

St. GASPAR BERTONI

73 MEDITATIONS
on
THE EXPOSITION ON FIRST KINGS

[Prologue & 1 K 1:1-16:13]
[MssB ## 4853-7340]



influenced by

St. GREGORY THE GREAT

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[For Private Use]

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**ST. GASPAR BERTONI'S 73 MEDITATIONS ON
THE EXPOSITION ON FIRST KINGS [1 S]**

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INTRODUCTION

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Introduction

Presentation: Gregory the Great

[A] Life

For more than a thousand years, St. Gregory, the First, the “Great” would share with Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine the honor of being one of the four Doctors of the Western Church. He is also, then, with St. Leo, the only Pope to bear the title “the Great”: this is due to the breadth and depth of his activity which can be followed even into its details - since these are the only two Popes of the ancient Church whose Registers of Letters have been conserved.

His times were particularly unhappy - in the year 543, there were signs of the first hints of the black plague that would break out in the Middle Ages. About 540, the war of re-conquest of Italy against the Ostrogoths exploded. Having been earlier disarmed, Italy was the prey of the Lombards. There were so many troubles that the great Saint actually thought that the end of the world was approaching! In his Homilies on the Gospel, and in his Letters, he expresses this conviction and it was the principle for so many of his activities and a means of his persuasion. His eschatological sentiments, which are dominant in him from his conception of the world which influenced his spiritual doctrine, which remained along classical lines - but, he was quite obsessed with the idea of the divine Judge and His Judgment.

Only little is known of his family background, but it does seem that he was born in Rome around the year 540. The name “*Gregory*” - in Greek, means the “vigilant”, the sentinel. A half a century later, he would bear the Latin name, “*Vigil*”. His father was a senator, and probably a regional notary. His three aunts lived as Nuns in the family home. In his lineage on his father’s side, was Pope Felix [483-492]. His family was both of senatorial and pontifical rank!

It is not clear whether or not he had siblings - most likely, he did have at least one brother, as there is a hint of one in a letter. As a young layman, he enjoyed a brilliant career as a government functionary. Prior to 573, he was Prefect of the City of Rome, its highest ranking magistrate. He soon after, however, gave up this world, distributed his own goods to the poor, and became a monk. He set up a monastery in his family home, as well as six other such institutions in the vast family estates in Sicily. In his times, monasticism perhaps was more a state of life than an organization, and the Benedictine Rule was imposed as the law.

Without being formally an abbot, very soon he had to take over the concern of the material affairs of his monastery. In that time, the monks were all laymen, whereas Gregory was ordained a Deacon about 579. He was sent as pontifical envoy to Constantinople and stayed there six years without learning Greek and lived with a group of monks from his own monastery. In later years, when he did become Pope, he established himself at the Lateran, and surrounded himself once more with a group of monks. On his return to Rome, he again took up the monastic life that he had left behind. In September of 590, after resisting for about 7 months, and even after an attempt at flight, and even seeking the emperor's veto, he was chosen by popular vote as successor to Pelagius II, who had died of the plague earlier in the year. Gregory dedicated himself voluntarily to the victims of the plague and led many to follow him because of his heroic service - and also through his life of prayer. He introduced great processions of supplication, litanies and the faith of the entire city was mobilized to combat this terrible scourge that had descended upon the city.

The disastrous floods in 589 had destroyed the bins of wheat stored along the Tiber. The misery was terrible and it became the Pope's personal concern to come up with the daily bread supply for the population. The public calamities, however, never let him neglect even individual situations of suffering and distress. His love poured out on the Lord's little ones, the weak, the widows, the orphans, the much exploited colonists, and the poor - and still without neglecting the poor in hiding and those who had been disgraced. He took care of monasteries in distress, bishops exiled and chased because of the war. He took care of the high and the mighty who had suddenly fallen on hard times.

For him, the patrimony of the Church was really the property of the poor. His tireless activity in behalf of all the wretched was like that of St. Basil and John Chrysostom. The Italy of that time was on the brink of bankruptcy - and the former Prefect of Rome showed that he had lost nothing of his administrative abilities. He was able to restore in value the domain of the patrimony of the Roman Church, giving to it all an administrative solidity. The end result of his administrative brilliance is that history can date from Gregory's Pontificate the primary origins of the Pontifical State. His abundant correspondence with the administrators of diverse patrimonies, who had not only been overseers, but authentic Papal Legates; this fact provides a fertile field for those interested in the history of these times.

However, along with this economic expertise of his reign, with his prudent defense of Italy, as Pope he struggled against simony, tried to correct the immorality of the clergy, and was committed to the religious conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. Even in a more real way than the *Exarchs* of Ravenna and of Africa, Gregory was indeed the Viceroy of Italy and even of the entire West - and this actually would take in Illyria, Spain and Africa. The papacy had been practically abandoned by

Byzantium, and so Gregory had to provide for the defense of Rome. He took charge of the resistance against the barbarian invaders and paid little heed to the objections coming out of the East when he tried to draw up peace with the Lombards. Thus, the Holy See, in the person of Gregory, would extend the temporal domination of the Church and based its prestige on the failings of the temporal reign.

In all his correspondence with the Emperor, Gregory never departed from expressions of genuine deference, even when he was resisting the latter's temporal power. However, one of his letters to the Emperor Maurice seems to be of such a powerful energy that some scholars concluded that if this Emperor had been Justinian, then the Pope would have been immediately deposed and exiled.

The Council of Chalcedon had recognized for the Bishop of Constantinople the title of "Patriarch". This was, from the Pontificate of St. Leo, a point of permanent opposition between the Papacy and the Greek Church. On top of this quality, neither Pelagius II, nor Gregory could keep the Patriarch of Constantinople, John [582-595], with support from the Emperor Maurice, from adding the epithet "*Ecumenic*", which deeply offended Gregory in his humility, the "Servant of the Servants of God" - and he then found himself defending the prerogatives of the Roman See.

Without renouncing its dependence with regard to Constantinople, Rome provided more and more fully for the needs of the faith and the defense of Italy. The patrimony of St. Peter ever increasing the largest base in the Latin world, boasted of domains not only spread out over the peninsula, but also in Sicily, in Corsica, in Sardinia, in Dalmatia, Illyria, Gaul and Africa. This assured the populace now with greater financial independence, with a much broader initiative.

This situation was even further developed who understood that being freed in fact from the Byzantine world he was able more and more to become the Shepherd of the barbarian West. His Pontificate would imprint a new orientation on the Roman Church. Up until that time, the popes were primarily concerned with the East when dogmatic controversies would absorb the greater part of their concern. From this time onward, they would turn more and more towards the west. Gregory accentuated this tendency of his predecessor. He was the first to conduct correspondence with the barbarian leaders.

From the ecclesiastical point of view, Gregory fortified the control of the Roman See over the various Churches. In those Churches where the Pope exercised from Rome the role of Metropolitan, he supervised close at hand the election of the bishops and their administration. He succeeded in progressively resolving the schism which after the condemnation of the Three Chapters [553], had separated the bishops who depended on the Metropolitan of Aquileia from Rome. In 596, he sent Augustine of

Canterbury to establish in Great Britain its first Episcopal sees, and to implant there the Roman authority. He once more took charge of the clergy of the Gauls, and attached the Church of Spain more firmly to Rome, all the while leaving these their due autonomy. He struggled particularly against simony, the endemic plague of the Frank realms, where the bishops received their nomination from the royal power.

The Celtic Christians refused to appeal to the Gospel in behalf of their conquerors and oppressors, but Gregory took the initiative to proclaiming the Gospel to the Anglo-Saxons. It seems that he made excellent choices of his missionary collaborators and that his relative *naïveté* regarding a country which seemed to him to be very far away - but, in the end, it seems that they were much closer than first imagined. It may still be debated, though, whether the concessions made by the Pope might not have been too much - and that the demands made on the methods of evangelization were not deep enough, and whether there might not have been excessively attenuated the contrast between idolatry and Catholicism. It seemed that there was allowed to go unchecked the persistence of certain non-believing customs. However, if it is difficult to admit that Gregory had sinned by an excess of liberalism, when it is known that the demands that he made weighed upon the converts, coming from paganism and Judaism, were a stroke of genius. It became immediately clear that Catholicism could disassociate itself from just Roman civilization. It became immediately evident that the future of the human race was not indissolubly bound to the prosperity, or to the fall of all that is Roman.

The influence of Gregory was most extraordinary in these varied domains, in an age during which the temporal and the spiritual were much less clearly marked than they are today. It must never be forgotten that his extraordinary imprint is also due to the spiritual resources that he relied upon, authentically mystical, which fed his impact, and the sublime doctrine of which so much of his effectiveness is simply the expression.

His life, then, was one of long suffering - he was indeed a mystic, set among the agitations of this world and the taxing obligations of government. These were all handled in and through his sensibility sharpened by the difficulties of each day, by the human misery and maladies that he encountered each day. He also personally was constantly restricted by the limitations imposed on him by his own precarious health. He spoke of this with extraordinary simplicity in the numerous letters and even publicly, in his inspired homilies to his people. He spent the last three or four years of his life, in bed, but without giving up in the least his varied activities. He would only get up to celebrate the grand solemnities, in that his sufferings did not allow him any respite. He died on March 12, 604. The Feast of St. Gregory, the Great is set for March 12th and tradition attributes to him the title of Doctor of the Church.

[B] His Works

Presentation: in a period of great instability, it is said that “Gregory committed himself to defending and reinforcing the Christian sense of life, and for this reason, to eliminate as best he could contacts with pagan civilization!” This is the view of Pope St. Gregory of Didier of Vienna, who, however, with laudable intention, taught his clergy a certain *grammatica* of life, based on the study of the authors of classical antiquity. In Sardinia and Corsica, Gregory had to root out the remains of ancient paganism, and knew very well that simple human beings would be much helped, or diverted in this, by their local bishops.

One of the great qualities of Gregory was his faculty of adaptability to the milieu, that might have been the most diverse, to the point of coming to experience immense popularity among God’s “little ones”. In judging sometimes harshly the language of Gregory, it has often been forgotten his constant care to adapt his style and language to the world of thought of his listeners and correspondents. Gregory wanted to be comprehended. This was simply his natural purpose to which he subordinated practically the exterior formulation of his language. Whenever he addressed the simple people, he was forced to hold to the style of the spoken language, so that others could follow his thought. How often did Gregory manifest his deepest regard for the popular classes of people, those bereft of any culture. This shows how his homilies on the Gospels and his *Dialogues* were totally permeated with his open honesty. This is evident in all his teaching also in the sense to be given to the worship of images. The major works:

1. **Moralia in the Book of Job:** the Saint refers to these simply as the Moral Books - these are above all, monastic conferences, given by Gregory to some monks whom he had accompanied him to Constantinople. This is the first, and the most ample of his works - 35 books. Gregory developed that which he had just begun in his oral commentaries, as is noted in his letters to Leander of Seville. However, the final touches given to this work would date to the second half of his Pontificate - where he speaks of the success of the mission to England - and he paraphrases discreetly an oratorical development of Tertullian on the same subject.

The *Moralia* are a kind of collection of his moral, ascetical and mystical recollections. However, the doctrinal expose’, with a broad basis on the text of Job in the OT, follows this, verse by verse. Thus, it does not have a systematic character and unfolds more according to the random thoughts suggested by the sacred text. While at the beginning these conferences pronounced before monks, neatly avoid the

vocabulary presented by John Cassian in the Eastern monastic tradition - it must be remembered that these monks were laymen without a formal education. On the other hand, it seems that Gregory, in his efforts to elevate somewhat the points of view that were simply human, put himself to presenting the spiritual realities maybe excessively from the monastic point of view. However, the influence of his *Moralia* was extraordinarily profound in cloisters. His use of allegory, the development of ideas founded on Scripture, his commentaries and quite varied interpretations of the same verses, his intelligent digressions, his extraordinary output, which we might question in some senses in modern times, brought about the success of this work and aroused the greatest admiration.

2. The Book of the Pastoral Rule: this is simply known as the *Pastoral*, and was composed in 591, under the form of a long letter-treatise [there is a Prologue, 4 books and an End]. It was a response sent to "John, the Bishop of Ravenna", who had reproached Gregory for having chosen to take flight from the responsibility imposed on him of being the Bishop of Rome. One might find here similar circumstances to those which had dictated the classic work of St. John Chrysostom, entitled *On the Priesthood*, and the *Apologeticus on Flight* of St. Gregory Nazianzen.

It has been noted that Gregory the Great imitated his name-sake, Gregory Nazianzen and quotes him expressly in *Pastoral* 3, Prologue. This might have been the source for the well known saying: *Ars est artium regimen animarum* [the art of arts is the guidance of souls] - a saying found in both doctors. Gregory the Great takes up his project in the letter dedicated to John of Ravenna: when one is at the base of the wall, he must examine with great care how the others arrive at the heights of power - and climbing through the ranks, how they lived the rules - and then, living all this, how they taught it - and in teaching it, how they conducted themselves, and how they are attentive each day to consider their own weaknesses.

The *Pastoral* never attained the depths and the contemplative of his other works, as the *Moralia* and the *Homilies on Ezechiel*. He offers few new ideas not already contained in those other works - he refers several times to his *Moralia*. He offers a list of the different categories of listeners, or directees, following *Moralia* 30, 13. In the finale of this last text, it is already clear that with the composition of the *Moralia*, he was already thinking of writings his *Pastoral*. Nonetheless, this work had an immense diffusion, attested to by the numerous manuscripts. During Gregory's lifetime, the Emperor Maurice had this work translated into Greek for the Patriarch Athanasias - it later became translated into Anglo-Saxon.

3. Homilies on the Gospels: In these Homilies, Gregory assumes a totally different direction. The *Moralia*, in their primary intention, were destined for a monastic

audience - whereas these “Homilies” were meant for the faithful laity. Gregory was convinced that to preach was one of the first duties of a bishop - but, this should be exercised within the solemn celebration of the Mass, and as a preference, using the Gospel of the day. From 593 on, he published about 40 Homilies on the Sunday Gospels, delivered by him between the years 590-593. Suffering from stomach difficulties which rendered him almost voiceless, Gregory had the first 20 homilies read by a secretary in his place - with the exception of the 17th. He himself was able to deliver the 20 following homilies.

Their great simplicity, their character which was at the same time both noble and yet popular, must have urged upon Gregory a considerable effort of adaptation and a considerable travail. The dogmatic developments themselves were closely associated to life, and from the many examples he was able to draw the attention of his listeners and allowed them to experience the story-telling of the anecdotes of the *Dialogues*. The Homilies on the Gospel were “one of the most read, and most venerated books of the entire Middle Ages”.

4. Homilies on the Prophet Ezechiel: these 24 homilies were preached before a circle of listeners who were surely of a monastic tendency. In the Preface of the first book, Gregory declares that he had pronounced these, *coram populo*, and had reconsidered them and corrected them eight years later, “at the request” of the Monks of St. Andrew’s. However, on the other hand, in the Preface of the second book he states that he had consented to the desires of his brothers who asked him for a commentary on Ezk 40 [the “Torah of Ezechiel, and the Future Temple”], which is of a very difficult interpretation.

Some interpreters have theorized that these had been preached before the same audience as the Homilies on the Gospel. However, their content makes this view unlikely, especially when one thinks of the adaptation of Gregory, which he takes up again, in an even more sustained effort, as in the *Moralia*, where he offers also mystical considerations. These are among the most beautiful and most profound in all of his works. The Preface of the second book makes clear also that these homilies date from that time when the Lombard King Argluif was approaching Rome to place it under siege.

5. The Dialogues on the Life and Miracles of the Italian Fathers: it is in these *Dialogues* that there is the most manifest this pastoral will of adaptation that has already been noted several times. The *Pastoral Rule* was addressed to the directors of the clergy. What was then missing was a book of edification capable of impressing the simple faithful, who were most avid for the ‘wonderful’. Gregory provided for this in drawing up an attractive and popular text, in which he demonstrated that the East did

not have the monopoly on the miracles, and that these were being produced in Italy. In July 593, he asked Maximien, he Bishop of Syracuse, to send him to accounts that might be fitting to contribute to the drawing up of his book. As the *Dialogues* show us Maximien still alive, and that Gregory had learned of his death in Nov. 594. This might provide the *terminus ad quem* of the composition of this work.

The work is presented under the form of a conversation of Gregory with some young disciple, the Deacon Peter, whose make up, while still incomplete, comes across as quite ingenuous. The young Deacon makes known that He is speaking in the name of the 'little ones', for the purpose of serving for their instruction. His naive questions are indeed not superfluous, since they bring about the flourishing account and determine the course of the whole work.

Through the four books of this composition, there follow one after the other, without much of a bond between them, in a kind of embellished legend, accounts of prodigies, healing, prophecies and visions. These edifying anecdotes, where in Book 4 alone might be found eight specimens borrowed from the Homilies on the Gospel, this is the style of the *Dialogue*, and these are all redacted only with a minimal use of Scripture, which is contrary to the usual practice of Gregory.

The well known Book 2 is consecrated almost entirely to St. Benedict and Scholastica, and Book 4 is committed to death and what comes after, and only these present a certain unity. Book 2 particularly has drawn much commentary on recent times - some of the more fanciful episodes do seem to have a basis in history, as Benedict's overcoming pagan rituals on top of Monte Cassino. Yet, others maintain that Gregory presented these fanciful tales more for their exemplary, or parenetic value. What the book does offer is an insight to pietistic writing of the 6th century. Yet, there are those scholars who hold that this work is unworthy of the grandeur of Gregory - and others respond that this that his very ability to adapt himself as a writer to the popular tastes of a more simple people is just one more sign of the true greatness of this saint. There is no doubt that in this composition, Gregory has sacrificed willingly the genre, the language and the rhythmic course of all his other works. The result of all this was a surprising success which made of the *Dialogues* one of the most popular "reads" in the Middle Ages. These were translated into Greek, Arabic, Anglo-Saxon - thus as Gregory Nazianzen is called "the theologian", so Gregory the Great is known in some circles as the "Dialogue."

6. IN PRIMUM LIBRUM REGUM EXPOSITIONES: this commentary represents but a third part of the *Moralia in Job*. In this work, there abound monastic expressions, that are more frequent here than in all other works of the great Saint. [This will be pondered below at some length]

7. **Expositio in Canticum Canticorum**

8. **Registrum Epistolarum**: this takes up anew a custom in vogue in the times of Liberius the Pope in the 4th century. In the ancient Roman administration the Pontifical Chancellor had the custom of registering chronologically, all the correspondence of the Popes. The Registers of Gregory are the first ones, however, to come down to us, and considerable portions of them have survived. They contain 868 letters - some of these are of Pope Pelagius II, probably actually written up by Gregory himself when he was a Deacon. This work is the most conclusive proof of that activity of Gregory as a man of government. These are most important for historical research. They also offer a good insight into moral theology and canon law applied in these times. In the history of ancient canon law, they enjoyed an incontestable authority. The Letters are of a human quality and exceptional literary worth.

Intellectually, Gregory was head and shoulders over his times. He knew how to make use of *captatio benevolentiae* in order to convince others of his grandiose points of view, and to accept some severe correction. Whenever it was a question of persuading human beings, whom others had been unable to convince, or even to take under consideration other points of view, due to their bias which had convinced them, Gregory was sometimes able to put his pen to bringing about a splendid piece of literature. Never did any of his compositions of an administrative or political nature lack this correctness of language and mastery of style.

9. **Liturgical Work**: in addition to all this, there is a liturgical out-put, regarding sacraments, antiphonaries - all part of his committed re-organization of ceremonies - all of this is permeated with a pastoral spirit that renders him quite close and actual, even in our own time. He introduced the *Alleluiah* throughout the year, with the exception of Lent. His sublime Moral sense enabled him to satisfy the demands of his own time, as well as the spiritual needs of those who were entrusted to him. He had a profound influence on ceremony and the chant of the Church.

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INTRODUCTION

PART 1



SPIRITUAL DOCTRINE

Part 1: Gregory's Spiritual Doctrine

Introduction

The following are considered by many interpreters to be the central themes of Gregory's thought.

- [1] All Christians, no matter what their state of life might be, are called to imitate the perfection of the Redeemer.
- [2] Contemplation has a step on action, and it is always necessary, but on this earth, a life that is uniquely contemplative is impossible. Each one has to respect one's own dominating tendency, active or contemplative, that depends on one's God-given temperament. With this there is the charge to be most careful never to overlook totally the complementary tendency. Gregory was always most judicious in this balancing act, perhaps even more so than some modern terminology. Thus, for him, pure "contemplation" would not be, in any case, a viable state of life, as the end result would indeed be an imbalance. Contemplation must always be united to the service of one's neighbor, providing thus the proof of a total love. All this cannot turn one from the challenges of daily life, and that renewed effort each day also in some apostolate.
- [3] The clergy, who in the Church exercise pastoral service, lead the most perfect life by law. The reason is because their vocation realizes both contemplation and action in a conjoined and alternating succession. In achieving this, they follow the example of the "mixed" life given by Jesus Christ, St. Paul, Jacob and Moses!
- [4] The spiritual life for St. Gregory has to be one of on-going conversion - this supposes continuing purification of heart, penance and humility. This is the challenge over the Platonic *epistrophe* - and the Plotinian *metanoia*.

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1. Orientation of the Gregorian Asceticism

a. **Return to Paradise Lost:** this is the true homeland for each human being. From original sin, pride, disobedience, the forbidden fruit, the pursuit of visible goods in general have cooperated to exile humanity from its proper home. We must imitate the Magi and go back by "another route", namely, that self-imposed asceticism and affliction, leading in time to the proper despoilment of being and having.

b. **Spiritual and Corporal Asceticism:** one could never insist too much on this aspect of Gregory's thought: the true spiritual character of asceticism. There are almost natural practices for this, such as vigils, fasting and abstinence. Gregory, however, seems to emphasize less the corporal practices of liberation and of welcoming the spiritual forces, but rather on the moral efforts which very often bear with them exterior challenges as well.

Gregory proclaims: there are those who would like to do good without ever distancing themselves from evil - or, who would want to be humble, but without ever encountering disdain - to become content with whatever it is that they have, but without ever lacking the necessities - those who would like to be chaste, without ever mortifying their bodies - those who want to be patient, but without ever bearing insult! Such as these want to seek and find virtue, but flee the travail of the virtues, and really do little else other than desiring the honors of triumph, but without ever knowing the combat of war in the harsh country-side.

Gregory had his own array of Latin terms: *cruciare, macerare, castigare, membrorum castigationem* - but these do not designate any employ of the instruments of penance, such as the discipline, the hair-shirt and the like. However, he does make use of words such as *ashes, embers*, from biblical sources. He always refers to such penitential practices with much reserve.

In commenting on the long-suffering Job, Gregory sees how this was a much tried man - this leads him to establish the principles of cultivating this valuable kind of mortification, which consists in being resigned in a Christian way to the sufferings caused by personal trials, illnesses and the like, or by public misfortunes in which we find ourselves involved. Gregory bestowed a respect for the divine character of human trials. Of themselves, physical, or moral trials suffice to correct and purify the sinner.

c. **The Different States of the Christian Life:** for Gregory, as much later for St. Francis de Sales, Christian perfection is possible in all walks of life, and it is the correct ideal for all: the married, the continent [meaning celibates, monks, virgins and nuns], and the preachers, or rectors [meaning the clergy having responsibility in the Church]. Each one of these categories ought to tend toward Christian perfection proper to it.

1.] **The Married:** St. John Chrysostom had stated that people in the world as the monks have the duty of attending to the same summit of perfection. In the finale of his 36th Homily on the Gospel, Gregory explicitly recognized that spouses have the possibility of arriving at the highest levels of perfection: *'I would like to exhort you to give up everything, but I do not dare to... If you wish it, even in holding on*

to these, you still can put aside all things, on the condition that you treat temporal matters by tending with your whole soul to eternal realities.'

Then, citing St. Paul [cf. 1 Co 7:29, ff.] if one has a wife, be as though not having one - the married have the task of pleasing their spouse without displeasing the Creator. Each is to use the world as though not making use of it - such a one limits his personal commitment to what is indispensable, without ever permitting the world to dominate one's soul...and never to hold back one's spirit which tends towards the heights.

The espoused indeed can pretend to the contemplative praising of God and to perfection by the renunciation of that which they possess. Gregory shows this by the description of a Christian husband, father of a family, resolved to lead the devout life, being content with that which he possesses, and committed to delivering himself from all the obligations of this world, fearing mightily to lose the advantages of repose [by quieting one's comforts, one can come to contemplative lauds]. Such a one refuses absolutely to accumulate profits, earned only at the price of sin. The counsel of prudence, or that restlessness which may ensue in such situations, dictated by a proper and humanly prudential discernment of the situation, is presented in this text as a diabolic suggestion.

2.] The Continent: Gregory does not seem to make clear whether in his eyes the monastic life had a particular function in the Church. The autobiographical indications as culled from his *Letters*, his *Dialogues*, and his *Homilies*, seem to indicate that he himself had not entered the monastery so much as a service to the Church, but rather to insure his own personal sanctification. This trait which characterizes all the monks at the beginning, whether hermits or cenobites, comports two correlative aspects: flight from the world, and the quest for God - to which developed obedience to another, in the order of the "continent" - all this will greatly assist supreme perfection.

- **Flight from this World:** and the pursuit of Peace and personal salvation. In recounting his "conversion" in the Letter of Dedication of his *Moralia*, Gregory expresses well the searing of the soul between two wills, as described by Augustine, according to the doctrine of St. Paul regarding grace. The disturbances created the sharing in Gregory's soul - having come to realize that he was seeking eternal love, he found himself in a sad and difficult situation. It was the unruly see of the world and its heavy responsibilities of his urban prefecture which led him to the determination to flee, after much hesitation, the tempest and the ship-wreck, and to finally gain the other shore of repose, the heaven of the monastery. Having abandoned forever, I believe finally, the disturbances of this world, I escaped the shipwreck of life.

This dramatic description of the entrance into the cenobitic life, even within the town, was like that of St. Benedict's entrance into the most primitive hermit's life. However, for any hesitations that would accompany this, he would once more be moved by the "conversio" of Benedict who withdrew 'ignorant in a learned way, and very wisely without letters', was not tantamount in Gregory for the lack of resolution.

In both cases - that of Benedict, as well as that of Gregory - the desire for heaven is opposed to the customs of this world. For Gregory, the "monk's habit" is the rejection of this world. The monastery, or the desert, are the opposite of this agitated and corrupt world, and assure the good of the soul, i.e., holiness and peace.

- **Eremitical [Hermit's] or Cenobitical [cloistered community] Life:** in itself, the form of life chosen is of little importance for the over-all purpose that moves the choice of the "Continent". The *conversatio monastica* is an individual matter and is conceived perfectly outside any abbatial authority and common life. One could, indeed, cease being a "cenobite" without ceasing to be a "monk". Gregory's personal inclination was for the common life for his own foundations and also for himself, putting himself solidly in line with St. Benedict who lived among the cenobites who were classified as *most strong people*. His *Dialogues*, however, speak of hermits who are consecrated to God near an oratory. What truly matters is the ascetical background favorable to the dominance of the passions and, consequently, prayer. The hermit, before God, is alone with himself. The cenobite draws forth from the arsenal, or from the workroom, which the monastery is, those spiritual tools placed at the disposition of all Christians, but which are thus managed, in principle, with much more effectiveness.

- **Obedience to Another, "the sublime School of Perfection":** in Gregory's eyes, however, the different styles of monastic life did not all have the same perfection: the most perfect imply obedience to another. The miracle-worker of Saint Maur, walking on the waters in order to carry out an order from St. Benedict, illustrates the importance of the monastic virtue of obedience.

This is what gives its mark to the type of monastic life that Gregory preferred, as did Benedict, and practiced then by the Cenobites and also by the hermit, delivered from the spirit of independence. This hermit, without going necessarily even to practicing that "team-approach" to the hermit's way will be, as at Chateaufort would show later, an obedient hermit. For the monk, whether he is a cenobite, or a hermit, obedience makes possible all perfections, for this submission to the will of someone else renders more precise one's subjection to God - on the condition that this "other", to which the monk freely subjects himself, is indeed the representative of God. Then, obedience, realizing the monastic ideal of a total imitation of Jesus Christ, reproduces the very obedience of Jesus Christ Himself toward His Father [cf. Jn 6:38]. The Abbot is

defined essentially in his quality of *father* - and the monks willingly obey him, because from them to him, obedience realizes one of the aspects of relationship by which Jesus shows His love for His Father. Because he chose just to do his own will, the first Adam had to leave the joy of paradise. The Second Adam, Jesus, Who had come to ransom human beings, does this by showing them that He accomplishes His Father's will out of love. It is always the Father's Will - represented by the Abbot's - and not one's own, that inspired these early monks not to leave the paradise of sacred obedience.

As Gregory shows in his *Moralia*, whether one is married, or a cenobite, in consecrated celibacy or the eremetical life, those who do not base their lives on dependence with regard to a superior, still bear some evidence of the evangelical marks of the perfect life. Renouncing all ownership, the Continent tramples under foot and abandons those responsibilities which might weigh heavily on the owner. However, the Monk who has done all of this, and then decides to place himself in the most sublime school and disposes of his own willful, and most personal choices, gives up even the best of desires. This is the taking on the "discipleship of a higher order". Thus, there seems to be no doubt that the category of the Cenobites and the Hermits, submitted to sacred obedience, are regarded by Gregory as a higher way of life than that lived by pious celibates and independent hermits.

3.] The "Rectors": this is the name used by Gregory to refer to those clergymen, who have canonical responsibilities, as preaching. In fact, they are often called *preachers*. They are called to be dead to themselves, and theirs is the laudable task of leading and directing others to the faith. The Saint's presentation of these would suggest a progressive dignity in comparison to the espoused. More or less, this "hierarchy" of ways of following Christ is present in Gregory's thought: from the lowest degree, without ecclesiastical authority, to the most high level, that of the clergy. His suggested order goes this way: the married, the celibates, independent hermits, cenobites and dependent hermits, and the clergy. It is also clear from his writing, as in that of John Chrysostom, that the clergy represent in the Church the most perfect state, and a way of life which today we attribute generally to the hermits.

This objective superiority of a given way of life in the one vocation to holiness has been quite stable in the Church through the centuries. This was continued by Vatican II, in the rather frequent use of comparatives when describing consecrated ways of life - as "closer" emulating the life style that Jesus lived with His Apostles, in pondering the Word and in carrying out the Apostolic Mission which Jesus handed on to His Followers after having received it directly from the Father: *as the Father sent Me, I now send you!* [cf. Jn 20:21, ff.]. John Paul II has continued this teaching:

... Within this harmonious constellation of gifts, each of the fundamental states of life is entrusted with the task of expressing in its own way one or other aspect

of the one mystery of Christ. While the lay life has a particular mission of ensuring that the Gospel message is proclaimed in the temporal sphere, in the sphere of ecclesial communion an indispensable ministry is carried out by those in holy orders and in a special way, by bishops. The latter have the task of guiding the people of God by the teaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of sacred power in the service of ecclesial communion, which is an organic communion hierarchically structured.

