and of other clerical malpractices

(*Letter* IX.1, *CCSL*, pp. 562–3, September 598; *Letter* VIII.35, *CCSL*, pp. 560–1, August 598).

Gregory's conception of public office and its duties was inevitably (like that of Cassiodorus) formed by both his secular and his episcopal administrative experience (Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 1, Pref.). As Cassiodorus puts it, he has himself in his prefecture enjoyed 'a dignity which all other public offices wait upon like lackeys'. But 'from this high office ways and means for the army are demanded . . . the food of the people is required . . . on this the weight of judicial responsibility is thrown, which alone would be a heavy burden . . . '. He found any leisure he might have enjoyed taken from him by the constant need to think of the public good. That remained the case with Gregory even after he had become an administrator for the Church and then Pope, not least because he never lost sight of the practical needs of his people, which pressed on him in the breakdown of the old administrative machinery. He conscientiously fed the Church's members in this world as well as urging them on in his preaching to aspire to the next.

Despite the many respects in which they overlapped, however, Church and state administration remained in principle separate. The Christian clergy had the privilege of exemption from public services which were menial or which would not be in keeping with their clerical status (*TC*: XVI.i.1; *TC*: XVI.ii.1–2; *TC*: XVI.ii.10). The Theodosian Code insists that they must not be 'disturbed in their life of perfection' when it is 'to no public advantage' (*TC*: XVI.ii.11). These exemptions made the life of a cleric attractive and it became necessary to discourage people from taking refuge in the name of clergy in order to avoid onerous public service (*TC*: XVI.iii.3, 6). Even in the much changed circumstances of his own day Gregory notes cases where something of the sort has happened. He was always anxious to prevent the ordination of laymen to bishoprics without proper preparation (*Letter* VIII.4, *CCSL*, pp. 518–21, to Queen Brunhild, September 597). Gregory wanted to see a committed, trained, professional clergy; they were, it is true, administrators in many cases, but they were clerical administrators not, he wanted to ensure, hastily ordained laymen, and their duties were different in intention and in theory, even if not in all practical details, from those of state officials. That preserved 'right order'.

THE BISHOP

The early letters of his pontificate are full of Gregory's sense of loss in his new office. He writes to one correspondent, a friend in Constantinople called Narsus (October 590), in a series of gloomy paradoxes:

> When you described the sweetness of deep contemplation you stirred again my groans over my ruin, for I heard what I have lost inwardly; although outwardly I have ascended – undeservedly – to the high point of rule (*regimen*) rainclouds of sorrow blind the eyes of my mind. For I reflect, crashing down from the high point of my peace, to what a low point of outward advancement I have climbed. (*Letter* 1.6, *CCSL*, p. 7.2–9)

To the Emperor Maurice's sister Theoctista he writes in October 590:

> Under the colours of episcopacy, I have been brought back to the world, in which I am subject to as many worldly responsibilities as I remember myself to have had in my life as a layman. For I have lost the high joys of my peace (*alta quietis meae gaudia*); tumbling down inwardly, though I seem to have ascended outwardly. That is why I grieve to have been thrust so far from my Creator's face. Every day I strive to be outside the world and outside the flesh. (*Letter* 1.5, *CCSL*, p. 5.6–12, October 590)

It was some years since Gregory had been able to enjoy monastic peace undisturbed. Nevertheless he seems to have felt this new office a sharper severance from quiet than anything he had been asked to undertake before. He often draws this contrast between a bishop's work, which lies in the world, and the monk's life, which takes him out of the world as far as it is possible for him to be out of it in this life. The bishop is a public servant who in many respects must resemble a state official. The monk has removed himself from the public arena. In a letter to Emperor Maurice of August 593 Gregory distinguishes sharply between the two. Maurice had tried to prevent his officials becoming monks or clergy. Gregory told him that while he was in full agreement with him that those who wanted to be clergy often wanted only to exchange one office for another and should be discouraged, he could

not countenance the restriction of those who wanted to retire from the world to a life of prayer and contemplation, which seemed to him to have a quite different purpose (*Letter* III.61, *CCSL*, pp. 209–11).

The danger to which the bishop is exposed as a public man is, then, above all, a loss or diminution of the inner life he could have led undisturbed as a monk. Gregory warns bishop Boniface in September 592: 'It is necessary, dearest brother, that when you do outward good, you guard these things with great caution inwardly, lest the desire to please men become your chief motive' (*Letter* III.4, *CCSL*, p. 149.8ff) The bishop should read the Bible daily, and reflect, so as to keep a check on himself, as he tells bishop Paul in February 592 (*Letter* II.14, *CCSL*, p. 100.8–9). That Gregory should see the difficulty in this light is perhaps a reflection of the fact that he had had the plan for his treatise on the bishop's task in mind for many years before he became Pope, when he was expounding the book of Job (*J*: XXX.13). Parts of the work he eventually wrote may have been composed while he was still at St Andrews as a monk.[1]

Reluctant though he was to take up the ropes of duty and feel the tension between the active and the contemplative life pull so hard, Gregory saw it as a necessary tension. It keeps the bishop in the right frame of mind, and prevents him from deriving a satisfaction inappropriate to his calling from the high position in which he finds himself. It would be natural enough to do so. It is a high place indeed. Bishops preach the word of life to those committed to them (*J*: XIX.XIV.23, pp. 974–5); their glory is the righteousness of those who are in their charge (*J*: XI.XIV.22, p. 598.2–3) and that is strictly not their own glory but that of others.

The cure of souls is both rule and service. Gregory speaks of *rectores*, but he also uses Augustine's phrase in calling himself the 'servant of the servants of God'.[2] Thus the good bishop will preserve a humility alongside his strictness. His rule will also be service, in such a way that he is a friendly companion to good men rather than their lord, and at the same time towering in his zeal for righteousness (*per zelum iustitiae erectus*) against the sins of the wicked; treating the good as his equals and the wicked as his subordinates, who come under his jurisdiction as their corrector (*Letter* I.24, *CCSL*, p. 29.268ff, to the Eastern Patriarchs, February 591). The virtue of humility is to be preserved in such a way that the bishop does not come to be seen as a weak man in matters of justice (*ut non solvantur iura regiminis*), unable to discipline his flock.

[1] Cf. Dudden, II.228.

[2] R. A. Markus and E. John, *Papacy and Hierarchy* (London, 1969), p. 4.

He must seek to preserve that balance between justice and mercy which is found in God himself (*Letter* 1.24, *CCSL*, p. 30.300–4, to the Eastern Patriarchs, February 591). There must always be tension and balance. To go so far in humility as to avoid the duties of the episcopate altogether would be wrong (*R*: I.vi, *PL* 77.19). 'He is not truly humble' who knows himself to have been marked out by God to occupy a senior position and spurns the call to that position (*R*: 1.6, *PL* 77.20), because he is raising up his own will against God's.

In certain respects the miracle-worker is in a not dissimilar position from the bishop. A man who has powers beyond himself must not come to think they are his, that they proceed from himself. He must preserve a similar balance between exercising high authority or extraordinary powers and remaining humble inwardly. Peter the Deacon asks in the *Dialogues* how one Constantius can have remained humble: one day the oil ran out in the church and he could not light the lamps, so he filled them with water and lit them, and they burned as though the water had been oil. How, asks Peter, can a man do something like that outwardly (*foris*) and remain humble inwardly (*intus*)? Surely after he had performed this miracle he became spiritually vain? Indeed, says Gregory, people visited him from far away. But one of them saw him as he was, a small and lowly figure, and Constantius embraced him joyfully, saying, 'You alone see me with open eyes' (*D*: I.5, *PL* 77.177C). That is how it should be with bishops. Perpetually reluctant, they should willingly do their duty; setting the highest standards, they should believe themselves to achieve nothing; endlessly active, they should be ceaselessly contemplative. Ambrose in his *De Officiis* emphasises the same duality. The *officium* of a bishop is so-called from *efficere*; he must *do* certain things. He must also look to his thoughts and appetites (*De Officiis* 1.8, p. 22).

