INTRODUCTION

On meeting St. Anthony, the old hermit Paul recalls the world, and for all his years of isolation in the desert he cannot quite forsake the fortunes of cities and empires: "Because true love embraces all things, please tell me how the human race is getting along: whether new roofs rise in the ancient cities, whose empire now rules the world, and whether any still exist, snared in the error of demons."[1]

The life of perfection includes charity for others; indeed, it is nothing without such charity. Though a thousand reasons bid the monk to leave the world, polluted as it is with enticements of demons, those who escape are never wholly comfortable about the fate of those left behind, imperiled and perhaps lost. Even in its most ascetic expression, late antique Christianity is never a flat rejection of the world. The gnawing recollection of Christ's lament cannot be dispelled, "O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that murders the prophets and stones the messengers sent to her! How often have I longed to gather your children, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings; but you would not let me. Look, look, there is your temple forsaken by God" (Mt 23:37–38).

To see this temple forsaken and destroyed is to witness God's justice, but one testifies to God's terrible vengeance with grief for those lost, for the suffering of people and the decline of cities once great. Apocalypticism is woven of bereavement as well as anticipation.[2] Is there more one

1. Hier. *vita Pauli* 10 (PL 23, 25).
2. Cf. *Ep.* 3.29 (CCL 140, 175); *Ep.* 3.61 (CCL 140, 209–11); *Ep.* 11.37 (CCL 140A, 931–32). For Gregory's apocalypticism see Claude Dagens, "La Fin des temps et l'église selon saint Grégoire le Grand," *RecSR* 58 (1970): 273–88, and *Saint Grégoire le Grand* (Paris, 1977), 345–430; René Wasselynck, "L'Orientation eschatologique de la vie chrétienne d'après saint Grégoire le Grand," in *Assemblées du Seigneur* 2 (1962): 66–80. See two articles by Raoul Manselli, "Escatologismo di Gregorio Magno," in *Atti del Primo Congresso Internazionale di Studi*

could do? "*Age quod agis!*"[3] Get on with business, do what you must do. Never cease to work, do all you can. Such is the advice in the late sixth century of Gregory I, gazing from the see of Peter at so many adumbrations of the end. Gregory responds with remarkable energy and imagination to work in his dying world, feeling a duty to serve others despite the perils to his own soul.[4] Gregory is often credited with founding the medieval papacy; and for many, his literary works mark the beginning of a truly medieval spirituality. Gregory achieved much, then, despite the disorders of the sixth century.

Gregory's times were the stuff of apocalyptic dreams and visions to impressionable minds such as his. The last western Roman emperor was deposed in 476, an event not particularly noticed, but by this time almost the whole of the Western empire was ruled by German kings. Italy's first *rex*, Odoacer, lasted less than twenty years and was replaced by the Ostrogoth Theodoric in 493. Theodoric ruled conscientiously for thirty-three years, although he could not remedy the structural weaknesses of the Italian economy. A shortage of manpower, high taxes, and low productivity continued to thwart capital formation, and the countryside drifted further toward a natural economy.[5] Theodoric died unable to secure his kingdom for the future, and Italy fell prey to Justinian's ambitions. Determined to restore the empire to its former glory, Justinian sent out forces to reconquer the West in 535. Italy was beset with wars of varying intensity for almost two decades and suffered unparalleled destruction; Rome was besieged at least four times. Starvation and the plague accompanied the wars, and the population dwindled.[6] The last half of the sixth century was marked by a serious economic recession.[7]

Longobardi, 383–87; and "L'escatologia di S. Gregorio Magno," in *RStR* 1 (1954): 72–83; and Paulo Siniscalco, "Le età del mondo in Gregorio Magno," Jacques Fontaine, Robert Gillet, and Stan Pellestrandi, eds., *Grégoire le Grand*, Colloques Internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Chantilly 15–19 September 1982 (Paris, 1982), 377–387. See also Brian Daley, *Eschatologie in der Schrift und Patristik*, in *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte* vol. 4, fasc. 7a, ed. Michael Schmaus et al. (Freiburg, Basel, Vienna, 1986): 245–47. A modern trend is to downplay the severity of the crisis that Gregory considers catastrophic; cf. Michel Rouche, "Grégoire le grand face à la situation économique de son temps," in Fontaine et al., eds., *Grégoire le Grand*, 41–57.

3. *HEv.* 2.37.9 (PL 76, 1279); *Dial.* 4.58.1 (SC 265, 194).

4. See esp. Patrick Catry, "Amour du monde et amour de Dieu chez saint Grégoire le Grand," *StudMon* 15 (1973): 253–75. The duty to serve others despite inconvenience to self is found also in Cic. *off.* 1.21; cf. Ambr. *off.* 1.9.28–29.

5. T. S. Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers* (Rome, 1984), 5.

6. Brown notes we have no means of gauging the population as a whole and eschews estimates, see *Gentlemen*, 63; also 6, 7, 144, 97. Michel Rouche estimates a decline in Rome from the fourth century to Gregory's time, passing from 700,000 to 200,000; the peninsula

The peace Justinian secured in 554 lasted only until 568, when a new and fierce tribe, the Lombards, crossed the Alps. The fortunes of the Lombards ebbed and flowed throughout the rest of the century, but their depredations were particularly difficult for the Church. Dozens of episcopal sees were disrupted, and Gregory did much to consolidate the remaining bishoprics.[8] Politics in Italy became a three-cornered affair among the Lombards, the Papacy, and the East as represented by the "exarch" of Ravenna.[9] Often at odds with both Byzantine and Lombard policies, the Papacy became increasingly autonomous. Yet Gregory never relinquished the ideal of a Christian empire somehow uniting disparate peoples.

Slowly, memories faded of Rome's splendid past as the imperial capital. The Senate ceased to function effectively soon after the Reconquest, and early in the seventh century the *curia senatus* was actually turned into the Church of S. Adriano. Rome became increasingly the holy city of saints and martyrs cherished by pilgrims,[10] an evolution reflected pointedly in building patterns. Secular structures were allowed to decay, despite the sunny provisions of Justinian's Pragmatic Sanction of 554. Only the Ponte Salaria was rebuilt in 565. Eventually the Papacy assumed responsibility for the vital aqueducts, even as it undertook many other civic traditions, such as maintaining the grain supply and feeding the poor. Nor was aristocratic patronage lavish in the late sixth century, focusing rather around small foundations associated with churches and charitable institutions. Only the large intramural churches and the cemetery-churches devoted to martyrs received much attention.[11]

Such rapid political and economic changes accounted for the vertiginous fluidity of Gregory's society. T. S. Brown has described admirably

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as a whole declined from 5 million to 3.5 million, figures that are rather high; see Rouche, "Grégoire le Grand face à la situation économique de son temps," in Fontaine et al., eds., *Grégoire le Grand*, 42ff., also A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Norman, Okla., 1964), 2: 1040–45.

7. The evidence of pottery, inscriptions, and excavations indicate a decline in the number of settlements and of material culture; see the discussion by Brown, *Gentlemen*, 6–7.

8. Jeffrey Richards, *Consul of God* (London, 1980), 100–104, says at least forty-two sees disappeared during the Lombard period. See also L. Duchesne, "Les Evêchés d'Italie et l'invasion lombarde," *MEFR* 23 (1903): 83–116; 25 (1905): 356–99, noting that twenty-seven sees were disrupted in the late sixth century. Cf. Brown, *Gentlemen*, 40.

9. On the difficulties of utilizing this title, which first appeared in 584, see Brown, *Gentlemen*, 48–53. In Gregory's time, the exarch was in charge of all army units in Italy, even in matters of pay and promotion. Still, Gregory's letters testify to the exarch's ineffectiveness around Rome.

10. See esp. Peter Llewellyn, *Rome in the Dark Ages* (London, 1970), 173–98.

11. Bryan Ward-Perkins, *From Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1970), 45ff. and 56ff.

the social revolution of the late sixth century: the rapid formation of a
new military aristocracy that came to dominate society at the expense of
the civilian senatorial aristocracy, the conflation of civilian and military
authority and administration that eventually enhanced the military
elite.[12] Gregory's letters and exegetical works provide an important per-
spective on these developments, revealing a world of mercurial mobility,
of brazen usurpation of the property, rights, authority, and even the re-
galia of others. Gregory was continuously wary of those who sought to
find a career and worldly success in the Church. These carnal-minded
Christians might better have chosen civilian pursuits instead. They
seemed all too familiar with the arrogance and power of military voca-
tions. Gregory cautioned against using such unseasoned wood "unless
dried of their humors," for such "newness" could destabilize the Church.
In a revealing simile, Gregory argued that bishops must be trained thor-
oughly, just as generals are trained before commanding troops.[13] Surely
his audience could appreciate this obvious truth.