As a way of showing forth the Church's holiness, it is to be recognized that the consecrated life, which mirrors Christ's own way of life, has an objective superiority. Precisely for this reason, it is an especially rich manifestation of Gospel values and a more complete expression of the church's purpose, which is the sanctification of humanity. The consecrated life proclaims and in a certain way anticipates the future age, when the fullness of the kingdom of heaven, already present in its first fruits and in mystery, will be achieved and when the children of the resurrection will take neither wife nor husband, but will be like the angels of God. [cf. Mt 22:30].

The Church has always taught the pre-eminence of chastity for the sake of the kingdom, and rightly considers it the 'door' of the whole consecrated life...¹

His *Homilies on Ezechiel* are explicit in this direction: the *preachers* are represented by Noah, and they leave behind the "continent" and the "non-preachers": the "continents" represented by Daniel, surpass by far the espoused, represented by Job. Another text that likewise establishes the superiority of the preachers as a state in life, not so much by their own radiance, but much more by the union of their person of two ways: the active and the contemplative. The *preacher* is trained to the fact of perfection, in that each one is not only committed to the active life, but is also supported by contemplation.

Since they cannot remain for a long time in divine contemplation, they are like the grasshoppers, in that they "receive" in their fall and return to the demands of the active life - where, however, they do not find their ultimate joy. When once again they are able to rise up with their ardor towards contemplation, they search for the air then in order to fly: they pass above their ordinary life, as the grasshoppers, in order to take their position, only to fall back to earth again. Thus, they strive ceaselessly never to lose from sight the most elevated realities - they fall back on themselves by the sheer weight of their corruptible nature.

¹Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, March 25, 1995, # 32.

4.] The Supreme Perfection of the Mixed Life: the monastic state - whether heremetical or cenobitic - prepares in an excellent manner for the grace of contemplation. But, the *pastors*, who unite action to contemplation, lead a life that is in itself, more perfect than mere contemplatives. The superiority of the mixed life over the uniquely contemplative life is suggested in various passages of the Saint's *Moralia* where he notes that the right eye represents the contemplative life and the left eye the active life. The perfection of a person is evidently in having two eyes! A person is incomplete, and hence, imperfect, if he/she is solely contemplative, or uniquely active. Without doubt, one might conceive as an ideal - which cannot be achieved in our present life - a life, which in its limit, would be already for us the life beyond this one: pure contemplation. However, one cannot inversely conceive of the human ideal to be a life that is uniquely active.

By the active life, Gregory, as later would St. Thomas, for whom, on this question of the "two ways", he will be the authority, understands two distinct realities, that are inseparable: the ascetic effort and the exterior activity in the midst of human beings. The obligatory moral effect, disposes one for contemplation and for adherence to God². At the source of all apostolic action, there is a principle of superabundant activity and energy: contemplation³. In his teaching and in his own life, Gregory maintains certainly the right, as will St. Thomas⁴, the primacy of contemplation. Absolutely speaking, the contemplative life, in which a believer aspires to perceive the beauty of God, tends more directly toward love in which perfection consists - this is why it is a more perfect way of life than the active. The mixed life which Gregory, as later St. Thomas, declares superior on this earth, to the life that is solely contemplative, is not that action which evolves around contemplation, but where contemplation itself overflows into action.

The idea that a life like that of the Apostles, the mixed life, *par excellence*, is superior to the life of the "Continents" as appears in Gregory's Letter ⁵ where he exhorts Athanasias to leave the heights of contemplative repose, where he reaches with the hand of the heart, the celestial secrets, so that he might be able to take up again the government of his Antiochian Patriarchate. This superiority of the apostolic life does not keep Gregory from respecting the fact that some believers may indeed be called to contemplation. The Saint also reserved much determination to preserve the monasteries from all that could alter the peace that is indispensable for contemplation regarded as that privilege which must never be lost to monastic life.

²St. Thomas Aquinas, II-II, q. 180, a. 2.

³ib., q. 182, a. 1, 3, 4; q. 188, a. 6.

⁴ib., q. 180, a. 1; q. 182, a. 1 et 2, ad 2 um.

He suppressed the baptisteries in these monasteries, the public processions, and would not allow Masses to be celebrated there by a bishop, as these would draw the faithful, and especially women. Gregory defended the interests and privileges of the monasteries in order to safeguard these for the Roman Church. He insisted on the incompatibility of the clerical life and the monastic state. The Nuns are not forgotten. In almost all these texts, the Latin word *quies*, the idea of tranquility is always to be safeguarded, and the mention under one form or another, the words *opus Dei!*

Yet, at the same time, faithful to a tradition which could also claim St. John Chrysostom as one of its adherents, and St. Augustine, Gregory does not hesitate to take from the cloister a monk who might be of special service to the Church, and to recommend to others the very sacrifice that made him suffer so much! It was under the impression of this sundering that he wrote several chapters of his *Pastoral*.

Later on, he was much occupied with this problem and he certainly leaned on his own personal experience. In his *Homilies on Ezekiel*, he made known that the veritable perfection of a contemplation, which up to that time had not been all peace and very sure of itself, this way of life had began to ripen only in the difficulties and the struggle of the active life. This same emphasis on practical charity very soon became "classic."

Gregory's deepest tendency is expressed then in a traditional monastic tradition of a rigorous retreat, supposing a theory, and one could almost say a theology of oppositions between the "world" and the "consecrated" one. On the other hand, there was addressed the evangelical challenges of the salvation of the world, body and soul, and of the apostolate. Confronted with these varied challenges, Gregory - like all the great bishop-monks - would bend his own personal references. Led very quickly to resolve all these oppositions, he surmounted his own interior sundering by a superior synthesis, by professing that the contemplation of human beings on this earth can only find its development and experience its authenticity in a full manner only in the unavoidable service of others. Action united to contemplation realizes the perfection of the believer, which will always be incomplete if contemplation does not flower into action.

2. Accompanying Conditions of the Spiritual Life

a. Temptation:

- **the role of the Devil:** in the modern mentality, the devil does not occupy the same place that he did in Gregory's thought. The ancients in general attached an importance to that which tempted souls came to realize as being the ruse of the ancient enemy. The devil is surely the prince of the wicked, both of angels and of men,

something like Jesus Christ is in the Church. Opposing the Body which has Jesus for its Head, another body exists which has the wicked among its members, with the devil as its head. "The [Tale of] two Cities" of St. Augustine and their respective chiefs offer an evident parallel, but not textually.

Gregory, following Job 41:24 [...*He looks the haughtiest in the eye; of all the sons of pride, he is the king...*] shows the power of the devil as incomparably superior to every other terrestrial power, both of the angel of rebellion as well as the angel of light - but, he is very careful to define the subordination of the devil with regard to God.

- **the role of the Body:** concupiscence acts within the depths of a human being and confounds one with its tendencies and life. Our body itself is a source of temptation, and becomes thus an occasion of repentance and ransom. Even when the soul attains the highest contemplation, the body continues to be an abominable vestment - and in this aspect of Gregory's teaching, there are some hints of pessimism! However, God in allying a spiritual substance with that of mud, and thus has found the means of rendering believers capable of the highest possible destiny. This world, in summary, becomes endowed with a particular privilege of reason.
- **the role of Trials:** for the great Saint, purification by trial is absolutely necessary to introduce one to contemplation, of which the culmination is the vision of God. Trial brings together two orders of reality:
 - **"temptation"**, in its religious and moral acceptance, of a certain impulsion by the awakening of desire;
 - **"trial", which comes from necessity and from "events"**, in the Paschalian meaning of the words. This is the doctrine of the *flagella Dei*, mentioned under words such as *adversa*, *adversitas*, *flagella*, *tentatio*, *tribulatio*, *verbera*, which appear about 600 times in the *Moralia*, and about 100 times in the other works put together.
 - **trial as "expiation"**: any serious reflection on the sufferings of Jesus would help us to understand these and to support them. In the *Pastoral*, we would have a clear proof, if there should ever be needed one, of the Christocentric character of Gregory's religion. No less than with St. Teresa of Avila, the contemplation of the deity without any specific form, is translated in the Gregorian view as *lumen incircumscriptum*, can never exclude the consideration of the lowly, suffering humanity of the Savior, even down to the concrete details which would so occupy the piety of the Middle Ages.

To be able to suffer with patience, it is required to contemplate tirelessly those great torments that our Redeemer endured from the part of creatures: how He had to endure rejection and insult; it is necessary to consider attentively His tearing away each day from the hands of the ancient Enemy those captive souls, He was pierced by those who insulted Him; in washing them in the waters of salvation, He did not turn away His face from the slaps of the incredulous; in interceding for us to liberate souls from eternal torments, He accepted in silence to be scourged; that in bestowing on us eternal honors in the midst of the choirs of angels, He supported being struck with the harsh blows of the scourge; that we might be preserved from the deceptions of sin, He did not refuse being crowned with thorns; and that we might be intoxicated by an eternal sweetness, He accepted the most harsh bitterness in place of honey; being equal to His Father and adoring Him in our Name, He kept silence under the outrage of the mocking derision He endured; in offering life to the dead, He, Life Himself, even to accepting the most agonizing of deaths. How is it, then, that believers find it difficult to support trials, on the part of God, as punishment for our faults - believing that a God endured, on the part of sinners, such terrible sufferings in exchange for such benefits?

- **Trials as “Purification”:** this always involves a piercing, a suffering. Such sadness dissipates the cloud of evil - in setting up a kind of screen, this diminishes the sharpness of the ability to look inwardly - or, it might illumine the fine point of the soul. The soul can really only “know” God when it has been purified by trials- from the fact of suffering, one’s nostalgia for God is sharpened.

The trial which affects the souls on the point of leaving their bodies normally consists in a vivid apprehension regarding the judgment of God. This final combat, Christ, our Model, had sustained at the time of His agony. Thus, the anguish of life plays the role of a preventive purgatory where the just person is truly washed of his/her faults.

- **Trials as a Divine Plan of Mercy:** in order to keep the soul from tumbling into pride.
 - the alternation of joy and sadness: it is the Plan of God that the elect should pass from joy over to sadness: at the moment of

conversion, after the temptations which follow that, and very often prior to death, one experiences these deep shifts of inner turmoil. The initial sweetness might expand into an immense sense of joy, consoling the elect - and then tribulations come to maintain the soul in a situation of alert, watching and praying. The end result of the satisfactions after this profound moral anguish conform one entirely to God.

-- the believer may be besieged by Temptations: the ancient enemy applies himself and all his wiles to hinder all those who wish to place terrestrial passions behind them, in order to attach themselves to the heavenly realities. Some, in fact, desert this world, abandon the emptiness of all transitory honors, and aspire by the quality of their lives to the ultimate degree of humility, and set aside all the habitual human possibilities. They proceed forward into the citadel of religious zeal. However, should there be any neglect in assuring their spiritual security, they may not have a good understanding of all they need to deal with, and thus feel the abyss of any human pride.

Once the soul has returned to God and to itself, it finds its punishment in the passing goods where formerly it had found its pleasure

Summary: there is, then, a certain concomitance of real trial and contemplation: temptation weighs heavily on the contemplative so that he/he may not fall prey to pride. Contemplation is raised up through temptations - and is kept from tumbling into despair. Thus, it is medicinal, and first having been provoked by our own faults, temptation at all ages, and in all levels of spirituality. Like tribulation, it can serve for our redemption. God proves one in the measure that He wishes to make us participants in His Holiness.

b. Conditions of Contemplation:

- **knowledge of self, circumspection and discretion:** the Socratic, *gnosis seauton*, which already had a certain sense of religiosity to it, progressively reinforces its religious character: know thyself! Gregory rarely recommended self-knowledge in express terms. His commentary on Canticles [cf. Ct 1:7: *If you do not know this, o loveliest of women...*] gives to this subject the most explicit text of his entire work. However, in reality, this *gnosis seauton* is present everywhere, underlying his text - he always emphasizes a constant reflection on oneself, a certain circumspection and discretion.

- **humility:** the first result of self-knowledge is humility, that pre-requisite for all contemplation: 'the swelling of pride closes the penetrating eye of contemplation...!' Humility accompanies contemplation: Abraham, admitted to the honor of conversing with God, declares himself to be no more than dust and ashes. The Lord nourishes the soul of his secrets, proportionately to the disdain that it has of itself. Gregory recurs here to varied images: mountains and the pasturage [cf. Jb 39:8] - the symbol of sublime contemplations; the valley of tears [cf. Ps 83:6, f.] and the valley of humility.

Humility draws its value from the example left by the Savior Himself: He underwent abjection, received blows, supported ignominy, and to end all, He died on the gibbet of the Cross. The Son of God became man not only so that He could be taken hold of, as St. Irenaeus already explained, by the human intelligence [the sense of this NT idea is noted in Mt 19:11, f.: *...not everyone can accept what I have said, but only those to whom it is granted...*] - but beyond all this the Savior humbled Himself so that He might even teach human beings, in a fallen state due to pride, the truth of His "condition".

The Saint noted that it is up to us to follow the way of life by that humility which the Truth has deigned to show in His Person that to which He exhorts us in his basic principle:... *Learn from Me in that I am meek and humble of heart!* [cf. Mt 11:29]. Why did the only Son of God take on this aspect of our weakness? Why is it that the Invisible has appeared not only as 'visible', but also as disdained? Why did He tolerate being the butt of outrages, why did He put up with the shame of mockery and the torments of His Passion, if not so that human beings might grasp a humble God, and so that they would not be proud? What is truly grand, then, is the virtue of humility, which is assumed in order to teach us in His reality. The unique One, Whose grandeur cannot even be imagined, has made Himself small even to suffering! Pride which has its source in the devil manifests itself as the origin of our fall. So, the humility of God has presented itself as the instrument of our redemption. Our enemy wanted to raise himself far above all other creatures in the midst of whom he had been created. Our redeemer, however, Whose grandeur surpasses all creatures, has deigned to become small in the midst of all creatures. Two lines further on may be noted certain expressions that seem to resonate with the views of St. Irenaeus: we have known our Creator from the height of His sublimity has descended, so that He might give glory to the human race! This whole paragraph that is in Gregory's letter of June 1, 595 to John, the Patriarch of Constantinople, is found then textually in his *Moralia*. Our Redeemer, then, is the 'Chief of the Humble', just as the devil is the 'king of the proud': these latter do not follow the paths of God.

c. **Purity of heart by disengagement from all that is created:** in its traditional and general sense, 'purity' is bound not only to humility, but also to detachment. Gregory expresses the obstacles to purity of heart by various examples of attachment, as that of noise, restlessness and envy. In order to place value on the correlative ideals of these of disengagement and of tranquility, the Saint makes use of comparisons of sleep, of death, the tomb, the mountains and pastures:

- spiritual sleep: the contemplative ought to imitate Jacob who slept along the way, with a stone under his head. To sleep along the way in this manner, means to close the ears of the heart to the desire of visible realities. Just as the Patriarch did not see the angels except in and during his sleep, in the same manner no one can enter into the spiritual world unless by being detached from all that is visible in order better to imitate the Redeemer. To rest one's head on a stone means to attach one's soul to Jesus Christ - to rest one's head means to hand over one's spirit, totally dis-occupied from the tumult of impure thoughts. It is necessary to note here the importance that Gregory always gives to the role of the Savior in the spiritual life: if the spirit empties itself, this is only to find Jesus Christ. Such spiritual sleep is not to be confused with that of laziness.

- the death, and the tomb of the active life: the "active life", which for Gregory also includes asceticism, the practice of good works and preaching, is comparable to a tomb - for it shelters us from depraved works! Those who die to creatures, find the tomb [cf. Jb 3:22] - they are full of joy, because they silence in them the needs and the solicitations of the flesh and of the world, by the practice of a continual mortification. They lead one to hide themselves within, in the most profound depths of the soul, before the face of God.

- the death and the tomb of contemplation: taken over by silence which causes within the soul the detachment from all that is of the world, the soul experiences a kind of death. Having become a stranger to all that might seem to hamper the sharpness of one's spiritual considerations, the soul becomes absorbed in a loving contemplation of God. The contemplative life, then, enshrouds much more perfectly than the active life, because it separates better from the corruption of the flesh and the world.

The 'tomb' designates the repose of eternal and intimate recompense, which radically destroys the corrupt life in order to hide it in the secret of the true light. One passage from the Saint's *Homilies on Ezechiel*, will replace the image of the 'tomb' with the idea of liberty culminating in Rm 8:21:... *creation still retains the hope of being*

freed, like us, from its slavery to decadence, to enjoy the same freedom and glory as the children of God...: that which allows Gregory to say that the spiritual 'tomb' of contemplation represents the supreme liberation.

- **mountains and pastures:** the contemplative makes the difficult climb up the mountain, as did Moses. And God descends there and allows Moses to hear there something regarding Himself. To await upon God, this is the authentic nourishment, and this is why contemplation is still signified by the pasturage on the mountain slopes; the interior nourishment of the faithful people, which is simply the interior vision, and is the fruit of contemplation, is called the grass, the forage, by Gregory - just as 'the interior wisdom' is signified by the green and fresh patrimony of eternity. Besides, Gregory assimilates to bread the nourishment of our soul. The common idea in all these images is that of tranquility, of calm, or more exactly that sense of repose which could never coexist either with the passions, nor with crushing cares. What is intended here is the provisory disengagement, limited to the time of contemplation. The influx of grace comes proportionately with that abundance in so far as the interior silence is perfect.

The presence of God is announced by a state of internal calm and elevation. Inversely, recollection is the complementary phenomenon of prayer. The contemplative state is thus comprehensible. A life that is agitated, very busy, even about the matters of the Lord, one that is dispersed, this is not, of itself, very favorable to contemplation. The sufferings and the regrets of Gregory the Great, once he became Pope, is a clear witness of these statements.

d. **Fear and Compunction:** every basically religious soul experiences a two-fold sentiment: respect and subjection of the creature before the *mysterium tremendum* of the Creator - which engenders humility and fear. Compunction is made up of both. It is not only repenting tearfully over past faults, but also in contemplation of the grandeurs of God, this sentiment also brings forth tears of joy. Some scholars have noted various degrees of compunction:

- the first species is destined to lead the soul to experience where it has been, i.e., regarding past sins, one's abuse of the divine benefits, one's infidelities without number;
- the second sort is that which springs from the apprehension of the chastisements merited by sin. Gregory describes this well in the apprehension of the sinner, which does not mention compunction, but tears. The soul that is

culpable ponders the sentence that will be brought to bear on the last day, and trembling, wonders where one will be.

- the third of compunction springs from the consideration of the evils beyond number of the present life - this level enables the soul to understand better its present condition, where the soul is right now. From this deep experience of wretchedness the soul comes to this naturally and to desire the blessed sojourn from which it is still absent, and where one is not yet.

- the fourth species of compunction is the enflamed desire for what is still to come - this is the most abundant, and the most sweet.

In each of these levels, compunction proceeds from a burdensome sentiment, but one that is indiscernibly mixed with love. In this connection, one can only think of the beautiful composition of Gregory the Great, entitled *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Here he speaks of the kisses of the sinful and repentant lover, as noted in God's word: *...Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth...* [cf. Ct 1:2] - *... You gave me no kiss...* [cf. Lk 7:45]. Gregory's entire paragraph here is consecrated to the compunction of love which succeeds fear. In his *Commentary on 1 Kings*, Gregory contrasts the two compunctions of love and fear.

Furthermore, Gregory distinguishes a compunction of sadness and one of joy. These two kinds of compunction are clearly distinct, and the Saint counsels that the soul should never be overwhelmed by the first, but one must be assisted by it. This enables one to aspire to eternal life in confidence in the paternal love of God. The verse of Jb 33:26, that alludes to the "compunction of joy": *... He prays to God who has restored him to favor, and comes, in happiness, to see his face...* [cf. Jb 33:26]. This *jubilation* in its biblical usage, expresses a spiritual joy which naturally breaks forth in cries of joy and in canticles. Such joy is nostalgic for the life beyond.

Compunction is an invisible language, and it speaks silently to all believers seeking God. For them, the celestial chant does not lull them to sleep, because their spirit knows the sweetness of the praise from on high, in order to perceive it, the ear of love. Interiorly, in effect, they understand that which they yearn for, their desire for God uncovers for them the heavenly goods which will be their reward. All that is visible for them is under their charge, since they find themselves separated from that which they grasp deep within themselves. Without ceasing, the soul, having left aside the labors of this world, is raised up, in order to be made over anew, even to achieving that celestial joy and hearing that canticle of heaven, which suddenly is heard in the ear of

their hearts, and this makes them desire each day that company of the citizens from on high.

Compunction, for Gregory, tills the soil of the human heart - it is a kind of 'machine' which raises up the mind and permits the believer to take pointed consciousness of the evil that has been committed and to judge one's past and future actions. Compunction gives likewise a better understanding of the divine language of Scripture. Gregory would point out very simply to his listeners that it was compunction that had helped him to penetrate the most profound mysteries of the Prophet Ezechiel. Often, the grace of the Lord all powerful enables the believer to understand better certain particularities of His language: one reads with more recollection the word of God; the soul, conscious of its sins, recalls that which it understood, is struck deeply by the thrust of sorrow and is pierced by the sword of compunction. Nothing, then, pleases this soul more than weeping and of washing away its stains in the flood of one's own tears.

Compunction and contemplation are closely bound for the sake of life, with the predominance of the sentiment of the wretched condition of here below [where one is], and of the desire for heaven where one is not]. It takes the divine intervention to lead us to deplore our most deeply rooted tendencies and to purify our hearts. God places our hearts before the merciful eyes and hand of His grace, and unties the attachments of our hearts. Then, our soul, decided to give itself over to penance and delivered from all carnal entrapments, can in all freedom direct the steps of its love toward the Creator.

e. **Love:** charity, like compunction, is also a 'machine' that carries the soul on high towards that light without limit, that Light which is God Himself. However, the fundamental idea remains for Gregory, the accession to love by degrees, from fear to fidelity, through the total detachment from oneself. The itinerary is always the same: after having at the beginning, misunderstood the divine advances, there comes a time when the soul sets aside the disdain and the fear in order to be united to God without limit, through love.

However, this love is not only the high point of the spiritual life: it is love which renders all struggle easy, allows one to endure all, to love all, to pardon all, and following Job's word, to taste even that which brings death [cf. Jb 6:6, Vulg.]: the weaknesses of sinners, the faults of one's neighbor, sufferings and finally, death itself. The commitment of the just person to the service of one's neighbor inaction, this enables one to evaluate the force of love which raises one up toward the Creator.

There first comes the time of action, and then that of contemplation - from this there results the necessity of exercising one's soul in the virtues before amassing into one's bins of repose the results. The soul needs to commit itself with great effort in work, before replenishing one's forces by contemplation. The consideration of the heavenly home permits one to love positively the sufferings and struggles of this world which up until such time, only inspired profound aversion. The bitterness of life become sweet for the believer committed to all this.

f. **The Weighing of Fear**: and this is why that if anyone wishes to raise up to contemplation, such a committed believer must weigh with care the force and the bearing of his/her love. There is need also to evaluate the depths of the fear which penetrates one's soul and which is like the stabilizing anchor of one's heart. In a specific paragraph, Gregory alternates between love and fear, between the motor and the breaks. In contemplation, love stimulates to commitment those who might be nonchalant, and fear fixes in contemplation those souls that might be agitated. Love awakens, fear balances and preserves sensibility of illusion and error.

3. The Mysticism of St. Gregory the Great

Presentation:

[1] It is by asceticism that the soul recovers the capacity of "seeing God", that it would have had, that it could always have without evil and without sin. partially already in this life, in a loving knowledge, totally centered in heaven, human nature is restored under the guidance of the *lumen incircumspectum*.

[2] The "**Mystic of Vision**" St. Gregory the Great is also a "Mystic of Light". There are two schools of tradition with a long history:

- the mystics of the 'light': these were first, Augustine, Gregory and Bernard;
- the mystics of the 'night': these would be Tauler, Ruysbroeck, John of the Cross
- all of these, of the 17th century, were won over by the darkness - *caliginism* - of Pseudo Dennis.

The "obscurity", the darkness of these authors is resolved into light by means of the *sharpness of the mind* - they would attach themselves to an obscure knowledge in a *dark light* - and Gregory would speak of vision' and 'invisible light.' In the Dionysian darkness, the light is intimately associated - the ecstasy of the Areopagite who would blind reason, illumines the superior parts of the spirit.

a. **Images born of Human Love:** as much later would St. Ignatius of Loyola, so also St. Gregory the Great found some difficulties with the nuptial symbolism. Nonetheless, both saints used it very effectively:

[1] **The Canticle of Canticles:** from the opening pages of this *Exposition in the Song of Songs* of St. Gregory, one might get the impression that he did not favor this symbolism. ¶3 underlines the fact that, in order to enflame our hearts to divine love, the Song of Songs has gone to even using relatively vile terms of human love. There is always a bit of pessimism noted in Gregory's writing when he speaks of the human body ¶4 places one, then, on guard when the Saint makes use of the word "machine", a word that is found just above as well. The word used as a kind of "lift" - when used badly it might also crush us rather than raising us spiritually.

A bit further on, St. Gregory states that it is necessary to use this vocabulary of human passion, in order to work on the virtue of impassability. Without any doubt what he is aiming for here is the Greek *apatheia*. These are rather unusual terms from the pen of St. Gregory - in the sense of *constantia*.

[2] **The Church as "Spouse" and the Individual Soul as 'Spouse':** as there exist chants for the various circumstances of public or private life, there are Canticles of Union with God - which one would sing in the solemn circumstance between the Nuptials of the Spouse and his beloved: hence the name, *Canticle of Canticles*. In ¶10, the Husband is the Lord Himself - the Beloved is the wife, the Bride, the Church, in her perfection, and the Angels are admitted to the rank of *companions* [*sodales*] of the spouse, rather than the perfect men in the Church; the followers are those young girls, beginning souls, growing up into ardor through additional efforts. In other words, there are "beginners" and those making progress. However, the summation of these diverse categories constitutes the Bride: all in the group are the Beloved of the Lord, because all in that group are the "Church".

Having said this, the Wife, who, for Gregory, in accord with the whole of the ancient tradition, is first of all, the Church. While it seems almost contradictory, the Beloved is also sometimes implying the individual soul.

In three separate texts Gregory indicates this double sense of the word Spouse, Wife, the Beloved. Thus, generally, by this word, there is indicated the Advent of the Lord in the Church, and also, in a special manner, each soul welcomes the entrance of the Lord into his/her heart, as the coming of the spouse into the wedding chamber. In ¶15, at the beginning, which opens the second part of the development announced in the preceding formula, it is repeated: by this imagery, generally it refers to the whole

Church; but in a special sense, we understand it as applying to each individual soul. Hence, from this there results a certain imprecision of meaning in the thought of the Church as “spouse” - and the individual soul as “spouse”, and sometimes these are juxtaposed. The plan traced by the formulae of introduction the spousal imagery comes eventually to be applied both generally to the Church, and especially to the individual soul.

[3] Spiritual Nuptial Union is expressed in terms of ‘Knowledge’ and ‘Vision’: marital love is not described in terms of union. God reveals Himself to the soul with as much splendor as is delicately and more spiritually sought. This is at one and the same time the privilege and the honor of those who strive to lead a good life, to penetrate profoundly the mysteries of the commandments of God. It is no aid then, that these are already admitted to union, but rather to a more penetrating understanding of the *mandata*. The most beautiful paragraph of this commentary is applied to the first impression - i.e., to the Church, rather than to the individual soul: it is to be noted that sometimes the Lord in Sacred Scripture calls Himself the ‘Lord’, and sometimes the ‘Spouse. For when He wishes to be feared in a salutary manner, He names Himself ‘Lord’; when He wishes to be honored, He calls Himself ‘Father’ - but, when He wishes to be loved, He calls Himself ‘spouse’. In this book of the Song of Songs He is called Lord and His Beloved is the ‘Spouse’ - not, the ‘Lord’ and His ‘Handmaid’ - but, they are named “Husband” and “Wife”. Hence, it is said of the Church: *...I arranged for you to marry Christ so that I might give you away as a chaste virgin to the one husband...* [cf. 2 Co 11:2]. In all of Gregory’s writings, this beautiful verse is only quoted here and it refers to the Church. Of the various citations of Scripture which end this paragraph ¶ 8, five of them speak of the nuptial theme and all of them refer to the Church as the Spouse of Christ.

At the beginning of ¶ 9, Gregory mentions the three kinds of life, moral, natural and contemplative - which the Greeks called ethical, physical and theoretical. Gregory characterizes each one of these ways by a verse from Scripture. He chooses for the contemplative life a verse from Ct 4:8: *... Come from Lebanon, my promised Bride, ... come on your way...* The Saint comments that this expresses the advent of the Lord and His coming into view. The yearning of the contemplative might be noted in this verse: *... On my bed at night, I sought Him Whom my heart loves...* [cf. Ct 3:1]. Thus in his Exposition on Canticles, mysticism is expressed in terms of union, and this “nuptial union” finds its ultimate expression in the vocabulary of “knowledge” and “vision.”

Summary: Love and Knowledge: so, to express divine love Gregory appeals to comparisons with human love but only with the utmost discretion, and prefers to describe this mystical state in terms of *knowledge* and *vision*. For the soul, to know God means to love Him - in this sense it is love that knows. The Saint identifies Love

and Knowledge. This insight calls to mind a basic principle of St. Augustine: whoever knows truth, truly knows it, and whoever knows it, knows eternity. Charity knows truth. This led to the expression *affective knowledge*.

b. Vision of God: 'to see the light', 'to see', in the language of the 4th Gospel, seems to provide the ultimate basis of Gregory's views on contemplation: this life yearns for the principle of seeing and *to see God, is the life of the soul* [St. Gregory of Nyssa].

[1] Clarifications: there is needed some understanding of the expressions bandied about by Sts. Augustine and Gregory: *visio Dei, videre Deum, contemplari Deum, conspiciere*, etc. This "vision" of God is the term commonly used for contemplation here on earth - this is what St. Thomas Aquinas means by *the contemplative life*. St. Gregory is a theologian and so he uses these expressions to indicate above all, the *entire spiritual life on earth*. In strict parlance, the "vision of God" is the term reserved for the beatific life.

It is clear that both the Greek and Latin Fathers did not always use these terms in the full rigor of their meaning, but developed a certain extension of them, for which later theology offers some reservations:

- first, the expression, *the vision of God*, is quite strong - even too strong for modern theology as it leads to confusion. That is why St. Bonaventure hesitates before using the word 'vision.' This metaphorical expression seemed to him to be incompatible with the obscurity of the contemplation promoted by Pseudo-Dennis. Rather, the Seraphic Doctor was very careful not to confound the earthly states of contemplation with the beatific vision - even though he was personally well aware of the very exceptional insights bestowed with the very clear, but transitory view of God granted to the faithful, perhaps a clear forerunner of the final beatific vision.
- secondly, nothing clarifies more than charity, which is the ultimate Christian value. This is permeated with a certain intellectualism that is more of a Hellenistic origin, than truly Christian, with the deep yearning love for God provides here on earth in the contemplation of God, or of the "divine". The interest here, of course, those extraordinary experiences, sometimes provided also for beginners, in a very transitory manner.