So much for the pastoral side. But bishopric carried power and administrative responsibility, too, and the question of how that power was shared in the Church was pressing. In principle, Gregory believed in delegating and sharing the work of ministry. 'We carry out the commands of heaven more effectively', he says, 'if we share our work with our brothers' (*Letter* II.5, *CCSL*, p. 93.2–3, to Maximianus, bishop of Syracuse, October 591). Nevertheless, when he sent a man to do a job for him, he kept an eye on the proceedings (*Letter* 1.36, *CCSL*, p. 43, to Malchus, bishop of Dalmatia, March 591). Beside his grander notions there always ran for Gregory that strong sense of the importance of conscientious attention to detail which was in accordance with his sense of right order. It made him careful of local

needs as much as of his larger duties. Local bishops were the leaders of their churches, and their clergy of priests and deacons had a primary loyalty to them. In the *Liber Sacramentorum*, the clergy are instructed to go in groups *per ecclesias suas* and to name their own bishop at the point where the Pope is named in Rome (*PL* 78.86B). But Gregory treated these local churches as component parts of the universal Church, coming within his own sphere of responsibility as bishop of Rome and requiring him to take a detailed interest in their affairs.

This question of the relationship of the provincial and local to the universal Church is a central one. Gregory writes of the bishop's task; he saw himself first and foremost as a bishop.[3] But he was also Pope, and in his letters and particularly in his dealings with Church affairs at a local level he shows that he had travelled some distance in his thinking about papal primacy.

The churches needed clergy. If there are no local clergy the people are without something which is necessary to their salvation. They have no one to declare their sins forgiven or to baptise their children so that they may be free of the guilt of original sin, says Gregory. He approaches a local suffragan bishop to remind him of his responsibility to see that a local church is provided with a parish priest. A church under his care is being served by a priest who ought to be officially recognised, installed and given the *emolumenta* due to him without delay (*Letter* II.16, *CCSL*, pp. 101–2, to bishop Paulinus, February 592).

The election of a bishop to a vacant See is an equally urgent matter. The flock will go astray and fall into the enemy's snare if there is no shepherd to guide them (*Letter* I.58, *CCSL*, p. 69.4–6, to the clergy and people of Perusia, July 591). Generally speaking, Gregory regards it as so much a local matter to fill a bishopric, that he instructs Peter the subdeacon to find someone suitable from the Sicilian clergy if he can (*Letter* I.18, *CCSL*, p. 17.16–18, January 591). It is only with the greatest reluctance that Gregory suggests moving the church of a See to a different place, which will be safe in these dangerous times when barbarians may invade (*Letter* II.13, *CCSL*, pp. 99–100, to John, bishop of Vellitrano, February 592). In the case of a bishop's election, a general consensus of local people, clergy and laity, is required. Gregory is pleased to hear in one case that there is a consensus of bishops and the local prince (*Letter* V.10, *CCSL*, p. 276, to the bishops of Illyria, October

[3] See P. Hinchcliff, *Cyprian of Carthage* (London, 1974), p. 114, on the idea that the bishop is the Church and the Church the bishop; also C. H. Turner's classic account in the *Cambridge Mediaeval History*, I (Cambridge, 1911), p. 159, on the growth of the parochial system with its single *rector*.

594; *Letter* v.16, *CCSL*, p. 282, November 594). At Naples he is glad to hear that the *ordo* and *plebs* have agreed on their choice (*Letter* II.8–9, *CCSL*, pp. 95–6, December 591).

But he still kept an anxious fatherly eye on these local decisions, to the point where he sometimes intervened over the heads of the local community. If he was uncertain about the rightness of an election or the conduct of a bishop, he would send a subdeacon to see for himself and report back (*Letter* II.19, *CCSL*, pp. 105–6, to Antoninus, March 592). As a rule he did so for the sake of preserving the very local rights and customs with which he seems to interfere. In the same instance at Naples, he is anxious that the local clergy have not known Paul long. He would like them to take time to think over so important a matter and, with Christ's help, to deliberate (*Christo adiuvante*). He writes to Paul himself to ask him to try to discover what the local customs are, and to try to maintain them (*Letter* II.9, *CCSL*, p. 96.4, December 591). When things went badly, he asked Paul to stay, so that he could work things out (*Letter* II.14, *CCSL*, pp. 100–1).

This close supervision is evident in many cases; it sometimes carries over into interference. If Gregory thought the local people were about to make a disastrous mistake, he would direct them not to elect their chosen bishop, but to seek someone else *in eadem civitate*, in their own locality, to whom Gregory does not object (*ita ut a nobis reprehendi non possit*) and upon whose election they can agree (*Letter* I.56, *CCSL*, p. 68.9, July 591). Some are beyond question unsuitable for the *pastoralis cura* he rules: twice-married men, the uneducated (*R*: I.11, *PL* 77.23D). Those who are eager to be made bishops are also likely to be unsatisfactory because they do not want to do good so much as to be distinguished (*R*: I.9, *PL* 77.21D and *D*: I.viii, *PL* 77.21B–C).

On the other hand, Gregory did not approve of the forcible ordination of an unwilling candidate, however suitable. If the bishop-elect cannot endure the prospect of his elevation (*Letter* I.19, *CCSL*, p. 18.5, to bishop Natalis, January 591), Gregory instructs the people of the diocese that there is to be a meeting of the leaders of the people of the city to think over the election of a substitute who will be fit for the bishopric.

If such a candidate is found and announced, the ordination may go ahead. If no such candidate appears, and no agreement can be reached, at least, says Gregory, 'choose three upright and wise men, whom you may send on behalf of the city, and to whose choice all the people consent'. They may be able to select a bishop from elsewhere who will

be suitable for the position (*Letter* III.xv, *CCSL*, p. 162.14–16, to Scholasticus, December 592).

What, then, of the special position of the bishop of Rome? Gregory's assertion of primacy against the claim of John, Patriarch of Constantinople to be universal bishop was as much if not more an expression of horror at the 'blasphemy' of anyone's claiming to be universal bishop as an attempt to set the old Rome above the new (*Letter* V.44, pp. 329–37, to John, June 595).

There were, however, substantial precedents for the claim that it was the bishop of Rome who must be regarded as carrying on the work with which Peter had been entrusted. This primacy had been asserted (in various forms of words) by a series of Popes, from at least the time of Siricius in 385. In Gregory's own century Pelagius I wrote to bishop John in 559 to tell him that he will be schismatic if he does not immediately unite himself again with the Roman See; Pelagius II wrote in the same vein to the schismatic bishops of Istria in 585–6.[4] It was, then, an established view before Gregory's pontificate that to belong to the Church was to be in communion with the See of Rome.

By Gregory's time Rome could claim the Petrine succession which had led Leo I to see himself as speaking and writing in the person of Peter. Gregory's letters indicate that he himself took a high view of the authority of the Pope over the Church, and of metropolitan bishops over the bishops of whom they had charge. He castigates the bishops of Sardinia for travelling on Church business without the knowledge of their metropolitan (*Letter* IX.203, *CCSL*, pp. 760–1), and without letters from him 'such as canonical order prescribes'. This tight hierarchical jurisdiction extends from the past forward in time as well as downwards and outwards from the present Pope. In a letter to the bishops of Sicily, Gregory says that he has sent Peter the Deacon to 'represent his authority in Sicily' as was the judgement (*iudicium*) of our predecessors (*Letter* I.1, *CCSL*, pp. 1–2, September 590). Such precedent goes back ultimately to the Apostle Peter. In letters of excommunication against the persecutors of the Arian bishop of Thebes (who had fled to Rome to complain), Gregory cuts the miscreants off

[4] R. A. Markus, 'Papal Primacy in the Early Middle Ages', *The Month*, 22 (London, 1970), 357, cf. Y.-M. Congar, *L'Ecclésiologie du haut moyen âge* (Paris, 1968), and C. Ernst, 'The Primacy of Peter: Theology and Ideology', *New Blackfriars*, 50 (1969), 347–55 and 399–404. W. Ullmann's foundation studies on these developments are conveniently collected in *The Papacy and Political Ideas in the Middle Ages* (London, 1976); his classic *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages* (London, 1955) remains the most substantial study. For a convenient summary of the issues, see J. Richards, *Consul of God: The Life and Times of Gregory the Great* (London, 1980), pp. 58–66 and 195–227.

from communion for thirty days (*Letter* III.6–7, *CCSL*, pp. 151–5, October 592), by his authority as Peter's successor.