Gregory came to view the world as clearly divided into realms of pu-
rity and impurity: the righteous of the world were forced to live among
the reprobate, like Job becoming the "brother of dragons and the friend
of ostriches" (cf. Jb 30:29).[14] Though mingling with the unclean, the righ-
teous must retain a sense of separateness. Gregory's society was turbu-
lent and confused; yet, like a whirling flock of birds that suddenly divides
in the heavens, its members disperse on divergent trajectories: either to-
ward a holy life purified of secular temptations or toward a life of sin and
pollution devoted to worldly gains. Increasingly polarized, Gregory's so-
ciety gradually lost a neutral and civilian middle ground. Too often the
Church stood face-to-face with the sword. Only a rigorous hierarchical
order could be trusted to contain the violent potential of the secular mem-
bers of society. Yet if each knew his place, obeying the rank assigned by
merit rather than *power*, a majestic social concord could be orchestrated
from such inherently discordant elements.

Gregory's earliest years coincided with Italy's shambling and labori-
ous instability, but Gregory was more fortunate than most. While he is
no longer believed to be of the *gens* Anicia or Decia, his family was of
noble lineage and handsomely rich. In addition to the family estate on

12. Brown, *Gentlemen*, esp. 8–20. Brown notes the lack of division between civil and
military power after the Gothic War and in the sixth century: "In practice civil and military
spheres overlapped continually, but most of the pressures worked against the autonomy of
the state power" (p. 9).

13. *Ep.* 5.58 (CCL 140, 356); *Ep.* 9.219 (CCL 140A, 787–88); *Ep.* 5.60 (CCL 140, 361).

14. *Ep.* 11.27 (CCL 140A, 904).

the Caelian hill, the family possessed properties in the neighborhood of Rome and farms in Sicily. Befitting their position, his family was prominent in the Church. Gregory's great-great-grandfather had ruled the see of Peter as Felix III (483–492), and Pope Agapitus (535–536) was a kinsman. Gregory's father, Gordianus, was a minor officer in the Church, and his three paternal aunts lived under vows in a family residence, albeit with varying success. Gregory's education was probably the best available in sixth-century Rome. Early lives boasted that he was second to none in grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic, and he probably had legal training as well.[15] Gregory began his career in public service, holding the office of urban prefect by 573. His brother Palatinus succeeded him and was the last to hold this office for over a century.[16] In 574, Gregory resigned to form a monastic community in his paternal home on the Caelian hill. As a simple monk, he spent his happiest years at this monastery dedicated to St. Andrew. But his tranquillity was short-lived, for in 579 he was called to serve the Church in the world as apocrisiarius (a papal legate) in Constantinople for Pope Pelagius II. He returned to Rome in the middle of the next decade and served as a deacon, and probably drafted some of Pelagius's letters. In 590, he was elected pope to succeed Pelagius, and he held office until his death in 604.

As pope, Gregory attempted to accommodate the Church to the world and yet to purify the Church from secular corruption. Even as the Papacy assumed greater responsibilities in the secular realm—maintaining the supplies of food and water, paying soldiers, negotiating treaties, administering estates, and systematizing charitable operations—Gregory still sought to preserve the Church from the pollution of secular values. He campaigned tirelessly against simony and demanded that the Church return properties gained in questionable circumstances. He excluded lay attendants from the Lateran palace and continually preferred clerics over laymen, and monks over clerics, in his appointments: only they who despised power could be trusted to exercise it wisely, even as they regulated their carnal natures with relentless discipline. Gregory's genius as an administrator was rooted in the same temperance and self-control that governed his spiritual life.

15. For early lives of Gregory, see: *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great, by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby*, ed. Bertram Colgrave (Lawrence, Kans., 1968); Paulus Diaconus, *Vita beatissimi Gregorii papae urbis Romae*, ed. H. Grisar, *ZKTh* 11 (1887): 158–73, appearing also in an edition by W. Stuhlfath, *Gregor I der Grosse* (Heidelberg, 1913); Io. Diac., *vita Greg.* (PL 75, 59–242). See also *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne, 2d ed. (Paris, 1955), 1: 312–14; and Bede, *hist. eccl.* 2.1.

16. Brown, *Gentlemen*, 11. After 599, no record of this office appears, and the office is effectively supplanted by the praetorian prefecture. The office reappears in 772.

Gregory's varied writings reveal a breadth of personality and vocation that has intrigued and, on occasion, baffled historians. His exegetical works on Job, Ezechiel, the Song of Songs, and 1 Kings possess an intellectual power and spiritual insight that justify his title as a Doctor of the Church. These works, and probably his lost works on Proverbs, the Heptateuch, and the Prophets, were directed largely to monastic audiences. While they enjoyed varying degrees of success, each is a serious and sophisticated effort to marshal the learning of the past and open new frontiers of spiritual knowledge.[17] In contrast (or so it seems) to these works of elevated ambition, the *Dialogues* and *Homilies on the Gospel* stand as works of a more popular spirit.[18] Filled with clear directives and comforting miracles, they teach his audience more effectively than mere instruction[19] and seem to express the side of Gregory known for learned ignorance (*indocta scientia, docta ignorantia*).[20] Gregory appears as the consummate professional in his terse, formulaic manual for the clergy, *Pastoral Rule*, an astute handbook useful not only to ecclesiastical rectors but to anyone bearing power.[21] Finally, a register of over eight hundred and fifty letters testifies to Gregory's administrative talents. But apart from scattered letters, the register is peculiarly silent about the spiritual world so vividly recounted in other works.[22] Gregory can seem to embrace very different personalities. Along with the sheer and perplexing variety of his works, autobiographical data are scanty, and moments of deliberate, self-

17. On Gregory's works and his audience, see Judith McClure, "Gregory the Great: Exegesis and Audience" (D. Phil. diss., Oxford, 1978); Michel Banniard, "*Iuxta uniuscuiusque qualitatem*: L'Ecriture médiatrice chez Grégoire le Grand," in Fontaine et al., eds., *Grégoire le Grand*, 477–87.

18. Frances Clark's argument that the *Dialogues* are spurious reflects the apparent incongruity of this work with Gregory's exegesis; see his "The Authorship of the Gregorian *Dialogues*: A Challenge to the Traditional View," *Studia Patristica* (to appear).

19. *Dial.* praef. 9–10 (SC 260, 16–18).

20. See Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 45–50.

21. See Robert A. Markus, "Le *Rector* de Grégoire le Grand et sa genèse," in Fontaine et al., eds., *Grégoire le Grand*, 137–146.

22. On Gregory's letters, see the works of Dag Norberg, *In Registrum Gregorii Magni studia critica* (Uppsala, 1937 and 1939), 2 vols; *Critical and Exegetical Notes on the Letters of St. Gregory the Great* (Stockholm, 1982); and "Qui a composé les lettres de saint Grégoire le Grand?" *StudMed* 21 (1980): 1–17. Norberg distinguishes two genres of letters: (1) Letters written to personal friends, to the imperial family, to kings, to patriarchs, and to others not under his jurisdiction. These letters contain such personal material that they were doubtless dictated by the pope himself. (2) Letters addressed to subordinates, generally treating administrative problems. In this category are formularies antedating Gregory, probably written by notaries such as Paterius, who was *secundicerius notariorum*, and administrative letters whose form dates from Gregory's time. Some of the letters were dictated by Gregory, others redacted by notaries recording Gregory's decisions. Gregory's own letters can be identified by his disregard for regular clausular endings.

conscious reflection are few. Certainly Gregory changes with time. He revises his position on the destruction of idols in England;[23] he varies his notion of the stages of sin.[24] He grows more pessimistic with age, more sensitive to the difficulties of the mixed life.[25] And yet no chronological evolution can be adduced to explain his diversity, his persistent ambivalence, and the recurrence of common themes. Gregory is elusive. Artless and honest, he is nevertheless a mysteriously subtle personality not easily confined to conventional categories.

This elusiveness is caught by Pierre Boglioni, writing of the contrast between the practical pope of the letters and the credulous monk of *The Dialogues*, noting as well the difference between the refined spiritual sophistication of the commentaries and the schematic simplicity of *Pastoral Rule*.[26] Boglioni's work illustrates the uneasiness of the modern reader in Gregory's world, thereby calling attention to modern difficulties in understanding Gregory. The historical imagination is surely taxed in reconciling the shrewd administrator and the ingenuous monk who speaks of devils weighing down rocks and dragons guarding the gates of monasteries. In the nineteenth century, such talk elicited the scathing ridicule of Adolph Harnack.[27] While modern writers are more sensitive to differences of history and culture, most still tend to treat Gregory's miraculous

23. *Ep.* 11.37 (CCL 140A, 929) orders Adilbert, king of the Angles, to destroy idols; *Ep.* 11.56 (CCL 143B, 961–62) orders Abbot Mellitus to have pagan altars purified and reconsecrated.