[2] Continuity: this limitation for study purposes does not intend to eliminate entirely the consideration of the *visio Dei* that is properly "beatific" and eternal, since Christian love exercised here below, gives us some insight into what

might be that of heaven, since all that is pondered and done with love here on earth is clarified by the revelation shows regarding eternal love. For St. Gregory, from the contemplative life here on earth to the joys of eternity, there is more continuation than rupture. The contemplative life hurries us along towards the vision from this life and leads interiorly from a holy life on earth to the joys of heaven. The life beyond really is not separated from the world where one's conscience is primarily moved by love. This "spiritual" life is to be continued for all eternity, and each analogy perceived between these two levels is therefore one of very great price. There is incomparably much more in the eternal state of the saints than in any privileged instant of ecstasy - however, the former prefigures the latter, as the charity of this earth prepares for the definitive charity of eternity.

[3] Frequency: these reflections are not directly geared toward those extraordinary mystical experiences, since St. Gregory seems to be talking more about the frequent perception of God. The Latin adverb, *saepe*, appears most regularly in the Saint's writings. The *visio Dei* means God as 'seized', 'grasped' or perceived in Faith.

[4] Spiritual Sense: God Himself, therefore, is the object of contemplation, the object of the act of vision. Thus, in the entire work of Gregory, there is clearly a certain tendency: the clear desire of some perception of the Divine, concerning which the teaching about the five spiritual senses, that one might find just about everywhere in the great Saint's writings, gives us some idea - St. John Cassian had already connected the spiritual sense and contemplation. Terms such as: *oculi cordis*, *fidei*, *mentis* - *aures*, *auris cordis* - are very frequent expressions. Hearing and sight are not the only experiences that are noted - there is also spiritual taste - authentic truth has a certain flavor, the soul feeds on it as enjoyable nourishment: *Since we enjoy the incircumscribed taste of truth undergone subtly by means of contemplation* - is a remarkable synthesis the Saint offers of these experiences. Gregory never translates this contemplative perception of his with more modern sounding words such as: *experimentum*, *experientia*, *experiri* - but, rather always in terms based on the sense life of humans, or more generic words such as "perception": *percepire*, *sentire*.

[5] Mens and Ratio: in going to the vocabulary used to designate the spiritual potencies that "grasp... perceive... contemplate" God, it can be noted in a kind of general way that "intellectuality" and "spirituality" are synonyms for Gregory. He did not make the distinction which would be made later in the Middle Ages, based on the earlier teaching of Augustine that there is some distinction between *mens* and *ratio*. The word *ratio*, as contrasted with *mens*, is rarely used. And whenever it is used, *ratio* corresponds to *mens* in its dominating and directing function. When Gregory allegorizes, *ratio* is the mistress of the house, the "lady" who maintains order

in the anarchical turbulence among the domestic servants, the *cogitationes*; it is that faculty which discerns, the *rationis discretio* and which keeps a careful watch, a *rationabilis custodia*.

[6] The “Point” of the Mind: Very often Gregory uses on each page several times the words *mens* - practice in translation shows that this word has in the great Saint the meaning of *soul*. Hence, the *acies mentis* is at one and the same time the *pupil of the mind’s eye*, the gaze of the soul - and, at the same time, the fine point, the high point of the soul.

a.] The “Pupil” and the “Gaze” of the Soul: there would be needed an entire meditation to make the comparison between the physical looking, gazing and what the saint means by the “gaze”, the concentration of the soul. It seems that at the beginning there was an accommodation of the concentration of the eye on the object seen. When that which is to be seen becomes visible, then the exercise of the eye sees it. However, this also takes place because the concentration of one’s look is directed upon the object and thus what is to be seen, is visible - also because the glance of the eye is directed toward it. This rather primitive sounding reality has been studied by great minds since Plato all the way to Descartes. Thus, “the point of the mind” is the experience of one’s faculty of vision concentrating on an object - which is always presupposed. Whenever one actually is seeing, one receives a certain clarification - that, which is to be seen, suddenly comes within the range of vision.

b.] The “High Point” of the Soul: this is the *nous*, the *logos*, influenced by the *pneuma*. This is the “extreme point of the spirit”, capable of reaching out for the One - and is distinguished from the ordinary exercise of the *nous*, which is to think. This the high point of the soul, its “depths”, and this effects the participation in the divine of the human *mens*. The word *anima*, which is less frequent, ought to be translated by the soul. The word most often employed, after *mens*, is the *cor*, often meaning both *mens* and *anima*. This high point of the spirit already turned toward the divine realities is of Augustinian origin. Bonaventure will speak of the *apex affectus* in his *Itinerary of the Mind to God*.

[7] The Identity of the Light and the Divine Essence: this “Light” of which the mystics speak seems to be the divine Truth, in its action upon intelligent creatures, on the human soul, but also on the divine nature itself, revealed and communicated. Gregory will push this distinction in the object of the Beatific Vision between the *claritas Dei* and the *natura Dei* as some of the Greek Fathers distinguished between the *ousia* [meaning nature, essence] and the *doxa*, the clarity of God. However, some of this theologizing does not seem to accord well with this line of Paul:... *the Appearing of*

our Lord Jesus Christ ... whose home is in inaccessible light, whom no man has seen and no man is able to see; to him be honor and everlasting power. Amen! [cf. 1 Tm 6:16].

[8] The Identity in God of 'being' and 'having': Gregory establishes then the identity in God of the "light" [*doxa*] and the "essence" [*ousia*]. The formula that developed from this is: "God is He who has" - He has eternity, the light - but, He is Himself His own light.

[9] The Incircumscriptus Spiritus: this divine Light, divine Truth, divine Nature, is incorporeal. Gregory conceives God evidently, as not falling under one's senses. He is one of those Incorporeal Beings which do not fall under the senses - but this applies also to the angels. They, however, are *circumscribed*. So, God is an *incircumscribed Spirit*. Hence, the invisibility of God is absolute - He cannot be seen, as He is without form, absolutely invisible.

[10] Windows, Clefts, Fissures: in his allegorical commentary on the details of the Temple seen by Ezechiel [cf. cc. 40, ff.], Gregory explains what is to be understood by the *oblique windows* - these are small on the outside, but the light streams through them and enlightens the interior. So, it is with the souls who contemplate - they see only a weak streak of the real Light, and then all seems to dilate. Of course, they can only see but a small portion of what they are looking at. That which they contemplate is eternity, but see practically nothing of its entirety. Receiving the light of the truth as through these small crevices in the outer wall, all seems to them to enlarge. This is in accord with St. Paul: *For our knowledge is imperfect, and our prophesying is imperfect and our prophesying is imperfect, but once perfection comes all imperfect things will disappear*. [cf. 1 Co 13:9]. This image of the *windows* [cf. Ezk 40:16. 22, 25, 29, 33, 36; 41:16, 26] is also developed by Origen in a mystical sense.

[11] Caligo [vapor, mist, fog, thick darkness]: God can be seen as the sun peering through a dense fog. There is some basis in the Psalms [cf. 18:10 - ... *He bent the clouds and came down, a dark cloud under His feet...He soared on the wings of the wind...*]. This concept would be much used by later mystical writers - but, it seems to have been introduced into Latin literature by Gregory. From all this imagery it becomes clear that the Light is not God, even though God IS the Light.

[12] The reverberatio [struck]: contemplation is symbolized by silence: ...*The Angel broke the seventh seal, and there was silence in heaven for about half an hour...* [cf. Rv 8:1]. The Light that is seen by the soul at the end of its elevation, this is the divine nature itself, revealed and communicated - it envelops the soul. The

disproportion is too great between the soul and the divine object - the soul is simply as though struck by lightning. The soul notes its basic incapacity to see the One Who does not know death. Very painful for the soul is its weakness flowing from its unworthiness. Those who will take the risk to contemplate the divine transcendence, without being properly prepared for that by a long exercise of asceticism, are as though knocked down by the weight of the All powerful. The soul becomes more concerned, and centered on God and is brutally separated, as it were, from its own corruptible and demanding flesh - weighed down by those illicit and obscene thoughts that torment it. The Greek verb is found in Wisdom [cf. 9:15:...]: *The exercises of reasoning of mortals are unsure and our intentions unstable; for perishable body presses down the soul, and this tent of clay weighs down the teeming mind..* The terms are reminiscent of Plato, but the metaphor is no less biblical [cf. Jb 4:19; Is 38:12; cf. 2 Co 5:1, 4. The antithesis between body and spirit is elaborated later by St. Paul - cf. Ga 5:17; Rm 7:14-25].

Summary

St. Gregory the Great provides an excellent attempt at early mystical writing - the One Who cannot be seen is presented in terms of "Light" and "vision". The vision of God is that promised in the First Beatitude here finds a culminating application - this is referred to paradoxically, *apophatically*, as the agnosticism of the faith! Later mystics, under the guidance of the exercise of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit - building on the Fathers - have refined even further mystical language. The spiritual influence of St. Gregory the Great has been immense.

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**Excursus I: The “Arcane” – The Mystery of the Sublime Realities,
The Sacred Wonders of God**

- The Christian Reality –

**Commitment to the Catechism of the Catholic Church
A Few Texts**

Introduction: The Cosmos and the Stars

An Ancient Mystery – Unveiled in the Modern Hubble Telescope

A Few Texts

1 In the beginning God created heaven, and earth.

2 And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved over the waters.

*3 And God said: Be light made. And light was made.

*4 And God saw the light that it was good; and he divided the light from the darkness.

5 And he called the light Day, and the darkness Night; and there was evening and morning one day.

*6 And God said: Let there be a firmament made amidst the waters: and let it divide the waters from the waters.

7 And God made a firmament, and divided the waters that were under the firmament, from those that were above the firmament, and it was so.

*8 And God called the firmament, Heaven; and the evening and morning were the second day. [Gn 1]

*5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said to him: Look up to heaven and number the stars, if thou canst. And he said to him: So shall thy seed be. [Gn 15 – many similar tests, comparing the stars and the sands of the sea: cf. also Gn 22:17; Ex 32:13; Dt 1:10; 10:22; 28:62; 1 Ch 27:23; Si 44:13, ff.; Ne 9:23; Hab 11:12]

9 He dreamed also another dream, which he told his brethren, saying: I saw in a dream, as it were the sun, and the moon, and eleven stars worshipping me. [Gn 37: 9]

*3 So as to go and serve strange gods, and adore them, the sun and the moon. and all the host of heaven, which I have not commanded: [Dt 17:3]

19 Then Manue took a kid of the flocks, and the libations, and put them upon a rock, offering to the Lord, who doth wonderful things: and he and his wife looked on... [Jgs 23:19]

*10 And the man that thought a little before he could reach to the stars of heaven, no man could endure to carry, for the intolerable stench. [2 M 9]

*12 Dost not thou think that God is higher than heaven, and is elevated above the height of the stars? [Jb 22]

*5 Behold even the moon doth not shine, and the stars are not pure in his sight. [Job 25]

38 Then the Lord answered Job out of a whirlwind, and said: 2 Who is this that wrappeth up sentences in unskillful words? 3 Gird up thy loins like a man: I will ask thee, and answer thou me. *4 Where wast thou when I laid up the foundations of the earth? tell me if thou hast understanding. 5 Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? 6 Upon what are its bases grounded? or who laid the corner stone thereof, *7 When the morning stars praised me together, and all the sons of God made a joyful melody? [Jb 38]

*4 For I will behold thy heavens, the works of thy fingers: the moon and the stars which thou hast founded. [Ps 8:4]

*Unto the end. A psalm for David. 2 The heavens shew forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of his hands. 3 Day to day uttereth speech, and night to night sheweth knowledge. 4 There are no speeches nor languages, where their voices are not heard. 5 Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth: and their words unto the ends of the world. 6 He hath set his tabernacle in the sun: and he, as a bridegroom coming out of his bride chamber, Hath rejoiced as a giant to run the way: 7 His going out is from the end of heaven, And his circuit even to the end thereof: and there is no one that can hide himself from his heat. 8 The law of the Lord is unspotted, converting souls: the testimony of the Lord is faithful, giving wisdom to little ones. [Ps 19]

*5 And he shall continue with the sun, and before the moon, throughout all generations.

6 He shall come down like rain upon the fleece; and as showers falling gently upon the earth. 7 In his days shall justice spring up, and abundance of peace, till the moon be taken sway. [Ps 72 (71): 5, f.]

*16 Thine is the day, and thine is the night: thou hast made the morning light and the sun. [Ps 73 (74)]

77 Understanding for Asaph. Attend, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. 2 I will open my mouth in parables: I will utter propositions from the beginning. 3 How great things have we heard and known, and our fathers have told us. 4 They have not been hidden from their children, in another generation. *Declaring the praises of the Lord, and his powers, and his wonders which he hath done. 5 And he set up a testimony in Jacob: and made a law in Israel. How great things he commanded our fathers, that they should make the same known to their children: rise up, and declare them to their children. *7 That they may put their hope in God and may not forget the works of God: and may seek his commandments. [Ps 77]

*38 And his throne as the sun before me: and as the moon perfect for ever, and a faithful witness in heaven. [Ps 88].

*4 For a thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday, which is past. And as a watch in the night, [Ps 89]

For David himself. Bless the Lord, O my soul: O Lord my God, thou art exceedingly great. Thou hast put on praise and beauty: *2 And art clothed with light as with a garment. Who stretchest out the heaven like a pavilion: 3 Who coverest the higher rooms thereof with water. *Who makest the clouds thy chariot: who walkest upon the wings of the winds. *4 Who makest thy angels spirits: and thy ministers a burning fire. 5 Who hast founded the earth upon its own bases: it shall not be moved for ever and ever. 6 The deep like a garment is its clothing: above the mountains shall the waters stand. 7 At thy rebuke they shall flee: at the voice of thy thunder they shall fear. [Ps 103 (104)]

*6 Who established the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever. 7 Who made the great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever. 8 The sun to rule over the day: for his mercy endureth for ever. *9 The moon and the stars to rule the night: for his mercy endureth for ever. [Ps 135]

3 Who healeth the broken of heart, and bindeth up their bruises. *4 Who telleth the number of the stars: and calleth them all by their names. *5 Great is our Lord, and great is his power: and of his wisdom there is no number. 6 The Lord lifteth up the meek, and bringeth the wicked down even to the ground. 7 Sing ye to the Lord with praise: sing to our God upon the harp. 8 Who covereth the heaven with clouds, and prepareth rain for the earth. Who maketh grass to grow on the mountains, and herbs for the service of men. [Ps 146].

*148 Praise ye the Lord from the heavens: praise ye him in the high places. 2 Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. *3 Praise ye him, O sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars and light. 4 Praise him, ye heavens of heavens: and let all the waters that are above the heavens 5 Praise the name of the Lord. For he spoke, and they were made: he commanded, and they were created. *6 He hath established them for ever, and for ages of ages: he hath made a decree, and it shall not pass away. [Ps 148]

*10 For the stars of heaven, and their brightness shall not display their light: the sun shall be darkened in his rising, and the moon shall not shine with her light. [Is 13]

12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, who didst rise in the morning? how art thou fallen to the earth, that didst wound the nations? *13 And thou saidst in thy heart: I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will sit in the mountain of the covenant, in the sides of the north. 14 I will ascend above the height of the clouds, I will be like the most High. 15 But yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, into the depth of the pit. [Is 14]

*26 And the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days: in the day when the Lord shall bind up the wound of his people, and shall heal the stroke of their wound. [Is 30]

*19 Thou shalt no more have the sun for thy light by day, neither shall the brightness of the moon enlighten thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee for an everlasting light, and thy God for thy glory. [Is 60:19]

*2 And they shall spread them abroad to the sun, and the moon, and all the host of heaven, whom they have loved, and whom they have served, and after whom they have walked, and whom they have sought, and adored: they shall not be gathered, and they shall not be buried: they shall be as dung upon the face of the earth. [Jr 8:2]

*35 Thus saith the Lord, who giveth the sun for the light of the day, the order of the moon and of the stars, for the light of the night: who stirreth up the sea, and the waves thereof roar, the Lord of hosts is his name. [Jr 31]

*34 And the stars have given light in their watches, and rejoiced: [Ba 3]

*59 The sun, and the moon, and the stars being bright, and sent forth for profitable uses, are obedient. [Ba 6: 59, f....] 60 In like manner the lightning, when it breaketh forth, is easy to be seen: and after the same manner the wind bloweth in every country.

61 And the clouds when God commandeth them... [Ba 6]

29 Thou, O king, didst begin to think in thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth mysteries shewed thee what shall come to pass. *30 To me also this secret is revealed, not by any wisdom that I have more than all men alive: but that the interpretation might be made manifest to the king, and thou mightest know the thoughts of thy mind of the God of heaven concerning this secret, and that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon...*47 And the king spoke to Daniel, and said: Verily your God is the God of gods, and Lord of kings, and a revealer of hidden things: seeing thou couldst discover this secret. [Dn 2.]

51 Then these three as with one mouth praised, and glorified, and blessed God in the furnace, saying:

52 Blessed art thou, O Lord the God of our fathers: and worthy to be praised, and glorified, and exalted above all for ever: and blessed is the holy name of thy glory: and worthy to be praised, and exalted above all in all ages.

*53 Blessed art thou in the holy temple of thy glory: and exceedingly to be praised, and exceeding glorious for ever.

54 Blessed art thou on the throne of thy kingdom, and exceedingly to be praised, and exalted above all for ever.

55 Blessed art thou, that beholdest the depths, and sittest upon the cherubims: and worthy to be praised and exalted above all for ever.

*56 Blessed art thou in the firmament of heaven: and worthy of praise, and glorious for ever.

*57 All ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever.

58 O ye angels of the Lord, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever.

59 O ye heavens, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever.

60 O all ye waters that are above the heavens, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all for ever.

61 O all ye powers of the Lord, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever.

*62 O ye sun and moon, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever.

63 O ye stars of heaven, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever.

64 O every shower and dew, bless ye the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever.

65 O all ye spirits of God, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever.

66 O ye fire and heat, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever.

67 O ye cold and heat, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever.

68 O ye dews and hoar frosts, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever.

69 O ye frost and cold, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever.

70 O ye ice and snow, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever.

*71 O ye nights and days, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever.

*72 O ye light and darkness, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever. [Dn 3]

4 Though thou be exalted as an eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars: thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord. [Ob 1]

*16 Thou hast multiplied thy merchandises above the stars of heaven: the bruchus hath spread himself and flown away. [Na 1]

39 The wise men will seek out the wisdom of all the ancients, and will be occupied in the prophets.
 2 He will keep the sayings of renowned men, and will enter withal into the subtitles of parables.
 3 He will search out the hidden meanings of proverbs, and will be conversant in the secrets of parables. 4 He shall serve among great men, and: appear before the governor. 5 He shall pass into strange countries: for he shall try good and evil among men. 6 He will give his heart to resort early to the Lord that made him, and he will pray in the sight of the most High. 7 He will open his mouth in prayer, and will make supplication for his sins. 8 For if it shall please the great Lord, he will fill him with the spirit of understanding: 9 And he will pour forth the words of his wisdom as showers, and in his prayer he will confess to the Lord. 10 And he shall direct his counsel, and his knowledge, and in his secrets shall he meditate. 11 He shall shew forth the discipline he hath learned, and shall glory in the law of the covenant of the Lord. *12 Many shall praise his wisdom, and it shall never be forgotten. 13 The memory of him shall not depart away, and his name shall be in request from generation to generation. 14 Nations shall declare his wisdom, and the church shall shew forth his praise. [Si 39]

*43 The firmament on high is his beauty, the beauty of heaven with its glorious shew. *2 The sun when he appeareth shewing forth at his rising, an admirable instrument, the work of the most High.

*3 At noon he burneth the earth, and who can abide his burning heat? As one keeping a furnace in the works of heat: 4 The sun three times as much, burneth the mountains, breathing out fiery vapours, and shining with his beams, he blindeth the eyes.

5 Great is the Lord that made him, and at his words he hath hastened his course. [Sirach]

*6 And the moon in all in her season, is for a declaration of times and a sign of the world. *7 From the moon is the sign of the festival day, a light that decreaseth in her perfection. *8 The month is called after her name, increasing wonderfully in her perfection. *9 Being an instrument of the armies on high, shining gloriously in the Armament of heaven.

*10 The glory of the stars is the beauty of heaven; the Lord enlighteneth the world on high. *11 By the words of the holy one they shall stand in judgment, and shall never fail in their watches.

*12 Look upon the rainbow, and bless him that made it: it is very beautiful in its brightness. *13 It encompasseth the heaven about with the circle of its glory, the hands of the most High have displayed it.

*14 By his commandment he maketh the snow to fall apace, and sendeth forth swiftly the lightnings of his judgment. 15 Through this are the treasures opened, and the clouds fly out like birds. *16 By his greatness he hath fixed the clouds, and the hailstones are broken.

17 At his sight shall the mountains be shaken, and at his will the south wind shall blow. 18 The noise of his thunder shall strike the earth, so doth the northern storm, and the whirlwind: 19 And as the birds lighting upon the earth, he scattereth snow, and the falling thereof, is as the coming down of locusts. 20 The eye admireth at the beauty of the whiteness thereof, and the heart is astonished at the shower thereof. [Sirach 43].

*2 Before the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars be darkened, and the clouds return after the rain: [Qo 12:2]

17 For he hath given me the true knowledge of the things that are: to know the disposition of the whole world, and the virtues of the elements, *18 The beginning, and ending, and midst of the times, the alterations of their courses, and the changes of seasons, *19 The revolutions of the year, and the dispositions of the stars, [Ws 7] ...28 For God loveth none but him that dwelleth with wisdom. *29 For she is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of the stars: being compared with the light, she is found before it. 30 For after this cometh night, but no evil can overcome wisdom. [Ws 7]

13 1 But all men are vain, in whom there is not the knowledge of God: and who by these good things that are seen, could not understand him that is, neither by attending to the works have acknowledged who was the workman: *2 But have imagined either the fire, or the wind, or the swift air, or the circle of the stars, or the great water, or the sun and moon, to be the gods that rule the world. 3 With whose beauty, if they, being delighted, took them to be gods: let them know how much the Lord of them is more beautiful than they: for the first author of beauty made all those things. 4 Or if they admired their power and their effects, let them understand by them, that he that

made them, is mightier than they: *5 For by the greatness of the beauty, and of the creature, the creator of them may be seen, so as to be known thereby. [Ws 13]

*5 And no power of fire could give them light, neither could the bright flames of the stars enlighten that horrible night. [Ws 17]

NT

2 When Jesus therefore was born in Bethlehem of Juda, in the days of king Herod, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem. *2. Saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to adore him. 3 And king Herod hearing this, was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And assembling together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born. 5 But they said to him: In Bethlehem of Juda. For so it is written by the prophet:

of thee shall come forth the captain that shall rule my people Israel.

*7 Then Herod, privately calling the wise men, learned diligently of them the time of the star which appeared to them; 8 And sending them into Bethlehem, said: Go and diligently inquire after the child, and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I also may come to adore him. 9 Who having heard the king, went their way; and behold the star which they had seen in the east, went before them, until it came and stood over where the child was. *10 And seeing the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. [Mt 2]

*25 At that time Jesus answered and said: I confess to thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to the little ones. [Mt 11:25]

11 Who answered and said to them: Because to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven: but to them it is not given... [Mt 13]

*25 And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, by reason of the confusion of the roaring of the sea and of the waves; 26 Men withering away for fear, and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world. *For the powers of heaven shall be moved; 27 And then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with great power and majesty. [Lk 21]

*20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and manifest day of the Lord come. [Ac 2]

25 For I would not have you ignorant, brethren, of this mystery, (lest you should be wise in your own conceits), that blindness in part has happened in Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles should come in. [Rm 11]

4 Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God. [1 Co 4:1].

2 And if I should have prophecy and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. [1 Co 13:2]

2 For he that speaketh in a tongue, speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man heareth. Yet by the Spirit he speaketh mysteries. [1 Co 14:2]

*41 One is the glory of the sun, another the glory of the moon, and another the glory of the stars. For star differeth from star in glory. [1 Co 15: 41]

*to his saints [Col 1:26]

2 Be instant in prayer; watching in it with thanksgiving:

*3 Praying withal for us also, that God may open unto us a door of speech to speak the mystery of Christ (for which also I am bound... Col 4))

15 That you may be blameless, and sincere children of God, without reproof, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation; among whom you shine as lights in the world. [Ph 2]

4 As you reading, may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ [Ep 3:4]

19 And for me, that speech may be given me, that I may open my mouth with confidence, to make known the mystery of the gospel.

20 For which I am an ambassador in a chain, so that therein I may be bold to speak according as I ought. [Ep 6]

*13 Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own confusion; wandering stars, to whom the storm of darkness is reserved for ever. [Jude 1].

*16 And he had in his right hand seven stars. And from his mouth came out a sharp two edged sword: and his face was as the sun shineth in his power. 17 And when I had seen him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying: Fear not. I am the First and the Last, 18 And alive, and was dead, and behold I am living for ever and ever, and have the keys of death and of hell. 19 Write therefore the things which thou hast seen, and which are, and which must be done hereafter. *20 The mystery of the seven stars, which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches. And the seven candlesticks are the seven churches. [Rv. 1]

*2 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write: These things saith he, who holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks: [Rv 2]

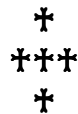
*3 And to the angel of the church of Sardis, write: These things saith he, that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast the name of being alive: and thou art dead. [Rv 3]

12 And I saw, when he had opened the sixth seal, and behold there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair: and the whole moon became as blood: [Rv. 6]

*12 And the fourth angel sounded the trumpet, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars, so that the third part of them was darkened, and the day did not shine for a third part of it, and the night in like manner. [Rv 8].

*12 And a great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars: [Rv 12]

*23 And the city hath no need of the sun, nor of the moon, to shine in it. For the glory of God hath enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof. [Rv. 21]



THE “ARCANE” IN CHRISTIAN INITIATION ⁵

[1] St. Cyril of Jerusalem, in his first of its kind Church Catechism, right after the *exordium*, and his exhortations that all might proceed toward Baptism with the right intention, turns to each one of his potential readers, saying:

“Consider well the great dignity that Christ grants you. You will have been called up to this time, a ‘catechumen’, since you have been addressed with words as an ‘outsider’. Now, though, you will hear one speaking of hope, and yet you will see nothing; hints will be made to you regarding the mysteries of which you will comprehend nothing; you will listen to the reading of holy books, but you have not arrived yet in understanding their depth. Yet, you are no longer enveloped by mere external sounds, that you will hear this echo within. The Holy Spirit, dwelling within you from now on, will make of your mind a divine dwelling. When you hear that which has been written about the mysteries, you will grasp that of which you before you were ignorant.

Therefore the Holy Spirit dictates precise norms regarding the law of the *arcane* to which the catechesis to the baptized was subject. He then continues:

... should some catechumen ask you what the masters have said to you, do not refer anything to outsiders. We entrust to you a mystery and the hope of the future life. Guard this mystery for the One Who will give you your reward. Do not let anyone say to you: ‘What harm would there be should I too, come to know this?’

⁵ Vincenzo RECCHIA, *Gregorio Magno – Papa ed esegeta biblico*. Bari: Invigilata Lucernis 1996, pp. 675-705

Even those who are ill may ask for wine; but if this is given to them inopportunately, it can easily produce frenzied action from which may result to further evils: the death of the sick person, and the wrath of his doctor. The same can happen to the catechumen, who hears something from one of the Faithful: he too might become frenzied [in fact he does not comprehend that which he hears, he may even laugh at sublime truth, and takes the one speaking to him for a ride), and the faithful who told the secret is considered as a traitor.

Now stay within the limits imposed on you, and you will keep yourself from talking too freely: all this is not because that which would be shared is not worthy of being divulged, but rather because the one who hears you is not capable of receiving your message.

You, too, once were a catechumen and we did not say to you that which we now expose to you; when through experience you will grasp the sublime nature of the truths that will be taught to you, and then you will give an account that the catechumens are not on the level of listening to it.

a. Regarding the disciple of the *arcane*, St. Cyril returns again explicitly in the course of his Catechetical Homilies again: in the 5th, which prepares the catechumens for the Handing over of the Symbol, the Saint – after having reminded all that the Church reassumes in the Symbol the content of Sacred Scripture, for those who do not have the possibility or the capacity to read the sacred texts, proceeds in this way: ‘Such dogma I wish that you would learn by memory of the letter and to recite it with every care one to another, without writing it, but engraving it into your hearts by memory, striving that none among the catechumens should hear that which I have entrusted to you.

b. In the 6th catechesis, St. Cyril comments on these texts:

7 In the word of truth, in the power of God; by the armour of justice on the right hand and on the left [1 CO 6]

2 And the Pharisees seeing them, said to him: Behold thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days.

3 But he said to them: Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and they that were with him [Mt 12].

Revelation makes known that God blinds the thought of unbeliever not because the Lord’s light [like that of the sun], does not blind one. The problem is that before the mysteries we are all like ‘*pipistrelli*’, bats that are **blinded by ordinary sunlight** – the believe cannot comprehend the revealed word. All may indeed hear the word – but the

“Hearer of the Word” must also respond to grace – therefore the full meaning of the revealed words only to the believers: ***gnosis*** – also an experience of the Lord. Thus, Cyril adds: these mysteries of which the Church eventually makes known to those who come forward out of the group of the initial catechumens, it is not her custom to manifest this Truth to non-believers. It was not the custom in those earlier times to treat of the mysteries which pertain to those mysteries which relate the mystery of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – nor with the catechumens the Church did not treat directly of those matters which pertain to the mysteries.

c. Many things are said secretly, since those in the “know”, i.e., the Faithful Believers, comprehend, and those who do not know these inner deeper aspects of the revealed truth are ignorant of these, but suffer no harm as a result – as they are not required to know them until the initiation is complete, and developed through life. Let us take note of Cyril’s 18th Catechesis, to be shared prior to announcing the ***mystagogy***:

[2] Catechesis and Liturgy

CCC 1074 "The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the font from which all her power flows." It is therefore **the privileged place for catechizing the People of God.**

"Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of men."

CCC 1075 Liturgical catechesis aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ (It is "**mystagogy**."") by **proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the "sacraments" to the "mysteries."**

Such catechesis is to be presented by local and regional catechisms. This Catechism, which aims to serve the whole Church in all the diversity of her rites and cultures, will present what is fundamental and common to the whole Church in the liturgy as mystery and as celebration, and then the seven sacraments and the sacramentals.