Yet Gregory makes no claim to *plenitudo potestatis* for the bishop of Rome. He leans upon the authority he borrows from the past, the consent of earlier teachers (*consona sanctis Patribus definitione*). The authority Gregory wields is that of the Church past, present and to come, unified by a singleness of mind on the truth which Gregory strove to preserve by encouraging the holding of councils and synods (*Letter* III.7, *CCSL*, pp. 153–5, to archbishop John, October 592). The Church gathered together may, he believes, grant absolution from an uncanonical condemnation or confirm it, or make it canonical (*Letter* III.9, *CCSL*, p. 157.9–13, to Antoninus, rector of the patrimony of Dalmatia, October 592). This is a right of assembly which the Theodosian Code reinforces as having been ordained by the provision of the Fathers to prevent and cure dissension among Christians or discord between superiors and subordinates; for these reasons it is necessary that priests should assemble together to discuss cases which arise (*TC*: XVI.iv.10).

Through the four ecumenical Councils, Gregory believes, the Church has handed on with a sure hand what it was given in the Apostolic age and by the Fathers (*Letter* I.24, *CCSL*, p. 32, to the Eastern Patriarchs, February 591). About 586, Pope Pelagius wrote a letter about the way in which the Council of Chalcedon had confirmed and strengthened the ancient traditions (*roborata . . . atque firmata*) (Appendix III, *Letter* 3, *MGH* II.453.3–4). But this holding secure along the line of time of the *apostolica . . . et paterna dogmata* seemed to many of Gregory's contemporaries – and to Gregory himself – to be threatened by divisions in the Church of their own day. Secundinus wrote to Gregory in May 599 to ask whether the Eastern Church follows 'the teaching of Leo of holy memory'. Gregory reassures him that it does. 'The most holy churches of the East hold *uno sensu, una doctrina*, the same faith as we do, and that is the faith of the Council of Chalcedon' (*Letter* IX.148, *CCSL*, p. 700.56–61).

So we come back full circle to Gregory's concern with the unity and universality of a Church now coming to its final triumph in the last days of the world, and yet requiring all Gregory's energies to defend it from dangers in dangerous times.

DIVISION

No one who is separated from the Church is a Christian, says Gregory (*J*: XX.ix.20, pp. 1018–19). The unity of the universal Church is the very bond (*compago*) which makes it the body of Christ (*Letter* II.40, *CCSL*, p. 127.17–21). He who suffers martyrdom outside the unity of the Church cannot be a martyr, whatever his suffering. Only a Christian who dies for the faith can be a martyr (*J*: XVIII.XXV.40, p. 911.35–8). There is only one Church (*J*: XVIII.XXV.41, p. 911.45).

There are two ways in which that separation may occur. It may be occasioned by entertaining wrong beliefs about God, which is heresy (*J*: XVIII.XXV.42, pp. 912–13). Or there is the erroneousness of schism, which consists in not loving one's neighbour in the body of Christ, but standing apart as though belonging to a different body (*J*: XVIII.XXV.42, pp. 912–13). For Gregory, the two commandments are inseparable. A Christian must love God and his neighbour. He must be both contemplative and active in living a fully Christian life. And just as in the Christian life contemplation gives rise to action in good works, so in matters of faith and practice, right beliefs make for unity among Christians. Schism will be the result of heresy and it will contain heresy within it.

Gregory's response to heresy and schism has, characteristically, a theoretical and a practical side. There is a good deal about heresy in his exegesis. He punctuates the *Moralia in Job* with accounts of the beliefs of heretics and explanations of the nature of their misconceptions. Nestorius 'imagined' that Christ was in some way 'promoted' to divinity by God; that he was born an ordinary man but had shown such merit that he had been advanced by God to equality with himself. But, Gregory explains, the Mediator between God and man is not, as Nestorius says, one Person in his human nature and another Person in his divine nature. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, one Person truly of both natures (*J*: XVIII.lii.85, pp. 948–9). As for Arius: he believed that there were not only three Persons in the divine nature, but also three Gods. Sabellius, on the contrary, holding that there was one God, also

held that there was one Person. The Church keeps to the middle way, proclaiming against Arius that there is one God and asserting against Sabellius that there are three Persons. Mani read in the Bible that virginity was to be commended; so he condemned marriage. Jovinian, knowing that marriage was sanctioned, despised virginity. 'Thus we see the heretics always in disagreement with one another and the Church moving midway between them in peace, her doctrine undisturbed by their ravings' (*J*: XIX.xviii.27, p. 979.21–4). The common characteristic of heretics is that they disagree with one another (*J*: XXXIII.i.3; *J*: III.xxiii.46, pp. 144–5), like Job's friends when they give different advice (*J*: Pref.vi.14, pp. 19–20). It is necessary to note certain features of heresy's infinite variety, Gregory believes, if it is to be recognised in its many guises.

Heretical thinking has certain characteristics in which it resembles Augustine's picture of the effects of evil upon human thinking. It is concrete (*J*: XVI.vi.10, pp. 803–4), Gregory says, because the heretics cannot think of God spiritually and therefore think in a perverted kind of bodily image (*imaginaliter*) (*J*: V.xxvii.49). Thus heresy is a form of insanity because it is not the thinking of a sound mind. Nestorius, for example, 'raves' that Christ is 'one Person in his human nature and another Person in his divine nature' (*J*: XVIII.lii.84, p. 948.46–7).

It is also deceptive thinking. Job's friends, while pretending to give him advice, attacked him: so do heretics, who do harm to those they pretend to teach (*J*: Pref.vi.15, p. 20). Heretics appear to venerate God, but really they oppose his mysteries, and so twisted is their thinking that they think it an act of humility to deny the truth. They think that they would insult God if they said that he really took flesh and died for man. So in trying as it were to do him more honour, they deny him the praise he ought to have for what he really did (*J*: XII.xxv.30, p. 647).

Heretics are quiet and friendly as long as they are left in peace. But if they are challenged by true preaching, which converts men to the catholic faith, they become hostile and burst out into bitter reviling (*J*: III.xxvi.52, p. 147.45–50). They do so in a self-righteous tone, as though they spoke only for the good of mankind (*J*: X.xiv.25, p. 555.6–25). So distorted is their view of things that they perceive the Church's preaching not as telling the truth, but as mere opposition to themselves (*J*: XIV.iv.4, p. 700.1–6).

This self-deception coupled with pride marks all their doings. Their preachers pretend that they are able to hear secret words spoken to them as a great privilege, as though only they were holy enough to hear them

(*J*: v.xxiii.45, p. 249.1–5). Their lives they believe to be so meritorious that they have attained perfect holiness (*J*: v.xxi.42, p. 247.34–6). They would think it unfitting that they should have only a common sort of knowledge and be thought no different from their fellow-creatures, and so they are always producing new secret truths, and hinting at new revelations made especially to them (*J*: v.xxiii.45, p. 249.6–11). Some avoid others and live a retired life of apparent holiness, and these are if anything more dangerous because they impress people with their seeming holiness of life (*J*: xvi.xlvi.59, p. 833.1–9). The pride which they take in what they hold to be a secret and special intimacy with God (*J*: v.xxvii.49, p. 245.1–7) leads, however, to their own downfall, for they inadvertently bear witness against themselves, entangling themselves in their attempts to express sublime truths and contradicting themselves (*J*: v.xxiv.46, p. 250.1–20).

There is always a mixture of truth and falsehood in heresy. Because they mix with Christians and know about Christianity, heretics learn many of the Christian mysteries and so not everything they teach is false (*J*: vi.i.2, p. 285). The danger is that the mingling of truth and falsehood helps to deceive the listener into accepting the false with the true (*J*: vi.xviii.28, p. 304–5). The true elements in heretics' teaching seem to them a matter for vaunting, and so they use them to display their knowledgeableness (*J*: v.xxvii.49, pp. 251–2). In this way heretics are like lepers, whose healthy skins are covered with spots of disease (*J*: v.xi.28, p. 237.284–6); or they are like Job's friends, who come as if to give words of comfort, but instead criticise him cruelly; thus heretics, who strive as they think, to defend God against the righteous, only offend him (*J*: viii.xxxvii.61, p. 429–30; *J*: vi.i.1, p. 284).

Heretics mislead the faithful by misreading Scripture and interpreting it to their own ends. They give heavenly words an earthly sense (*J*: iii.xxv.49, p. 146.24–6). They praise the same authorities as the Christians, but pervert what they say, so that they mislead the simple (*J*: viii.xl.64, p. 431.8–10). They chew away at the Word of God but they cannot 'eat' it because they are not aided by divine grace; it is as though they gnawed it (*J*: xx.ix.20, p. 1018.1–10). As a result, they break off fragments which cannot be digested by their interpretations to feed to their followers (*J*: xvi.xlviii.61, p. 834.1–6). They give their followers not the bread of life but the bread of error. The Scriptures are a field where the heretics reap and carry away 'sentences' which are not their own but which they put to their own use, and they do violence to the owner of the field because they distort and twist the sense of his Word (*J*: xvi.xlix.62, p. 834.1–6).