24. See chapter 5, n. 56.

25. In *HEz.* the tension between active and contemplative lives is more acute than in *Mor.*; still the ideal of uniting the two lives remains. While *In lib. I Reg.* exalts monastic life, the mixed life is still present. McClure's argument of chronological evolution utilizes dating now disputed, "Exegesis and Audience," 39 and passim. See Paul Meyvaert's "The Date of Gregory the Great's Commentaries on the Canticle of Canticles and on I Kings," *SEJG* 23 (1978–79): 191–216; and A. de Vogüé, "Les vues de Grégoire le Grand sur la vie religieuse dans son commentaire des Rois," *StudMon* 20 (1978): 19ff., independently supporting Meyvaert's late dating of *In lib. I Reg.* Meyvaert argues that the *Mor.* was preached during Gregory's stay in Constantinople (c. 579–585/6), and completed by 591; *Reg. Past.* completed by 591; *HEz.* by 591–592 (assuming the uncertainty of the date of Agilulf's march on Rome, which Gregory mentions at the beginning of book 2, the text is usually thought to date from 593, which would in any case be a signal of early composition for the first book); *HEv.*, completed by 593; *Dial.* late 593 to early 594; *Cant.*, 595–598, existing as the unrevised notes of Claudius of Ravenna; *In lib. I Reg.*, preached in 595–598 (de Vogüé, 597–598) and revised from Claudius's notes in 599–604 (de Vogüé, 598). R. Bélanger argues that Claudius actually edited notes of *Cant.*; see the introduction to his edition of Grégoire le Grand, *Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, SC 314 (Paris, 1984), 22–28.

26. Pierre Boglioni, "Miracle et nature chez Grégoire le Grand," in *Cahiers d'études médiévales*, I: *Epopées, légendes et miracles* (Montreal and Paris, 1974), 11–102.

27. According to Adolf Harnack, Gregory appealed to a declining civilization sunk in superstition and magic, and he created a crude work-religion (*ergismus*); cf. *History of Dogma* (New York, 1961), 5: 262.

side as something requiring explanation, if not apology.[28] Yet this mirac-
ulous side needs to be understood as an integral part of his thought, for
it is emblematic of a larger vision of the world, one that violates modern
perceptions and classifications. The unity, coherence, and internal logic
of Gregory's mind and world view often escape his critics because Greg-
ory's world can be so alien and inaccessible to modern minds.

Gregory's world is different from the modern world with its clinical
objectivity, where any trace of the extraordinary is scoured impatiently
from contemporary life. Gregory's world is still the late antique uni-
verse populated by Principalities, Thrones, and Powers; a reality whose
boundaries witness an energetic traffic of visitors to and from the other
world. Yet Gregory's world differs subtly from the late antique world of
Augustine, or that of the Desert Fathers, for theirs are worlds where one
is still cautious of crossing these boundaries, still conscious of how this
dull life differs from the shimmering brilliance of the other side. The late
antique "upperworldliness" Peter Brown describes is a world of such dis-
tinctions.[29] The other world is most often above, invisible, and difficult of
access. It is something the soul strives to reach; it is not at one's elbow,
tugging at one's very sleeve. Moments when boundaries are crossed are
cherished as rare and numinous. Plotinus strives a lifetime for perfection,
yet he reaches the All-in-All only four times during the years he spends
with Porphyry. And Porphyry, sitting long at the feet of his master, enters
into union only once, in his sixty-eighth year.[30] Lesser students may have
had even less success. For their part, neo-Pythagoreans find the other
world remote and far different from known experience. Only the most
extravagant asceticism can be expected to refine and lighten the soul suf-
ficiently for the ascent.[31] Late antique people may embrace the holy man
and the martyr as true mediators of the other world, but they also spend
considerable time verifying their credentials.[32] Living on familiar, if un-
friendly, terms with demons, even the Desert Fathers can be frankly sus-
picious of crossing over to the other world. "If you see a young man
ascend to heaven by his own will, catch him by the foot and throw him
to the ground, for it does him no good," runs the advice in the *Vitae
patrum*.[33] It is no accident that in late antiquity so much of the contact

28. Cf. Sofia Boesch Gajano, "Demoni et miracoli nei *Dialogi* di Gregorio Magno," in
Hagiographie, cultures et sociétés iv–xii siècles (Paris, 1981), 263.
29. Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1978), 68 and passim.
30. Porphyry, *On the Life of Plotinus and the Arrangement of His Work*, 23.13–18.
31. Cf. Herbert Musurillo, "The Problem of Ascetical Fasting in the Greek Patristic
Writers," *Traditio* 12 (1956): 1–64.
32. Brown, *Making of Late Antiquity*, 1–26.
33. *Vitae patr*. 5.10.111 (PL 73, 932).

with the spiritual world is confined to dreams, those moot courts of inspiration.[34]

For most of his life, Augustine shares this caution and reticence. Augustine stresses the distance and the tenuous paradoxical relationship between the transcendent world of the spirit and the visible world of daily experience, for this distinction is ultimately a function of God's omnipotence. The two different orders of reality are linked only paradoxically, in a way that ensures mystery. Visible signs both partly conceal and partly reveal invisible reality, making impossible a certain correlation between external sign and invisible reality.[35] Of necessity signs are ambiguous because God's mysterious majesty remains inscrutable to mere human beings. Knowing this, Augustine repeatedly warns his listeners not to presume to discern God's will in earthly affairs; nor should they read visible signs around an individual as indications of his secret election.[36] Only in the elderly Augustine is Gregory foreshadowed. Late in life Augustine speaks warmly of miraculous events, writing especially of medical cures gained by the faithful around him. He has now come to appreciate the need of frail humanity for proofs of "an unbelievable, distant transformation."[37] In this aged Augustine—and in a writer such as Paulinus of Milan, who recorded lovingly the miracles of Ambrose's death and life—one finds a glimpse of Gregory's vision.[38]

To understand Gregory one must begin by recognizing that he has modified the paradoxes of the mature Augustine and that the fluid boundaries of late antiquity have all but vanished. The supernatural is mingled with the world of ordinary experience, and in surprising ways. Visible and invisible, natural and supernatural, human and divine, carnal and spiritual are often directly and causally connected. Where Augustine stresses the mystery and ambiguity of signs, hiding yet hinting at supernal realities, Gregory is far more interested in carnal signs as mediating links between this world and the spiritual reality beyond. While

34. On the place and importance of dreams in late antiquity, see esp. Artemidorus, *The Interpretation of Dreams: Oneirocritica by Artemidorus*, trans. Robert White (Park Ridge, N.J., 1975), esp. 1–10.

35. See Maurice Pontet, *L'Exégèse de s. Augustin, prédicateur* (Paris, 1945), 257–303; Robert A. Markus, "St. Augustine on Signs," in *Augustine: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert A. Markus (New York, 1972), 61–91.

36. In *civ.* this is the general criticism of pagans who blame Christians for the fall of Rome; it is also an argument Augustine uses against Donatists in his exegesis of the parable of the wheat and the tares; see my "Augustine as Pastoral Theologian: The Exegesis of the Parable of the Field and Threshing Floor," *AugStud* 14 (1983): 129–51.

37. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), 417. See esp. *civ.* 22.8f.

38. Emilien Lamirande, *Paulin de Milan et la "Vita Ambrosii"* (Montreal, 1982).

Augustine stresses the inscrutability of God's order, Gregory is apt to spell out just what God's possibilities are: good fortune and prosperity can mean either election or abandonment; but then so can misfortune and adversity. In any individual case, the outcome of God's actions may be unknown, but the general principles of God's dispensation are known, and proper human action can be prescribed. In so labeling the possible meanings of God's dispensation, Gregory systematizes the unknown and draws a clear map to guide the pilgrim's return to his homeland.[39]

In Gregory's world, invisible reality exists alongside the visible reality it sustains and determines. The other world is at one's very elbows, though often hidden to those of carnal minds. Yet those whose vision is restored, like the holy man and the good Christian, see invisible causes all the more clearly since they are, in fact, the more "real." Consequently, the familiar distinctions that once governed reality now become blurred. Natural causation is eclipsed by supernatural intervention.[40] Natural disasters such as earthquakes, fires, or storms are expressions of God's wrath, or his trial of man; a nun's indigestion is not caused by the cabbage, but by the devil lurking in its leaves.[41]

Gregory tends to link causally flesh and spirit, present and future worlds, displaying a certainty and predictability in their interconnection. To abase the power of the flesh is to exalt the aims of the spirit,[42] and the more painful the afflictions and scourges suffered in this life, the greater the joys in the world beyond.[43] Reaching the other world is much simpler now because it is so immediately present. Union with God is eminently attainable: one can even cling to the light inwardly at the same time one is busied outwardly in secular affairs.[44] As the spiritual and carnal boundaries are broken for body and soul, this world and the next, so too the boundaries between the self and others weaken, and social unity is intensified. Each individual exists only as a member of the larger, transcendent body of Christ, which is political and social as well as religious; a delicate hierarchy preserves the right order and harmony of the universe.