Prior to this, there is a hint made of **the further instructions** that would be given to the Baptized regarding the Mysteries – but, in that era, **only on Easter Night.**

[3] **The Role of an Ordered Catechetical Instruction:** In those early times regarding the Disciple and the ***Arcane***, there was a reference made to ***the testimony for the Lector***. This was omitted in some Codices, but it was usually shared at **the end of the**

Proto-catechesis. In this it was noted that **the written redaction of the Catechesis** is only for the **Faithful, and those to be illuminated**. In absolute manner it was not given to the catechumens or to the Unbelievers. Even though there is some doubt among scholars that the Christians were not allowed to divulge the text of the Catechesis even to the **competent**, i.e., among those who were not spiritually prepared to receive them.

a. The **Arcane** is attested to by the patristic tradition of the first centuries. In recent research, after there would be some information shared relative to the various elements of the faith and worship, for whom a specific mention is made to the **Arcane**, we can see the motives which according to these early Fathers, justify this practice. These are interior motivations, and they pertain to the **spiritual attitude** of those to be initiated – and also external, of a **disciplinary level**. The testimonies of the ancient liturgical tradition will confirm all that the early Father state in their works.

b. The **Arcane** brought about a ritual **“separation” between the Faithful Believers and those not yet baptized, the Un-believers, or catechumens.** As a phenomenon bound to the schools of the Catechumenate, it tended to disappear little by little **as Christianity became the common and traditional religion**. There was created, then, an aura of this **Arcane** within the Christian community, **bound to the process of initiation to intimate an ever more intense union with God**. The individual rites bound to the ancient discipline of the **Arcane** remained in the liturgy, as an appeal made to each one’s interior life and to the deepening of all in the colloquy with God.

[4] The Law of the **arcane** comprehended the **Liturgy of Christian Initiation, the Eucharistic Liturgy** and in a special way, the **Our Father, the Creed**.

a. The expression, **the Faithful know**, is an expression that is rather frequent in the homilies of St. Augustine and other Fathers. With regard to the **arcane**, the lament that St. John Chrysostom expresses in his first Letter to Pope Innocent regarding the profanation of his Church on Holy Saturday in the year 404 at Constantinople. He describes for the Pope the great disturbance of the Clergy of the invasion of rude soldiers into the temple, and the mis-treatment of the women who fled from the Baptistry, and the blood-tainted baptismal waters. All of this brings out dramatically that crude soldiers had dared to enter into that part of the temple in which **the Eucharistic species were retained**. All of this brought to the saint an

authentic horror that among these soldiers there were those who were not initiated into the Christian Mysteries, upon whom the Blood of Christ had been shed.⁶

b. The Saint would write on another occasion, that there was a chalice which was not offered from person to person, **but the King of Heaven Himself places in our hands**: this tremendous chalice, full of power, more precious than every creature – **which nonetheless only the initiated know of it, and which those to be illuminated, will come to know.**

c. The Eucharist is, according to Origen, a Sacrament **known experienced only by those who have been drawn forth by it**, and this cannot be manifested to those who are ignorant of it. [**Hom IX in Lev. – Hom 13, 3**], Or as may be found in the words of St. Augustine, a sacrament which **only the Faithful know** while those called the **listeners** only hear of it [Sermon 131, 1]. This is a matter of the manna which God had shower down from heaven **only on the baptized believing**, of which the catechumens are ignorant, to their shame because they have preferred to remain on the far side of the Red Sea [Tr. in Job, II, 4]. As for the Eucharist as a Sacrament, the **Arcane** at times is extended to the Last Supper, even though regarding this unique event, at St. John Chrysostom put, of necessity it must be spoken of – or to that **priesthood according to the order of Melchisedech**, unknown to the Jews [Enarr. in Ps 109, 17].

d. A particular care was given to enveloping in secrecy other **liturgical gestures**. When Origen commented on **Nb 4:18, ff. [19 But do this to them, that they may live, and not die, by touching the holies of holies. Aaron and his sons shall go in, and they shall appoint every man his work, and shall divide the burdens that every man is to carry. 20 Let not others by any curiosity see the things that are in the sanctuary before they be wrapped up, otherwise they shall die.]** – where the text speaks of **the various offices** assigned to the individual clans of the tribe of Levi, in transporting the Tabernacle and the sacred objects across the desert, there was diffused even more the **Law of the Arcane** into the Judaic and Christian world. The altar and the sacred utensils had to be diligently covered before being entrusted to those officials entrusted with their transport [**Nb 4:13-15: 10 And over all they shall put a cover of violet skins and put in the bars. 11 And they shall wrap up the golden altar also in a cloth of violet, and shall spread over it a cover of violet skins, and put in the bars. 12 All the vessels wherewith they minister in the sanctuary, they shall wrap up in a cloth of violet, and shall spread over it a cover of violet skins, and put in the**

⁶ St. John Chrysostom: ... Select Homilies and Letters..... *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Vol IX [re-print] 1996 Clark/ Eerdmans, pp. 310, ff.

bars. 13 They shall cleanse the altar also from the ashes, and shall wrap it up in a purple cloth, 14 And shall put it with all the vessels that they use in the ministry thereof, that is to say, fire pans, flesh hooks and forks, pothooks and shovels. They shall cover all the vessels of the altar **together with a covering of violet skins, and shall put in the bars.** 15 And when Aaron and his sons have wrapped up the sanctuary and the vessels thereof at the removing of the camp, then shall the sons of Caath enter in to carry the things wrapped up: and they shall not touch the vessels of the sanctuary, lest they die...].

e. There was some particular emphasis laid upon those sacred items entrusted to the clan of the Kehatiti, because if any one among them even for an instant did so much as cast a glance toward those precious sacred objects that they were transporting, they would be struck dead! Only Moses, as Origen clarified, was cognizant of the profound motive for the mysteries that were typically pre-announced in the ritual of the **circumcision**, of the **New Moons**, the **Pasch**, the **Azymes** and of the **Sabbath**.

f. Also only Aaron and his sons were permitted to enter by a way not permitted to any others, while the *initiates* had to carry on their shoulders the weight of the sacred objects – they had to carry out the divine orders, even though they did not comprehend at any depth the reason for what they were obliged to do.

g. These same precautions to some extent were carried over into the **Church**. As Origen points out, the motives for genuflections, for example, and that practice of turning toward the east in prayer, the meaning of the liturgical formulae, the sacred gestures, all the ceremonies regarding **Baptism** and the **Eucharist** – there was no one who could understand them all without some difficulty. When we perform all these without coming to grasp the reason for them, we bear on our own shoulders the divine mysteries shrouded and enveloped, at least as with Aaron or his sons, were not with us. It was to these alone to see all these sacred objects uncovered and bare. Furthermore, even they could do all this only on condition that they might understand well their duty of revering all the sacred objects with a veil, when the time had come to hand over the bearing of these objects to those assigned for this task.

h. A 5th century writer describes the scene of the Catechesis to **those being initiated [iniziandi]** of that era in Jerusalem. The catechumens, after the exorcisms carried out by the priests, after 40 days of fasting, they all gathered around the Bishop's Chair, who explained to them **in a carnal and spiritual manner**, for five weeks, the Scriptures. In the 6th week, the explanation of the **Symbol** began with **those to be**

baptized there were also their god-mothers and fathers, and those among the people they had invited, provided they were among the Faithful.

i. Also the **Pater** was enshrouded by the Veil of the **Arcane**. Be most attentive, as St. Ambrose wrote, not to divulge the mysteries of the **Symbol**, or of the **Pater**. The **Lord's Prayer** could only be offered for the first time by the neo-baptized only on coming up out of the Baptismal Font. St. John Chrysostom recalls the ecclesiastical laws in this regard. [Hom 19, in Mt 5]. The **Creed**, then, had to be memorized, without it being written down, this was so that it would become the object of the daily meditation, and also to avoid running the risk that a copy of it might be picked up and read by those not initiated [Ambrose, **Explan. In Symb.** 9].

[5] With their simple attestations regarding the **Arcane**, there would be illustrated by many of the Fathers, the reasons behind all this legislation. The practice was a **gradual deepening of experiential knowledge and of love, matured in the coherence of one's works**. The knowledge of the **thought of God**, accompanied by the **uniformity to His will**, for St. Gregory of Nyssa, produces in one's spirit **the effect of light in a dark cavern**. [**Illumination**]. Clarity intensified more and more as one the more in depth approached the **Luminous Font**.

a. **St. Augustine**, in speaking of the recognition of Christ by the Disciples on the Road to Emmaus, states that their knowledge through Faith can be susceptible to further development and intensification through the intuition of the believing heart. Only a **believer** can arrive at this **intuition**, while the catechumen is not yet capable of it. [Aug., *Serm.* 222, 7]. The words which Jesus used to exhort them to eat of His flesh and to drink of His Blood, only the Fatherful can hear them – the catechumens might hear such words but they would not be able to **hear them through experience**. Such a situation refers to those under Instruction as **Hearers**.

b. **St. Ambrose** exposes to the **Baptized** the reasoning behind that which is brought about in the Sacraments of Christian Initiation. It is not proper to provide this teaching before Baptism: Christians may be called the **Faithful** because **they are meant to grasp through faith, before the fathom the depths of the teachings behind these liturgical gestures** [*De Sacram.* I, 1].

c. **Tertullian** in his *De Baptismo*, addresses himself only to those who **bear in depth their Christian formation** – both to those who content themselves in believing, and **not fathoming to the depths that which has been transmitted to them**, and such as these live with a knowledge typified perhaps by lip-service because of their lack of religious expertise. The **Catechumens, newly introduced**, begin “to irrigate

their ears with the divine discourses", and they are like little puppies that have just been born. Their eyes are not yet completed opened, and they spend some time simply stretched out on the ground. When their eyes are opened the future Believers **become more sure in their steps through penance**, enter into a life of some real penance.

d. **Origen** makes some reference to the **image of food** which has to be adequate for the age of the person. The moral instruction in the Scriptures is compared to **milk** that is given to those who begin to walk on the path of Christianity, as with babies. With those disciples who are already at the beginnings of the process one may not yet begin to speak of the profound and more mysteries – but it is necessary to treat of their conduct, moral conceptions, their tenor of religious living, and of the prime elements of the revealed faith. For those who like treatment contrary to this first nourishment, such as a life of luxury, avarice, and libido. For such as these, in trying to provide any instruction on the Recognition of Jesus, it would be more like giving **wine** to a sick person. [Hom. In Jgs, 6, 6].

e. **The plunging to the depths of these faith-matters** can only happen through meditation which renders the **Thought of God** familiar and more comprehensible con-natural. This is all summarized in the **Symbol** and the *Our Father*. **St. Gregory of Nyssa** loved to repeat the Words of the **Pater**, because for him in their **frequent repetition** one would arrive at noticing the **first stages of comprehending, the deeper sense of the thoughts hidden in them**.

f. **St. Augustine** [*De Fide et Sym.*, 1] refers, following in the footsteps of Origen to the image of **food**: as to infants and those still being breast-fed, to those who are just baptized and are **not yet robust from that most diligent and spiritual familiarity and knowledge of sacred Scripture**, there is entrusted the **Symbol** which **includes the divine doctrine** to which others more advanced, might turn in humility and in the firmness of their charity. The **Symbol** is a synthesis, a summary, summa, of the Scriptures and this must be prayed both in the morning and the evening, just as at. Gregory of Nyssa taught regarding the *Our Father*.

g. The **Arcane** is a question of that knowledge which is not so much the fruit of solely that intellectual deepening, but much more it is that frequent re-thinking that commits the whole person along the line of genuine love and of the sacrificial gift of oneself. Hence, there is much justified insistence on the concept of **purification** in order for one to approach authentically the **Arcane**. Baptism insures the remission of sins, but in the cases of adult converts, some personal penance should precede the reception of the Sacrament. It is God Himself Who provides the

recompense of pardon. God is careful of His resources as would be the vendor along the way. The time of Penance is precisely that of preparation for Baptism. With this injunction, there is no desire to deny, or lessen the power of Baptism, but rather clearly indicate the manner of reaching the gift from God. Who can offer the *asperges* for anyone who does not repent?

h. God takes care of His treasures keeping it from thieves and from those who would strive to deceive Him with empty promises. It is only when one becomes robust with the nourishment of penance, will one ever able to lift up a Canticle to God as Deborah did [cf. Origen, Hom 6 in Jgs 3]. Anyone who respectfully approaches the sacred and terrible mysteries, it is so necessary that such a person be vigilant, free from every worldly concern, endowed with temperance and a **clear alacrity for good**.

i. Moses, prior to introducing the people entrusted to him to the **Mystagogy of the Mountain**, demanded the purification present in chastity and then fulfilled the ritual of aspersion with the water. And this revealed incident concerned simply a theophany of God, and not any **direct contact with God, as does take place in Christian prayer**. Otherwise, we would be trying to put up a construction on shifting sands and the structure would inevitably collapse. No one should rationalize that it would be all right for him to sin, simply because he has now be admitted among the number of those **hearing God's word** – just the first step. The **Baptismal Bath presupposes the interior purification that is achieved in the heart of catechumens with penance: this is the first immersion, to which every Christian is called**. The *Hearers* of initial instructions should desire, but not presume baptism.

j. The *Arcane* is the safeguard for intimacy in prayer – for Christians this is described as a family conversation with the Heavenly Father. This presupposes **the communion of the divine life and the harmony of thoughts and choices between believers and God**. For this reason, the *Our Father* is the pray that only the full-fledged Christian would offer. This exclusivity favor the Baptized is first of all a problem of coherence between word and life. St. Augustine, in his *Faith and Works*, confutes the error of those who choose to admit of those who wanted to admit to Baptism even those who lived licentious lives, with the pretext that moral doctrine might be then transmitted after the Baptismal Bath, from the instant that one's faith is saved.

k. The calling God genuinely as **Father** in the *Our Father*, implies **a profound appreciation of the divine attributes and our conformity to these**. This is a question of **a family relationship with God** who simply cannot be the Father of one choosing to be evil, one who is contaminated with self-indulgence. First of all, one cannot conduct a life of the high and the mighty, but yet the Faithful are called to be committed to a

sublime and lofty way of life. They are called to be open to a mystical elevation, as one such as would raise one above the attachments of this earth – striving ever toward the star-lit skies above, and to avoid anything that could surreptitiously induce a weakening of these bold choices.

l. As for authentic intimacy with God, this can only happen when one has gone through a demanding and somewhat lengthy “tertian-ship”, formation period, of **loving in a loving manner**. St. Ambrose offers his commentary on these words from Sgs 4:12: **12 My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up**. The Saint explains that the Mystery should remain within the Christian inviolate from any immoral conduct, and from any communication concerning it with those ***not initiated*** as yet - as well as from the garrulous busy-bodies gabbing without any faith. Your guardianship of your faith needs to be protected, so that there be preserved unbroken the integrity of one’s life and silence.

m. The **Symbol**, too, ought to be the object of the daily continuous meditation and formula of prayer. For this indeed as a **Compendium, Summary, Synopsis of Sacred Scripture** in which **God, by means of the Prophets, speaks to humanity so that human beings might learn to respond** – this is the trajectory on which there is initiated that **some conversation** between the Father and His children might get underway. In any event, in disturbances, in temptations, in all un-well feeling, in illness - one might repeat while meditating attentively on the words of the Creed, and salvation might be achieved. Thus, the **Symbol**, too, is subject to the **Law of the Arcane**: in this context Ambrose continues in his treatment of the Creed: Enter very deeply within your self. And why is this so? So that you might make a habit of this practice so that you will be looked upon as the reliable one where there are members of the **Faithful**, as you undertake the task of forming the **Catechumens**, or as you **take on the heretics**.

n. The **Arcane**, beyond its **requirements of prayer**, there is bound **the practice of solitude**, which is **a requirement for any intimacy of love**. Only after a solid foundation of love, St. Augustine observes, can one **pierce the darkness and the clouds of the Mystery**. As the old Dominicans would say: **one cannot love what he does not know** – and the Franciscans might add: **and one can never know deeply unless he loves!** It is clear that **when one does love, from whatever one knows, when this is known in the strength of love, there is much deepened experiential knowledge – to “know” Christ Jesus is to experience personally His Passion and Death, Resurrection and Ascension**. This can increase, intensify, deepen until fulfillment in the Beatific Vision, when God is known as He is.

o. Origen comments on this leading passage: Gn 49:11 [... ***He shall wash his robe in wine, and his garment in the blood of the grape***] distinguishes his ‘robe’ [stole] which is the most external clothing and the **amice**, which is more intimate. Those who are baptized put on the **robe** of Christ Jesus – while those who are finally admitted to the Sacrament of the Eucharistic Blood have become **participants in the most holy and the most intimate covering**, which is called the amice here. Once experienced and coming to know the power of the Blood of Christ, all the stronger does the soul become, and the more pure in this **Daily Bath of Progress in divine knowledge, uniting oneself to God** – this is not only some intimate garment, personal, but even more this will make of each fervent believer **one sole spirit with Him**. The **Arcane** is the Law made for the catechumen who is not yet **initiated** into the mystery, and for the Faithful person for the safe-guarding of intimacy in relationships with God. **Every deepening of a thought of Faith, according to this mentality of the ancients, is an elevation of one’s life.**

p. In the itinerary toward intimacy with God it is evident that the Church believes in the **arcane** - of which **non-believers have no ‘experience’**, as in faith they are not yet capable to seeking for this realm. St. John Chrysostom offers a kind of acerbic commentary on ‘not giving holy things to the dogs, nor pearls to the swine’ [cf. Mt 3] – held that **the mysteries are celebrated behind closed doors [as in the Eastern tradition still behind the screen]**. This was never intended as a punishment of the non-initiated for their weaknesses or lack of sufficient spiritual acumen, but for the simple reasons that **their intellects have not yet been illumined by Baptism**. Even when the catechumens and fully initiated baptized are members of the same family circle, the catechumens and initiated “Faithful” are totally distinct in the spiritual realm. Texts used to support this would be like these: ***I still have much to say to you, but you cannot bear that now*** [cf. also Jb 16:22] - In Gregory’s Commentary on Job, he maintained that **some disciples did not yet have a peaceful spirit for the reception of such sublime mysteries**.

[6] Along with the gathered motives that shed some light on the itinerary of the interior life there might be added those external reason of safeguard: emulation, the necessary distinction among the faithful between the catechumens and those your yet among the “Faithful”, **fully immersed in ecclesiastical teaching and discipline**.

a. St. Gregory of Nyssa addressed himself who are distinguished between the reception of it, and the lack of it - stated that some of the non-initiated experienced embarrassment – in that they were not yet “Faithful” despite their advanced years. They considered themselves as children, if not infants, not yet exposed nor not yet capable of pondering the **arcane**. He, therefore exhorted the

catechumens to unite themselves to the Mystical People, in order to understand the words which still remained hidden to them, to sing the hymns of the Seraphim with all the perfect Christians, to desire that Bread of the Altar and that of Divine Word that would invigorate their interior spirit – and that specially Consecrated Wine that brought joy to the hearts of the believers, and this led them to digest the mystery that rejuvenated them.

b. St. Augustine hinted at that **Manna** which Christ gives to the baptized, and continues: it is known that this rained down from heaven and the **catechumens had no experience as yet of that which the Christians were receiving**. These non-initiated were somewhat embarrassed because they did not yet know this **experience**. After eating the manna in the desert, they crossed the red Sea, and as they eventually came to believe in the Name of Jesus, so did Jesus also come to believe in them, to have confidence in them.

c. Emulation enkindles desire. Tertullian, speaking of penance, stated that this has as its purpose to put to an end all desire for earthly, worldly realities. This custom tends to remain in the soul, as the fruit especially useful for that period in which one begins to feel old in harshness and bitterness, while maintaining nonetheless the sweetness of one's own nature. It is this which enkindles the desire for heavenly things.

d. St. Augustine states that the sacraments of the faithful are withheld from the catechumens, not only because the non-initiated are not capable of properly grasping them. Even if they simply cannot comprehend them yet as is fitting, but the practice was meant by the Church to **increase their more ardent desires**. And this often took place in those from whom the **arcane** remained hidden. And the same Saint, responding to those who wanted to be admitted to Baptism, even though they were unworthy, this would have a good result in many catechumens. Every Christian, upon learning how the Faithful are expected to live, came to follow with greater serenity and religiosity in joyful hope for those most salvific sacrament.

e. Baptism comes to distinguish souls. In the public square no one could tell the difference between the Catechumen and the fully initiated Faithful, but rather during the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries the candidates for Baptism would notice their being asked to leave before the presentation of the sublime mysteries. St. John Chrysostom added to this that sometimes we should ask ourselves the difference between the **fully rational** and the irrational. In his view, heretics did not have seriousness, discipline or authority: among them no distinction was observed between the Catechumens and the Faithful: it seems that all pray, all listen, even total non-

believers. Yet many swell up with interior pride wanting to give the impression that they understood.

f. Reference was also made to the **arcane**, in the pagan institutions of learning, philosophy. In the presence of mystery, Tertullian noted, let the first response be **silence**. It is not generally thinkable that anyone of us would have a private revelation concerning these sacred matters – they are open to all, cooperating with God the Merciful, All-wise revealer. The Christian **mystery** has been known across the centuries by more souls than most philosophies.

[7] It is clear, then, that the **Arcane** made up part of all the spiritual preparation that has been created in the Baptized, that harmony of **personal dimensions** with the liturgical gestures and sacramental rituals. This **preparation**, much encouraged for our cooperation, is already a significant indication. **The seed of the Holy Spirit begs for the good fertile soil in which to be planted.** The ancient rituals – from the awe-inspiring rituals of exorcisms – to the simple and most appealing rituals of Baptism – **the inner joy of one's First Holy Communion, Confirmation, that inspires one with Wisdom, Piety, Counsel, and Fortitude** – the relief known in a healthy sacramental confession; the anointing of the sick that enables one to join more closely to the Redemptive Sufferings of Christ: all stand out and are indications of fathoming the **arcane toward a deeper – or more sublime level**. Thus one might be able to **grasp even in our won age those joyous Hymns honoring the Sublime God.**

a. The 'memories' of the **enthusiastic Early Church** remain always an ideal: no one could dampen the commotion of joy in the ancient liturgies – how high were the voices of old in adoration, praise and thanksgiving! Joy is born, says Tertullian in the comparison of the **simplicity** of the Ritual and the sublimity of the effects that Faith presented as occurring. We gaze on in admiring faith. St. Justin describes the joy that was born in new Christians after the admission of the Neophytes into Baptism, which was called an **Illumination**. Those who received it were respectfully called the **Illumined**, without any pretense at intellectual ability produced by some magic formula. All that had to do with the spiritual regeneration of a newly baptized was **greeted with immense respect.**

b. The catechumens were immersed in the **Bath of Illumination** after a long period of formation. They were **led by the infused faith to cling to those sublime truths taught – this led to the personal persuasion in Christian Doctrine – and lastly, the Illumined learned how to pray and to beseech of God in fasting for the remission of every obstacle of sin.** The Eucharistic Ritual in particular was that which was celebrated after having received the Illumined into the Community –this was

distinguished from the regular weekly [daily?] communion to which only the baptized were admitted on a regular basis.

c. The Catholic Church is distinguished according to Tertullian from other communities through its seriousness, discipline and authority. For Pseudo- Dennis **the ecclesiastical hierarchy is a copy of the celestial hierarchy**, which corresponds to the **sacraments hierarchically arranged** among themselves. These are transmitted through sensible sounds and materials because otherwise there could be no identifying them, and they would be exposed to the ridicule of the non-believers. **Ecclesiastical Hierarchy is one of order and initiation**: both of these aspects are encountered in the **contemplation** of the heavenly realities in such a way, though, that the Monks represent the highest level of initiation. Then follows the hierarchy of Orders because those in this vocation are led by their own constitution to the study, contemplation of the divine realities. The sublime dignity of those in orders does not dispense them from the obligation for striving after interior perfection. With all the fullness of the priesthood infused into a bishop never removes him from his initial level of being a subject, like the simple faithful, to the judgments of God.

d. To this divinely instituted hierarchical structure of the Church, there correspond the various categories of the **Christian lay people**: there are, as is known, **catechumens** classified as **listeners [fides ex auditu]** – there are the **beginners**, the **proficient**, the **perfect** – those is like entering into a house that has doors, stairs, the ***triclinium*** [dining hall] and the cubicle [place of repose] .All this explains the cautions which safe-guard the entrance of the non-initiated into the Church and that internal discipline of the assembly, attested to us by the most ancient liturgical tradition. It is into this category that there is to be inserted the ***arcane***.

[8] **Various Testimonies: In** Hyppolytus' Apostolic ***Tradition***, he addresses himself to the simple Faithful - at the end of that section in his work dedicated to **Christian Initiation**. With his usual simple and sublime language, so characteristic of him, the Saint plunges into the very depths of the Christian Mystery, and points out: We have placed before you this instruction briefly summarizing holy **Baptism** and **Oblation** – you are at the moment catechized regarding the resurrection of the flesh and the various writings placed at your disposal.

a. If further teaching is required the Bishop will provide for this, particularly **the teachings required of the Baptized** – as it is better that non-believers do not know about your reception of the Sacrament before it is actually conferred. This is the white stone about which St. John speaks in Ap 2:17: **[He, that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches: To him that over-cometh, I will give the hidden**

manna, and will give him a white counter, and in the counter, a new name written, which no man knoweth, but he that receiveth it.]

b. A new name is written on this, which only the one who has received the little stone will know. This passage concurs with the Apostolic Tradition in all that concerns the Christian Initiation: Those who are led for the first time to listen to the word, are presented to the Church Doctors when the People has not yet entered, and these candidates are interrogated on their reason for entering the Faith. There is immediately put under the light that separation between a member of the Faithful and the Catechumenate. When the Church doctor will have ended his catechesis, the catechumens will pray together apart, separated from the Faithful. When their prayer has been ended they will not yet receive the Kiss of Peace, because this symbol means those receiving it are already fully initiated. This separation is also maintained in the common meals shared in which the Catechumens are invited to share in accord with their level. They will not yet receive the *Eulogical Bread*, but rather that Bread of Exorcism, after which they will return to their places.

c. What is being presented here is **a symbolic separation, a detachment from the unfaithful world**, and a gradual insertion into the full Christian community. **This is celebrated as a progressive purification and sanctification**. For three years the Catechumens will listen to the word: however, this is not merely a question of time, but rather one of **an interior, spiritual maturity**: if one shows **authentic solicitude** and is **constant** in good deeds, such a person will not be judged according to time, but much more according to conduct.

d. The Aspirant to Baptism ought first to be presented by one of the faithful, who can attest to the person's capacity of listening to the Word of God. Then, it is required to ascertain that there do not exist any social impediments, or that one is following a condition of life that would not be up to the effective practice of the Christian Doctrine. There begins, therefore, an undertaking that is one of instruction in the listening to the gospel, and of purification of every-day exorcisms. If one really is not good and does not live purely such a person should be set aside, as he/ she has not listened with faith to the Word, since it is not possible that one on the outside would be able to remain hidden always. Also the imposition of hands will be progressive, as is all of the initiation ritual: first, all of this Listening will be exorcised by the Church doctor, whether this official be a lay person or an ecclesiastic. Then, as the day set for Baptism approaches, the Bishop should exorcize each one of the baptized in order to ascertain his/ her pure life.

e. As a conclusion of this **lengthy itinerary**, the candidate would receive Baptism, and from the part of the Bishop, the infusion of sacred oil for thanksgiving, with the sign of the Cross on one's forehead, followed by the kiss of peace. Only then, and not before, will the candidate be admitted into the **Praying Community of the Faithful** and the kiss of peace will be exchanged. The one who had been washed in the waters of Baptism has then entered to make up part of another life, that of which the newly baptized has been committed to acquiring little by little that ***Habit of the Faith***, with the long formation period, and penance as a Catechumen. The new member of the Faithful should sin no more.

f. Thus, **existing as among the deceased**, the newly baptized are no longer able to commit sin – and this is also true of those who are **ritually dead in Christ**. One is baptized into a progressive sharing in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ: the water of immersion represents the sepulcher and the oil represents the Holy Spirit. The ever-present sign of the Cross reminds all present of its continuously permeating presence. The person who becomes initiated into Baptism ought to be then, chaste, pure, holy, friend of God – capable of praying as a son would ask of his own father. The Catechumen, in preparation for Baptism is anointed with blessed oil by the Pontiff, so that free from every wickedness, is seen to be 'worthy' of initiation according to the precept of the Most Beloved, Only-Begotten Son of God.

g. Indeed this purification is not the fruit solely of some mystic rite – rather, it results from **the harmony of one's doctrine and one's life** in the Catechumenate: 1 Tm 4:16: [**Take heed to thyself and to doctrine: be earnest in them. For in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee**]. The newly baptized is expected to **know the terms of the Mystery of God**; the fact of **Creation**; **sacred history of the OT and the NT**. And the prelate, who imposes his hands on the candidate to enroll each into the Catechumenate, ought to teach each one the **Path of Justice and of Truth**, so that the candidate might be judged ready for the **Bath of Regeneration** and of **adoption** in Jesus Christ. And when the candidate was about to be baptized, the Catechumen ought to understand clearly that the renunciation of Satan and adherence to Jesus Christ are **life-long commitments**. It is expected that each of the baptized will abstain from all that is contrary – and therefore, he/ she is ready to **accede to the mysteries**, after having first purified his/ her heart from all perversity, stain and rust. This is much like the farmer: first he ruggedly prepares the soil. And then he plants the seed.

h. All this tends to render, little by little, the Catechumen **capable of praying in a worthy manner**:

- Three times each day the Christian ought to **repeat that prayer taught by the Lord Himself**, but behind and above all this, each of the baptized needs to prepare him/ herself **to live in meritorious fashion the adoptive filiation** that comes with grace, in such a manner that the Lord God would not have anything of which to reprove those who call Him “Father”, that no one should ever be rendered totally unworthy of Him.
- Furthermore, in all this it is necessary to be intent on **thanksgiving**, as faithful and grateful servants.
- And it is here that the ***Apostolic Constitutions*** insert the Prayer of **thanksgiving to God for the Gift of the Eucharist**, which is the life, the salvation, the Redemption, pledge of the Resurrection, symbol of Unity. Not just anyone can in faith be initiated into consuming the Eucharist, but only those who have been **baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ**, otherwise such a person would eat to his/ her own condemnation.

i. The ***Arcane*** also makes up part of **this ancient discipline which held true in every Christian community**, in order to be **gathered into the House and Family of God**. The Bishop was seen in the Church comparable to a captain of the ship, of whom the Deacons are like assisting boats-men, who assign their fellow passengers their proper places, extending every care and seriousness. The Church is set for a journey east-ward – in the command post, there is the bishop, surrounded by his Presbyterate – the Deacons, dressed to serve as galley-men and navigators. Thus the Laity sit in their places throughout the Church, **in an ordered manner, maintaining a respectful, prayerful silence**. The women would sit together – in the midst of all the Lector, standing on an elevated podium, who will read the sacred Scriptures, with the exception of the Gospel, which, of course, will be proclaimed either by a priest or deacon. After this reading, there would be **an exhortation** on the part of each of the presbyters, and therefore, of the Bishop himself, the commander of the ship. Meanwhile the Porters will stand by and keep watch on the entrance doors. A certain “hierarchy” in the assembly would be observed.

j. Maintaining this order, the entire Christian Community would move through life as in a Liturgical assembly. After the consecration by the Bishop, he would then direct **toward the assembly his word**. This ancient description goes on through the representative prayers involving all: it was prayed that the **Listeners** should pray that the Lord would hear their prayer and satisfy the deepest yearnings of their faith-filled hearts; **gradually the Gospel would be revealed to them, its laws taught**, and there would be inculcated into their hearts **an authentic religious fear**; their ears would be

further opened over time so that they might **make the revealed Law the subject-matter of their daily meditation**. Prayer was likewise offered for the remission of all sin.

k. Then those considered to be among the **Competent** there would be asked that those initiated into the Passion, Death, resurrection and Ascension of the Lord might rise up with Christ, and that they become more and more **Participants in His Reign and His mysteries**. They begged that the Lord might enroll them and gather them with all those Saved in His Holy Church. It was prayed that the Catechumens might be confirmed in their knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ – that they be conserved in their knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ - that they be firmly rooted in His teachings and Doctrine – that they might make progress in such a way as to become worthy of the Bath of Re-generation and of the Sacred Mysteries. For the **Neophytes**, it was also prayed that each one become a participant in the angelic powers, since they already **shared in the Grace of God** – that they no longer be dominated by their flesh, but by their spiritual lives. Thus it was prayed that each and everyone should be conserved to the end, for God and for Jesus Christ.