Again, in their preaching, the heretics contrast with true Christian teachers. They want only to win earthly honour (*J*: XXIII.i.3). They despise the Church, arguing that her tribulations mean that God is angry with her (*J*: XII.xxviii.33, p. 648.16–18). Wise Christian teachers are moderate and restrained, and speak only enough to silence their adversaries. They do not wish to display their own powers, but simply to suppress the teachers of heresy (*J*: XXIII.x.17).

It is clear what attitude the Church must take to heretics. The common multitudes who follow heretics are condemned with them (*J*: III.xxv.48, p. 145.1–16). But if heretics turn to the Church she will receive them (*J*: XVI.vi.10, p. 804.13–14). Sometimes the grace of God works upon heretics to bring them back to the unity of the Church (*J*: XXIII.i.6). Sometimes the death of a heresiarch is enough to free his followers who then return to the Church (*J*: XVIII.xiv.22–XV.23, pp. 899–900). The Church always wants to see the return of her lost sheep.

The heretics cannot purge their heresy and appease God's anger by any sacrifice they are themselves able to make; only the catholic Church can cleanse them of their sin (*J*: XXXV.xiii.12). The Church is not impressed by their claimed powers (*J*: XX.vii.17, pp. 1015–16). Heretical sacraments cannot be acceptable to God unless they are offered on behalf of the heretics, 'by the hands of the catholic Church' (*J*: XXIII.i.6). The Lamb of God is eaten in one house; the true sacrifice of the Redeemer is offered in one catholic Church. The divine law orders that the flesh of the Lamb is not to be carried out of the house, because what is holy must not be given to dogs (*J*: XXXV.viii.13).

The Church is older than heresy, in every way its senior (*J*: XXIII.iv.11). Gregory is confident that the Church will ultimately triumph. But he does not want to see Christians taking the threat of heresy casually. Every effort must be made to suppress it, because the minds of individuals are being invaded. The battle is for the saving of the faithful, not for the ultimate survival of the Church (*Letters* IV.31–2, *CCSL*, pp. 251–2, to Authemius the subdeacon and Pantaleonus, Pretorian Prefect of Africa, July 594).

That is why the Church's first task is to try to prove that the heretics are in error. If the heretics are not shown that they are wrong, so that they understand their error, they will go on attacking the truth. They must be made to feel their error (*J*: VIII.v.6, pp. 384–5). Gregory writes to Demetrius, bishop of Naples, suggesting to him how he should deal with those who are uncertain in their faith. He is to do his best to bring them to faith, and then admit them to communion (*Letter* I.14, *CCSL*,

pp. 14–15, to Demetrius, bishop of Naples, 590). This is the Church's second task: to bring the heretics and their followers back into unity with the universal Church. The faithful soul is a bride of Christ, so that the heretic who carries her off into his own error is, as it were, bearing off another's wife (*J*: XVI.lx.74, p. 842). Thus heresy may be compared with adultery (*J*: XVI.lx.74, p. 842; *J*: XXII.xvi.39, p. 1120.113–16).

The question of rebaptism is a particular case of a major difficulty in bringing about reconciliation, which had both a theological and a practical aspect. Baptism was the sacrament which made men members of one Church. It freed men from the consequences of the sin of Adam, so that they were guilty only of the sins they themselves committed (*J*: XV.li.57, p. 785). Gregory was as clear as Augustine that baptised infants suffer eternal torments after death because their original sin is not cleared (*J*: IX.xxi.32, pp. 479–80; *D*: IV.18, *PL* 77.349). The same applies to aborted children (*J*: IV.iii.8, pp. 168–9). He believes that before the institution of baptism, faith alone had been enough, or, for those who grew to adulthood, the water of sacrifice, or, for Abraham's progeny, the mystery of circumcision (*J*: IV.i.1, pp. 163–4); but some such purging has, he holds, been necessary to salvation for all men since the Fall. Gregory explains to the bishops of Italy that the children of Lombards who have been baptised in the Arian heresy (*Letter* I.17, *CCSL*, pp. 16–17, January 591) may be reconciled with the Church because baptism in the name of the Trinity is valid even if it is administered by heretics. Its force comes from the God in whose name it was administered, not from the fallible human being who carried out the baptism. Such repentant heretics may be received back into communion by being anointed with chrism, or by the laying on of hands, or by a profession of faith alone. On the other hand, other heretics, the Montanists, for example, do not baptise in the name of the Trinity. Such heretics must be baptised when they return to the Church because the ceremony they have undergone is not baptism at all (*Letter* XI.52, *CCSL*, pp. 952–6, to the bishops of Iberia, July 601). The underlying principle is straightforward enough: the Christian can be joined to the Church only once; the sacrament is unrepeatable, and if it has been validly performed there can be no second baptism.

In areas where the theological basis for making a decision was less clear, Gregory used the test of unity of practice and principle in judging where the Church should stand. To Leander, bishop of Seville and friend of his time at Constantinople, he writes of the practice of baptism by triple immersion, on which Leander had asked his advice

(*Letter* 1.41, *CCSL*, pp. 47–9, April 591): *in una fide nil officit sanctae ecclesiae consuetudo diversa.* There can be no difference of custom in the one faith of the holy Church. The test of what is sound in the Church is unity. The end of all Gregory's striving is to repair and sustain that unity. The problem of heresy is thus a sub-department – if a major one – of the problem of schism for Gregory, as it had been in a slightly different way for Augustine.

On the practical side, the law took a clear-cut view of a man's being inside or outside the Church. The cleric was removed from the ordinary jurisdiction of the state, but if he voluntarily separated himself from the Church he lost that separateness as much as if a bishop judged him unworthy of office and removed him from his position (*TC*: XVI.ii.41). In accordance with the same principle, taken still further, since heretics and schismatics are, by definition, outside the Church, their discipline is left to the state. The state is to seek out heretics actively, bringing them before the public authorities and correcting them severely (*TC*: XVI.v.35). The punishment of heretics involves confiscation of their property to the fisc and their subsequent intestacy (*TC*: XVI.v.2, 7). The state in its turn disowns them from its protection. They may not 'live under Roman law' (*TC*: XVI.v.7), although their children may do so, provided they themselves are Christians. To be outside the Church was a condition clearly marked by civil disabilities.

Although Gregory sees being inside or outside the Church in equally clear-cut terms, his feeling about those who stand outside is not all of a piece. He makes distinctions between various sorts of unbeliever and schismatic, and has noticeably different anxieties about each. In general of course he wanted to bring men in: he knew of unconverted heathens in Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, and he did what he could to seek out and punish Manichees and others; to England he sent a mission and followed it up with epistolatory advice. But factors other than the simple will to win souls for the kingdom of heaven affected the way he approached the unbelievers of Christendom.

The Jews posed both a theological and a practical problem, but a familiar one, with which the Church had learned to live. They were everywhere in the Empire and their presence made itself felt. There were not infrequent quarrels between Jews and Christians in local communities. Gregory always encouraged moderation in settling such disputes. Some local Jews have a synagogue near a church, so close that the services are audible to the Christians at their worship. Gregory asks the local bishop to check the suitability of a suggested new location, so that there will be no further complaints (*Letter* 1.34, *CCSL*, p. 42,

March 591; *J*: II.6, *CCSL*, p. 94). Gregory wanted to ensure that the Jews were not harassed or persecuted, but on the other hand he did not want to see them given the freedoms of Christians. In this Gregory was following a principle laid down in law.[1] The law said that the synagogues of Jews were not to be destroyed or plundered or the Jews persecuted, but that Jews were not to be allowed to add to their number by making converts, own Christian slaves or hold office in the state. The Jews were not forbidden their faith by law (*TC*: XVI.viii.9; *Letter* IV.21, *CCSL*, p. 239, May 594; *Letter* VI.29, *CCSL*, p. 401.1–6, April 596). They were allowed to practise their own ritual (*TC*: XVI.viii.13); they were to suffer no disability before the law (*TC*: XVI.viii.21); and they themselves were to be allowed no violence against any of their number who chose to become a Christian (*TC*: XVI.viii.1).