39. For other examples of such systematization, see: *Mor.* 26.27.50 (CCL 143B, 1304–5); *HEz.* 1.1.1ff. (CCL 142, 5ff.); *HEz.* 1.12.16 (CCL 142, 191–92).

40. Cf. Boglioni, "Miracle et nature," 28–35.

41. *Dial.* 1.4.7 (SC 260, 42–43).

42. Typical formulas are found in *Mor.* 7.15.19 (CCL 143, 346): "Nam quo uirtutem carnis humiliat, intentionem spiritus exaltat"; and *Ep.* 11.18 (CCL 140A, 887): "Quoniam qui ex carnis blandimento multa peccauimus, ex carnis afflictione purgamur."

43. *HEv.* 1.14.5 (PL 76, 1130): "tanto illic laetior, quanto hic durius afflictus."

44. *Ep.* 7.23 (CCL 140, 475); *HEz.* 1.9.22 (CCL 142, 135–36); *HEz.* 1.3.13 (CCL 142, 40).

To pursue a separate course is to subvert both self and society, to imitate the devil's delusion of self-sufficiency.

In Gregory's world, the shape of history and of individual lives is sketched only from a celestial perspective.[45] Augustine's sense of secular history independent of God's intention is lost.[46] Nor is there the canny sense of secular politics one finds reflected in Eusebius.[47] God's providence orders every event, and his will is communicated each minute in the rewards and punishments he sends. History becomes the record of God's communication with the elect, while individual lives become mosaics of black and white tracing the path of God's hand in the adversity and prosperity he sends. Nothing remains neutral or indifferent; ordinary reality—the natural, the secular, the human, the carnal—is subsumed and directed to transcendent ends. Earthly life is very much Job's trial, an arena where "our athlete" goes forth to fight the devil in the great *agon*, where everything that happens and all that exists is somehow a part of God's pedagogic game.[48] While the angels sit as silent spectators in the great theater of the heavens, the moral theologian becomes a commentator who explains the possible meaning of every turn of fortune that the athlete suffers in battle. All worlds and realities intersect in that great drama of the athlete in the arena.

Gregory sees direct links and dependencies between the two orders of reality, carnal and spiritual, this world and the next. He rejects the very distinctions that defend the transcendence and omnipotence of God in Augustine's theology. But Gregory's concerns are not Augustine's. To Gregory, God is not less majestic and mysterious because man knows he sends the whirlwind of adversity and the sweet smile of prosperity, but more so. The very fact that God controls everything, either by active ordination or passive permission, is sufficient proof of his terrible power and of his abiding mercy as well. While this realization might unsettle modern minds, it would come only as a relief to Gregory and his contemporaries, who were so familiar with the cavalier and ruthless enterprises of the devil. Reassured of God's ultimate control, they can envision limits

45. Cf. Boglioni, "Miracle et nature," 28–35.

46. See Robert A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge, 1970), 157ff.

47. See Harold Allen Drake, *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius' Tricennial Orations* (Berkeley, 1976). Eusebius's orations are carefully written to appeal to pagan Neoplatonists as much as to Christians.

48. *Mor.* 1.3.4 (CCL 143, 27); *Mor.* 10.1.1 (CCL 143, 534). God's pedagogy is a recurrent theme in Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*; see also Marc Doucet, "Pédagogie et théologie dans la *Vie de saint Benoît* par saint Grégoire le Grand," *CollCist* 38 (1976): 158–73.

to the devil's power and trust that the chaos around them is really part of a greater providential order. So while Augustine stresses the mysterious chasm between an omnipotent God and his contingent creatures, Gregory knows man's helplessness well enough to stress God's connection with man. Gregory prefers to speak of God's use of physical, visible, and temporal changes of fortune to soothe man, or shake him to the core. Gregory's God chastens with punishments and comforts with blessings, but he always remains the Father calling his prodigal son to return home.

To stress the unity and continuity of all reality is ultimately to emphasize the hand of God in the carnal side of life; that is, in the physical world, in the body, in pain, and in that darker presence known as evil. Here Gregory anticipates the physicality so characteristic of the later Middle Ages in figures as diverse as Anselm and St. Francis.[49] He is also reminiscent of the anti-Pelagian Augustine studiously arguing the "Catholic view" as "a view that can show a just God in so many pains and in such agonies of tiny babies."[50] The devil is God's *exactor*—his executioner, his "enforcer." The devil strikes man with evils, having the full permission of God to vent such wrath. The flesh and particularly its torments become an important means of attaining spiritual ends. Now suffering and evil are transformed into partial goods, for they are known to be the discipline of the Father chastening the sons He loves; they are integral and essential parts of God's plan.

Without hesitation or dread, Gregory recognizes that God is ultimately responsible for suffering, be it the illness visited upon the body, the instability that shakes political order, or the trials burdening a fragile soul. While others might rush to repel this deduction with academic niceties, Gregory embraces it as a confession, even a tribute to God's omnipotence. Yet such a confession is not easy, and it exacts a high price from repose. Gregory's feelings weave back and forth between loving the good Creator and fearing the evil he permits in judgment. But submission to God's dispensation is inescapable: man might resist, but God's will is always done.[51] Traces of this conflict and rebellion persist in the ambivalence found on many levels of Gregory's thought. Gregory always works toward a balance and resolution of these positive and negative feelings, be they described as hope and despair, humility and pride, or love and fear.

49. See chapter 2, n. 54.
50. Augustine, *c. Iul. op. imp.* 1.22, quoted by Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 397.
51. *Mor.* 6.18.28 (CCL 143, 304–5); *Mor.* 9.16.23 (CCL 143, 473); *Dial.* 3.21.4 (SC 260, 354).

In many ways, Gregory only articulates what is latent in earlier Christianity. Though Gregory owes much of his intellectual vocabulary to Cassian, Augustine, and Ambrose, it is remarkable to compare his writings with theirs. Gregory pulls to the very surface the dialectics and paradoxes that structure Christian thought. What is often the invisible architecture in earlier writers becomes in Gregory the visible Church, with the beams and buttresses clearly articulated. Gregory's spirituality is often little more than variations of tradition; yet slight changes can be of great consequence, creating new, distinctive styles. Gregory shows that the shift from late antique to medieval spirituality is gradual, a change by quantitative degrees that eventually becomes qualitative and dramatic.

Old ideas are recombined, new emphases appear, and subtle but stubborn differences distinguish Gregory from the earlier writers who inspired him. This is particularly true of Gregory's relation to Augustine. Although Augustine's work may have served as a reference library where Gregory found authoritative definitions and images, Gregory is often nearer the Greek tradition in his sensibilities and reads Augustine in that spirit. While it is doubtful Gregory knew Greek himself, he seems to have known in translation works of Origen, Gregory Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa. Conversations with friends may have given him further access to Greek thinkers, such as Theodoret of Cyrus.[52] Gregory knows Cassian

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52. On Gregory's Greek, see Joan Petersen, "Did Gregory Know Greek?" in *The Orthodox Churches and the West*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford, 1976), 121–34; "Did Gregory the Great Know Greek?: A Reconsideration" (unpublished manuscript); and *The "Dialogues" of Gregory the Great in Their Late Antique Cultural Background* (Toronto, 1984), esp. 1–14, 151–91. See also A. de Vogüé's introduction to the *Dial.* (Paris, 1978) SC 251, 110–40, and the footnotes of all three volumes; and Paul Meyvaert, "A New Edition of Gregory the Great's Commentaries on the Canticle and I Kings," *JThS* n.s. 19 (1968): 215–25, noting Gregory's use of Origen. Gregory has familiarity with untranslated Greek sources: the writings of Lucian of Samosata, Theodoret of Cyrus's *Historia Religiosa*, and a story found only in the Greek version of the *Life of Symeon Stylites*. Gregory may have had oral knowledge of Theodoret's and of Gregory of Nyssa's commentaries on the Song of Songs, if he wrote the letter on the Three Chapters for Pelagius II (cf. MGH *Ep. 2 App.* 3 (3), 449–67). Translations known to be available to Gregory were those of Jerome, the most important of which were: Didymus, *spir.*; Eusebius, *chron. a. Abr.*; Epiphanius of Salamis, *c. Orig.*; several homilies of Origen: *in Is.*, *in Luc.*, *in Ier.*, *in cant.*, *in Ezech*; Theophilus of Alexandria: *epp.* 87, 92, 96, 98, 100; *reg. Pachom.*; and the Bible. Rufinus's most important translations were: Pamphilius, *apol. Orig.*; Eusebius, *hist.*; several works of Origen: *princ.*, *in psalm. 36–8.*, *in gen.*, *in exod.*, *in Lev.*, *in Ios.*, *in iud.*, *in num.*, *in Rom.*, *in cant.*; Ps-Clement: *recog.* and *epist. ad Iac.*; Basil: *reg. br.* and *reg. fus.* (edited as one rule) and nine homilies; Gregory Nazianzen: *orat.* 2, 6, 16, 17, 26, 27, 38, 39, 40; Evagrius Ponticus: *sent. mon.* and *sent. virg.*, also Sextus, *sent.*; and the *hist. mon.* In addition, Dionysius Exiguus translated Gregory of Nyssa, *hom. op.*, and the *vita Pachom.* Hilary of Poitiers translated a homily on Job by Origen, fragments of which survive. A translation of the *vita Anton.* also existed in sections of the *Vitae patr.* On the problem of Diony-

very well, and he has thoroughly absorbed the Neoplatonism of Ambrose. He doubtless knew sections of the *Vitae patrum*—particularly those translated by the deacon who became Pope Pelagius I (556–561) and the subdeacon later named Pope John III (561–574)—also those of Paschasius and Martin of Dumio,[53] and Rufinus's *Historia Monachorum*.[54] Several lives of saints were also at hand.[55] This spirit of asceticism from the desert is always a silent partner in his work, leading Gregory in new directions away from Augustine and the Western Fathers. He will often exhibit striking similarities with others of his era also steeped in Eastern monastic culture, such as Dorotheos of Gaza or John Climacus. This monastic sensibility, the restless vision of the athlete's battle with the devil, left a deep impression on Gregory. Yet Gregory sees less the display of ascetic valor in the desert and more the suffering and sacrifice the monks endure in that warfare.