[9] It is not easy to determine the precise moment when the emphasis on the **Arcane** disappeared as a Rule for the general discipline of the Early Church. As this ideal arose with the perfect organization of the Christian community and the development of the Schools of the Catechumenate, and that this continued on, step by step in various phases of the spread of the new religion. It eventually disappeared, it seems, once Christianity was seen to be completely affirmed, becoming the common and traditional religion. By the time of St. Gregory the Great, there does not seem to be any further such juridical requirement. For all practical purposes, the juridical insistence on the preparation for the **Arcane** required of the Catechumens, prior to their full participation in the Sacramental Liturgy, **some serious instruction was seriously demanded**.

a. However, this gradual insertion of those being initiated in juridical manner into the **Arcane**, disappeared as the clear separation in Church between non-believers, Catechumens, Initiates – one **had to “merit’ and be more prepared for an ever fuller insertion into the sacred rites**. The Descent of the Bishop from his Chair, after the gospel, was interpreted through its symbolism. For the Faithful, as for the Initiates this action implied the **Second Advent of the Lord Jesus** – coming to judge humanity at the end of time, and to definitively separate the evil from the good. There was demanded a level of certainty in the believers in the faith, represented by every separation or “non-admission” of the Initiates until after their careful and gradual preparation of both heart and mind.

b. This **knowledge of God** was meant to increase in continual manner among all the Faithful leading to a greater tranquility of mind, that would sedate unruly passion. For the fully initiated **Faithful**, the goal was an ever-more **comprehensive understanding** of the revealed word. In the same manner, the liturgical closing of the Doors; the gradual entrance into **a greater familiarity with the sacred mysteries**; the kiss of peace and the profession of the Symbol of Faith – all were accomplished in accord with that grade of perfection to which each assistant at these sacred rites had received. The emphasis was ever more insistent on the passing over from the world of the senses, to the spiritual truths shared in the celebration of these mysteries. This New Doctrine of the Divine Mystery was meant to be accompanied by an ever more perfect harmony between us and God.

c. Early commentators made it very clear that the effort of showing the varying degrees in the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy meant to serve as a reminder to those being initiated into the traditions and the mysteries was hierarchical” in style. The Lector did not communicate the **Arcane** mysteries to those not initiated to grasp them in their life-style and inner convictions. Those who were called to ascend the levels of sacred Orders gradually are initiated into becoming, according to the mystical knowledge, both consecrating and consecrated, perfect instruments of the perfection of the faithful. In a similar manner, the Faithful, pondering these sacred symbols, under the action of the Holy Spirit, are gradually led to ascend through that spiritual and beatifying contemplation, in hierarchical fashion unto that purity of their divine station.

d. As a result, the Sacraments are divinely instituted means which gradually lead us to an ever-more perfect assimilation to God. The symbolic language, which is particular to them, corresponds as Ps Dennis and St. Thomas indicate – to those needs of our human nature. These vary, depending on the level into which the eventual Faithful have been inserted for further progress and development. This process was jealously guarded in secrecy all geared to further progress.

e. As with these sacraments, so, too, the other means of the progressive initiation into the ever more intimate contact with God. These means are diversely utilized in accord with each one’s interior perfection achieved in this long initiation. Among these means, are listed the following: **Sacred Scripture** - in a certain similarity with the sacramental symbols, this significant body of sacred writings, have an historical content – but these are also endowed with a kind of ‘soul’, spiritual sense, hidden deeply in them. All is included in the vast sway of God’s holy word: the entire world, the giant cosmos, made up of the visible and the invisible. There is humanity

itself, a mini-cosmos as each individual is –and then, of course, the Church, which can be seen as a mystical image, reproduction,

f. When the Church is gathered in her liturgical assemblies, with the circles of believers all in their assigned customary places, the Faithful filled the central nave – then, the group of presbyters up around the altar – these assemblies were meant to serve as a symbolic rendition of the entire universe. St. Gregory of Nyssa had expressed a similar conception in his mystical commentary of Moses on Sinai. There, the Prophet could see the Tabernacle of God – already a symbol of the future Christ, the Word of God - perfect image of the Terrestrial Tabernacle, which in its turn, symbolized the coming Church. Before receiving his second **Theophany, Moses experienced the most perfect exterior and interior solitude**: at the foothills of the mountain on which God would appear, every irrational creature stopped.

g. This is the ultimate **Arcane Truth, Goodness**, internal to the Christian community, through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. And intimately bound and intertwined with the Itinerary of the spiritual life. In St. Jerome's commentary on **Ps 44 [45]**, he brings out the fact that it is through the contemplation on the Divine Word, that there comes about the gradual transformation of the man of God as promised by Christ. This transformation can be verified already on this earth, where the human soul, once assumed in union by the Divine Word, can indeed be considered precisely as that **Spouse** sung of in this Psalm. The path that leads to such a transformation is that of **detachment** from temporal realities, and by **interior solitude**. The relationship between the first Christian initiation and the supreme development possible in the spiritual life is clear.

h. This is the **Law of the Arcane** – here is that solitude to be guarded in one's relationship with God. St. Augustine, too, traces out that path which leads to the vivid contact with the Word of God who dwells within us all. This is a tiresome journey which demands a long hard task of asceticism through the various levels, from the initial Fear of the Lord, the beginning of all true Wisdom – to the heights of Wisdom, through the meekness of authentic piety which does not contradict the Word of God, that knowledge through which one accedes to the Divine Word in order eventually to achieve the love of God and for one's neighbor - that fortitude through which gradually one becomes ever more detached from temporal matters and immerse ourselves in the eternal realities, even to the sublime point of coming to love our enemies, and to fix our purified eye directly on God, in that measure that is possible on this earth.

i. Such as ascent brings one into contact with that ultimate truth and Goodness which Christ is. It is not a matter here of coming to learn something intellectually, but much more that of discovering an interior resonance and of achieving an encounter between **Word** and **Sign** which are outside of us, with that **Truth**, and **Goodness**, which is within us. We do not come to understand universal matters, as we are not treating here of what is just outside, but rather we consult that truth present to the human mind, so that we might be able to consult this, instructed by words. The One consulted, of course, is Jesus Christ Himself - **that immutable virtue of God and that eternal wisdom which metes out His ‘coming’ into one mind on that level of which one is intellectually capable** – and **comes into one’s will by the amount of mercy one is willing to share with others** - and **comes into one’s soul to the level that He finds love of God and Neighbor there**. It is right here that every human word pales - that every human expression draws silent, totally inadequate to express this sublime mystery of Divine Mercy – after some words of instruction have initially set us on the glorious path of a direct colloquy with God. The ultimate encounter with Jesus Christ takes place in that silence and solitude comparable to that of the desert,”engineered” skillfully by the “spiritual person.” Like Justine of old, the great Martyr to the truth, encountered in the Scriptures not some abstract truth, but the merciful, all-wise God Himself Who is simply beyond all merely human access and expression.

j. In the Early Church practice of a gradual immersion into the **Arcane**, the pressing and sublime need for protracted silence is represented by one’s isolation” into the school of the incipient Catechumenate. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, developed his initial Catechism in progressive fashion, and developed gradually through the levels of initiation in order to lead the entire Christian community into that most solemn and most sublime celebrations and beliefs, to the sacred **Synaxis**. The sacred **Trisagion** is close to the apex of the celebration – this is introduced by the celebrant proclaiming: **Lift up your hearts!** Truly in that tremendous moment of loving, hope-filled faith, it is more than ever necessary to rivet the hearts of the Faithful on high, tending ever forward toward God – not getting stuck in the muddy slime of this earth, totally immersed in merely human matters.

k. The response to that invitation of **lifting up the hearts of the worshippers** is that assurance that must be kept present in every moment, that tending toward a deeper grasp, appreciation, comprehensions of God. So it is, that the Liturgy provides a synthesis of the entire created universe: heaven and earth, the sea, the stars – the entire created world, through very rational creature, as well as the non-rational, the visible and invisible –and the endless string of **binomes de totalité** - all of this unites the worshipers with the Heavenly Chant of the Cherubim. This is what

Isaiah saw in his chance afternoon visit to the Temple, with the angels fluttering around the Throne of the Most High. To share in this one must realize that he/she is on sacred territory, and needs to approach in discalced manner, heads bared, and faces veiled. Following the solemn Chant of the **Trisagion**, the **rhythm of interior elevation** continues through the praying of the Lord's own Prayer. Thus, **the sacred realities are for the holy!** This is the moment of the Faithful's Communion with Jesus Christ: He is the Holy One by nature – while we are all holy by participation, limited by our smallness, lack of preparation. We need to share more fully through the Eucharist through spiritual exercises and the apostolic mission. St. John Chrysostom proposes a catechism for the ***Illuminandi***, illustrating the images of the **Sacred Nuptials**, promised to all the enrolled. And the instruction reached out in trying to lift up hearts and minds and lives with the image of the endlessly distant constellations above which draw the human eye [and imagination?].

l. The bond between the **Arcane** and **interior silence** will ever remain in the tradition of the Church. The preaching of the word in a solemn festivity is preceded by the joyous singing of the **Alleluiah**, and only then is *the Gospel proclaimed with the use of analogy, with canticles preceding: this is to show that the world is illuminated by the grace of the holy word.* After the reading the people once more make the sign of the Cross, so that that which it has just heard might remain under the custody of the 'seal', so that their minds be not emptied by any diabolical strategy. IN the former liturgy, the Canon was prayed almost totally in silence and this was called *the secret Mass*. The idea was that in the silence of the entire Church, during which all noise from spoken words might be silenced so that the intention of every mind and the devotion of all hearts might be riveted on the prayer of the priest and the forth-coming consecration of body and blood of the Lord are consecrated.

m. From the schools of the Catechumenate the Secret of the initiation s passed over into the internal world of the ecclesial community. The commitment to the **Arcane** held sway in the Church solely to indicate the itinerary that leads to union with God. The meaning of the anointing of Confirmation, the sacrament indicting initiation into the adult age of the Christian, will become a kind of veil of modesty in which there is recovered the perfume of holiness from the mature Faithful. And this odor of holiness is attained through the contemplation of the spiritual fragrance of God, represented precisely by the sacred oil. Anyone who would contemplate these wonders would be like the painter who studies his/ her model to reproduce it on the canvas. The committed believer would only see the similarities with God to be reproduced in the 'work of art' which each one's life is meant to be.

n. The secret of the extended ritual of initiation would remain into recent times, in Canon Law, # 564 – which prescribes for religious communities a clear ‘division of companies’ between Novices, Postulants. The process and the technique of initiation into religious life have been much blurred in many areas in our own time. However, it can only achieve its ultimate purpose when the formation program leads one to a more accurate and a more intimate union with God – it is for this primarily that the religious institute by rule intends to lead its members. This gradual initiation incorporation is inserted into the path way of perfection according to various life-styles, and charisms.

[1] St. Augustine, for example, was the **Saint of the Light** – and St. John of the Cross is the **Saint of the Night**. As for this latter, there is great insistence on beginning with the concept of **detachment** that intensifies through the **Night of the Senses**, being elevated into the **Night of the Spirit**. For Teresa of Avila it begins with the image of the **Interior Castle**, with its **seven mansions**, progressively passing through each of these into the ever-more more interior, intimate dwelling places for the human soul. Gradually one is introduced into the Bridal Chamber with the Divine Spouse in **Mystical Marriage**.

[2] Wherever the ideal of a spiritual initiation is introduced, there comes to the fore almost naturally, the entire matter of the **Arcane**. In a spiritual commentary on the Carmelite Constitutions there is a traditional practice of not giving much publicity to the sacred laws and ancient customs that rule the Carmelite Life, which is kept hidden from the eyes of the world regarding the Carmelite manner of living.

o. Much more recently the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, ***Sacrosanctum Concilium* [# 65]** notes:

65. In mission lands it is found that some of the peoples already make use of initiation rites. Elements from these, when capable of being adapted to Christian ritual, may be admitted along with those already found in Christian tradition, according to the norm laid down in Art. 37-40, of this Constitution.

This unusual insight is not to reopen the old polemic between Christianity and the ‘mysteric’ but provides an authoritative insight into the wisdom of primitive civilizations. The simple facet of the matter is that initiation into an ever-deeper relationship with God pertains to Christianity, as it does to the so-called ‘mysteric’ religions, and even to some schools of philosophy. [In the professions, one may proceed from an **apprentice –journeyman- master** [as in carpenter, plumber, etc.]!

The intellect can only go so far – while Faith is substantially an ‘intellectual’ virtue it needs a constant exercise of the will through Hope and Charity – so that beyond merely intellectual concepts one must strive for and be open to evermore sublime sentiments and attitudes of life not toward Truth, but also toward Goodness, Beauty.

CONCLUSIONS:

[1] The ***Arcane*** is clearly attested to in the Patristic tradition of the early centuries. It comprehended **the Rituals of Christian Initiation, the Eucharistic Liturgy, the Symbol of Faith and the Lord’s Prayer**. Those, who were finally ***illuminated***, were admitted into the very bosom of the Liturgical community only after Baptism. Tertullian put it this way: that the faithful were bound, connected, to the **Law of the Secret**.

[2] The ***Arcane*** then, according to these early Fathers, is a requirement of Christian Initiation in which the **gradual deepening of religious truth in their minds and hearts** required that there would be **a gradual harmonization of the life lived and the truth known**. It was often compared to **Food**: in its variation it is always adapted to the human age in life: **milk** for the Infants, **herbs** for those who have grown sufficiently, **vegetables** for the adults, and **meat** for the perfect. Stronger food given to those not yet ready for it was comparable to wine given to the sick: it would produce harm for those who are ill, and the rejection of the doctor.

[3] The ***Arcane*** **a safeguard for intimacy in prayer** which for Christians is meant to be **an intimate conversation as within a family** with the all-Merciful Heavenly Father – this presupposes **a communion of life, one that is intimately shared, and a certain agreement in thought and the will between a human being of faith and God. It also implies the need of love**: in this Itinerary as described leads eventually to union with God. It is only natural that there may be sought to veil from any eye not endowed with faith, that which would make no sense to him /her.

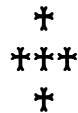
[4] The most ancient liturgical documents confirm the Fathers’ statements in a two-fold way:

- in the first place, these great Doctors prescribed a progressive selection of Christians from the first admission to the Catechumenate, to that moment in which in the Ritual of the Mass, prayer with the recitation of the ***Our Father*** becomes more intimate, and **the union of God by means of the Eucharistic communion becomes even more profound**. Little by little as one proceeds along this way, the community becomes ever more restricted in number and above all becomes more recollected due to each one’s greater intimacy with God.

- furthermore, the Liturgy registers those rites that refer directly to the disciple implied in the ***arcane***: the sending out of the Catechumens, the closing of the doors, the rites of the exorcisms, the different attitude regarding prayer according to that level of initiation and if purity, the different prayers offered by those who are still Catechumens and those who are the Faithful.

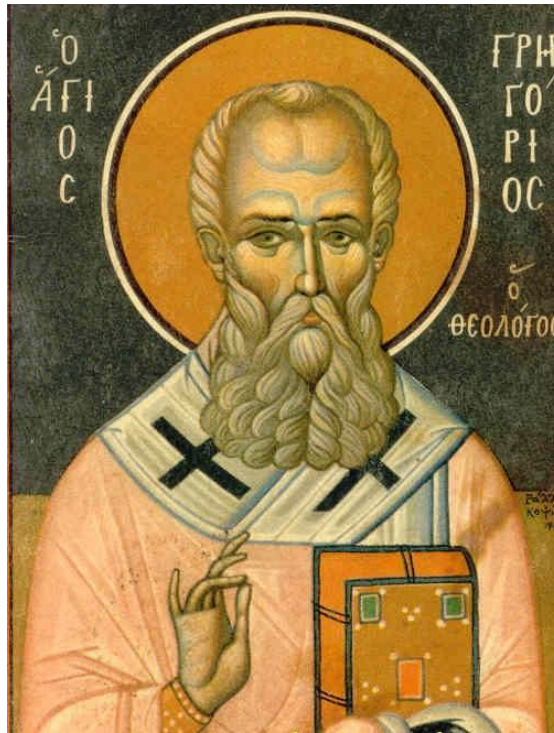
[5] The ***Arcane***, as a part of the early legislation of initiation into the Sacrament of Baptism and full-fledged participation in the Eucharist, divided the non-initiated from the full Faithful, springs up with that perfect organization of the Christian community. There is likewise the parallel development of the Catechumenate and all tended to disappear in a moment in history from that time when Christianity indeed became the common and traditional religion. Nonetheless, the relative rites for all this permeated the Liturgy and came to be interpreted in the Patristic literature variously, according to that level, **Grade of Perfection** of the Faithful who participated in it. It remained throughout as **an appeal for an ever more profound interior recollection in order to achieve an ever more intimate union with God.**

[6] The ***Arcane***, then, remains always a law connected with the process of progress in initiation into the life of Faith, which purifies one and at the same time, renders each participant evermore like unto God, and is a safeguard of love. In so far as in recent canonical legislation for the religious life, it offers a real challenge to the lives of contemplation to which all are called.



INTRODUCTION

PART 2



Sancti Gregorii Magni
in Librum Primum Regum Expositionum
Libri VI

Part 2: *Sancti Gregorii Magni in Librum Primum Regum Expositionum – Libri VI***Chapter 1: An Imperfect and rather Disjointed Work**

Presentation: Both contemplative, and man of action, Gregory the Great was a born writer. He enjoyed writing, and he placed this trait of his at the service of God, for the edification of the Christian people and for his own soul. The edited work is the last of a production whose breadth is striking and it saw the light of day over a 20 year period and in conditions that were apparently not very favorable.

a. **Previous Works:** Before pondering on the **First Book of Kings [Samuel]** Gregory had previously written rather extensively on the **Book of Job**. Begun at Constantinople under the form of conferences given to a group of Monks, this enormous volume entitled ***Moralia*** of Job did not achieve its final form until he was in Rome, towards the middle of his Pontificate. At the beginning of his reign, while undertaking a vast correspondence, Gregory drew up his ***Pastoral*** and the 20 first **Homilies on the Gospels**, followed by 20 more pronounced from his chair, and gathered together by his secretary. Perhaps during the years 591-592, which will be followed in 593 by the 10 Homilies on Chapter 40 of the same prophet. All of these were delivered and then written down some eight years, based on notes taken during the actual deliveries of all this eloquence. Finally, in 593-594, Gregory composed the four books of Dialogues. He was in conversation in all this with the spirit of youthfulness in the Deacon Peter, who after having assisted in the research on Scripture, asked him to interrupt these in order to leave an account of the miracles of the saints in Italy.

b. **The Abbot Claude of Ravenna:** It is at this juncture that another collaborator takes his place along-side the busy Pope: by the name of Claude, the Abbot of a Monastery in Classis, the port of Ravenna. Already in July 592, the Pope entrusted him with the mission of ransoming the prisoners at Fano. But, as the other monastic superiors of Ravenna, Claude suffered the encroachments of the local clergy. A conflict broke out with the Bishop, John. Just prior to his death, which happened towards the end of 594, it is probable that the Abbot of Classis had come to Rome to plead his case. At any rate, he was indeed there a year later, in January 596, when the Pope invited the successor of John, the Bishop Marinien, to send a representative to plead the cause of the Church of Ravenna in the process which opposed him in the monastery of Classis.

So, there began for Claude a long sojourn with Gregory. As the Deacon Peter had done before him, the monk of Ravenna served the Pope as interlocutor and secretary in the labors of exegesis of the sacred page. This task of interpreter of Scripture, of which Gregory had begun at Constantinople in discoursing on Job before his brothers, he followed him to Rome under the form of personal service with a chosen confidant, one capable of posing judicious questions, of noting down carefully the responses, and of following the multiform exegesis in all of its detours.

c. Gregory and the Book of Kings: one of the OT Books that Gregory and Claude undertook to explain was that of the first of the Four Books of Kings - [the first two, of course, today are more commonly referred to as 1 & 2 **Samuel**]. This history of the humble beginnings of the Monarchy in Israel has one assist at the coming of Saul and the royal anointing of David. Both of these happened in and through the intervention of the Prophet, Samuel. He had been born of a woman who had long been sterile and who obtained him through prayer. He grew up in the shadow of the Temple, in a priestly family, to whom he had been charged by God to point out its reprobation.

Many of the events in this dramatic book of divine inspiration appealed to the heart of Gregory, both monk and bishop. From the beginning, the pilgrimages of Elcana and the piety of Hannah, the religious education and revelations of the young Samuel, lent themselves readily to a reflection on the spiritual life and to the beautiful developments regarding contemplation. At the same time, the wrongs of the High Priest Heli, and of his unworthy sons, the ministry of the Prophet and the demerits of his own children, the elevation, and the faults and eventual rejection of King Saul, followed by the election and the anointing of David - all this history of the spiritual and temporal leaders of the people, seemed to bring out with each passing line, the image of the Christian shepherd. In these figures of long ago, Gregory could see reflected not only his own experiences and personal problems as a Bishop - but, even more, the concerns that the episcopacy of Italy and beyond, foisted upon him. His correspondence is full of those cares for the vacant Churches, the Episcopal sees to empower, the dioceses to reorganize, the prelates to instill or remove.

With Claude, it was easy to involve himself in such matters. Like Gregory, this man was at the same time a monk and shepherd. The Superior of his monastery. He also was most familiar with his recent disheartening experiences, those temptations to which the clergy was charged, as well as their spiritual needs.

d. The Monk and the Reader of St. Benedict: together with Claude, Gregory allowed his thought to run in two directions whenever he engaged himself with

spontaneity. From that which had satisfied his faith in Christ by a typological commentary on the first lines of the text, he recognized in the father of Samuel, that **“one man”**, the ideal figure of the monk - and in [H]anna, his preferred wife, **the contemplative life**, to which he remained attracted. Further on, the spectacle of the child Samuel obeying Heli and of Saul, disobedient to the divine order, he went on to call to mind the fundamental virtue for the monasteries which is obedience. In the arrival of the ark at Bethsames, he saw the entrance of the postulants in the communities of the monks, and the ‘right of the king’ exposed to the people by Samuel, these appeared to the commentator as prefiguring the instructions that the superiors would address to the new-comers.

This first line of thought, that found inspiration in his own monastic past, which was that reinforced by his ties with the posterity of St. Benedict. Gregory placed him as the central figure of the *Dialogues*, filling with his biography the IInd Book and inaugurating, both by himself as well as with his sons, Book IV. Not only Honoratus of Subiaco, whom he knew personally, and who would have still been alive at that time, but also one of his disciples, Valentinian, who had governed a monastery for a long time at the Lateran. In becoming the neighbor of these monks, was Gregory’s attention drawn by these monks to the Benedictine Rule? He always held the Saint in the highest esteem, and sang his praises at the end of the Life of Benedict. And he cites this formally in the Commentary on Kings, in presenting from one end to the other, one of his traits which struck him: the judicious discernment of vocations prescribed by the Abbot of Cassino. Around this citation, there can be recognized many echoes of the Rule, of which Gregory seems to have had the text before his memory, while talking it over with Claude.

e. The Pontiff and the Church: these **monastic** inspirations, with their Benedictine resonances, come to the fore quite often in the course of this incomplete commentary, as well as his concerns about the **priesthood**, which much tried the Bishop of Rome. This second line of thought dominated and served to make of **this Commentary on Kings a second Pastoral**. The Pope’s *Pastoral Rule*, dedicated to Bishop John of Ravenna, had seen the light of day at the beginning of his Pontificate. The treated of the manner in which one reaches the episcopacy, concerning the life of the shepherd and of his multiform comportment in regard to the different flocks, before concluding with the invitation to remain humble. All this will be found some five years later in the Commentary on *First Kings*.

However, in taking up these themes again in the middle of his Pontificate, with the Abbot Claude of Ravenna, Gregory enriched these with new insights, which enter more into the concrete details of his Episcopal activity. His thought leads sometimes

toward the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, and often on those of Penance and Holy Order. The different states of the consecrated life present themselves to his spirit. He dreams of priests who would assist their bishop, of virgins who are the better part of his flock, and above all, of the monks, among whom he conducts the shepherd newly ordained, so that he might learn from them to live the most often, alone with God.

f. **The Exegete and his Tools:** with the *Pastoral*, the **17th Homily on the Gospels**, where Gregory addresses himself to his colleagues in the Episcopacy, there is also an antecedent which connects many times with his present meditation on the Book of Kings. However, the work which is coming to the light of day recalls only, by its **priestly content**, this first essay on the ministry of the **Bishop**. From the point of view of method and form, this meditation continues likewise in his *Moralia*. As in this reflection, Gregory applies himself primarily to distinguish the different senses of the text, then contents himself with a single commentary following, where different interpretations are all mixed in. However, he takes care to finish as he began this two-fold exegesis of the final section permitting him to place Christ at the end of the work, as well as at its beginning. The Commentary on Kings receives thereby a more completed aspect than does his work on Job, in comparison with which it is quite inferior in length.

In discussing with Claude, Gregory committed himself fully to his task as exegete, attentive to the sacred text and to it alone. Of course, he had at hand the precious dictionary of the Hebrew names compiled two centuries earlier by St. Jerome, but at the beginning he did not make much use of it. Little by little, in the measure that the names of the personalities and of the places multiplied, he realized the usefulness of this specialized Lexicon and consulted it with every greater regularity.

As for the explanations given by his predecessors, the Pope did not strive very hard to conform himself to them. Origen and Augustine had each of them, in a very different manner, commented on the first pages of the Book of Kings. Gregory kept two orientations on his own: the first is his Christological perspective of St. Augustine, joining to this the moral outlook of Origen. Here and there, in his earlier works, he himself had touched on this or that verse. No more than the commentaries of the Fathers, he was concerned with his own explanations. Certain ones among them, however, came to his spirit more spontaneously, as well as the reminiscences of the prayers that he had composed for the Mass for those texts extended or introduced by him into the Liturgy.

In this hermeneutical undertaking, Gregory was sustained above all by his own interest and that of Claude. But, he also thought of the little ones of the Holy Church, who might one day profit by the fruit of his labors. The readers of good will, whom he kept in mind, consoled him from the opposition that he felt building up in certain clerical circles. Known through their reading, or at least by hear-say, his commentaries on Job, Ezechiel and the Gospels were sometimes judged useless, having seen the abundant Patristic literature which had preceded him. The Commentary on Kings would, without doubt, be of the same sort, even though there did not exist in fact as yet any explanation of the Book of Kings. Despite this unfavorable prejudice against any new work, Gregory was decided to go forward, both for the good of souls as well as for his own personal profit.

g. Between the Barbaric Kings and the Empire: consciously or not, his interest in the Book of Kings was also perhaps stimulated by the circumstances in which he lived. At the very moment that Gregory was engaged with Claude, the Roman See accomplished an evolution that would have broad circumstances.

In June of 595, Gregory's difficulties with the Emperor Maurice reached their climax. Two letters for the Emperor left from Byzantium: one of these defended in very lively terms the Italian policies of the Pope; and the other protested with no less energy against the title "ecumenical" assumed by the Patriarch of Constantinople. In September, Gregory decided in favor of John of Chalcedon in the canonical process which placed him in opposition, already for several years, with the Patriarch, John. A few days prior to rendering this sentence which absolved the priest of Chalcedon, he sent two letters to Gaul: the first was addressed to Queen Brunehaut, and the second to her son, the King Childebert, with whom he had just entered into relationship. The months that followed saw come to life the **English mission**. In July 596, a new courier left for Gaul, carried by **the Monk, Augustine**, the head of that mission, whom Gregory recommended to the Frank Kings, and other individuals capable of helping him.

Gregory's reflections, then, on the Book of Kings coincided with the beginnings of a new Roman policy, which put together cordial relationships with the Merovingian sovereigns, before establishing similar ties with Recarede in Spain, Ethelbert and Bertha in England. Authors of the conversion of their people, these latter two will be compared to Constantine and Helena. With the same enthusiasm, Recarede is praised for having led the Goths from Arianism to the Catholic Church. Visibly, Gregory found these royalties of the north and the west more satisfying than on the part of Byzantium. As he paternally exhorted the barbarian kings, the bitterness which had built up over 12 years of subjection to the Empire enabled him to refer as a "deliverance" the tragic end of the Emperor Maurice. It is almost natural to think in this

connection of Samuel anointing David on the one hand - and on the other, reproving Saul, putting Agag to death.

h. The Manner of Production: an Unsatisfying Collaboration: these events, though, take us even beyond the time that Gregory was elaborating his Commentary on Kings, assisted by Claude. With this Book of Scripture, several others were also being pondered by these two committed to such study. Much appreciated by the Pope, this collaboration would draw to an end in the month of April, 598. The direction of the Monastery of Classis, abandoned by Claude already for three years, once more demanded his attention. On the other hand, his process with the diocesan clergy ended and favorably for the Monks.

He would return to Ravenna, armed with two letters from Gregory, addressed to the Bishop Marinien. One of these contained the decree ending the Process. The other asked the Bishop to welcome the Abbot returning to his Monastery. The two men had had a friendly relationship, beyond doubt, from the time of the first days of Claude's sojourn at Rome, when Marinien was still a monk and a priest of the Monastery on the Celio. This friendship had passed, and Gregory hoped that it might be re-established, in consideration of the bonds which united him to both of them.

With these letters of the Pope, Claude brought with him from Rome a large pile of commentaries on the different Books of Scripture. Too ill, now, to complete them himself, Gregory left to his collaborator the care of presenting a first redaction. And once this was completed and reviewed, the idea was then to establish the definitive redaction.

It could very well be, that this initial reaction was begun in Rome, dictated, as it were, solely during the "leisure" time that the Abbot Claude could have. The material of notes on which he worked was divided into two series: for the explanation of **Proverbs**, the **Song of Songs** and the **Prophets**, there would be added also this one on the **First Book of Kings**, as well as on the "Heptateuch". There is no proof that he had succeeded in even having all of this vast amount of work all together. Nonetheless, he had at least drawn together a part of it when the occasion presented itself of paying a visit to the Pope.

Gregory really wanted to take up again with Claude the interpretation of the Bible. But, how could he provide for his replacement as Abbot? In Rome, the Pope did not find anyone to send to him. Finally, in July 599, he wrote to him to seek an administrator among his own monks and then, once the monastery was provided for, that he should come to join the Pope in Rome, and that this would only be for five or

six months. The second Roman sojourn which would follow for Claude would allow him to read to Gregory the text of his commentaries which he had edited. Being quite adept in literary matters, the Pope was not happy with the presentation: Claude had actually deformed his thought. When the Abbot of Classis had died, Gregory sent to have all of his papers sent to Rome, including all the biblical commentaries that he had been working on.