Some attempt is to be made to convert the Jews, says Gregory judiciously, but only with care and consideration. The Jews are not to be forced into baptism; only if they are genuinely converted by preaching will they remain Christians, and that is the end to be sought for. Forced converts will return to their old faith (*Letter* I.45, *CCSL*, p. 59, June 591). Gregory consistently advocates kindness, persuasion, an emphasis upon the joys of Christian hope rather than upon the fear of judgement, whose terrors may frighten prospective converts away; just as he did in directing his missionaries to England.[2]

Even under strong provocation, Christian leaders are to be mild and reasonable. The Jews complain that one of their number, Peter, a convert to the Christian faith, gathered about him some disorderly persons, and on Easter Sunday, the day after his baptism as a Christian, took possession of the synagogue and placed there a cross and an image of the Virgin Mary and the white garment in which he had been dressed when he was baptised. Gregory instructs the local bishop to remove these things reverently, because the law protects Jews from harassment within their existing synagogues. Peter should be told kindly that what he did was wrong, even if he did it out of zeal for the faith, because he used violence (*Letter* IX.6, *CCSL*, pp. 750–1, to Januarius, archbishop of Caralí, July 599).

[1] *The Theodosian Code*, tr. C. Pharr (Princeton, 1952), p. xvii; S. Katz, 'Gregory the Great and the Jews', *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 24 (1933–4), 113–36; E. A. Synan, *The Popes and the Jews in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1965), pp. 17–31; B. Blumenkranz, *Juifs et chrétiens dans le monde occidental 430–1096* (Paris, 1960).

[2] R. A. Markus, 'Gregory the Great and a Papal Missionary Strategy', *Studies in Church History*, 6 (1970), 31. I should like to thank Professor Markus for posing the problem of Gregory's reasons for anxiety over heresy to me squarely.

Gregory's policy of restraint seems to have rested upon two principles: the practical common sense of proceeding slowly towards the conversion of the Jews and winning their real love for Christ rather than a superficial commitment; and the need to keep within the spirit of a humane and moderate law, which enabled the Jews to retain real if diminished privileges, and, because of the favour God had shown them, to be regarded in a quite different light from pagans and heretics, against whom the law rightly moved with severity (*TC*: XVI.X.1–25).

The Jews were seen as 'traitors' (*judaica perfidia*) (*Letter* V.37, *CCSL*, p. 310.65–76, to the Emperor Maurice, June 595), because they have deliberately closed their eyes to the teaching of God's Son. But nevertheless, they were seen as having a providential role as guardians of Scripture and as destined for salvation at the last, so that they both help the gentiles to reach the kingdom of heaven and themselves fulfil the purpose God had in mind for them when he chose them to be his people.

The same balance between condemnation and approval, of a religion to be tolerated, allowed to persist, but not officially sanctioned, marks all the Law's dealing with the Jews and Gregory's own instructions in his letters.

Thus Gregory saw the Jews as occupying a special position among those who were not members of the Christian Church. He speaks of 'two peoples' who are the two 'breasts' of the 'body' of the Church (*J*: XXIV.viii.17). Much was given to the Jews. The Jews were the 'eldest son' of the Lord, born to him long ago by the teaching of the Law; the gentiles were merely the younger son (*J*: II.xxix.48, p. 88; *J*: II.xxxiii.53, pp. 92–3). But the Jews took pride in the Law and became one-sided and over-confident as a result (*J*: XXXI.xv.29). They misunderstood what God required of them and obeyed the Law with the fear of slaves, not with the love of sons (*J*: XIV.xli.49, pp. 727–8). Their service was all external show (*J*: XXIX.iv.7), and there was no inward devotion in their hearts. God gave the Jews not only the Law but also other aids to righteousness such as the keeping of the commandments and the ministry of sacrifice and the mysteries of prophecy. By these means they were kept for a time within the bosom of grace, as if within the womb of the Creator (*J*: XXIX.xxviii.55). The Jews were blinded by boasting about their knowledge (*J*: XXIX.v.8). They did not see that their own Scriptures foretold the coming of Christ and so they did not believe in him (*J*: XXX.xxviii.55). The Jews' blindness is not merely an absence of sight; it involves a hardness of heart which made them persecute Christ and his followers

(*J*: VI.xviii.32, p. 307; *J*: XXIX.xxvi.52). The Devil dwelt in their minds. The Gospel describes how they worked for the death of Christ because they were angered to see him raising the dead to life (*J*: XXVII.xxvi.50). Hardened like frost by unbelief, the Jews refused to see who Christ was, and behaved with terrible cruelty to him (*J*: XVIII.xxix.46). They remained hungry, although God had given them food (*J*: VI.iv.5, pp. 286–7), and it was left to the gentiles to eat their 'harvest' (cf. Matthew 5.6). Or the Jews may be seen as the lame and the gentiles as the blind; the Jews saw where they were to go, but did not; the gentiles, who did not have the Law, could not see where to go (*J*: XIX.xxiii.40, pp. 988–9) and are not to be blamed for their long blindness.

So decisively did the Jews turn their backs on the truth that the apostles turned from the attempt to preach to them, and preached to the gentiles instead (*J*: IX.vi.6, pp. 459–60). Jesus gave the lead here, because when he 'came naked out of his mother's womb' it was as though he issued from the flesh of the synagogue and came openly to the gentiles (*J*: II.xxxvi.59, pp. 96–7). God himself cut off from the Jews the prophecy, teaching and miraculous signs he had once lavished on them, and took away their faith, hope and love (*J*: XI.xvi.25, pp. 600–1). The soft hearts of the Jews which were once receptive have been turned as hard as the hearts of the gentiles once were, and the hearts of the gentiles made soft (*J*: XXIX.xxix.56). The Jews respond with scorn (*J*: XXVII.xliii.71), and are embarrassed to think that the sentences of Holy Scripture have been understood by the gentiles before themselves (*J*: XXX.ix.32). When the Jews had the Law and the gentiles were blind, the Jews were like princes and the gentiles abject. When the Jews refused to accept the Incarnation for what it was, that was reversed (*J*: XI.xvi.25). The Jews perished because of their faithlessness and then the Holy Church was propagated in the empty earth (*J*: XVII.xxv.35, p. 870.10–12). The reason why God left the gentiles to wait so long in unbelief is a mystery. Gregory can only say that it was pleasing to God and that it cannot be unjust if it was God's will (*J*: XXI.xiv.32).

This account apart – and its purpose is to show the working out of God's providential purpose in the Christian Church rather than to put the Jews in a critical light – Gregory's approach to the problem of the survival of Judaism in a Christian Empire was characteristically moderate and civilised; he is shown at his most sophisticated when he is talking about law, calm, urbane, confident that God's purpose will in the end take care of the problem. In the meantime the problem is contained.

His response to the Arian invaders was very different. He feared them politically and accordingly he moved against them as heretics as far as it lay in his power to do so.

The Arian heresy had the largest following among the tribes which pressed down on the Empire. They had been keen proselytisers. Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria (c. 296–373) wrote to warn monks against Arians who travel from monastery to monastery as 'visitors' and try to convert their hosts. It is important, says Athanasius, that no one should join with them in worship, or others will be influenced by what they see and think that their teaching is acceptable.[3] Despite the eventual triumph of the Athanasian position at the Council of Constantinople in 381, their efforts had, nevertheless, been successful in some areas, and the Lombard invaders of Italy in Gregory's time were Arians.

The Lombard problem was a more or less continuous anxiety of Gregory's pontificate as it had been of his young manhood. In 593 the Lombards briefly besieged Rome, at the time when Gregory was giving his Homilies on Ezekiel. His concern breaks through the surface of the exegesis. He bewails Rome's decayed condition and compares its past glories (*Ez.* II.vi.22–4, pp. 309–13). The threat that the catholic Church would be overwhelmed by the heretics if the invasion was successful, and overwhelmed at its very geographical centre, made Gregory feel acutely the necessity of cutting heresy out of the Christian world.

Heresy had to be purged from the places where it had been. A story in the *Dialogues* tells how an Arian church in Rome had been closed for two years and then reopened and dedicated for use as a catholic church. Relics of St Sebastian and St Agatha had been brought in. Gregory was there with a large congregation at Mass, when a pig was found to be running about amongst the feet of the congregation. No one could see it, but it could be felt butting about amongst the people's legs. One night there was a loud thunderclap and the Devil was driven out, and after a few days a cloud came down from heaven upon the altar of the church and the church was filled with a sweet scent and God miraculously lit the lamps. The Arian taint was gone (*D*: III.30, *PL* 77.288–9). By such stories Gregory emphasises the need for cleansing; there can be no compromise with heresy.