To this grounding in Eastern monasticism must be added Gregory's own apocalypticism, fanned equally by the depredations of the barbarians and the imperial forces, who were as little trusted as their Germanic foes. Gregory's sense that the end is close at hand is no mere rhetorical device. The imminence of the end inspires an intolerant anxiety, and Gregory reacts by being doubly conscientious. With chilling severity, he scrutinizes every step along the way, for one false move might mean the loss of a soul. The battle Gregory fights in the arena is the beginning of that final great struggle with Satan and the Antichrist. Wars, famine, disease, invading soldiers—all are tribulations and adversities inflicted by the devil in this intensified conflict presaging the end.[56] The familiarity

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sius the Areopagite, see chapter 1, n. 23. For Jerome's and Rufinus's translations and other information about Gregory's sources, see Martin Schanz, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur bis zum Gesetzgebungswerk des Kaisers Justinian*, pt. 4:1 (Munich, 1920), 374–81 and 415–23; and pt. 4:2, 605–22.

53. Existing as the *Verba seniorum* in the *Vitae patr.* (PL 73): book 3 is a translation by Pseudo-Rufinus, books 5–6 by Pelagius and John; book 7 by Paschasius of Dumio. In PL 74, the *sent. patr. 109* is by Martin of Dumio (= Martin of Braga) and the *Heraclidis Paradisus*, a part of the *Historia Lausiaca* of Palladius is translated anonymously. See esp. José Geraldes Freire, *A Versão Latina por Pascásio de Dume dos Apophthegmata Patrum*, 2 vols. (Coimbra, 1971), from which I will cite Paschasius. See also W. Bousset, *Apophthegmata* (Tübingen, 1923), 1–208; and A. Wilmart, "Le recueil latin des Apophthegmes," *RBen* 34 (1922): 185–98.

54. PL 21, 393–462.

55. See A. de Vogüé's introduction to his edition of Grégoire le Grand, *Dialogues* (SC 251), 113ff.

56. *Mor.* 34.1.1 (CCL 143B, 1733). See also *Ep.* 5.36 (CCL 140, 307); *Ep.* 5.39 (CCL 140, 316); *HEz.* 2.6.22–24 (CCL 142, 310–13).

Gregory displays with the other world comes from his own experience in this battle: the nearer the end, the more one sees of the next world.[57] Sight of the next world is expected and welcome. Considering Gregory's intimate involvement in this battle, the equanimity he possesses is its own kind of courage.

Gregory's classical education reinforces the desert tradition he loves, often simply because the science, medicine, and natural history of his era are a legacy little changed from classical times. Gregory's readings of Cicero and Seneca, and his familiarity with other Christian writers such as Ambrose and Augustine, kept him in touch with Stoic ideas.[58] Like other educated men of his time, he understands the world and the human body through a science brewed from several strains of classical thought: Stoicism, Neoplatonism, Pythagoreanism, Hippocratism. Of course, Stoic and Platonic ideas, in particular, were already part of the Christian intellectual tradition, having been absorbed by many earlier Christian writers of East and West.[59] This classical influence is especially evident in the ideas of self-discipline and discernment (*discretio*) found in Cassian and in the Desert Fathers,[60] and in the general sense of world order found

57. *HEz.* 2.4.12 (CCL 142, 268).

58. Cf. M. Doucet, "Le Récit par saint Grégoire le Grand (*Dial.* 2.35) de la vision de saint Benoît, et les *Tusculanes* (1.14–21) de Cicéron," paper presented at the Ninth International Conference on Patristic Studies (Oxford, 5–10 September 1983); J. Stelzenberger, *Die Beziehungen der frühchristlichen Sittenlehre zur Ethik der Stoa, eine moralgeschichtliche Studie* (Munich, 1933), 374–75; Leonhard Weber, *Hauptfragen der Moraltheologie Gregors des Grossen* (Freiburg in der Schweiz, 1947), 53f. Also useful are P. Ewald, *Die stoisch-ciceronianischen Moral auf die Darstellung der Ethik bei Ambrosius* (Leipzig, 1881); and F. Homes Dudden, *The Life and Times of Ambrose*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1935), 2: 502ff. In speaking of Gregory's Stoicism, it is best to consider his contact with writers themselves influenced by Stoic ideas. A rigorous application of Stoicism is inappropriate.

59. For Stoicism essential sources are: Michel Spanneut, *Le Stoïcisme des Pères de l'Eglise de Clément de Rome à Clément d'Alexandrie*, Patristica Sorbonensia, 1 (Paris, 1969); idem, *Permanence du stoïcisme de Zenon à Malraux* (Gembloux, Belgium, 1973); and now Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, edited by Heiko A. Oberman, vols. 34–35 (Leiden, 1985); for Neoplatonism, see especially *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought. Essays in Honour of A. H. Armstrong*, ed. H. J. Blumenthal and Robert A. Markus (London, 1981); and A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (New York, 1974), *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, 1970), which also treats minor philosophical trends. Medicine and geography also have many ideas in common with Stoicism.

60. On *discretio* see esp. Eloi Dekkers, "'Discretio' chez Benoît et saint Grégoire," *CollCist* 46 (1984): 79–88; Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 117–24; A. Cabassut, "Discrétion," *DS* 9:1311–30; Fr. Dingjan, *Discretio: les origines patristique et monastique de la doctrine sur la prudence chez saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Assen, Holland, 1967), 86–102; A. de Vogüé, "'Discretione praecipuam': A quoi Grégoire pensait-il?," *Benedictina* 22 (1975): 325–27; Robert Gillet, in-

in Augustine and Ambrose. Ideas of balance, equilibrium, and moderation would have been keynotes in Gregory's classical education and in his Christian sources. Yet because Gregory is so concerned with God's paradoxical ordering of the universe, and because he sees justice, righteousness, and virtue as reciprocity and equilibrium—that is, a mean between extremes—his writings are often reminiscent of Aristotle, Cicero, Plotinus, and any number of ancient writers who shared so many ideas about the harmony of the cosmos. Gregory also has a striking fondness for the binary oppositions that intrigued the Pythagoreans and other philosophers and are so pervasive in Western thought in general. This is not to say he read ancient philosophers in depth. More likely, his own desire to map out the mysteries of God's order and to define possibilities led him to draw on the residue of Greek philosophy latent in Christianity.

Gregory's temperament and historical situation led him to a selective use of sources. No single inspiration or tradition captures his essence as a thinker. He takes much from many sources, and his borrowing is eclectic and free-spirited, never slavish. In addition to the major writers already mentioned, traces of writers such as Hilary of Poitiers, Julianus Pomerius, and even Juvenal can be found in Gregory's works. Yet Gregory always digests and transforms the ideas of others, shaping them to his own requirements. His thought is the proverbial paradox: the whole that is more than the sum of its parts.