Mostly due to the imperfections of the redactor, this disappointment for the author, who was no longer able to recognize himself in his own work, was due to some extent to the novelty of the enterprise. As far as is known today, this was the first time that Gregory had attempted such a procedure. The two methods utilized by him thus far, consisted in his dictating - and then emending when this had been read back to him. The first part of this process held true for the *Morals*, the first half of the *Homilies* on the Gospels, the *Pastoral*, and the *Dialogues*. The second aspect of his method was utilized at the beginning of the *Morals* on Job, in the 20 last *Homilies* on the Gospels and in the *Commentary on Ezechiel*.

If for this ***Commentary on Kings***, Gregory did not employ any of these proven methods, it is simply because he had become too ill to bring the effort that both aspects would require: dictating and then emending what had been dictated. In leaving up to his assistant the task of emending, beginning with the copious notes that had been jotted down, the Pope could only hope that the entire work, or at least most of it, would be spared. If the dictation of Claude had been good, his own which would follow shortly would only repeat that and make it the definitive copy.

However, to rely so heavily on a collaborator, meant to run the real risk in the part left up to his assistant, of unsatisfactory work, experience, apparently did not bring him satisfaction. Being used to the fact that the secretaries would write for him certain of his letters, the Pope would not allow this procedure for his commentaries on Scripture. Official correspondence is one thing - but quite different is that subtle and gifted explanation where the exegete brings the best of his intelligence and his heart to his task.

i. **The Revision and the Final Redaction:** due to illness the new procedure would achieve only a summary revision, the imperfection of which without doubt, was due to the poor state of health of Pope Gregory. He did provide the work with a minimum of literary presentation. His principal effort consisted in providing for it a Preface, rather carefully worked out, in which, no doubt, he had the assistance of Claude. Then, he divided the work into six books. These which are much longer than those of the *Morals*, adapted themselves poorly to the structure of his commentary,

which would have asked for a much larger number. However, each book normally required an introduction and a conclusion, which Gregory did not want to multiply.

Prepared in this way, somehow, as best he could, for publication, the ***Commentary on Kings*** was without doubt the only one that the Pope took the personal care to edit. The other commentaries, elaborated with the help of Claude, had they also been put into some provisory shape by him? There is no clear indication that these had received a definitive form from Gregory himself. Regarding all this final literary output of the Pontiff, there only exists, along with the explanation on Kings, some of the notes concentrating on just the beginning of the Song of Songs.

If Gregory personally had privileged the publication of ***the Commentary on Kings***, it is beyond doubt because he saw it as an important work, especially by reason of its **doctrine on the priesthood**, with which it is full. From our perspective, we can legitimately think of it as his **testament**. On several points, there might be marked a clear progress in the thought of the author, as this represents its final stage. It is also because his study of pagan letters, rather badly handled elsewhere, is here recommended as a help for the understanding of Scripture.

j. **The *Commentary on Kings* in History:** despite its real value, which could make it a precious work, **this *Commentary on Kings* has remained very little known**. It hardly seems that even St. Bede would have read it. There is a long line of outstanding exegetes who have ignored it - and this would even include some scholars in Gregory's works. Only two manuscripts came down across the ages to the time of printing.

This **obscurity**, which contrasts with the enormous diffusion of the other works by Gregory, **remains difficult to explain**. Without doubt, it might be the rather anonymous style of the Preface, in that it does not seem to be addressed to anyone in particular, and does not even identify the author himself. But, the principal cause could also be the late accomplishment of the work. Published too late, in that period of time when Gregory's forces were on the wane, it has not had the same success as his other works. The anti-Gregorian reaction, which followed his death in Rome, did not permit this work to enjoy the same wide-spread acceptance.

One misfortune led to another. The strange silence which surrounds this ***Commentary on Kings*** has led to its authenticity being doubted. At the end of the 17th century, Peter Goussainville presented a study in favor of placing this work **among the *spuria***, basing his strong arguments more on the manner of the biblical citations, which would be those of the Vulgate, and employed in a style inferior to that of Gregory. Furthermore, there was **alleged also the excessive interest on the part of the author**

for monasticism. These arguments, though, were refuted at the beginning of the 18th century by a certain Denis of St. Martha. However, this scholar made the oversight of dating the work in the earlier years of Gregory's Pontificate - and of suggesting that Claude was an old companion of Gregory's in their life together in the Monastery of St. Andrew on the Celio.

This handling of the work was then accepted without much discussion up until recent times. However, the question of this ***Commentary on Kings*** took a decisive step forward in the 20th century through the studies of Fr. Peter Verbraken, who had been able to correct the text received from the manuscript recently discovered at Cava. **The scholar was able to show that the work is in all points in harmony with the basic thought of Gregory, as is its style** - keeping in mind the stylistic imprint of the Abbot Claude: such as abbreviating the citations, and always interpreting the Scriptures in an optimistic manner.

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Chapter 2: Authenticity and Date

Different from the other exegetical works of Gregory, the ***Commentary on First Kings*** offers neither personal confidences of the author, nor any clarifications on the circumstances of its composition. - and there is no mention of any contemporary happenings. The work is not dedicated to anyone. It never refers to any other of the works of the author, and does not contain any part reproducing any of the passages of these works, as happens in his ***Pastoral***, his ***Morals***, his ***Letters***, ***Homilies on the Gospel***, and the ***Dialogues***.

a. **Certain Indications of the Date of Composition:** **Letter to the Sub-deacon John [602]:** the block of writing that is this ***Commentary on Kings*** would be a kind of a mongrel composition, at least as far as trying to situate and date it is concerned - if it were not for the fact that it is mentioned, by chance, in the correspondence of Gregory. In January 602, Claude died as the Abbot of the Monastery dedicated to the Saints John and Stephen, at Classis, near Ravenna. This obliged the Pope to write a long letter to the Sub-deacon John, the agent of the Roman Church in that city. After having ruled on the nomination of the successor of Claude, Gregory

gives specific orders on the subject of “certain papers left behind” by the deceased Abbot:

... My very dear son, Claude, who has just died, had begun speaking to me about Proverbs, the Canticle of Canticles, the Prophets, as well as of the Books of Kings and of the Heptateuch. As I myself was too sick to place all these things in writing, he drew them up according to his own idea, for the sake of saving them from being forgotten, with the intention of bringing these to me when the moment came for their final and more redaction. However, when he read these to me, I discovered that he had modified the ideas that I had already exposed, and at times not very well. Thus, it is necessary that you, without any excuse, or delay, should go to this monastery and assemble the Brothers. They will bring to you without any dissimulation, all the papers concerning the different parts of the scriptures that he had taken away with him. You will then gather them up and will bring them to me as soon as possible... [**Letter 12, 6, lines 31-43**].

Of the five OT texts enumerated in this Letter, only *Canticles* and *Kings* are commented upon, and each of these quite incompletely, in the exegetical work of Gregory that has come down to us: the *Song of Songs* stops at **Ct 1:8** [cf. **SC** 144; **SC** 314]. These two expositions, partially saved, are all that rests of the two series of commentaries neatly separated by the list:

- on the one hand, the two Wisdom books and the Prophets;
- and on the other hand, the Heptateuch and Kings.

As Songs and Kings belong to a different series, both of them also different by form, Songs, as the title suggests [*Exposition in the Canticle of Canticles, from the beginning of the work set down by Gregory, Pope of the City of Rome*] seems to indicate a simple presentation of notes taken upon hearing the Pontiff. The second, the Commentary on Kings, presents itself as a genuine “work” which the author wrote down, for “readers” and the entire composition is prefaced.

This last remark leads us to the statements made in the letter dated in 602. This mentions a first redaction made by Claude, which ought to have been followed by a new redaction, reviewed and corrected, by Gregory himself. According to every appearance, it is this second version, authorized and definitive, which has come down to us and published in the series *Sources Chretiennes* 314]. However, to clarify even further the origin of this work, and its date, it is necessary to point out, in the correspondence of Gregory, all that concerns the relations of the Pope and the Abbot of Classis.

b. Other Letters of Gregory concerning the Abbot Claude: in chronological order, here is a resume' of Gregory's Letters which mention Claude:

July 592: the Bishop John of Ravenna is asked to send the abbot Claude to Fano with the silver to ransom the captives [cf. 2, 38].

January 596: the Bishop Marinien of Ravenna, the successor of John, had just sent to Rome - despite certain protests on the part of his clergy and members of his diocese - representatives to plead the cause of his Church in the suit which opposed the Abbot Claude, dating from the episcopacy of John [6. 23].

April 598: Returning to Ravenna, the Abbot Claude brought to Marinien two letters from the Pope. One of these notifies the Bishop of his decision, in favor of the Monks, which ended their case with the Monastery of Classis [8, 17].

The other recommends that the Bishop receive Claude well. If Gregory had kept the abbot for a long time at his side, it is simply because he was of such help to the Pontiff in his arduous labors on Scripture. He would have kept him for a further long time, except that the Abbot of Classis was indispensable to his Monastery. That Marinien should show him the same affection that Gregory himself did, and that he revivifies the charity that he had witnessed in the past [8, 18].

July 599: Held back by the concerns for his Monastery, Claude did not return to Rome as Gregory had hoped. On the other hand, the Pontiff was not able to rely on any of the three persons about whom Claude had spoken to him. The hope was that the Abbot would seek in his own monastery someone to take his place, and arrange matters as best he could, and that he would eventually come to Gregory once more. If he did not find the man he wanted, the hope was that the Abbot himself could come for some time - five or six months - and spend that time with the Pontiff [9, 180].

January 602: Claude is dead! Gregory provides for his succession, and reclaims his own papers.

In reading through these half dozen letters, one might trace the outlines of the history of our text on *Kings*. It is just before the spring of 598 that there took place the "long sojourn" of Claude at Rome, in the course of which Gregory beyond much doubt had explained before him the books of Scripture that we know. When did this "long sojourn" actually begin? It was at least in January of 596, and probably even a year or so earlier - that Claude had come to plead his case before the Pope, prior to the death of the Bishop, John. According to this hypothesis, the Abbot of Classis had been able to

establish a friendship them with Marinien, once a Monk in the Monastery of Gregory on the Celio, unless he had known him even before.

That which Claude had retained of the oral expositions of Gregory and without doubt, had jotted them down in the form of notes, he was then able to redact once back in Ravenna, beginning with his return in April 598. It could even be that he had begun this work while he was still in Rome. On the other hand, without having the proof that he had come back to the Pope again following his appeal in July 599, it would be hard to imagine that the Abbot would not have obeyed this papal summons to come back to Rome and remain there at least for a few months. It is in the course of this second sojourn that he probably read to Gregory his redaction of the different commentaries. Not very satisfied with this work, would the Pope have charged him to review this undertaking still further? In any case, Claude seems still to have been working on the papers when he died towards the end of 601. It seems, then, that there was a certain amount of unedited papers that the original author wished to recover. When Gregory did eventually receive them from Ravenna, he would have committed himself to them at least for a part of the two years of life which remained to him.

The *Commentary on Kings* is, therefore, beyond much doubt, the last work of Pope St. Gregory the Great [at least, in the view of some experts]. This final position might explain in large measure the particularities which led to certain doubts on the authenticity of the work. For a long time, too, there were those who considered the Abbott Claude, the former monk of St. Andrew on the Celio, as one who had taken possession of the commentaries assembled by him in the years preceding the Pontificate of Gregory. All of this misinformation led to this entire matter being so poorly understood. Situated between the *Moralia*, and the *Homilies on Ezechiel*, the *Commentary on Kings* should not have differed much from these in style. But, when one recognizes that the *Commentary on Kings* is such a late work in the life of Gregory, there is not much surprise in seeing the author having certain concerns, a much more developed thought on various points, as well as displaying a more developed style.

c. **The Political and Religious Situation:** the date of the *Commentary on Kings* is important also for understanding its relationship with the development of the political thought of the Pope. As recent studies have shown, it was in 595 that Gregory left Byzantium and began to be more interested in the barbarian kingdoms. Is it, then, just by chance that he chosen then to comment on a book of Scripture which recounts the installation of the royalty in Israel?

This similarity of ideas, it is true gives rise to two objections:

- on the one hand, the first two Israelite Kings, Saul and David, represent principally, in the eyes of Gregory, the Christian Shepherd and his model, Jesus Christ: the outlook of the commentator is not political, but **spiritual** and **ecclesiastical**;

- furthermore, the Book of Kings is only one of five parts of Scripture explained in this period by the Pontiff: this Book of Kings does not seem, then, to merit the particular attention of the author.

Both of these remarks shed some light on the situation in which the ***Commentary on Kings*** came to be. The totally **ecclesial** interpretation of the royalty, which contributes to make of the work a **Tract on the Christian Priesthood**, indeed is one that could expect it to be from the pen of a man who had already had several years of the episcopacy behind him. In the midst of his Pontificate, this ***Commentary on Kings*** has been issued as a kind of **Second Pastoral**, where the concerns are especially moral of one who is enriched, as will be noted, with very precise indications on the **sacramental services and the spiritual demands of the Episcopacy**. However, this spiritualization of the theme of the royalty does not exclude all relationship with the political reality of the barbarian kingdoms. In this regard it is very significant that the **Mother of Christ** is exalted, at the beginning of the work, in a sumptuous page where his heartfelt style comes to the fore: the epithet, *praecellentissima*, which Gregory applies to Mary, is the same one that he most customarily would use to greet the kings and queens of France, the Visigoths and the Anglo - Saxons.

On the other hand, it is clear that the ***Commentary on Kings*** pertains to an ensemble of commentaries, embracing a number of books of scripture, which allows one to pose this question: why, along with a few pages of notes on the Canticles, would this work alone have come down to us? Of course, one may not totally rule out **chance**, all the more so because of the extreme rarity of the manuscript tradition [only **two** exemplars have come down to us], gives to the conservation of the ***Commentary on Kings*** the air of a miracle. It is not impossible that the other commentaries taken over by Claude had also been similarly edited by Gregory and that they were lost. However, another hypothesis merits our attention: in the ***Commentary on Kings*** it could be because the subject matter was one of preference for Gregory, who then would have chosen this one among the other like commentaries, with a view to editing it, while he would have left the others in the state of notes, or even could have destroyed them.

The certain privilege accorded to the ***Commentary on Kings*** would also rather easily be explained by **the importance and the actuality of the considerations of the author on the episcopacy of which the work is full**. Drawn by this Book of Scripture

due to its obvious connection with the **pastoral concerns** which were much on his mind, Gregory would have set down to commenting much on his own in that he would have seen in the first 16 chapters a particularly useful task, and this would have led him to ensure its transmission and priority. One might also conclude that he had concentrated on this work in whatever time of leisure he had and strength that remained to him in the last years and months of his earthly existence.

d. The Preface and its Echoes: whatever may be the truth in all this speculation it is most helpful to examine the Preface carefully, which has been placed in the body of the work. This piece begins with establishing, welcoming certain "simple" readers, that the First Kings is a profound work and one that is full of mysteries. This depth has even something frightening attached to it, which counsels against undertaking the explanation of the entire work. It is better to limit oneself merely to a part of the whole: **the work will come to a close with the anointing of David.**

Divine and mysterious, inexhaustible and always new, the Scripture transcends all the commentaries that men may compose on them. And the author maintains that no one should judge the inspired book on his exposition! Furthermore, **the mystical quality of First Kings** does not flow only from the fact that it has God as its author. The work has, therefore, a kind of prophetic tone. So great is its richness that one may not even dream of developing everywhere each of the senses that the text presents. In this matter, too, it is necessary to restrict oneself. This prudence imposes itself even more in that certain ecclesiastics consider as superfluous all new effort at exegesis, having taken note of the abundance of the commentaries already in existence.

In reality no one had yet explained this book line by line. Up to this point, the Fathers of the Church had commented only on certain passages, and the necessities of an exegesis that followed would not permit that this be continued. The style of this new **Commentary** would not in any way surpass theirs, but this is not important. The rule of faith will be saved, and the mediocrity of style will find an excuse in the **difficulty** of the undertaking. This is most evident in trying to steer the middle course between the mere apparent platitudes of the text and the sublimity of the mysteries hidden within it. The beginning of **the book is commented upon on two levels**: the author develops **the typical sense**, and then **the moral sense**⁷.

This Preface is to be compared with the double Introduction to the **Moralia**, which forms a unit three times longer - the **Preface** in the former covers 732 lines - the one to Kings **is 218 lines**. In both compositions, Gregory treats a good number of

⁷ CCC ## 115-119.

common points and responds to the same questions. But, the Preface to the ***Commentary on Kings*** has none of the autobiographical data as is present in the Letter to Leander, nor in the portrait of Job which fills the Preface to the *Morals*. On the other hand, though, two new concerns present themselves: **to justify the spiritual commentary** of an account that is apparently bound to this earth, and to **situate the commentator in connection with the earlier Fathers**.

The first of the author's concerns is in some contrast to the apparently "simple" readers, noted often in different forms - and these remain at the surface of the text. Under this apparent banality, the Letter of the Book of Kings covers unfathomable depths. The divine author of the work, its human redactor, the commentaries that the Fathers have given certain passages, all indicate that the composition **is infinitely richer** than would appear. The work might be compared to a river, a forest, a sea.

The other concern derives perhaps from one perspective, from these same "simple" readers - finds their mistake reconfirmed in the statement that **no previous Father of the Church has taken the trouble to comment methodically on this Book of Kings**. Gregory, though, has in view another opposition: that of certain Church people who would prefer to remain with the commentaries of the ancients, much more in accord with their tastes. Inaugurating a polemic which will run right through his entire composition, Gregory accuses these colleagues of worldliness and spiritual laziness. Their attachment to the Fathers is but a pretext, for in reality, being totally taken up with worldly affairs, they do not take the time to read. It seems that the new commentator has to justify himself for breaking new ground. As the monastic rules, the exegetical works of the past are considered to suffice. To add to this venerable deposit, seemed useless to many.

This is not the first time that Gregory makes certain reproaches regarding the works of exegesis. Earlier, at the beginning of one of his ***Homilies on Ezechiel***, he mentions those among his listeners who might tacitly address him, in words such as these: 'how do I even dare to ponder these very profound mysteries of the Prophet Ezechiel, which the great exegetes of the past have not even touched! That which is considered to be temerarious is in truth, useless.' As for the silence of his predecessors, which is thrown up to him as an aggravating circumstance, Gregory offers his *apologia*: there is simply in such efforts an empty space that he is trying to fill.

The Fathers might have well commented on this or that passage of the Books of Kings, but never have they taken in hand the whole text to explain verse by verse: a great part of his Preface turns around these two facts, and Gregory tries to situate himself in the line of his predecessors. In the fact that they attest that the history of

Kings is full of mysteries, they thus caution any undertaking of the commentator in their regard. Their selective manner is contrasted with the commentary followed by Gregory in that this new approach constrains him to limit himself to merely one part of the text. Such a difference in approach will oblige him at times not to follow in their interpretations, for a text in its totality cannot be explained in the same manner as chosen bits and pieces. Joined to the concern of avoiding annoying repetitions, this necessity of interpreting in a different manner than his illustrious predecessors, will engender a certain variety: the preceding Fathers are sometimes followed, and sometimes left aside. Lastly it is also of them that Gregory thinks in speaking of the eloquent speakers of the Holy Church, whose style he knows is superior to his own.

Both for its form, as well as for its depth, Gregory's ***Commentary on First Kings*** can claim a certain independence. Without allowing himself to be intimidated by those defending the work of the ancients, Gregory courageously forges ahead, he breaks new ground, and will abandon himself to the divine inspirations and to the impulsion of charity. That upon which he bases himself is his challenge to be of some assistance to the **"little ones in the Holy Church"**, so that they might find greater profit in a book that pertains to them. As the entire OT, the Books of Kings offer a teaching regarding Jesus Christ and the Christian life. This mysterious content cannot remain hidden to them under the letter. It is necessary to penetrate this for the **"simple" readers**, who would not even suspect what is present in this composition.

In addition to his pedagogical and pastoral motivation - which is doubtlessly the ultimate reason for his undertaking - it is necessary to note in his Preface two propositions to which Gregory makes reference in the body of his work: the previously made decision to stop with the anointing of David, and the attribution of the History of Kings to certain Prophet-writers. These further missions show that the Preface had not been added in the last hour, once he work was completed. The passages, to which reference is made in the course of it at the very least, are later than the redaction of the Preface, or at least contemporary with it.

The Preface, then, makes up a part of the work itself. It pertains to the same redactor. Was this Gregory himself, or someone else? That needs some reflection.

e. The Problem of Authenticity: we are not referring here to the history of the opinions pronounced in this regard over the past four centuries:

- some have always maintained that this Commentary on Kings is **truly the work of Gregory**;
- but, others have attributed the work to a **more recent author**;

- and still others - and in great number - have seen that the Gregorian correspondence has offered this formula: **an oral exposition by Gregory, listened to by Claude, and then this was more or less changed from the notes that he took during these conferences.**

The major stages in this discussion are the denial by Goussainville [1675] - the staunch defense by Saint-Martha [1705] - and the recent convincing demonstration by Fr. Verbraken [1956]. After this most recent study, over recent decades, there has been an increasing number of adherents to the thesis of a **substantial authenticity**, with some emendations added by Claude. It is most difficult to discern the extent of his emendations - there is ample room for opinions in this sector as there are those who have apparently been able to pin-point certain "non-Gregorian" aspects of the work.

Thus, the Commentary on Kings is indeed a **Gregorian work, drawn up by Claude, is a fact which now most scholars would accept.** However, admitting this, other questions come to the fore: did Gregory ever put his stamp of approval on the work that Claude submitted to him? In other words, is the Pope also the author of the Preface? Neither Saint-Martha nor Fr. Vebraken believed this was so. The earlier scholar believed that he noted an air, a style about the Preface that did not seem to have come from the mind of Gregory: there is a lack of simplicity, inflated figures, and a luxurious style - which were not his. Fr. Verbraken, on his part, made no clear pronouncement concerning the Prologue, but he thinks that Gregory died without having corrected and edited Claude's text.

In 1957, another scholar [A. Mundo'] came to believe that the Prologue to the Commentary of Kings is indeed from the hand of the Pope, who had simply edited, at least in part, the notes that had arrived on his desk from Ravenna. Accepting this view, another scholar [Fr. Meyvaert] recognized in the Prologue a highly worked out piece, completely from Gregory in vocabulary and style, and containing a very personal one. Joined to other indices - the mention of the "readers" of the work, the elaborated structure and the division into books, the final prayer for both writer and reader [cf. VI, 116] - this Prologue is similar to the Letter-Preface of the *Moralia*, and this would indicate that the redaction of Claude had been reviewed and the published by Gregory.

In our eyes, the authenticity of the Preface is as certain in that this piece makes up a part of the body of the work, as has been seen. Undoubtedly, **it is "Gregorian" in its totality**, and the *Commentary* cannot be separated from the pages of Introduction to which they refer. To attribute to another hand this piece of opening and the passages that make it up does not really seem possible for it presents numerous points of contact with the other works of Gregory, as the notes of scholars have maintained.

At the most, one might conjecture, as some scholars have done, that Claude had participated in the redaction as he did in the rest of the work.

With, or without this collaborator, Gregory certainly revised and edited this ***Commentary on Kings***. Consequently, all that is found there received the revisions of the Pontiff, both that which came from Claude's hand, as well as his own composition. The unusual characteristics of the work - both regarding the ideas presented as well as for the style of writing - could well have been the result of the maturation of the author himself, as this is his final work - or, also the result of the *redactional* interventions of his disciple. In both hypotheses, the traits in question are indeed "Gregorian" - since Gregory had accepted them in the definitive text that he handed over to his readers.

As a result, one might indeed affirm the entire authenticity of the *Commentary on Kings*, without excluding, of course, that Claude has also left his mark on these pages. To discern once and for all on those particularities directly due to Claude is just about impossible - for the personal evolution of Gregory might also offer some explanation on the originalities of a late work. All that one can do now is to take note of the original traits in the ***Commentary on Kings***, placed in evidence by comparison with the rest of the work of the great Pontiff. And so, without any pretense at being complete, there follow some of the characteristic traits, of which some have given rise to the suspicions of not being the authentic work of Gregory the Great.

f. **Mariology and other Unusual Traits:** from the very beginning of the *Commentary*, one page really stands out by the extraordinary praise that is given to the Virgin Mary, exalted beyond all the angels and saints. His ample bestowal of titles, exceptionally introduced by the superlative ***beatissima***, her assimilation to the "mountain" of Isaiah, where Gregory ordinarily sees Jesus Christ in Person, the royal epithet ***praecellentissima***, which is bestowed on her - and all of these on this one page, breathes of **a Marian devotion which surpasses that of the Middle Ages** - and it is **a style with which Gregory and his entire era were scarcely accustomed.**

Further on, there are those who believe they have discerned another indication of **a medieval insertion**, in the expression that seems to be from the ***Salve, Regina: in hac valle lacrimarum***⁸. However, Gregory made use of this expression several times in his ***Commentary on Kings***, and the question is from where did he get it? In any case, it does seem in harmony with the verse from the Psalm present here: ***... in the vale of tears, in the place which he has set...*** [cf. **Ps 83:7**]. Regarding other analogous citations, within the text itself, or within its interpretation, there are observed other

⁸cf. I, 78, 4.

scriptural texts used in the course of this *Commentary on Kings*, as might be seen with any careful reading.

At the end of the following book, Gregory takes up two opposed heresies: that of Origen, and that of Novatian. The former has misunderstood the Divine Justice, and the latter down-played His infinite Mercy. The reproach addressed to Origen is found elsewhere in Gregory - but, this criticism addressed against Novatian is new. But, once again, it could also be an indication of the *Commentary* taking a step forward.

g. Monastic Concerns: once in the first half of the work, and six times in the second half, there arises the question of the “Monks” and of “Monasteries”, terms which Gregory avoids in his exegetical works. In these explicit passages, and also in a good number of others which makes use of transparent paraphrases, the common monastic life is called to mind with a precision that some have thought of as “suspect”. Two phrases in the Benedictine Rule are even cited formally, their author being qualified as an “eminent master of the most strict life”- and here and there a good many expressions lead one to think of the same Rule.

It could be that this influence of Benedict on the *Commentary of Kings* is due to the relationship that Gregory had with the near-by Lateran, and the Abbot Valentinian, one of the sources for the drawing up of the life of the Saint. Composed just after the *Dialogues*, this *Commentary on Kings* attests as the *Dialogues* do, the radiance exercised by the great Monk of Cassino on a writer who had not shown to him the same attention.

h. Is there hinted at a Ritual of Episcopal Anointing? The cenobitic life is not the only domain where the *Commentary on Kings* provides some astonishment for its readers by its interest for particular situations and precise rituals. The ecclesiastical and clerical life is also there the object of the same attention, descending right down into details. One of these is particularly troubling. Speaking of the royal anointing of Saul, the commentator notes: this anointing represents that which is accomplished materially still today, in the Holy Church: that which is placed on the head of a candidate who received the sacrament of Anointing. But, since this anointing is a sacrament, the subject thus promoted is not uselessly anointed without which by the virtue of this sacrament he is fortified within.

Apparently these two phrases seem to imply that the Episcopal Consecration is performed then by means of an anointing with oil. It is believed that this ritual did not fully enter into the Roman Liturgy until two or three centuries after Gregory. However, the habitual interpretation of ‘anointing’ in the work of Gregory, and

especially in the ***Commentary on Kings***, suggests that it is a matter, here as elsewhere, of a symbolic representation: to “anoint” [*oindre*] means to “ordain”. If the adverb *materialiter* means simply “materially”, the material reality which is in view here is the ceremony of ordination, not that “unction” that figures in it.

i. **Praise of Profane studies**: another difficulty presents itself further on, when Gregory ponders on the value of secular studies and gives these an astonishingly positive evaluation. These proposals are presented by the condition of Israel suffering under the yoke of the Philistines: these forbade the Chosen People from manufacturing arms, and even kept them from having their own furnaces, so that it became necessary to go down among the Philistines for the sharpening of their utensils.

Likewise, as is noted in the ***Commentary on Kings***, the demons detour Christians from studying secular letters, which would become in their hands weapons of spiritual combat, in affirming their understanding of Scripture. To commit oneself to these studies is, without doubt, a certain “coming down from the heights of the Bible”, the sole reading truly worthy of the Christian, but it is also placing oneself in a position to understand the Sacred Text better. The secular authors sharpen the spirit, they prepare it to draw from Scripture that which they have need of in order to build themselves up, and to be able to preach to others, they render each one more capable of disentangling the diabolic suggestions, in oneself, and also in others, in a very rapid and sure manner. Moses, Isaiah and St. Paul have first of all cultivated profane literature, and it is also thanks to these that they excelled then in the knowledge of divine realities.

This relatively favorable appreciation of secular culture contrasts with the severe declarations of Gregory in his letters to Leander of Seville and to Didier of Vienne. And beyond doubt, some recent studies have shown the limited bearing of these proposals, hostile to grammar and rhetoric, which in no way are a hindrance, neither in fact, nor by right, of a direct usage of these disciplines. But, the tendency and the tone of this ***Commentary on Kings*** are not much different from this. When one compares these encouragements to the study of letters with certain passages of the ***Dialogues***, which exalt learned ignorance, it seems that this Commentary, on this point, as on others, marks an evolution in Gregory’s attitude.

One can also subscribe to the opinion according to which this Commentary presents here the taking up of a position that is well fortified where Gregory, in his works known by others, never reached a genuine synthesis. However, the doubts regarding the authenticity of Gregory’s authorship in this ***Commentary on Kings*** which came to the fore due to German criticisms, are not legitimate if they date the work to a time prior to his Pontificate, was often done. **If, on the contrary, the work is placed at**

its proper date, towards the end of his Pontificate, the maturation of which this work offers witness becomes both natural and plausible.

j. **A Suspect Ecclesiology?** One final difficulty ought to be mentioned, since the passage on which it is based is doubtful. With regard to the *speculators* [the watchmen] of Saul, who observed from afar Jonathan's exploits:

1 S 14:16, f: ... *And the watchmen of Saul, who were in Gabaa of Benjamin, looked and behold a multitude overthrown and fleeing this way and that. And Saul said to the people that were with him: Look, and see who is gone from us. And when they had sought, it was found that Jonathan and his armor-bearer were not there...*

Gregory speaks of a supreme summit of the universal Church, which orders preachers to traverse the world, protecting all around him those ministers whose doctrine he examines and carefully supervises their conduct.

This expression makes one think of a more recent conception of the papacy as responsibility for the universal Church, above the bishops responsible for the local Churches. An ecclesiology of this nature would be in harmony with that of Gregory, as it is well known the aversion he experienced for the title "ecumenical" assumed by the Bishop of Constantinople. His protestations on this subject are of a character that is so general and so absolute that they seem to block the application of the term to the Roman Pontiff himself. Furthermore, if the "ministers" of this passage are the agents of Rome who supervise the bishops, one would see in this a figure unfolding of the roman Curia which has something anachronistic when thinking of the times of Gregory.