There is a need for state action and large-scale planning. Gregory writes to Gennadius, Patricius and Exarch of Africa (*Letter* I.72, *CCSL*,

[3] Athanasius, *Epistolae 53*, *Patrologia Graeca*, 26.1185–8.

pp. 80–1, August 591) to advise him on a course of action to take against the Donatists. 'It is proper to move against the enemies of the Church with all force of body and mind . . . on behalf of the Christian people . . . as warrior of the Lord. If they are allowed to do so, heretics rise up fiercely against the catholic faith.' In Africa, thinks Gregory, the principal difficulty comes from the Donatist schismatics and Gregory advises the Exarch on the election of a leader of the Church who will be free of Donatist tendencies and able to cope with the Donatist threat. Gregory's picture of the Donatists in Africa seems to have been composed of a sense of the importance of the danger taken at second hand from Augustine's anti-Donatist writings of long before, and – also at second hand – from the reports that reached him. He did not know Africa. He had perhaps a limited understanding of the process of coming together by mutual tolerance which appears to have been gradually wiping out the divisions in Africa itself,[4] as Catholics allowed their families to worship with Donatists and Catholic bishops saw no objection to giving Donatist clergy charge of churches. Gregory applied pressure from the beginning of his Papacy to make the Church and Imperial administrators in Africa suppress the Donatists. He saw things in black and white. In the case of the bishops of Numidia, he wanted those who had come to their bishopric from the ranks of the Donatists to be prohibited from holding office, even if there is strong local support for them (*Letter* I.75, *CCSL*, pp. 83–4, August 591). He heard with concern of schismatics on all sides (*Letter* II.39, *CCSL*, p. 126.33–7, to Columbus, bishop of Numidia, July 592; *Letter* II.43, *CCSL*, pp. 131–2, August 592). Whereas in the case of the Jews Gregory was familiar enough with the difficulties their presence raised to behave with delicacy and to work towards their conversion by mild persuasive methods, gently and mercifully rather than by the threats which he feared might lose more souls than they saved; and in the case of the Arians urgent political circumstances lent, unavoidably, a sense of danger; in dealing with the Donatists Gregory was working with an idea not a reality. He was following through his belief in the importance of unity in the Church, rather perhaps than perceiving with any clarity the difference between the African provincial Church with

[4] R. A. Markus, 'Donatism: The Last Phase', *Studies in Church History*, 1 (1964), 118–26, and see Markus, 'Reflections on Religious Dissent in North Africa in the Byzantine period', *Studies in Church History* 3 (1966), 140–9, on the evidence for the survival of Donatism from Augustine's to Gregory's time and the possibility of its revival in the later sixth century, and on the liveliness of the baptism controversy. P. R. L. Brown, 'Religious Dissent in the Later Orthodoxy of the Roman Empire', *History*, 46 (1961), 97.

its continuing local focus and his own pontifical insistence upon the Church universal. For Gregory unity was universality; for the Africans it was, as it had been in the early Church, loyalty to one's bishop, a working out at local level of the pattern of Christ as head of the body of the Church.

For Augustine, in Africa, the issue had had a different complexion. The Donatists represented fragmentation in the Church, and therefore a breach of unity felt at a local level and presenting a spiritual impossibility. Gregory was Pope; he was in Italy; he was running a universal Church administratively speaking as well as spiritually.

When he comes to define heresy Gregory takes it for granted that he can point to a set of doctrinal principles which have already been formulated and given the stamp of orthodoxy, and which rest upon the pronouncements of the 'four Councils of the Church': at Nicaea (325), he says, 'the perverse dogma of Arius was destroyed'. At Constantinople (381) the error of Eunomius and Macedonius was condemned. At Ephesus (431), the wickedness of Nestorius was condemned. At Chalcedon (451), the wickedness of Eutyches and Nestorius was made apparent. These four Councils, Gregory says, he embraces (*complector*) devoutly and he maintains them (*custodio*) wholeheartedly, for on these, as on a corner-stone, the structure of the holy faith rises up, and if anyone does not adhere to them, even if he looks like a 'stone', he lies outside the 'building' of the Church (*Letter* I.24, *CCSL*, pp. 22ff). The authority of these four Councils is of the highest. They are to be received like the four Gospels (*Letter* III.10, *CCSL*, pp. 157–8). The authority of Christ's Church is equal to that of his Word in the Bible. Thus the avoidance of heresy depends upon the avoidance of schism, because only the one Church can pronounce with authority.

The keynote of concern here is again the importance of maintaining the Church's overall unity. Each block of stone must be built into the fabric. Gregory writes to Eusebius, archbishop of Thessalonica, to warn him to root out heresies so that 'one feeling of concord may knit together for salvation those whom a pure and single confession of Catholic truth unites'. If anyone 'presumes to diminish' (*imminuere praesumit*) or to try to change the sense of what has been laid down by these Councils (*quasi corrigendo eius sensum mutare prolata*), he is to be anathematised (*Letter* IX.197, *CCSL*, pp. 752–4). There is no room for private opinion or the operation of the individual conscience, because the faithful soul cannot wish to disagree with the Church's teaching. Dissidence is a sign that the Devil has been at work.

CONCLUSION

Gregory's early influence lay in the dissemination of his most popular and practical works. The *Dialogues* were translated into Greek by Pope Zacharias (741–52) and became a standard work in monastic (and other) libraries in the East. The *Regula Pastoralis* was also translated into Greek, in Gregory's lifetime, by Anastasius of Antioch. Both works were rendered into English in King Alfred's day. From Spain to Rome in the seventh century came Taio, later bishop of Saragossa, in search of copies of Gregory's works; he knew of the *Regula Pastoralis* and the *Moralia*, which Gregory had sent to Spain; from what he found he made a collection of extracts. Taio perceived that the *Moralia* was full of teaching on doctrine as well as on behaviour, and he rearranged the material in an order which would make it more readily accessible to the reader who wanted help on a particular point. In a letter to Eugenius, bishop of Toledo, he describes his feelings on reading Gregory. He crept up to the door step by step, irresistibly drawn (*in aestimabili accensus desiderio*) and, like a bold *explorator*, he went in; he was struck by wonder at the sight of the profusion of beauty before him; he rushed about plucking the flowers in handfuls like a little child at play. Then he decided that it would be better to make them into an orderly arrangement rather than a bundle. Gregory himself prompted him to do so, he says (*PL* 80.723–5). He explains the order he has chosen. He begins with God himself, the Trinity, the origin of the world, man and his story to the end of the world. Taio's enthusiastic gathering was not restricted to doctrinal matter (*PL* 80.724B). And he has put in some portions of Augustine, too, as a sauce and a flavouring and a scattering of flowers at the feast (*PL* 80.729A–B). Gregory's work lent itself to extracts and that was undoubtedly a factor in its mediaeval success. Guibert of Nogent and his near contemporary William of Malmesbury found him useful in that way in the early twelfth century. Gregory's *dicta* had a way of providing 'keys' to the art of exegesis, as Guibert remarks.[1]

[1] Guibert of Nogent, *De Vita Sua*, ed. E. R. Labande (Paris, 1981), p. 138.

The popular, the colourful, the striking in Gregory was always attractive to his later readers: perhaps no one did so much as he to encourage hagiographers to make a special feature of death-bed scenes. He was a mine of material for innumerable later writers: Anselm of Canterbury on angels; Guibert of Nogent in his writings on preaching and exegesis; Rupert of Deutz, who abbreviated Gregory's *Moralia in Job* and admired it so much that he believed that the Holy Spirit had inspired Gregory in the way he set forth the mysteries of Christ.[2] Bernard of Clairvaux took from him ideas which underlie the *De Consideratione* and his preaching on virtues and vices. Ailred of Rievaulx borrowed from him in his *Jesus as a Boy of Twelve* and in some parts of the *De Anima*. Robert Grosseteste had a well-thumbed copy of the *Moralia in Job*.

To all these and others of the period up to about 1250 the consistency of Gregory's teaching, the repeated use of certain patterns, made a strong appeal. Alan of Lille, for example, picks up some of his expressions for his own use (*non vacat a mysterio*, cf. *Ev.* XXIV.4, PL 76.1186); *lamenta poenitentiae*; *paradisi gaudia*; *cura pastoralis*; *zelus rectitudinis*; *potentes huius saeculi*; *oculi mentis*; *electi praedicatores* are other phrases, his own, or in some cases also Augustine's, which Gregory's mediaeval readers repeated after him. His images had the same characteristic of repeating in orderly sequences and drawing analogies which are carefully matched point by point so as to give as many correspondences as possible, and thus to make a memorable pattern out of each image. Gregory also supplied a vast stock of material for interpreting specific texts, from which scholars borrowed freely for a millennium.