The uniqueness and originality of Gregory's thought and his contribution to the later tradition of medieval spirituality have yet to be appreciated, perhaps because of the methods so often used to examine his works. Gregory's writings are an encyclopedia of spiritual experience, wide ranging, sagacious, eminently practical. Yet these writings need to be read with the same diligence given poetry. Form and content, struc-

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troduction to Grégoire le Grand, *Morales sur Job* I–II, trans. André Gaudemaris, SC 32 (Paris, 1952). On Cassian, who influenced Gregory's idea of *discretio*, see Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, 1968), esp. 82–136 and 148–62. Cassian and the Desert Fathers are the important sources influencing Gregory; see *conl.* 1.20; 1.22–23; 2 (entire); 4.9; 4.19; 7.5; 16.22; 16.27; 17.23; *inst.* 5.4.2; 5.20.1; 5.36.1; 7.1.1; 11.4.1; 11.8.1; 12.17.3; also *Vitae patr.* 5.10 (entire). Discretion is also found in Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory Nazianzen, and the Benedictine Rule, and it is especially associated with Aris. *Nich. Eth.* Discretion is both the power to discern the ideal and distinguish differences from that ideal (διάκρισις: *discernere, discutere, distinguere, examinare, considerare, pensare, perpendere,* etc.). It is also the power to moderate one's conduct so that one might obtain the ideal (μέτρον: *moderare, moderamen discretionis, temperare*). It is often symbolized by scales: *trutina, Mor.* 33.35.60 (CCL 143B, 1724–26); *Mor.* 8.4.5 (CCL 143, 384); *libra, Mor.* 3.13.24 (CCL 143, 130); the eyes, *Mor.* 6.37.57 (CCL 143, 327); *Mor.* 7.28.37 (CCL 143, 361–62); or the nose, *Reg. Past.* 1.11 (PL 77, 24), *Mor.* 31.44.85 (CCL 143B, 1608–9), *Mor.* 28.10.23 (CCL 143B, 1413–14).

ture and idea are inseparable in Gregory's writings, more so than for many early Christian theologians. To understand Gregory's message, one must focus on the mental processes and the various configurations of ideas that structure his thought, for these patterns determine the very definitions and prescriptions he gives for the spiritual life. Because this internal grammar, or structure of thought, is so important in Gregory's spirituality, and so striking even to the casual reader, it has rightly concerned every scholar of Gregory, to a greater or lesser degree.[61]

To define this structure, to present Gregory's complex *mentalité*, requires the skills of the literary critic, the anthropologist, and the historian. A close study of Gregory's writings must focus not only on the explicit argument but also on incidental and implicit information. By discovering the hidden logic of comparisons and associations and tracing the various interconnections of ideas, one can determine the criteria defining various mental categories and discern the function of specific ideas in the whole network of thought. From a knowledge of the underlying principles governing the operation and grammar of Gregory's thought, we can understand more fully the intuitions, prejudices, and assumptions that shape his values and judgments, and perhaps appreciate more fully the subtleties that distinguish his vision of reality from those of other writers.

Numerous scholars have studied structural features of Gregory's thought or have concerned themselves especially with the form and methodology of his thinking. Ferruccio Gastaldelli and Leonhard Weber have discussed rhetorical devices and the influence of rhetoric in general.[62] Jean Leclercq and Robert Gillet have noted patterns of alternation, while Jean LaPorte has argued that Gregory is systematic in his teaching, even though he is not to be considered a systematic theologian.[63] Pierre Aubin's investigation of interiority and exteriority was a milestone,[64] and the later works of Claude Dagens, Rodrigue Bélanger, Marc Doucet, and others have built upon Aubin's basic insight.[65] Dagens in particular has

61. See, e.g., Boglioni, "Miracle et nature," 67.

62. F. Gastaldelli, "Teologia e retorica in s. Gregorio Magno," *Salesianum* 28 (1967): 267–99; Weber, *Hauptfragen*, 53–74.

63. Jean Leclercq, *The Spirituality of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1961), 2:3–30; Gillet, introduction to *Morales sur Job I–II*, 29ff.; Jean LaPorte, "Une Théologie systématique chez Grégoire," in Fontaine et al., eds., *Grégoire le Grand*, 235–42; Weber, *Hauptfragen*, 53–74.

64. Pierre Aubin, "Intériorité et extériorité dans les *Moralia in Job* de saint Grégoire le Grand," *RSR* 62 (1974): 117–66.

65. Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*; Rodrigue Bélanger, "Anthropologie et Parole de Dieu dans le commentaire de Grégoire le Grand sur le Cantique des cantiques," in Fontaine et al., eds., *Grégoire le Grand*, 245–54; Marc Doucet, "'Vera philosophia.' L'Existence selon saint Grégoire le Grand," *CollCist* 41 (1979): 227–53.

elaborated the interiority/exteriority contrast, and it becomes for him the fundamental structure governing Gregory's definitions of spiritual experience. These studies, along with many others, are to be lauded for avoiding the neoscholastic approach that has characterized Gregorian studies of earlier generations. Yet these studies, as excellent as they are, still leave work to be done.

A greater overall pattern can be discerned that embraces those structures of alternation, interiority/exteriority, and others already noted by scholars. This grammar of reconciliation and complementarity underlies the vision of unity and the sacramental reality that is distinctively and characteristically Gregorian.[66] Gregory sees carnal and spiritual realms as interrelated, connected as endpoints of a continuum. Like faces of a coin, ends of a stick, or poles of a magnet, they are extremities of a single whole. Two relationships are evident: one of opposition, which is metaphoric and paratactic; one of connection or unity, which is metonymic and syntagmatic.[67] Though opposite, carnal and spiritual realms are very much united through various degrees of complementarity and reconciliation. At any one moment, only a single aspect of the relationship might appear, such as the conflict between spirit and flesh, or the sympathy of body and soul. But when opposition is overt, unity is latent, and vice versa. Gregory's line of discretion (*linea discretionis*) illustrates this structure of unity and opposition. Like the old Stoic sage, one should pursue moderation and follow the line carefully, diverging neither too far to the right in the spiritual excess of severity, nor too far to the left in the carnal excess of laxity. Qualities or states that are extreme opposites are, by their very opposition, interrelated as margins of the same line. Similarly, the

66. For this notion of "sacramental reality" in the Middle Ages, see Gerd Tellenbach, *Church, State and Christian Society at the Time of the Investiture Contest*, trans. R. F. Bennett (New York, 1970), 47ff.

67. See Edmund Leach, *Culture and Communication* (Cambridge, 1976), 14ff. For a summary of these anthropological terms, see Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*, Janua Linguarum: Series Minor 1 (The Hague, 1956), and Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago, 1966) and his other works. In metaphoric and paratactic associations, a separation and distance exist between two elements because their association is wholly arbitrary, though conventional. In metonymic and syntagmatic chains, there is an intrinsic connection through the participation and organic interrelation of elements. Gregory often moves between these two ways of thinking, and the distinction should be appreciated. For instance, the vices are a metaphoric disease of the soul, and yet a metonymic relationship is present as well, because the humors of the body can affect the soul. Man is both a metaphoric world in miniature, and he shares in the four elements of the world metonymically. These relations affect causation and the relations between this world and the next. Augustine's signs are paradoxical and metaphoric, for they both reveal and yet conceal hidden truths. Gregory's signs are sacramental and metonymic: carnal signs reveal hidden spiritual truths, at least to those with discretion.

scales of the soul are to be balanced. One should be neither too high in the spiritual pride of contemplation, nor too low in the carnal numbness of worldly activity. Movement on one side of the scale affects the other: the lower, left, and outward carnal side balances the higher, right, and inward spiritual side. In equilibrium the soul experiences a mixed life of activity and contemplation, humility and hope.

Gregory wishes especially to stress the reciprocity and complementarity of spiritual and carnal. In this concept he has begun to modify the traditional polarities and the dialectical movement between spiritual and carnal, as found in Saint Paul and earlier Fathers from Tertullian to Augustine and beyond.[68] Gerard Caspary adeptly summarizes these complex patterns: "[t]he Covenant of Grace is the Covenant of the Law, enhanced and renewed. . . . it is the duality of spirit and letter that explains both the perfect continuity and the utter opposition between Law and Gospel."[69] The Old Dispensation is ethically opposed to the New. Law and grace are at odds. Yet the Old Dispensation is related to the New as means is to end; so the Old is subordinated hierarchically to the New. The Old Dispensation of the flesh precedes the New Dispensation of the spirit in time; law comes before grace, the old man before the new, Adam before Christ. Perceptually, the Old Dispensation is a visible, external, and less valuable "shell" concealing yet revealing an invisible, inner, and more valuable core. The letter hides and yet points to the inner spiritual meaning. Four dimensions are distinguished: ethical opposition, hierarchical subordination, temporal precedence, and a perceptual contrast of inner and outer. Caspary's schema captures this Pauline dialectic: one must first move through the lesser, external, carnal Dispensation to attain the more valuable, inner, and invisible Dispensation of spirit, paradoxically accepting the carnal to obtain the spiritual.

Gregory's most striking modification of Pauline thought can be seen in the complementarities governing his moral theology, the line of discretion and the scale of the soul. Gregory is able to create a complementarity out of the dialectical opposition of spirit and flesh because each pole has become ambivalent. The original division between the ethical good of the spirit and the evil of the flesh now becomes replicated at each pole. Having partly "switched charges," neither pole is now wholly positive

68. On the Pauline patterns and exegetical tradition, see esp. Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, trans. John Bowden, 2d ed. (Atlanta, 1975), 15–26. On Gregory's use of Augustine, see, e.g., Gillet, introduction to *Morales sur Job*, 7–109; Henri DeLubac, *Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l'Ecriture*, 2 vols., 4 parts (Paris, 1959–1964); Pontet, *L'Exégèse de s. Augustin*, 257–303.