However, this interpretation, which comes almost spontaneously to our minds, does not impose itself. At the beginning of the passage, Gregory recalls that Saul represents the "bishops" and Jonathan, the "priests". This last equivalence is maintained, it seems throughout this entire piece which treats of the supervision of priests by bishops, but not that of bishops by the Sovereign Pontiff placed over them. As to the assimilation of King Saul to the "bishop", this is corrected by the entry into the scene of the "look-outs", to whom Gregory transfers the figuration of the "episcopacy". Saul becomes then the figure of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church universal and the bishops then bear the title of "ministers", or "legates."

Thus, it seems to us, at least, the most plausible interpretation of a text which remains obscure. If this view is the right one, there is then no real difficulty regarding the subject of the authenticity of the work, nor even a remarkable development of the ecclesiology of its author.

k. **A Stylistic Singularity:** as though the text were saying: from the point of view of from, the *Commentary on Kings* presents a remarkable trait, which clearly

distinguishes it from all the other works of Gregory. Whenever he comments on Sacred Scripture, he has the custom of introducing the glosses explaining the text with a formula such as this: ***As though the text would say...*** In his first works, one finds very often this variation: ***as if it openly would say... did say ... will say...*** The phrase knows of a variety of variations, but the two initial conjunctions, ***ac si*** [***as if, though...***] - hardly ever change.

This *constant* that one finds also in the Song of Songs, fades in this ***Commentary on Kings***. In “Songs”, the ***ac si*** does occur 30 times, but in “Kings”, the habitual conjunction then becomes ***quasi*** - which appears 160 times. Furthermore the ***ac si*** is only found exceptionally, about 7 times in that this conjunction is habitually preceded by ***tale est***, or ***quod tale est***, expressions which are never found outside the ***Commentary on Kings***.

Lastly, the adverb, ***aperte***, which accompanies the formula the most often in the first works, becomes rare in the ***Commentary on Kings***. In this regard, however, the ***Commentary on Songs*** resembles that of Kings: no one of the seven glosses introduced by an ***ac si***, contains the adverb, ***aperte***.

If these particularities of the last commentaries of Gregory’s life are imputable to Claude, one could conjecture that the one on Songs, where there is noted only the omission of the adverb, preceded the *Commentary on Kings* - which then changes this whole construction. In any case, Gregory has admitted both changes in his editing of the ***Commentary on Kings***. It could just as easily have been that his style has evolved, or that he renounced corrections these stylistic differences of Claude, which seems the most probable. In any case, he has modified in his final work the literary habits by now well established.

I. **Other Formal Particularities:** in more than in this most distinctive trait, the ***Commentary on Kings*** presents others that are more or less sure, such as the word ***eucharistia***, and the expression ***sacramentum scripturarum*** - the rarity of the title ***Mediator*** given to Christ and the frequency of the appeals to ***spiritual experience***. In retrospect, the expression ***sic nimirum*** is not proper to Gregory, as was once thought. The profound reflection which permits the ***Thesaurus*** of Louvain to reveal beyond doubt other interesting particularities of style. It seems that the ***Commentary on Kings*** is somewhat inferior, from a literary point of view, to the works over which Gregory labored the more, but it still remains close to these others both in its form, and the depth of the material treated.

Here are some of the “accidents” that one will note in this work: first of all, a number of errors, but Gregory committed others like them in his earlier works. He has a good number of incomplete expressions, or some omissions, which at times render

the commentary difficult to follow. Besides, the lack of charity results at times from the expression itself, which leaves much to be desired from the point that the meaning itself is the problem. The reader will also encounter repetitions that are not really very stylish, the use of conjunctions which reveal less the literary language than the spoken language - some uncertainties regarding the gender of words, or the mode of the verbs, works surprisingly presented in the passive, elliptic expressions, and even *anacoluthons*.

Pressed for time, fatigued by age and illness, would Gregory really have had the possibility of reviewing the work of Claude with any less care than in his previous works? In any case, these minute weaknesses are not really that numerous, nor that serious, to cover over **his underlying style, which stands out on each line**. All of these symptoms and defects have been noted however, by scholars. One more addition might be the author's penchant for a play on words, alliterations that are sprinkled throughout this *Commentary on Kings*, as well as in the other writings of the Saint.

Conclusion: This Commentary on Kings is therefore, a work that is fully "Gregorian", even though it is known it is a work accomplished in collaboration. Gregory first of all "spoke" this *Commentary on the Books* of Kings before Claude - i.e., most likely on the different pieces of Fist Samuel. Then, he took cognizance of what had been dictated to Claude, jotted down by him, but the author found this redaction unsatisfying. Desirous nonetheless to publish this commentary, as it was only a part of the entire biblical work, he restricted himself to a portion to be edited - i.e., just up until the anointing of David. He then drew up a *Preface* which justifies his limitation of the material to be treated, divided the work into **six Books**, supplied each of these with some words of introduction and conclusion, and then submitted the entire work to a rather summary revision, without effacing totally the hand of Claude in the work. It might also be noted that Claude could also have collaborated in this final redaction, just as he did in the initial composition of the work. It is most noteworthy to interpreters, the appearance of the word *quasi* right in the middle of the Preface, introducing an explicative gloss.

If Gregory had limited his explanation to **the 16 first chapters of the First Book of Samuel**, it is beyond doubt because of the exceptional interest of this account, as well as the amplitude of his own endeavor. As for the rather subjective division into separate Books, this only very imperfectly corresponds, as will be seen, to the real structure of the Commentary. So different from the first Books of his *Morals*, those in his Commentary on Kings do not coincide with the very brief sections between which the sacred text is distributed. This division into six Books that are too long, is an artificial re-organization, made without much attention being given to the true unfolding of the **1 S.**



Chapter 3: Formal Aspects of the Work

a. **The Six Books:** the *Commentary on Kings* is divided into **six Books**, and these divisions for the most part are clearly indicated in the text. The first two changes from one book to another, give rise to transitional explanations [such as: *in sequenti volumine... superiori libro...*]. Then, the beginning of what follows is not announced formally, but in Books 4 & 5 [e.g., ... *haec in quarto huius operis libro disputata sufficient...*] - this is done with greater clarity within the text itself. These formulae of transition are very often found at the end of the Books, called also sometimes, *libellus*, or *volumen*. When these indications are found at the beginning of books, brief prologues replace these in several passages.

This half dozen books follow well defined literary limits. A Preface usually precedes, which determines the extent of the Book: and the entire reflection, as has been repeatedly noted above, ends with the Anointing of David. Responding to this plan, two formulae of conclusion may be noted: one is close to the end; and the other in the last lines - these declare **a completed commentary. It all ends at the spot indicated, 1 S 16:13.**

Within this context of precise boundaries, the almost identical conclusions to both Books II and IV suggest that these six Books are **grouped in pairs** - hence, there are three groups: I-II; III-IV; V-VI. The Prologue of Book V, with its referral to the Preface, confirms this grouping. Following the conclusions which immediately precedes these, the introductions of Books III and V are new *principia*, beginnings.

This division into six Books, united as couples, is reminiscent of the structure in Gregory's longer work, the *Moralia*. The 35 Books of this great work are divided into six "Parts", or "volumes":

- the first two comprise 5 volumes [cf. *Morals*, i-5; 6-10];
- the two following comprise 6 Books [cf. 11-16; and 17-22];
- the last two respectively contain 5 [cf. 23-27] and 8 Books [cf. 28-35].

The six Books in the *Commentary on Kings* correspond then, exactly to those of Parts III & V of the *Morals*. However, the length of these parts is quite inferior to those of the *Commentary on Kings* - the Books of which are about twice as long as those in the *Morals*, the *Commentary on Job*. On the other hand, the *Morals* have less material in the explicit transitions between their books, and each of these begins with a kind of Prologue.

b. The Ten Sections: all with whittling this work into manageable shape, the division into six Books and the grouping of these into three couples still only imperfectly present the real and comprehensive organization of the ***Commentary on Kings***. In reading the work, one is immediately struck by a series of facts:

- the taking up again of the same passages for a second, and even third interpretation;
- following these multiple exegeses, one notes the design of dividing the biblical text into four sections that are somewhat lengthy [cf. **1 S 1:1-28; 1:28-2:10; 1: 11-36; 3:1-21**];
- then Gregory offers one single time interpretation of a block of other chapters [e.g., **i S 4:1-7, 17**];
- then, he again takes up his exegesis on several levels, in explaining in three separate ways about 20 verses [i.e., **1 S 8:1-9:2**];
- finally, after having treated of a tract of 8 following chapters [i.e., **1 S 9:3-16:1**];
- he comments twice on the final short section [cf. **1 S 16:1-13**].

This distribution of the Commentary into sections coincides in part, with the disposition into Books. The beginnings and the ends of these correspond always, until the middle of Book IV, to a stage of the Commentary, which would be a change of section, or the passage of a register to the other in the explanation of the same *pericope*. But, following the large slice of 8 Chapters explained all in a piece [cf. **1 S 9:3-16:1**] he covers without interruption the second half of Book IV, all of Book V [and the first half of Book VI [cf. IV, 79 - VI, 61]. Having already noted that the division into books corresponds to the articulation of the Commentary, it seems legitimate to keep this in mind in the present case, and of dividing this large chunk of continuing exegesis into three more sections:

- the end of Book IV;
- Book V;
- and the beginning of Book VI.

This all adds up to 10 sections, as follows:

Section	1 Samuel	Subject	Comm. 1 R	Sense
1.	1:1-28	His Birth	I, 1-60 I, 61-84	typical moral
2.	I: 28-2:10 2:1-10	Hannah's Cant.	I, 85-112 II, 1-28	typical moral

3.	2:11-36	Eli & Sons	II, 29-75 II, 76-110	typical moral
4.	3:1-21	Samuel's Vocation	II, 111-159 III, 1-37	moral typical
5.	4:1-7, 17	Eli & Samuel's Ark	III, 38-173	Spiritual
6.	8:1-20 8:11-9:2 8:1-9:2	Samuel & Sons From Sam. to Saul [same]	IV, 1-14 IV, 15-37 IV, 38-78	literal spir. [neg.] spir. [pos.]
7.	9:3-10:27	Saul's coming	IV, 79-217	Spiritual
8.	11:1-15:7	Saul's Wars	V, 1-212	Spiritual
9.	15:8-16:1	Saul's Fall	VI, 1-61	Spiritual
10.	16:1-13	David's Anointing	VI, 62-96 VI, 97-115	spiritual typical

†

c. **Exegetical Method: the Different Senses:** as might be evident from this Table, the **Typical** Sense and the **Moral** Sense alternate regularly in the first three sections, as the Preface had announced. In the 4th Section, the order is reversed, with the **Moral** explanation coming first. This change seems due to a simple distraction: without even thinking of it, Gregory seems simply to have continued the **Moral** interpretation of the second part of the previous section in just taking it beyond.

Another 'distraction' might be evident at the end of Section 4, where the author, having ended his second explanation of Samuel's vocation, continues without transition into penetrating into a new *pericope*. Here, however, one hesitates to qualify as "typical, or "allegorical", the unique Commentary which fills the long Section 5. Right at the very beginning, the typical character of the exegesis blurs as the Section unfolds, where Moral considerations seem to take over more and more. It seems then preferable to speak of a spiritual sense. Including both the Typical and the Moral, this term - "**Spiritual**" - often recurs in contrast with the "carnal", "historical", or "literal" sense. It is this term "**Spiritual**" which defines better an undifferentiated exegesis, where **allegory** [the history of the Church] and **edification** come together.

This same might be said in the following sections. Gregory does not specify these, ordinarily, if the sense is Typical, or Moral - but, he concerns himself constantly with laying out the **spiritual** sense, not, however, with neglecting totally the literal sense. It is here in particular, in Section 8, that he speaks also of the *mysteries*, of *mystical matters* - which really are these **spiritual** realities, with the nuance of the divine secret being hidden from the common view.

Section 6 presents a few particularities. First of all, it is the only one which comments on the text in the **literal** sense, before approaching the more **figured** senses. Then, the work distinguishes **two spiritual senses**: that are not the **typical** or the **moral** sense - but, these are two separate manners of looking upon the personality of Saul and his “right of the king”: the first is unfavorable, while the second is favorable. Gregory comments, then, on the *pericope* in three separate approaches, something unique in the Commentary on Kings, and each of these explanations delimits the text in a different manner - and the third giving to it its full amplitude, which the first two had restrained.

These original traits of Section 6 are discovered again in part, in a passage of the *Morals*. The first of the discourses of Job’s friends, that of Eliphaz, is first of all interpreted in a bad manner [**Eliphaz represents the heretics!**] - but, then, his words are given a positive twist [for he does say the truth!]. The second interpretation, omitting the beginning of the text, does not begin in the same place as the first⁹.

In his over-all undertaking, the exegetical method of the *Commentary on Kings* recalls also that of *Morals*, with certain particularities. The two works begin by developing separately diverse senses, then are content with a single commentary. In that the *Commentary on Kings* has alternating the **Typical** and the **Moral** senses in their first four sections, so, too, the *Morals* on Job present side by side the **allegorical** sense and the **moral** sense in their first three Books. But, to these two **spiritual senses** [contrasted with “history”], the Commentary on Job adds - or rather “pre-fixes” the **historical** sense, so that each *pericope* has begun not only two separate times, but even three. This phenomenon happens only in Section 6 in the Commentary on Kings.

At the beginning of Book IV, the Commentary on the *Morals*, still separates the **historical** commentary and the **moral** commentary - but, this latter is then opened up, without solution of continuity, into a new *pericope*, and Gregory will not distinguish further the different registers. Having passed on to Section 4, the *Commentary on Kings* does more or less the same, except for taking up *in extremis*, the two-fold commentary, for the sake of finishing, as he had commenced - with Jesus Christ!

d. **The Quantitative Relationship of the Commentary on the Text:** in his different sections, Gregory does not extend in equal manner on the text which he comments. The more he lingers, the more then does he pick up speed. It could be interesting to measure this variable relationship of the *Commentary* to the text. The following Table might indicate the varying number of pages per commentary and the number of verses of the text in each section. And within these, we distinguish, when

⁹ Compare: *Mor* 5, 29-49 [Jb 4:1-16]; and 49-66 [Jb 4:12-16]

I Reg IV, 1-14 [1 S 8:1-20]; 1537 [1 S 8: 11-9:2; 38-78 [1 S 8:1-9:2].

there is time, the respective numbers of the different sorts of commentaries - with the numbers in parenthesis]

Section	Pages	Verses	Pages per Verse
1	48 [32 + 16]	28	1, 71
2	34 [18 + 16]	11 [11; 10]	3, 09
3	45 [25 + 20]	26	1, 73
4	42 [24 + 18]	21	2
5	75	72	1, 04
6	41 [8 + 12 + 21]	24 [20;14; 24]	1, 70
7	83	52	1, 59
8	132	122	1, 08
9	38	29	1, 31
10	29 [19 + 10]	13	2. 23

†

As approximate as all this is, this Table at least shows that the sections are classed, with regard to the extent of the commentary, in the following order: **2, 10, 4, 3, 1, 6, 7, 9, 8, 5**. As one can note, the Commentary is longer in the Sections where the same text is explained different times:

- passages that are particularly favored are the **Canticle of Anna [2]; the Vocation of Samuel [4]; the Anointing of David [10];**
- those treated in median fashion: Eli and his sons [3]; the birth of Samuel [1]; and the passage of the sons of Samuel to Saul [6];
- and finally, those passages that are treated more rapidly: the coming of Saul [7]; his faults [9]; his wars [8]; as well as the adventures of the Ark [5].

If one gives attention to the numbers between parentheses in the second column above, there will be noted that the second commentary of each section is always shorter than the first. This law is verified as well in the three cases, where the **typical** sense opens it [Sections 1 - 3], rather than in the two cases where it takes its place in line [cf. Sections 4 & 10]. So, it is not so much a matter of a preference as such for this or that sense, but rather a simple tendency to speak longer the first time than the second. The only exception on this point, as on the others, is Section 6, where the three successive commentaries are longer and longer.

In summary, the **560 pages of the commentary cover 396 verses of the Biblical text** which would be an over-all **average of 1, 41 pages per verse**. These numbers should be compared with those of other works by Gregory:

Works	Pages	Verses	Average pages per verse
<i>Morals</i> 1-5	259	84	3, 08
<i>Morals</i> 6-10	294	180	1, 63
<i>Morals</i> 11-16	265	324	0, 81
<i>Morals</i> 17-22	285	173	1. 64
<i>Morals</i> 23-27	251	165	1, 52
<i>Morals</i> 28-35	418	145	2, 88
Hom. Ezk I	182	67	2, 71
Hom. Ezk II	190	47	4, 08

†

Keeping in mind the approximate character of these examinations, it appears that the amplitude of the Gregorian commentary varies very much from one work to another, and even from one part to another within the same work. The average page per verse, **1, 41**, is quite inferior to that of the *Homilies on Ezechiel* and of the first part of the *Morals on Job* - but, quite superior to that of the third part of *Morals*, which, as is known was composed from notes taken from it having been heard. When one approaches the II, IV and V the parts of the *Morals*, it remains quite inferior. In detail, it is interesting to note the averages that are almost identical of the Second Section of the Commentary on Kings [3, 09], and of the beginning of the *Morals* [3, 08] - as well as other correspondences to be noted. Globally, one can say that our work in no way figures as an anomaly in the overall output of St. Gregory.

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Chapter 4: The Content and Intended Readers

Analogous in form to the Commentary on the *Morals in Job*, the *Commentary on Kings* is distinguished quite clearly by its content. In cultivating the same type of **spiritual** exegesis, where the moral sense dominates, he speaks quite often, and in a manner that is quite precise, of certain **structures of the Church**. This original content, which derives from the tenor of the commented text and from the personal concerns of the commentator, has **two principal hot points**: the **priestly ministry** and the **monastic life**.

Analysis of the Work: prior to taking up an inventory of the notations relative to either one of these two points, it is necessary to see, in reading through the work, how these themes are read from the text and intertwine throughout the commentary.

There follows here a rapid analysis of the Commentary on Kings, Section by Section. Of necessity, this will be a bit dry and to the point in some places, and the resume' will open certain pathways through the exegetical forest, quite thick with foliage:

Section 1: [I, 1-84]: Christ, the Spouse of the Church, and the Ideal of the Monk:

First Interpretation [I, 1-60]: Elcana represents Jesus Christ, that one unique man, Who has repaired by his virile force the baseness of Adam, and redeemed the human race. His two wives are symbolic, in that one is the **Church [Anna]** and the other is the **Synagogue [Phenenna]**. The conflict between the two wives represents the persecution that some of the Jews had inflicted on the nascent Church. Judaism, and especially its priests, is also called to mind by the two sons of Eli, and by Eli himself, in the person of whom there figures primarily the hostility of the old priesthood, then its partial rallying to the Christian faith.

The Christ "adores" by His obedient life, and "immolates" by His redemptive death. The Church, by her preachers, announces Jesus Christ with a perfect selflessness, has compassion on the blind Jews who persecute her and contemplates ceaselessly the divine will, the rule of her action. Born of Anna, Samuel is the figure of the body of Christian preachers who came forth from paganism and presented to Eli, i.e., instructed in the OT. The three calves offered at the same time signify on the one hand, her two-fold pastoral task - that of converting sinners and assuring the perseverance of the just - and, on the other hand, that intimate contemplation which ought to accompany her action.

Second Interpretation [I, 61-84]: Elcana also represents the one who has left the world, that "man" who by his strong virtue, is "one", "unique" by his exclusive and passionate desire to see God. This renunciation, of which the Monk is the completed type, knows in him the tension between the two ways, the contemplative [Anna] and the active [Phenenna]. The active life is easier, and more quickly produces fruit. The contemplative life does not bear its incomparable fruits of spiritual joy until following a long and sustained effort, which proceeds from the assiduous reading of the Bible to continual prayer, in passing by the orientation of one's regard towards heaven, bitterness and tears of compunction, the firm proposal of remaining in the presence of God. In short, all depends on divine grace, the visits of which are sovereignly free, and disconcert the plans that men make, always demanding from him a constant effort.

On this moral register, to "**adore**" and to "**immolate**" are to be understood by the fearful veneration and that delightful rejoicing through which the soul which contemplates, passes. Eli, whose sons are not mentioned, plays the role of carnal superiors who are opposed to the desire of contemplation of their subjects, not

without acceding to it when these persevere in their requests with humility. As for the three calves, of which one alone is immolated, these are the praises addressed by the contemplative to God, One and Three.

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Section 2 [I, 85-II, 28]: The Triumph of the Church and of the Soul who loves God.

First Interpretation [I, 85-112]: through the mouth of Anna, the Church celebrates Christ's victory and her own triumph over the incredulity of the Jews: faith combated by her has spread all over the world. After having proclaimed the incomparable excellence of Jesus Christ, the Man-God, the Sanctifier of the Angels and human beings, the Author of miracles which surpass all those of the OT Saints - the Canticle of the Mother of Samuel contrasts the lot of the Jews, fallen from their dignity of the chosen race, and that of the Gentiles, called to take their place. At present, the Synagogue is sterile, while **the Church is giving birth to multitudes**. The Apostles and their successors, the preachers who have come over from paganism, will take their seats in majesty and they will judge, at the end of the world, the unfaithful Jews.

Second Interpretation [II, 1-28]: the voice of Anna becomes that of **the soul who loves God with an exclusive love**, with a heart on which the devil no longer has any empire. His enemies have been lowered, and these are the evil spirits and those men who resemble them, in particular, **the unworthy ministers of the Gospel and the Eucharist**. All are rendered mute by their pride and love for this world. In face of these misfortunes, the poor who renounce the world are protected by the grace against the temptations of the demons and exalted here below by their contemplation of the heavenly goods, anticipation of the eternal glory. Thus, Jerusalem from on high wishes that he children be multiplied, while Babylon - the symbol for the world - continually loses hers.

This two-fold exegesis, **typical and moral**, join together in order to render a special **homage to the triumphant Christ**, at the end of time.

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Section 3 [II, 29-110]: The Priesthood of Judaism and that of the Church

First Interpretation [II, 29-75]: The aged Eli represents the Jewish priesthood in decrepitude, but also the OT prophets and the doctors, who announced Jesus Christ. Before Him, the infant Samuel was born and grew up, the figure of the believing people having been converted from paganism - and in particular, a figure of her **preachers** who constitute the **new Priesthood**, destined to replace the old, and to enjoy here below an incomparable prestige. The sons of Eli represent Israel according

to the flesh, and especially the Jewish priesthood in that which is its darkest side: attachment to its own prerogatives, refusal to adhere to Jesus Christ and the condemnation of Him, persecutions inflicted on Christians. The Envoy of God, the Apostolic College, made known to this priestly order of Judaism its rejection, which has manifested itself by the cessation of the ancient cult. However, a certain number of priests adhere to the faith [cf. Ac 6:7], and a small part of the Jewish people did the same, in awaiting for the conversion of Israel which will follow that of the nations.

Second Interpretation [II, 76-110]: The young Samuel, serving the Lord before Eli appears to be the model of the obedience of subjects to their superiors. In pleasing not only God, but also human beings, he reminds them that they live a common life as an important duty: by their generous asceticism, the stronger among them ought to take care not to trouble the younger ones. The figure of superiors, Eli will be punished for the faults of his sons, whom he did not know how to correct with firmness. His excessively carnal love for them announces the evil of ecclesiastical nepotism. Woe to those prelates who ordain unworthy candidates! Those who seek only in their pastoral charges for temporal advantages will suffer a terrible chastisement - while faithful priests, who will have kept their eyes on Scripture, will build up around them a "house" of obedient subjects, destined to receive with them "a priestly part" of the eternal joys.

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Section 4 [II, 111 - III, 37]: Concerning Obedience and from the Meditation on Scripture to Contemplation

First Interpretation [II, 111-159]: continuing along the **moral** line, the *Commentary* sees again in Samuel a model of obedience and humility, in that the young lad submits himself to contradictory orders and to a superior who is less than worthy, in keeping himself from making any judgment about him. Blind and bent over, Eli appears as the type of the worldly prelate, given over to the relaxed life and vain desires.

This unconditional obedience prepares Samuel to receive the divine communication. For to **obey** is the unique way which leads to interior joys, lost by the disobedience of Adam. It is through obedience that **the 'simple 'accede to the highest contemplation**, which fills them with love, without that alone rendering them capable of preaching. At the same time both terrifying and deliciously sweet, the revelation of God to the soul brings to the fore two aspects of the divinity - justice and mercy - which both misunderstood in their own way - Origen and Novatian.

Second Interpretation [III, 1-37]: taking up again the **allegorical exegesis**, it is noted that Eli, as was seen earlier, was an ambiguous person, who **represents the OT** in so far as this pre-figures the NT, and also that Judaism hostile to Jesus Christ. In the first of these roles, the old priest is visited three times by Samuel, the type of the Christian preacher, in the night where God calls out to him: he awakes to the divine voice of grace, that inspired him to run to Eli, in order to submit his interior message to the control of Scripture properly meditated upon. The sleep to which he is ordered to return being the contemplation which prepares one to understand and to hear new appeals. In his second role, Eli receives the notification of the rejection of his house, i.e., of the reprobation of the Jewish people, in that the ministers of the Christian faith, figured by Samuel, saw themselves assure by the divine assistance forever.

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Section 5 [III, 38-173]: The Word of God and its Effects of Grace:
Conversion, Penance, Contemplation

The conflict between the Israelites and the Philistines, with the initial defeat of the former, and then their final victory, is interpreted in two ways. Briefly, at the beginning of the Section, and then at greater length at the end, the Philistines are taken for the figure of demons which afflict the People of God. In the middle, they represent the Church, i.e., the converted pagans, and especially those preachers who wage war on Israel, understood this time to mean the Jewish People, in forcing their conversion.

In this second interpretation, the satraps of the Philistines are naturally these same **shepherds of the Church**. The failure of Israel, the death of Eli, the taking back of the Ark, signify the spiritual and even temporal ruin of Judaism. The Israelites killed by the Philistines are those Jews converted to Christianity. As before, the Ark figures as the OT writings which pass from a carnal interpretation of the Jews, to the spiritual understanding of the Christians. The scourges which its presence unleashes among the Philistines prefigure the conversion of the pagans. Among these, certain one refuse the faith, and this leads to the sending back of the Ark: rejected by the incredulous, the divine word is taken over by others who will receive it. The *ex-voto* offerings placed by the Philistines on the chariot which carries the Ark represent **the penance of sinners touched by God**. As for the oxen who carry the chariot, leaving their calves behind them, these are the preachers of the Church that are reaching out towards their mission, which makes them beat back their carnal desires.

The image of the Church, but also of every faithful soul, the chariot which bears the Ark arrives at Bethsames. This episode introduced a monastic episode. **“The House**

of Sun”, Bethsames represents the contemplative life. Its inhabitants are monks. The arrival of the chariot among them figure that of the Postulant entering into the Monastic life, which occasions some interesting perceptions on the reception of monastic vocations, requiring humility and love to be cultivated in the contemplative life, the biblical teaching that the superiors need to dispense there.

With these additional vicissitudes regarding the Ark, the thought goes back to the “preachers”, i.e., the clerics, and notably those **unworthy clergy who profane the Eucharist** over which they have the charge. But, the final lines of the text invite the commentator to speak above all of **contemplation**. If the assembly as Masphat directed by Samuel leads to the theme of penance, with some new insights on the Confession of sins and the role of the priest, the name of this locality, which signifies, *speculatio*, provokes many remarks on the role of contemplation in the struggle against the demons and in the pastoral ministry, not without evoking specially, in order to draw to a conclusion, those contemplatives *par excellence*, who the monks are. Lastly Samuel, the type of the Christian shepherd, comes to Ramatha [meaning “**consummate vision**”], i.e., **to the desire of heaven**.

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Section 6 [IV, 1-78]:

The Shepherds of the Church, Good and Bad

First Interpretation [IV, 1-14]: in the **literal** sense, this passage [cf. **1 S 8:12-20**] places for consideration several enigmas: the choice that the holy man Samuel leads to the unworthy sons to succeed him; the order which the Lord gives him to establish the kingdom, even though this would be claimed by a people who rejects God; the designation of Saul who will, in the end, be reprovved. These difficulties led to reflection on the mystery of the divine plans. In any case, the choice of Samuel does not excuse in any way **the prelates who knowingly ordain the unworthy**, for his sons were still undeserving when he invested them with power. This is the exercise of one who has corrupted them: a beautiful example of danger that one incurs in passing over from subjection to government. As for “the right of the king” that Samuel exposes to the people, this appears as the just chastisement of this rebellious people, whose sin figures the vices that are excessively extended in our time: pride and disobedience, laziness and negligence in the service of God, the refusal to act according to the will of God and the advice of His representatives.

Second Interpretation [IV, 15-37]: in the **spiritual** sense, the institution of the royalty [**1 S 8:11-9:2**] is first of all considered from an unfavorable point of view. The king represents in the Church the evil shepherd with a carnal heart. Commented upon

this time in detail, the right of royalty is understood as the description of those ravages caused by worldly prelates, who surround themselves with adulators, with evil counselors, perverse agents, and who corrupt the faithful people by their example. In the same line, the designation of Saul appears as a malediction. In the face of this proud king, who will lead Israel into her defeat, Samuel represents the humble spiritual leader to whom victory is given.

Third Interpretation [IV, 38-78]: pondered in its total amplitude [cf. **1 S 8:1-9:2**], it is **once more explained spiritually**, but from an opposite point of view. Having made abstraction from the further failures of Saul, the reader sees in him presented as the chosen and good Man who is to come. While he figures now the faithful shepherd, worthy of his charge, Samuel growing old represents the Christian priesthood used through the centuries and somewhat lukewarm. His sons are the shepherds, avid for the terrestrial goods, as would be the case in modern times, those who would sow corruption among the flocks.

Seen from a good perspective, the right of the king calls to mind in the present the pastoral action of a good bishop. As for the prediction which finishes him - the people will cry towards the Lord to be delivered from its king and will not be heard - Gregory applies this to the particular case of the monks who wish to abandon the religious life and that their superior ought to refuse to let them go. This drama of the consecrated monks, who are unfaithful to their promises ought to insight the superiors to show themselves severe in the sorting out of vocations, just as the Benedictine Rule wished, cited here in a manner that is at the same time both anonymous and expressed.

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Section 7 [IV, 79-217]

Initiation into the Pastoral Charge

Sent by his father in search for the asses and unexpectedly anointed by Samuel to reign over Israel, **Saul figures as the new Bishop, and Samuel the Prelate who ordains him**. The quest for the animals is a symbol for the work of the conversion of souls and the sacred royalty indicates Episcopal ordination. The man of God instructs the one whom he anoints concerning his duties as shepherd and places him at the head of the Church, after having carefully examined his aptitudes and verified that his choice comes from God.

The Shepherd who is newly ordained finds certain models both in those bishops who have renounced the world and who have given themselves over to a certain contemplation in the bosom of their ministry; and also in the **Monks, specialists in**

contemplation, who teach him mortification and the custody of his senses, the condition of the contemplative illumination; and others also in the qualified interpreters of Scripture, those who are teachers in the Church. He experiences himself that interior change, worked by the grace of the sacrament. His life ought to be a coming and going between the contemplative retreat and preaching, those “sorties” out into the public remain relatively brief in comparison to the time spent in solitude.