In the areas with which we have been chiefly concerned – exegesis, preaching and the attempt to synthesise the active and the contemplative in the Christian life – Gregory's mediaeval influence is clearly marked, at least until about 1200. It is often mixed with other influences, especially that of Augustine, but in many cases we can be sure that it is his. To a number of mediaeval scholars, Gregory the Great was *Gregorius noster*, rather as Virgil among the Roman poets was the familiar *Virgilius noster*.[3]

Gregory became something of a patron for Guibert of Nogent, for example, towards the end of the eleventh century, when his mother sent him to school with his harsh and insistent tutor on the feast day

[2] On Rupert of Deutz's use of Gregory see J. H. van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz* (California, 1983), pp. 47–8, 62–3.

[3] Lubac, II.537–8.

of Gregory himself.[4] Guibert speaks of other Fathers, too: Jerome, Gregory Nazianzen, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea. But Gregory the Great remained a special influence upon him, not least because, as he explains, Gregory was instrumental in helping him make the change of habit in his reading which turned him from a secular to a Christian scholar. He says that Gregory holds the keys of the 'art' of exegesis; all its traditional rules are set out in his commentaries (*veterum auctorum regulae*).[5] Guibert was moved by this example to attempt a commentary of his own on Genesis, in which he tried to bring out the moral sense; and then he went on to comment on other books, he tells us, always laying the chief emphasis upon one of the higher senses.[6]

Gregory became perhaps the most significant single influence upon the detailed working out in the West of the system of interpretation adumbrated in the writings of Origen and Augustine, and involving literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical senses.[7] He envisages a scale running from the allegorical sense to those moral and anagogical interpretations which especially appealed to Guibert of Nogent as requiring the application of fresh effort by the exegete of his own time (*PL* 156.26 and 488C):[8]

> There are four *regulae Scripturarum* on which the whole Bible runs as on wheels: they are history, which speaks of events, allegory, in which one thing is understood by another, tropology, that is, moral speech, which deals with behaviour . . . anagogy, that is the 'spiritual understanding' by which we are led to higher things in dealing with the heights and the heavens. For example, Jerusalem is historically speaking a city; by allegory it signifies the holy Church; by tropology, that is, morally, the faithful soul of the man who sighs for the vision of eternal peace; by anagogy it signifies (*signat*) the life of the heavenly citizens, who see the God of Gods face to face.

Guibert points out the respective usefulness of each of these senses to the *interior homo* (*PL* 156.25D–6A).

Guibert is an excellent example of a monastic scholar whose debt

[4] Guibert of Nogent, *De Vita Sua*, 1.4, ed. Labande, p. 26, and cf., *Gesta Dei per Francos*, Preface, *PL* 156.681–2, for more of Guibert's comments on his early education and the excessive love of poetry he had when he was young.

[5] Guibert couples Gregory and Jerome in *De Incarnatione*, *PL* 156.489A, and cf. *PL* 156.29D (*Liber Quo Ordine*), *PL* 156.339A.

[6] *De Vita Sua* 1.17, ed. Labande, p. 138.

[7] R. Wasselynck, 'L'influence de l'exégèse de S. Grégoire le Grand sur les commentaires bibliques médiévaux', *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 32 (1965), 157–204, lists mediaeval authors who make use of Gregory.

[8] Lubac, 1.187–8, and B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (2nd edn, Oxford, 1952), pp. 243–5.

to Gregory is clear, and it is perhaps worth pausing a moment longer over the details of his borrowings.

Gregory was especially interested in the Bible's prophetical utterances, where human beings were visibly striving to express divine truth and were clearly handicapped by their ultimate inability to talk in any terms but those of 'bodily images'. Here, too, Guibert can be seen to follow him; not only in his own choice of prophets for commentary, but also in the details of his discussions. 'Note the prophetical way' (*nota propheticum morem*), how they frequently repeat 'in that day', showing by the demonstrative pronoun how insistent the presence of the divine light (*internae lucis*) must be in their minds (*PL* 156.314C). 'Note the prophetical way, how easily the shift is made from singular to plural, from plural to singular, from person to person' (*PL* 156.349C). Language is being stretched to the limits in these attempts to express what is beyond language.

Guibert speaks with awe of the difficulty of tropological explanation and describes the efforts of Origen, 'supreme in learning after the apostles', Apollinaris of Laodicaea, Eusebius of Caesarea 'than whom no one was more famous in his time among divine preachers' (*PL* 156.399A).

Like Gregory, Guibert constantly points to double and multiple meanings (*PL* 156.314A). Water, for example, sometimes means the pleasures of the flesh (*PL* 156.37A, on Genesis 1.2), often the knowledge of the Bible (compare Gregory, *Moralia* on water, *J*: XI.X.14, pp. 593–4, and *J*: XIX.VI.9, pp. 961–2, on water as knowledge for preaching and in this passage: 'Waters in Holy Scripture sometimes denote the Holy Spirit, sometimes sacred knowledge, sometimes wrong knowledge, sometimes calamity, sometimes drifting peoples, sometimes the minds of those following the faith', cf. *PL* 156.41B, on Genesis 1.6). Guibert gives us wisdom in two modes, too (*PL* 156.41D).

So dominant is this search for the interior sense that Guibert finds himself in no discomfort when he encounters a note of a variant reading. All is equally adaptable to the divine teaching purpose. The Old Translation does not give *inanis et vacua* at the beginning of Genesis, but *invisibilis et composita. Quod optime moraliter consonat!* 'That fits perfectly with the moral interpretation!' exclaims Guibert (*PL* 156.35). The earth is 'invisible' in those who do not know themselves.

Guibert's work owes a great deal to numerous other Fathers beside Gregory. But his overall perception of his task as an interpreter of the

Bible is, like Gregory's, first of all that of a preacher. All his effort (*tota verbi nostri vigilantia*) is directed towards the *motus interioris hominis*. Everyone, he says, can benefit from this because everyone shares the experience of sin and has to fight against vice. 'I do not think,' he says, 'that any preaching is *salubrior* than that which shows a man himself and those things which are outside him spread within, that is, in the mind.' He continues: 'If anyone wants to know how he ought to treat his inner man,. . . he can offer no better recommendation than the study of Gregory or Cassian' (*PL* 156.27B).

Preaching in the grand Gregorian sense of making men see into the inner truth behind outward things, makes life itself an exegesis. The preacher in his own person acts as one of the 'things' or examples through whose outward appearance to the senses God teaches men about inward and spiritual realities. The teaching is everywhere. Guibert points to 'the nature of the lion' (*PL* 156.469A). In one connection, and elsewhere, where the lion has a different meaning, he points to another aspect of its behaviour (*PL* 156.324B). In the first case the lion's eating habits are relevant, in the second its custom of sleeping with its eyes open so that it is always alert. God has given it these characteristics so that it can teach several things. When the 'seed' of the Word of God sprouts in men's hearts, that is the earth sprouting grass (*PL* 156.45B). There is no 'like' in Guibert's description. The grass on the earth actually enacts the springing of the Word of God.

There is, both Gregory and Guibert insist, a right and a wrong way to use the inward and outward duality of Scripture. Where the good preacher reveals the inner meaning by his analysis of the outward and necessarily 'corporeal' images, the heretic perverts the outward meaning so as to make it not less but more 'corporeal' (*per falsas Scripturarum interpretationes. . . quasi carnaliter dicta Scripturarum exempla exponunt*) (*PL* 156.443C–D).[9]

The preacher may draw 'out' what is 'in' Scripture in the right manner in two ways: by going behind its outward face in search of truths of faith or in search of guidance on good behaviour, in the dual tradition of Christian mediaeval teaching. Gregory does both even in the *Moralia*, where his ostensible purpose is to teach about the living of a good Christian life.

On the mediaeval development of the art of preaching, Gregory had only perhaps a modest influence after about 1200, as he did in other areas in the changed circumstances of university teaching. Gregory is

[9] Lubac, II[1].112–18.

essentially a monk's author. But some of the earliest exponents of the art of preaching owe him a great deal: Guibert of Nogent, Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercians, and Alan of Lille took over his imagery and his assumptions about preaching. His imagery continued to be attractive. After Alan of Lille's time the art of preaching became, in the course of the thirteenth century, one of the mediaeval rhetorical arts.[10] As such, it began to concern itself substantially with form. The preacher divided and sub-divided the theme suggested by the text he took as his starting-point. The art lay in ordering the parts and finding illustrative material and arguments, just as it had done in ancient rhetoric. It was here that Gregory's work continued to be useful. Gregory frequently divides or 'distinguishes' the meanings of Biblical terms in his exegesis, so as to clarify a point or to tease out the implications of an image. He can show that two different things are meant in two passages which appear to disagree, and he can develop the images suggested by the range of possible figurative uses of each term.