69. Gerard Caspary, *Politics and Exegesis: Origen and the Two Swords* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1979), 17; see also 11–39.

nor wholly negative, and while still opposites, the poles are also comple-
ments. There is reconciliation, for each pole supplies the qualities that
remedy the deficits of its mate; and evil now lies in the extremes of each
pole, arising when either pole is viewed apart from the complement that
checks its negative potential. Gregory's formulation of the balance be-
tween activity and contemplation and even sin and virtue ensures the
humility often wanting from ascetic virtue and the contemplative life.
Complete devotion to the contemplative life is dangerous, as is the pure
pursuit of the active life. Good stands in balance and equilibrium, which
is achieved when both poles are embraced properly for the good qualities
each possesses.

This kind of complementarity typifies the general pattern of recon-
ciliation in Gregory's thought. But the complementarity of carnal and
spiritual creates a double paradox, and so modifies the original dialectic
of Paul. Now, one moves not only through the flesh to reach the spirit;
one must return back again to the carnal to become truly spiritual. This
cyclical movement returns to its origins; it is a pattern of unity analogous
to the line whose extremes are endpoints of a single unity. As Gregory
sees it, Jacob begins with Leah, attains Rachel, and returns to Leah—ac-
tivity precedes contemplation, but contemplation must be expressed in
service to one's neighbor. More surprising, the merciful grace of Christ
becomes a New Law recapitulating, indeed strengthening, the Old Law
that it supplants; and it is even possible to find the grace of God fulfilled
in the wrath of the devil. Gregory forges a new unity through this return
to the carnal, which in turn supports his sacramental vision of reality.
Visible carnal signs point toward the invisible spirit, and now these signs
return to reveal the spiritual world in the present. Consequently, the cit-
izens of heavenly Jerusalem can be discerned by their earthly acts, and
even glimpses of hell are perceptible in the flaming craters of volcanoes.
At the center of this pattern of sacramental unity—indeed, the very rea-
son it exists—lies the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ. In Christ is the
perfect unity of spirit and flesh; he is the type of all succeeding unities of
flesh and spirit. Sacrifice becomes the center of Gregory's theology, be it
the sacrifice of Christ, the Mass, or the individual Christian, for sacrifice
is the means whereby the two sides of reality are joined and reconciled.
Through sacrifice, the carnal becomes spiritual.

There is a whole continuum of reconciliations between spiritual and
carnal, offering a wide range of intensities. The reconciliation between
God and the devil (representing the spiritual and the carnal poles of the
supernatural) is very weak; indeed, it is surprising to find any at all.
Nevertheless, the devil is God's *exactor* and his servant. This reconcilia-

tion is different from the mixed life of activity and contemplation, where each acts in a reciprocal way to remedy the weakness of the other. In Christ, reconciliation becomes identity, for he is both sides of reality simultaneously: God and man, spirit and flesh, reconciled and reconciler. The universe encompasses the carnal and the spiritual woven together in various intensities, yet all combining to form a design of harmony and extraordinary order.

These patterns of reconciliation affect the stylistic devices Gregory chooses, and they give his thought a distinctive texture. Because complementarity, continuity, opposition, and paradox play so important a role in Gregory's thought, certain rhetorical figures are particularly apt. There are simple paradoxes of contradiction or opposition: God is both *with* and yet *not with* the Israelites in the desert. Dialectical paradoxes abound, for they express complementarity: one is lifted to joy through tears, or healed by being wounded. Daring reversals are few but memorable: sin becomes virtue, and virtue becomes sin. Oxymora are numerous, where reconciliation takes the form of the union of opposites: joyful sadness, merciful severity, immutable mutability. So, too, chiasmus is employed frequently to express the balance that can be constructed with paradoxes: in holding, God repels; in repelling, he holds. Imagery of balance is particularly significant: weights and measures, scales, lines and roads, and other formulations of a mean between extremes.

Oppositional contrasts are of three basic types. The original Pauline polarity of carnality and spirituality always remains at least latent in Gregory's thought, expressing the primary values one achieves paradoxically. In this category are such contrasts as upright and fallen, sight and blindness, fixity and wandering. The majority are complementary dialectical pairs: ascent and descent, sweetness and bitterness, softness and hardness. The pairs work together and ideally strike a balance. Also, there are contrasts of the negative extremes generated when each pole is not checked by its complement, such as zeal and laxness, or pride and despair. These are extremes of the proper complements, authority and humility, and humility and hope. Finally, to secure the complementarity of halves that are in some sense dependent upon one another, Gregory frequently uses correlatives such as *tanto . . . quanto, eo . . . quo,* or *sic . . . ut tamen*. The density of such rhetorical figures gives Gregory's writings a tight, aphoristic, and at times almost mathematical quality that sets him apart from other patristic writers.

Gregory's distinctive style of thought, both in its art and its content, accounts largely for his enormous influence and popularity in the Middle Ages. His formulaic paradoxes can be extremely pleasing mnemonic de-

vices, and once the reader has taken hold of Gregory's thought there can
be a delightful predictability to his manner of expression. If Gregory men-
tions God's sweetness in one breath, the next breath is certain to mention
God's trials; and the third will doubtless convey his "sweet tortures" and
"delectable pains."[70] Gregory is eminently readable, but more than that,
he is easily preached and discussed with others. His work is simple, in
the archaic sense of the word. It possesses clarity, integrity, unity of
thought, and purity of style. Gregory confronts problems directly and,
most important, gives answers. His answers are indeed paradoxical, but
they are neither so abstruse nor so speculative that only a highly edu-
cated elite could appreciate them. Such unpretentious forthrightness
commanded wide appeal in the Middle Ages, if the proliferation and dis-
tribution of Gregory's manuscripts are valid indicators.

Ironically, while waiting anxiously for the world to end, Gregory pro-
vided an intellectual framework to integrate all aspects of life with Chris-
tianity. While decrying power, he showed how the Church and the Chris-
tian could use and benefit from power and earthly achievements. While
wishing for withdrawal and purity, he presented a model of returning to
life amid sinful and unsettling circumstances. Gregory is at once pro-
gressive, because his thought is flexible and comes to terms with the
world, yet conservative in his ideals. His thought is dynamic, always of-
fering the means of converting defeat to victory, yet somehow static, for
success turns all too easily to failure.

Gregory deals profoundly and sensitively with the ambivalences that
plague human life: why tears of love and grief are so closely allied, why
sin nips the very heels of virtue, why the loving God must also have the
devil as his *exactor*. His works express a quiet regret, a sadness that any
resistance lingers in his soul, however unwilled. Like Job, with whom he
identifies,[71] Gregory humbly confronts the universe, but he struggles as
Job never did to make his will truly love what God wills. He offers his
soul freely in conscious obedience. Yet this sacrifice is most poignant in
his bitter contention against those hidden stirrings of the unconscious
mind that most men only dimly perceive. Gregory wants fervently to
know and control each step of the heart: every footprint must be scruti-
nized, every feeling sifted through the febrile hand of discretion.

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70. *HEz.* 2.4.3 (CCL 142, 260): "Vnde et donis suis flagella permiscet, ut nobis omne
quod nos in saeculo delectabat amarescat, et illud incendium surgat in animo quod nos
semper ad caeleste desiderium inquietet, excitet, atque, ut ita dicam, delectabiliter mordeat,
suauiter cruciet, hilariter contristet."
71. Cf. *Ad Leand.* 5 (CCL 143, 6).

What conversions must a man feel to thank God for the strokes, rather than resist him? These conversions Gregory knew very well: one should no longer fight against God as an enemy, nor fear his avenging wrath. One should grow to love him and long passionately for the Kingdom. The fight must be waged against that part of oneself differing from the Father one loves. One must agree with God and support his chastening punishment against one's rebellious self.

If Gregory knew the conversions, he also knew the reversals, the exasperating mutiny of the carnal man that must be uprooted and destroyed. Like a candle searching the inmost parts of the belly (Prv 20:27), self-examination scrutinizes the hidden recesses of the mind for secret sins, and then immolates those sins in the fires of penitence, burning with deepest compunction.[72] Examination of self pierces the soul and destroys its carnality, like teeth tearing the flesh and mincing it to nothingness. Man's former rebellion in carnality burns on the altar of penitence as a sacrifice of obedience to God. This sacrifice arises from love and longing for the Kingdom, but beneath these tears of joy are clearly discernible the earlier fear of wrathful judgment and the tears of grieving for one's possible torment in hell. In a word, ambivalence is again apparent. We see a man who sacrifices himself for love *and* fear of God; one who must fight against the self he unfortunately possesses and inadvertently gratifies.