This principle gave rise to much later work along the same lines: Bede's *De Schematibus et Tropis*, the reconciliation of the four Gospels by the early Premonstratensian Zachary of Besançon in the first half of the twelfth century, and most notably in the later twelfth century Peter the Chanter's *De Tropis Loquendi*.[11]

The distinction of terms had a further usefulness to mediaeval authors. In the later twelfth century a few dictionaries of the multiple meanings of the Bible's terms were compiled. Their authors worked with Gregory's lists and others in the Fathers of their own finding, and the genre became so popular that such dictionaries became commonplace among the equipment of the preaching friars. They enabled them to put together quickly a picture of the ways in which the terms in a given text might be developed.

The lists, even as early as Alan of Lille's dictionary are far more extensive than Gregory's.[12] Alan finds water to mean eighteen different things in Scripture, from the world, first matter, wisdom, the infusion of the Holy Spirit, to heresy, tribulation, the people, the mind of the righteous, and so on; combining as Gregory does pejorative and good senses, but going beyond Gregory in the thoroughness of the

[10] J. J. Murphy surveys the field in *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (California, 1971).

[11] See my *Alan of Lille* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 23–9 and Appendix II.

[12] See R. H. and M. A. Rouse, 'Biblical *Distinctiones* in the Thirteenth Century', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge*, 41 (1974), 27–37.

search (*PL* 210.703–5). Alan also includes prepositions, conjunctions, adverbs, again in a way which has precedent in Gregory, but which goes beyond anything he attempted.

But perhaps more than anything else in the long term Gregory taught his readers to preach for a popular audience, to convey in pictures they could grasp, ideas which are often theologically and exegetically very sophisticated.

Perhaps no mediaeval monastic order as fully tried out in practice what Gregory had taught as the Cistercians. Isaac of Stella in the twelfth century says in a sermon that the Cistercian demonstrates by manual labour that he is one of the sons of Adam, outside paradise and obliged to toil for his living (*PL* 194.1858). There was a consistent emphasis in Cistercian writings on the alternation of action and contemplation, on the way in which the two help one another's purposes in the devout soul. The orders of regular canons, too, if from a different angle of approach, attempted to combine life under Rule with life in the world. The Knights Templar in the Holy Land set out to fight for the faith both with spiritual weapons and with swords of real metal. It would be inappropriate to attribute to Gregory all or even most of the influence here. Benedict had included manual labour in his Rule. There were many more forces at work in shaping mediaeval monasticism. Nevertheless, the problem of the relation between action and contemplation was perennial. Gregory gave it a turn away from seeming to be an opposition towards appearing as interdependence. Some feeling for the same intimacy between the two is to be seen in all these movements.

Gregory's climbing image held great appeal for a number of mediaeval monastic writers. Benedict used it as well as Gregory, and it was especially appropriate to the patient striving for perfection of the monastic life. Anselm of Canterbury used to talk to monastic communities about the steps to be taken towards this goal, making his own modification of Benedict's *gradus*.[13] Bernard of Clairvaux wrote in his *De Gradibus Humilitatis et Superbiae* about the steps of pride, and left his readers to infer the steps of humility for themselves (for, he says, he has written about what he knows, and has found he has more to say about his pride than his humility).[14] Richard of St Victor describes

[13] See R. W. Southern and F. S. Schmitt, eds., *Memorials of St Anselm* (London, 1969), p. 110, and R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (London, 1953), p. 114.

[14] Bernard's *De Gradibus Humilitatis et Superbiae* is edited by J. Leclercq, C. H. Talbot and H. Rochais, *S. Bernardi Opera Omnia* (Rome, 1957–78), 8 vols, III.

the spiritual ladder in terms of a transformation of a man into the figures which are types of each stage. He becomes first Reuben (fear of God), then Judah (love of God). Progress is made. Between the birth of Joseph (discretion or full self-knowledge) in the soul, who is the child of Rachel (reason), and that of Benjamin (contemplative ecstasy) the soul begins to have a new kind of spiritual experience, divinely bestowed gifts of interior vision and light.[15] Richard also makes use of the image of the defended castle, in which sense and imagination both teach the soul its distance from the things of this world and act as its supports and help it in contemplation, in such a way that the soul preserves its separation paradoxically by remaining in a right relation with the world.[16]

Gregory did not strike out new lines of thought; his gift did not lie in the exploration of untouched or vexed questions but in taking familiar and well-worked discussions and making them shapely and easily grasped: not only to his own listeners, but to a wide readership for many centuries after his own time.

The shape he gave them was generally that of a picture or image, most often taken from Scripture. It is easy to underestimate what he achieved here. It is possible to render in that way only what is very thoroughly mastered, so that its principal characteristics have become clear. Rather as a caricature picks out features which make its subject instantly recognisable, so Gregory's images – without the exaggeration of caricature – convey the essence. And they do so in terms which the reading of the Bible could only make more and more familiar. Gregory naturally fell into the habit of 'chewing' the text of the Bible slowly and reflectively which was the method by which the monastic scholars of the Middle Ages were to stock their minds with Scripture.

But at the same time he never lost sight of the grand plan. His images may have travelled more or less piecemeal from his works down the centuries, but they are not chance elements in his talk and interpretation. They are repeated and counter-changed, but they make a consistently argued case for some profound theological principles.

The fourteenth century Robert of Basevorn, surveying the great preachers of the past, lists the distinctive features of the work of each. He sums up admirably those elements in Gregory's work which consistently appealed to his mediaeval readers: his use of the *figurae*

[15] G. A. Zinn, *Richard of St Victor* (New York, 1979), pp. 17–19.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Scripturae and of *exempla sensibilia* to make his points; his habit of dividing the meanings of the Bible's terms (*frequenter nomen unum in multum signata dividens*); his ability to speak to ordinary people as well as to scholars; his use of 'edifying stories'.[17]

Gregory's concern with the problem of balance communicated itself too. In circumstances outwardly greatly different from Gregory's but occasioning what he recognised to be very similar strains, Bernard of Clairvaux wrote a treatise in the mid-twelfth century for Pope Eugenius III, a former Cistercian abbot, now struggling to carry out the duties of the papal office. Bernard gave his treatise the title *De Consideratione*, in an echo of the opening passages of Gregory's *Regula Pastoralis*. He considers exactly the Gregorian dilemma of maintaining an inner life of contemplation and, simultaneously, an active life in the world. Gregory spoke for many mediaeval Churchmen. But above all, he spoke for his own difficulties, and that heartfelt personal note lifted what he had to say out of the context of his own time and gave it universality in its appeal to men of later ages encountering similar strains and conflicts.

But he did something incomparably more important, which brings together these fragmentary influences and lendings. The ideas about the nature of language which Augustine developed form the basis of the theology and philosophy of the West in the Middle Ages; they gave direction to the study of the liberal arts and to the exegesis they were designed to assist. It was Gregory who drew together the elements of this system and made a working synthesis of them: the principle that all God does is a communication of himself to rational beings; that God himself is language; that that communication may go on inwardly in a man's mind and soul, or outwardly, by showing him things his eyes can see or telling him things his ears can hear. Thus all divine communication has its inward and outward aspects. The Bible, accordingly, has its outward surface and its inward and deeper meanings. And it has to modify ordinary human language to express even its outward meaning when it refers to God, and the more so when it expresses a deeper spiritual mystery. To the mediaeval monastic tradition of *lectio divina* among the Benedictines and especially the Cistercians, these principles spoke with great directness. They made it possible to make sense of all the difficulties the text presented, and in his detailed treatment Gregory solved many problems for them

[17] For Robert's text, see M. T. Charland, *Artes Praedicandi, Contribution à l'histoire de la rhétorique au moyen âge* (Paris, 1936), p. 247.

specifically. The Gregorian synthesis served to make these notions commonly understood and to give them the currency they needed if they were to enter into the thinking of dialecticians and grammarians as they developed the work on language which is arguably the highest achievement of the universities of the later Middle Ages.

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