Gregory was ambivalent and divided, though he earnestly wished not to be. His inventive moral theology stems from an unconventional life. Drawing on personal experience, Gregory studied the paradoxical relation between active and contemplative lives, between sin and virtue, adversity and prosperity. He will succeed in reconciling such divisions in

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72. Compunction is especially important in Gregory's spiritual doctrine. For the tradition of this term, whose Greek equivalent is *penthos*, see esp. Irénée Hausherr, *Penthos*, trans. Anselm Hufstader, Cistercian Studies 53 (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1982). Hausherr (7f.) notes that πένθος is used in Mt 5:4; a later synonym is κατάνυξις. Cassian is Gregory's main influence (e.g., *conl.* 1.17; 1.19; 2.11; 4.5; 4.19; 9.28–29; *inst.* 4.43.1; 12.15.1; 12.18.1; 12.27.5). The influence of Origen is also important, indirectly and directly, as are the Desert Fathers; see *Vitae patr.* 5.3 (entire). For Augustine's influence, see Jean Doignon, "'Blessure d'affliction' et 'blessure d'amour' (*Moralia* 6.25.42): une jonction de thèmes de la spiritualité patristique de Cyprien à Augustin," in Fontaine et al., eds., *Grégoire le Grand*, 297–303. See also Pie Raymond Régamey, "La Compunction du coeur," *VS*, suppl. 44 (1935): 65–84; Joseph Pegon, "Compunction," *DS* 4: 1312–21. See also P. Catry, "Désir et amour de Dieu chez saint Grégoire le Grand," *RecAug* 10 (1975): 269–303. *Compunctio* and *compungere* are difficult to translate. To feel compunction means one is pierced by a sharp feeling, be it fear of judgment and grief of sins, or love and longing for God. Gregory distinguishes a compunction of fear and one of love.

a Christian who is perfect in imperfection. Gregory's conversion to mo-
nastic life came slowly, as Dagens has noted.[73] *Diu longeque* . . . "For a long
time I drove away the grace of conversion," he wrote to Leander of Se-
ville. It is not known exactly how long nor for what reasons he continued
in public service. A sensitive conscience pursued him relentlessly, if
slowly, a Monica more subdued, though equally dogged. As noted ear-
lier, Gregory resigned his civil office (574) and retired to the monastery
only to be thrust out into the world again as apocrisiarius to Constanti-
nople (579). He returned to serve as deacon to Pelagius II (585/6) and was
elected to succeed him as pope (590). His early letters as pope reflect his
inner turmoil and resistance, as he grieved over the loss of his tranquillity
and the burdens he had to bear.

His high birth and office bespeak a man accustomed to considerable
wealth and power. Perhaps the donation of his family property to create
monasteries and his distribution of wealth to the poor reveal most dra-
matically his desire to reverse his past. He bore a deep suspicion of those
in power, whether they were secular rulers or clergy. Yet always a leader,
Gregory was tied to his past and consciously aware of all the temptations
and gratifications he could find there. More important, he knew part of
him responded to these offerings. The simplest and purest life is the mo-
nastic "grave," where both world and monk are dead to one another. All
too treacherous is the life of the prelate, whom the world denies repose
but instead devours as the sea swallows the living and expels the dead.
Gregory was of the living, and he was forced to face a worldly life that
could offer fulfillment of just those impulses he struggled to abnegate.
The converted man suffers the peculiar horror of being punished by his
former pleasures, of suffering with grief what he had once pursued with
delight. He begins by taking on worldly conversation as a condescension
and a burden, but he ends by clinging to it with pleasure: such observa-
tions account for Gregory's obsessive anxiety about secret sins. Yet this
suffering and these unwitting sins can be offered as a sacrifice to God if
carefully washed with cleansing tears of compunction.

The plaint closing the *Moralia*[74] is a deeply moving revelation of this
anxiety: would that none of his words were spoken from the desire for
human praise, but only in praise of God. But as Gregory examines his
inward intention, he finds that in "some unknown secret way" the desire
for human praise has blended with his higher intentions. By his exposi-

73. Dagens, "La 'Conversion' de saint Grégoire le Grand," *REAug* 15 (1969): 149–62.
74. *Mor.* 35.20.49 (CCL 143B, 1810–11); and cf. *Reg. Past.* 4.1 (PL 77, 125).

tion he has revealed his gifts and will not withdraw the healing remedy of his words from his audience. But by his confession he has exposed his wounds and neither will he conceal them from us. Will his readers confer on him the solace of their prayers before the strict Judge? Will their tears wash away the filth of every sin they discover in him? Gregory's personal agonies translate the penitence and compunction of the Desert Fathers to the medieval world, as man's fundamental posture of sacrifice before God.

Although resolved to retire to a life of contemplation, Gregory was forced back unwillingly into a world that part of him still loved despite all his determination. Because of this, Gregory will emphasize self-control, self-examination, and penitence as a means of dealing with this basic conflict and ambivalence. Rational action and discipline can perform the penitence necessary for inadvertent, secret sins. Having been tossed back into the world unwillingly, Gregory will add a new meaning to the self-control found in the monastic tradition. The monastery is the citadel of security; yet controls are external, localized in the monastic cell. Now the *arx mentis*, the citadel of the mind, must be the primary bastion of stability. It must both regulate the impulses of man's carnal nature and weather the vicissitudes of the world outside. A stable, unshaken fortress, the mind must overcome all mutability of the world, whether personal or social.

If the true citadel of virtue is the mind and hèart, and not simply the cell, then a kind of ascesis can become accessible to all levels of Christians in varying degrees of achievement. By making perfection paradoxical, so integrating worldly involvement and the inevitability of sin, Gregory can give all Christians a chance to develop *discretio, compunctio, stabilitas,* and *tranquillitas*—virtues formerly associated with monastic life. Gregorian Christianity is inclusive and open-ended.[75] In the *Dialogues* 1.12.4, Gregory cheers his disciple Peter, assuring him that even today there are holy men of great stature, as there were of yore. Though their saintliness now appears more often as inward virtue than as outward miracles, they are no less holy. This adjustment of doctrine to historical circumstance is calibrated to meet the world as it is and to christen it. No part of life remains untouched by the sacred, no part of life need necessarily be excluded from the Christian. Not that Gregory joyously affirms the world, as Teilhard de Chardin did: Gregory always remains wedded somberly to his

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75. Weber's point is well taken: Gregory is not hostile to the world as such, but speaks of leaving it for the sake of heaven; see *Hauptfragen*, 125–28, esp. 128, n. 2.

apocalypticism and to his desire for the true repose of the monastery. He knew very well how demons polluted every corner of carnal life. But through sacrifice and repentance, carnal life could be offered to God, cleansed and purified by tears of contrition. Through sacrifice, the things of the flesh could be reunited with those of the spirit.

If Gregory's notion of stability ultimately sustains a conquest of the world and life in the flesh for the Christian, it is important to recognize that his stability is not only internal and personal but also social and political. Stability is also a desire for order in a sea of violence churning between the twin evils of tyranny and lawlessness. Gregory will find the counterpart of personal stability in political and social hierarchies that can unify disparate minds and bridle arrogance and cruelty. If there is a certain self-containment in the citadel of the soul on a personal level, this is balanced by the rejection of isolation and selfishness on a political and social level. The unity of spiritual and carnal characteristic of Gregory's vision implies also a corporate definition of personality. Any modern sense of the individual as autonomous and self-determining will be rejected, for single egos cannot be separated from a greater general mind without grave social and personal disharmony. A parallel pattern exists for self and society: if the focus of personal stability is in the citadel of the mind exerting discipline over irrational members, the focus of social and political stability is an authority exercising control over a similar "body" of which it is "head." In both cases, a unity embraces carnal and spiritual extremes of the entity, be it man or the social body of Christ, and unity is possible because of the inner connection of those two extremes.

Of Gregory's contributions to later spirituality, this broader integration of the carnal side of life in a unified vision of reality is little recognized. Gregory is remembered more narrowly for his confrontation with evil and suffering and for the message bequeathed to individual Christians in similar struggles. This personal message has proved very compelling; Gregory's suffering may well be one of the great events in Western spirituality. His triumph lies in his minute exposition of self-control, in his ability to transform suffering and trial into spiritual progress. He shows how the Christian should struggle to govern responses to the painful and delectable ambivalences of human experience, and through discretion retain equanimity of soul. Gregory has faith enough to see the hidden prosperity in every adversity, yet is wary enough to fear the secret adversity that prosperity can bring. Whether the hand of God caresses or strikes a blow, man should be able to redress the balance in the scale of his soul, for he expects uncertainty and accepts God's will. Ideally, positive and negative feelings are reconciled: for Gregory, the strokes do not

vitiate the love. Does not the Lord chasten every son he receives? The passage Gregory cites of Paul expresses this acceptance of life's ambivalence, and the love enabling him to endure it: "I know both how to be brought low, and I know how to enjoy abundance: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry; both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me" [Phil 4:12–13].[76]

76. *HEz.* 2.7.15 (CCL 142, 329).