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Section 8 [V, 1-212]:

The Bishop and the Priest in the Combat of the Christian Life

In this exegesis regarding Saul’s wars, one goes from **the real battle against greediness**, figured by the Ammonites, to the combat **against luxury**, represented by Amalec - in passing through vain glory and pride, evoked with regard to the fall of Jonathan. This gives rise to the author’s views on correction.

Save for one passage, announcing the following section, where Saul appears as disobedient, and Samuel as the priest who corrects him, the King is constantly taken for the figure of the Bishop, with **Jonathan after him, representing the priesthood** - and both of these direct the Christian people in the struggle against the demons and vices, figured by the Philistines - they who represent at times, sinful men - rather than by the other enemies of Israel.

In the army which obeys these two leaders, there may be particularly distinguished the virgins, symbolized by the troop stationed on the hill of Gabaa and the inhabitants of the monasteries. In the course of the battle, there can be seen those repeatedly passing over the Jordan River, i.e., those abandoning their cloister in order to return into the world, then to return to religious life after the defeat of the enemy. An analogous episode - those Israelites who fled into the mountains joined with their victorious compatriots - suggests an analysis of **the proper role of the monks in pastoral work, which does not consist so much in converting covering, but rather in counseling and in leading others toward perfection**. Further on, the criteria of recruitment of the army of Saul lead to the recommendations on the discernment of monastic vocations. It should also be noted, in the forerunners of the war against the Philistines, there is an insight concerning the “blacksmiths” who are, for the Church, those who cultivate the secular letters: without participating directly in the spiritual combat, they sharpen the weapons [the knowledge of the Scriptures, with which one does battle.

The members of Saul’s family are figures of the qualities of the sinner, since his two sons represent the active life and the contemplative life. Symbol of the active life, Michol will be the only one given to David in marriage, the image of the shepherd

vowed to the Ministry of the Word, whatever might have been his own desire to contemplate.

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Section 9 [VI, 1-61]:

The Failed Prelate: Luxury and Disobedience

In sparing the king and the flocks of Amalec, the figure of luxury, Saul becomes the type of the failed Prelate, whom Samuel reprehends and rejects, despite his excuses. Considered in the **moral** sense, as a fall into vice - in the **historical** sense, a disobedience to the orders of the Prophet, i.e., of God Himself. One finds here, for the good, the situation already encountered in passing over the preceding Section [V, 63-75]: the role of the Shepherd who speaks and corrects in the Name of God has now passed from Saul to Samuel.

In the struggle against luxury - Samuel puts to death the King of Amalec - thus joining the reprobation of disobedience. This takes on immediately a certain monastic spirit: Samuel the Prophet represents not only the Bishop, but also the Abbot.

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Section 10 [VI, 62-115]:

The Ordination of the New Shepherd and his Task: to Preach Christ

First Interpretation [VI, 62-96]: the anointing of David represents the choice and the ordination of the new Bishop. Where to look for him? In a "religious house", or "community" which has taught him the perfect life. This quest ought to be conducted with the greatest care, in the light of Scripture, where God manifests His will. The chosen one should be neither ignorant, nor pretentious, nor avid for silver and power. Above all, he should be endowed with humility. That which God wills for His Church, it is not so much a man who is capable in the affairs of this world, but rather a uniquely spiritual man, concerned about the good of souls, one who should be capable of healing their wounds and to sustain them in their temptations. It is, therefore, from the "pasturage" of contemplation that the future king will come, one who should in the example of his consecration, now show himself but rarely in public, to the point of even provoking a certain astonishment when he does it. Action, contemplation and charity are the three points upon which he should excel.

Once he has been chosen, and chosen well, the newly elect ought to be instructed in the duties of his charge, and above all, in conformity to Jesus Christ, Whom he should realize in his conduct. To the severity of the "horn", he will join the mercy of the "oil": to the sublimity of a holy life, the humility of the one who is anointed "in the midst of his brothers". The sacramental ordination is accompanied

with a fast. The consecrate associates himself with several of his colleagues. The grace of the Holy Spirit is the effect of the Sacrament. He ought to remain with the elect in perpetuity.

Second Interpretation [VI, 97-115]: David represents the **Christ**, the “Anointed”, i.e., preached by the Prophets, by John the Baptist, by the Apostles, who proclaim His mystery of the Man-God. **Samuel is therefore the figure of the preachers of the Church** who announce the Christ in imitating His sufferings by the mortification of their flesh. This Christological finality, responding to the beginning of the Commentary, abounds thus in insights on the ministry of preaching, in particular on the very elevated action and the contemplation which the preacher should cultivate, in order to unite the hearts to Christ out of love.

SUMMARY

Two Major Themes: these insights into the *Commentary on Kings* allow one to see that the two great themes mentioned above are not developed in an equal fashion. That which dominates by far is the consideration of the Priesthood. The **Monastic Life** appears only here and there, in those passages generally brief, but remarkably to the point and important.

[1] This predominance of the theme of the Priesthood holds of course to history as this unfolds in the sacred text. **Eli and his sons are priests. Samuel**, elevated to the temple by the High Priest and charged with keeping him informed, is the invested himself with a prophetic role which makes of him the spiritual leader of his people. All of this is designated to prefigure the Christian Shepherd. Anointed by him, **Saul and David** are kings, of course, but their anointing leads the reader to think of Jesus Christ, and to those who represent Him here below. These four protagonists invited the commentator to speak habitually of the Christian Priesthood.

[2] Less obvious, the relationship of the text with the monastic life is only discovered in some secondary figures and episodes. This would be above all **in the couple, the parents of Samuel, Elcana and Anna - the “one” man, the type of the Monk, and his preferred spouse, symbol of the contemplative life.** Then, **the young Samuel** in person, as he serves in the Temple and obeys Heli. Then a series of **minor personalities**, forming groups: the inhabitants of Bethsames who receive the Ark, the city of Masphat, visited by Samuel, the young women going to the fountain, the three men on their way toward Bethel, the Israelites who abandon, or rally to the army of Saul, the soldiers recruited by the King. As for Saul himself, his disobedience furnishes the occasion to come back again to a theme already suggested by the child Samuel.

a.] **Concerning the Priesthood:** as in the totality of his work, Gregory sees above all in the Christian Shepherd a “preacher.” It is useless to offer much commentary on this omnipresent theme. More rare and remarkable are those notations relative to several sacraments [Penance, Eucharist, Order], rather than to conduct, good or bad, of the members of the priestly body.

Is Penance at the hour of death sufficient to have one enter into life? Around this much debated question, which obliges one to hold for the author’s view of a “full purgatory” following death, Gregory develops the general doctrine of penance, in noting the role of the intercessor played by the priest who hears the Confession. Furthermore, he might also impose the affliction of the fast, that is laid down in order to efface the sin. However, this does not obtain its effect unless it is placed upon the penitent by the judgment of the priest. He examines the acts submitted to him in the Confession, and establishes in accord with the importance of the fault, the measure of the fitting affliction. He does not do this, though, unless coming to this conclusion in contemplation, thereby coming to know the Will of God in this matter. In this very delicate role of the “judge of souls”, the priest must keep in mind the merits of the past of the one who has been struck with the *Eucharistic censure*.

However, it is above all with regard to the faults of Saul that Gregory concerns himself with Penance. The beginning of the last Book in his *Commentary on Kings* abounds in observations on this point. The confession of carnal failures risks poisoning the spirit of the Priest who listens to their confession. When it is a matter of little sins, confession alone can efface them - and the priest puts them to death by an absolution imposed by “his apostolic authority”. In other words, it does not suffice to confess the sin to the *priests* before God. It is necessary also to purge the penalty by penance. Regarding this last duty, a good number of sinners would like to dispense themselves in asking the priest to accomplish this for them. Very often, he charges himself imprudently with such burdens which he cannot bear alone, as the fault has to be expiated conjointly by the tears of the penitent and those of the priest.

Without prolonging this discussion too far with further remarks regarding the Confession, let us pass on now to the Eucharist. On three separate occasions, Gregory takes up the matter of priests and other “ministers” who dare to consecrate, to touch and to receive unworthily the Body and Blood of the Lord. As the faithful, whom they exhort to approach these mysteries in a state of purity - they themselves need to be even more pure when they offer the sacrifice. The case of sacrilegious communions leads to distinguishing between the Sacrament received exteriorly, and its interior “effect” which is not produced in the communicating soul. This is a distinction which Gregory will renew with regard to Baptism and Holy Order.

This last Sacrament is the one about which the Commentary on Kings speaks the most, both with regard to the sons of Samuel, as well as those of the two Kings, **Saul and David, anointed by the Prophet**. The choice of the one to be ordained is made primarily as the object of numerous recommendations. It is necessary to take him in a “religious house”, or “community”, where there is practiced the “perfect life”, and to seek there without pause, a capable subject - as there is simply no excuse when the choice is of someone who is unworthy. One must seek out the signs of the vocation, and those required aptitudes, notably the union of contemplation and deal, the application to tears not only for one’s own sins, but also for the sins of others. This discernment of vocations ought to be conducted under the light of the Scriptures, where God indicates those men He wished for His service.

The anointing of David provides Gregory with the occasion of putting together a detailed list of qualities which the Episcopacy requires. The horn of oil which serves to anoint the new King symbolizes the combination of authority and goodness, of severity and mercy that must be found in him. These contrasting, paradoxical qualities come together in a single whole which summarizes all: this is called charity. However, **the future shepherd cannot be “simple”, i.e., in the sense of a man of just ordinary goodness, but one who loves without possessing a clear and communicable knowledge**. To charity in the Bishop must be added “**instruction**”, in the manner that he is able to teach and command, carrying out all that he himself preaches. “**Wisdom**”, or “**knowledge**”, or **interior “contemplation”**, joined with an **exemplary exterior conduct** [“good works”, *conversatio*]: this couple recurs endlessly under different forms. Furthermore, Gregory insists on either one or other of these elements: the capacity of commanding with discernment, contemplation, with ardent and clarifying word. The knowledge that is necessary for the priest, the author emphatically brings out, is the opposite of the *savoir-faire* of this world which would plunge him into the affairs of this world.

However, these diverse notations take up little space in comparison to the author’s continual recommendation: that of humility. The importance of this capital virtue is not only in that it is in accord with the teaching and the example of Jesus Christ Himself, but even more due to the adverse temptations which assail the leaders of every society, and especially those of the Church of that time, given the privileged situation of the priesthood in a world which was becoming Christianized. There will be ample space to talk about this further in the matter of the unworthy shepherds.

Carefully chosen and proven, the future Bishop should also have passed through all the inferior orders of the Clergy, and the Prelate who is to ordain him ought to be

assured, if need be, from the consent of the ecclesiastical superior. For one's nomination and ordination the 'consecrated' should associate himself with several colleagues. A fast should accompany these solemn acts which require freedom of spirit and recollection. From the one who ordains, the new Bishop receives advice and instructions on the manner of exercising his charge. For this admonition, he is to respond with a promise, which - sad to say - will not always be maintained.

The *Commentary on Kings* is in effect **full of complaints in the matter of the "preachers" of the contemporary Church**. Often the evil goes right back to the ordination itself, conferred on subjects who were simply not worthy, because of the scarce spirituality with which they have been endowed. But the situation also arises of subjects who were irreproachable, but who subsequently allowed themselves to be subverted, in the course of their ministry, by temptations inherent within. For the priesthood is rich, respected, influential, and those who are invested with it risk being attached to temporary advantages, in the place of giving all their cares over for the good of souls. From the Preface on, Gregory takes up these ecclesiastics plunged into the care of this world, which keep them from being more committed to the word of God: 'We desire earthly goods, they maintain, we do allow ourselves to be absorbed by the exterior cares of this world.' His reproach is repeated endlessly, in terms that scarcely ever vary. The boredom and negligence which follow upon this are so expanded upon that Gregory can speak of an "aging" of the Christian priesthood, of which the last years of Samuel serve as a symbol.

Worse still, there are rapacious Prelates who actually use violence and injustice in order to satisfy their insatiable covetousness. Furthermore, their carnal failures are numerous. Gregory goes on to say: 'Today, one sees many chaste priests and failed bishops.' Their fault, despite their cover-up, or their confession, does not keep them from wanting to remain functioning to the great embarrassment of the one who has responsibility over them.¹⁰ There could even be found some among them who lived under the presumption that 'those men invested with sacred orders could also practice conjugal union.'¹¹

The fact is that these failures in chastity were largely due to the pride of holding on to power. The root of this evil was in the **exteriority** which leads one to lose from sight those interior goods and assimilates the Pastor to a secular leader. Hence, Gregory's insistence on the **secret** and **retired** path of contemplation, **the soul of all**

¹⁰ In his correspondence, Pope Gregory absolutely interdicts any resumption of their sacred service on the part of any of these failed clerics.

¹¹ For Pope Gregory chastity should be manifest in an exemplary manner by those preachers sent to convert seculars.

pastoral ministry. Young Samuel who was sleeping in the temple near the Ark of the Covenant, is for the Pope the symbol of that 'distance from earthly duties carried out in public' and of that 'retreat hidden in the sanctuary of that interior vision achieved by means of meditation.' Further, since the symbol deals with a boy, this represents for Gregory 'subjects' rather than their leaders. However, these latter also have the same responsibility of 'being rarely in public, and often in retreat.'

Certainly the shepherds cannot, nor should they abandon their flock in order to give themselves over to contemplation without pasturage. But while the integral monastic life is forbidden for them, it is still possible for them to imitate by withdrawing regularly from pastoral action in order to ponder over their own salvation, and '**to repose a while aside**', giving time to contemplation and prayer. It is from 'the secret of meditation' that they will come forth with great usefulness into 'the public of activity', or for preaching. This should never serve as a simple pretext in order to rejoining the world which they only pretend to flee, as those badly intentioned seculars do not fail to say. In the very bosom of their of their preaching and activity, the Shepherd can and should to keep his view riveted on the Master Whom he serves, and to give way to a certain contemplation.

b.] Therefore, **priesthood** and the **monastic life** are **not opposed states in life**. While they are different, they nonetheless have many elements in common, particularly the aspiration to contemplate. In this regard, however, the monk enjoys a freedom that is denied to the priest, and for this the latter might experience some envy. Constrained to preach the contemplative life without being able to lead this way of life, the Bishops remain, from this point of view, inferior to the monks. These monks offer the bishops a model that is always useful for them to note, particularly when they take on their responsibilities. As a result, their teaching in this regard has its limits, beyond those, beyond which they can only remit to those souls taken up with perfection, the contemplatives.

This kind of superiority recognized as pertaining to the monks remains totally relative, however, for the priesthood is indeed, in the eyes of Gregory, as it is in the eyes of the entire Church, the summit of the Christian hierarchy. Even though he never loses sight of the fact that all the laity are indeed priests, the Pope often insists on the respect and the obedience that the 'subjects' owe to their 'prelates', basing himself on the word of Christ: **Whoever hears you, hears Me** [Lk 10:16].

Among the 'subjects' of the Bishops are also found those 'prelates' of the second order, who are the priests. Saul and Jonathan – Jonathan and his retinue figure at every turn this hierarchy on two levels. The Bishops have the duty of

supervising their priests, both from the point of view of doctrine, as well as that of morals¹², but they do receive from the latter helpful advice.

c.] **Concerning the Monastic Life:** of lesser, but still of much importance for Gregory, the monastic life is not without its relationship, as has been seen already, with that of the Priesthood. Before going into detailing further these aspects, it is necessary to point out a vocabulary trait which is quite unusual in Gregory's vocabulary: in his *Commentary on Kings*, the Pope twice employs the term *monachus*, and five times makes use of the words, *in monasteriis*. These departures from the usual Gregorian terminology in designating the categories of the Christian People by such expressions are always situated, except for his first use of the word *monachus*, in the second half of his work [cf. Books IV-VI]. By themselves, these terms denote an interest particularly vivid for the realities and the problems of the monastic life, which are here being considered more closely than in the rest of the scriptural commentaries of the Saint.

Outside of these explicit passages, the monastic life is designated in a more or less clear manner by the Pope's circumlocutions, without it being always able to be stated that he is speaking of this structure alone, to the exclusion of the clerical life. However, there is no doubt that Gregory thinks of this when he speaks of the *secret*, or *the remote life*. It is certainly the type of life he personally lived, at least this was his basic priority, in speaking of the renunciation of the world and contemplation.

These notes of the renunciation of creatures, withdrawal from the world and the sole aspiration of seeing God define in effect that which Gregory calls the **contemplative life** and which constitutes for him the essence of monasticism. It is this fundamental program which in his *Commentary on the First Book of Kings* that he indicates, or develops the more often: the ascent of Helcana to Silo and the circumstances of Anna's conception, the repose of Samuel in the Ark, and its arrival in Bethsane, a toponym for Masphat, and the going up of the three men toward Bethel, the names of Saul's two daughters, and the *holocaust* he offers: these very natural developments lead, in the manner they are interpreted, to the same contemplative ideal, of which Gregory never fails to point out, each time that he has the time, the rigorous demands and the difficult paths of access.

The contemplative life is indeed the source of the most sublime joys here below, the **prelude of those of eternity**. However, these come only at the price of a complete

¹² This classical emphasis is noted in St. Paul's *attende tibi et doctrinae* - noted in St. Gaspar Bertoni's insistence on progress: spiritual and intellectual, noted from his *Compendium Rude* - and then all through his Constitutions.

detachment and great personal efforts, aroused, sustained and crowned by divine grace. It is further no less difficult than this long spiritual ascension then to commit oneself to those unforeseen responses of grace that one might dare even to call 'capricious': sometimes it seems to leave without any response the most pressing appeals, and at times it arrives with a suddenness which is beyond all expectancy. Among the multiple presuppositions of contemplation are listed: reading, prayer, forgetfulness of the world, humble penance, tears and compunction. Gregory insists particularly on guarding one's senses and thoughts, words and deeds. After the two principal *exposés* in his ***Commentary on First Kings***, this constant surveillance over himself is the basis of the entire contemplative experience.

However, this quest for contemplation is not a simple matter of individual effort. In Gregory's eyes, this has to be situated in the frame-work of a community. This is what imposes itself on all as the primordial duty: obedience, of which we will treat. Furthermore, the members of the contemplative community ought to look out for one another, the stronger among them moderating their asceticism in the interest of the weaker among them. If certain ones among them can be restrained in their challenge, the life in common will serve them, as is intended for all, the benefit of mutual edification by the word of God and example. Furthermore, Gregory invites the superiors not to misunderstand the particular necessities and possibilities of their subjects by an excessively rigid fixation of the common regimen.¹³ The individual charisms should be taken into consideration, as well as the varying individual need for a more strict personal asceticism for the different men of which they may have need in their battle against vice.

Beyond the permanent problems, the monastic community has to face up to two crucial eventualities: **the arrival** of new subjects and the **departure** of members who return to the world. The reception of Postulants is envisaged by Gregory in three separate texts, and each time he mentions the key word: **discernment**. The arrival of the Ark at Bethsames is the first occasion is the first occasion that the commentator finds in order to typify it, and he uses the expression found in St. Paul: ***the discernment of spirits*** [1 Co 7:7]. Then, the 'Right of the King' permits the author almost immediately with the Benedictine Rule [cf. ***RB*** 58, 1-2, 8, 12], on those painful trials which require this discernment. A Ritual of Profession is drawn out in this passage: the exchange of questions and responses between the superior and the professed monk, followed by a secret prayer of the former, who offers to God the commitment made by the latter. Finally, the recruitment of Saul's army leads to the

¹³ Both St. Ignatius and St. Gaspar Bertoni offered a certain lee-way for superiors and spiritual directors in the matter of penances, or the need of food, to be proportioned according to a greater or lesser degree to find the happy medium for each person.

recommendation of a serious proof of these vocations, leading toward the retention only of those subjects who are at one and the same time 'strong' and 'apt', i.e., endowed with a correct will and with a certain **spiritual intelligence**.

As for the departure of the 'apostates', Gregory envisages this also three times: first of all in commenting on the 'right of the King'; then in connection with those Israelite warriors who cross over the Jordan, and of those who rally the army of Saul after the victory. Being forewarned on their entry of the trials which await them, the monks cannot be freed when these discourage them and they ask to leave. Resisting their pleas, the superior should not open the door for them, but should direct them to the monastery and care for them. Even when they have left the religious life, there are also those who return and persevere.

The last and the most important of the monastic themes developed by Gregory's ***Commentary on First Kings***, is that of **obedience**. With this in any manner being reserved for the monks – Gregory speaks of this often with regard to other categories of Church life – this virtue is particularly necessary. It is this which should regulate the personal austerities in the bosom of the community, even more than their desires for a solitary and contemplative life. To his superiors, the contemplative ought also to submit for verification, the progress of his soul and the fruits of his contemplation. While 'growing up', in age and wisdom, as the young Samuel did, he must remain ***servant***, of those men whom God has placed over him.

This figure of the **Child Prophet** inspires the Commentator to present his first hymn to obedience, to which will respond pages no less fervent with regard to the disobedience of Saul. These celebrations of obedience do not cede at all to that which Cassian and other monastic authors have written in the most strong manner regarding this subject. Gregory presents it as the sole means of salvation, remedying the disobedience of Adam, and assigns to it a sovereign role, which elevates it over all the virtues and observances of the monastic life. In becoming a monk, one commits himself in an irrevocable manner to practice it, even when it can be legitimate, in certain circumstances, to hide from his superior, out of humility, the good that one does.

d.] The Author, the Listener, the Readers

Just full of considerations relative to the Priesthood and Monasticism, this *Commentary on First Kings* seems to have been written by and for men situated within the confines of these two states of life. Very often the Commentator speaks in the first person plural, ***we***; often the equivalent of the first person singular [*I*], or the ***we*** of the

preacher, including both himself and his public [**you and I**]. These declarations containing the first persona plural pronoun bring to the fore three different situations: some concern the monks and their superiors; others, the shepherds of the Churches; and still others, the subjects of these latter.

This third series of texts is without doubt less significant for it is always permissible for a superior to place himself among his subordinates. Such a person is referring to his own past experience in their condition, and in making use of the preacher's '**we**.' On the contrary, it is scarcely possible to pose as a monk, or as a Bishop when truly one is not one. Let us limit ourselves, then, to the alternative either monk, or bishop. A remarkable passage seems to imply that the author is neither. Commenting on the 'rapid' appearance that Samuel made in the village, Gregory writes: 'We have seen chosen the retired way of life, and so we need to protect this it with great care. Let us therefore set carefully the hours for the ministry, so that there will remain only little time in activity and so that we might return very quickly to the high ground of contemplation. These prolonged periods where we remain apart in silence ought to be observed with such rigor that even those who approach us in a habitual manner know that they do not have access to us as this would oppose our main wishes... The places where our shepherds have the custom of praying and going away by ourselves, we need to respect these, in not going there... When holy men go aside by themselves and maintain silence, it is necessary to respect these by not disturbing them. It cannot be excluded that Gregory thought this way – at least, this was his priority, particularly for the Abbot Claude and the other monastic superiors.

Thus the author states **that he is a member of a monastic order, as he recognizes in Samuel the model of the Bishop, and takes from him a lesson which concerns his pastoral 'ministry.'** A monk and a Bishop: this indeed describes Gregory well, in fact, throughout the last decade of the century. This two-fold belonging explains best the mixed character of his *Commentary on Primum Regum* – and, in particular, his use of we/us in the monastic passages, as well as those referring to clerics.

However, his employment **we/us** cannot always be simply the author's use of the inclusive plural. Sometimes it is a matter of an authentic collective plural, including the author and those to whom he addresses himself. Who, then, are the ones whom he addresses? It is fitting here to distinguish his audience and his readers. Under his definitive form of a written 'book', the *Commentary on Primum Regum* is addressed evidently to a rather broad public, indeed one that is undetermined, and Gregory can dream of these varied readers in the numerous passages where he is of **we/ us** represents the **simple faithful**. However, before it had been edited under this present

form, the work was constructed in those circles with which the Abbot Claude was most familiar. In addition to this environment, did Gregory have other listeners? Certainly one might think of his circle of family members, his staff, both monks and clerics, with whom the Pope would have been surrounded living in the Lateran. One might even imagine that would change made up of monks in the near-by monastery of Valentinian, as well as Prelates who might visit Rome, as well as priests and other clerics, and also newly ordained Bishops. All of these possibilities would explain how the Commentary was of interest throughout the ever extending circle of these diverse states of life. However, the two great threads of his thought: the clerical and the monastic, as well as the others that would make it up, all intertwine in a manner that is so subtle that one would not be able to discern in this irregular tissue distinct pieces addressing one or the other category of individuals.

In the final analysis, however, Gregory might not have had any other audience than the Abbot Claude. As the Pontiff represents himself to the Abbot. In explaining his *Commentary on First Kings* to a group of disciples, he makes reference to his previous work, the *Moralia on Job*, that found their origin in conferences he delivered to those monks who accompanied him to Constantinople. This is not the only precedent.

The *Dialogues* of Gregory allow us to see another manner of his exegetical production: head to head, **as in a conversation**. St. Gregory has devised this with a single interlocutor, a man by the name of the Deacon Peter, of whom it is stated in the Preface of the work: that the Pope 'had him as his collaborator in the investigations on the sacred Word.' The conversation on the miracles of the Saints of Italy, which the *Dialogues* are, simply 'interrupts' these exegetical inquests which the Pope and his Deacon worked on together. The under-lying conferences on the *Moralia* date to a time prior to his Pontificate. The conversations one on one with Deacon Peter are dated as taking place during Gregory's Pontificate, just before the Abbot Claude came on the scene. All unfolds as though this Abbot had taken the place of the Deacon as his collaborator in the explanation of the Scriptures, all the while Gregory writing to Marinien in April of 598, will speak in practically the same terms: 'He was a great help to Us in the Word of God.'

Therefore, it could very well be that the Abbot Claude was the only person who actually 'heard' St. Gregory 'comment on *the Books of Kings* and on other biblical texts mentioned in his Letter of January 602, to the Sub-deacon John. Being a monk, who had become a bishop, St. Gregory would truly have been understood in his *Commentary on First Kings* with a Monk who had become an Abbot. This last quality might indeed explain, among other factors, the use of **We/Us** in the passage where

Gregory calls to mind the role of the superior in the Ritual of Profession. Of the many other pages where mention is made of 'superiors' without making clear whether these are with ecclesiastical influence or monastic, they would be understood quite well in the hypothesis of a conversation between a bishop and an abbot. Both of these men, monks and shepherds, Gregory and Claude, form the necessary couple and suffice to keep in mind for the understanding of the ***Commentary on First Kings***.

Throughout his long conversations with the Abbot of Classis, the Pope dreams manifestly of a public made up of well-informed readers. The laity and the clerics of every rank will find in this work ample material for their reflection. Monks likewise, will benefit from the many passages which concern them in a particular manner. However, no group of individuals could benefit more from this work than **bishops**.¹⁴ It is without doubt in thinking of them that Pope St. Gregory chose to comment on the pages of Scripture, where so many passages are applied so naturally to the priestly figure of the Christian' preacher.'

†††

Chapter 5: Sources and Influence

Rich in insights concerning the contemporary ecclesiastical reality, Gregory's work in his ***Commentary on Primum Regum***, is also at the same time quite original in its interpretation of the sacred text. With bits of earlier exegesis from Origen and Augustine, whom St. Gregory certainly would have known, his points of contact seem so rare and tenuous that one might ask whether these are just fortuitous connections, achieved by chance. To this almost total lack of contact there is to be added likewise a similar absence of traces of his work in subsequent generations: several centuries would pass without anyone finding even a trace of this work. With regard to the great current of exegetical tradition, where the borrowings back and forth were so frequent, the ***Commentary*** of St. Gregory seems to have been held in a kind of isolation. This is the singular situation that we would like to describe here, in considering the twists of turns of that which Gregory owes to his predecessors, and that which he handed on to his successors.

[I] The Interpreter and His Materials, Sources

Let us begin by what is the most clear: and this from the very pen of Gregory and to his regard for Jerome, when it is a matter of the biblical text commented upon, or the understanding of the Hebrew names.

¹⁴ In the faith of St. Gaspar Bertoni, these men, chosen by the Holy Spirit to govern the Church of God, are the incarnation of the will of God in His Apostolic Mission [cf. Ac 20:28; cf. also CF # 185].

1. **Gregory and Jerome:** without always being in conformity with the Vulgate, the Gregorian text of the *Primum Regum* is precisely this, with the commentator noting at times that ‘many of the manuscripts’ have a different reading. In order to appreciate correctly this substantial fidelity to the version produced by St Jerome, it is necessary to keep in mind the variant Old Latin translation which is introduced in a number of instances, very early on into the Latin Vulgate. Of the 22 interpolations of the Book of Samuel, Fr. Vebraken noted that the six first are missing from Gregory’s *Commentary* while the subsequent 15 or 16 are present. Since these have all passed as authentically from the pen of Jerome, there can be noted in their adoption a mark of increasing adherence to the Vulgate, a tendency which Fr. Vebraken feels is supported by other signs.

An analogous progression is observed in the usage that Gregory makes of the translations of the proper names offered by Jerome in his famous *Book of Interpretation of Hebrew Names*.¹⁵ In his Books I, II, and IV, the commentator seems to leave more than half of the names without any translation. However, already in Book III, he uses more the Glossary provided by Jerome, but it is only in the last two books that the translation of the names becomes a bit more constant.

This increasing interest for the etymology reached the total of 74 out of the 114 names in the text that receive an interpretation. The majority of these translations repeated simply the interpretations of St. Jerome. When the great biblical Doctor of the Church offered several etymologies for any one name, Gregory’s comportment regarding these varied. There are times when the Pontiff chooses two possibilities for the same word – and on other occasions, he mentions only one – and sometimes he alternates the meanings that Jerome presented as the proper name might reappear. In a general manner, it appears that the Great Pope managed his dictionary with a great deal of freedom, employing much liberty. Far from restricting himself to the given text where Jerome interpreted the passages from the revealed Book of Kings, Gregory shows evidence of having perused Jerome’s entire work – and this not only to supply for what is lacking in these *Interpretations on the First Book of Kings*, but sometimes also in order to add, or to substitute for a different translation that he might find elsewhere which would strike his fancy in equal manner, or which would seem to suit his purposes the more. Quite often Gregory chooses to slide over from one Hebrew word to another, to the extent then, that the translation he offers in reality might translate a different proper name, one that might have a close consonance [examples would be: *Ramatha/Rathma; Gabaa/Gabatha; Achimaas/Ahinaam*]. Such analogous slipping over from one word to another are observed also in the Latin terms of the translations taken up by Jerome.

¹⁵ cf. CCC # 72, pp. 19-161.

In most of these manipulations, St. Gregory has made use here and there of an authentic inventive genius. In the place of *Dei possessio* indicated by St. Jerome as the translation of **Elcana**, it becomes **fervor of God**, perhaps a reference to an etymology of the word **cham** [warm], supplied by the same author. Totally absent from Jerome's vocabulary, the names of the rocks **Bores** and **Sene** but which are not any the less translated: **Bores** by the idea of **primacy**, without doubt in the strength of truly pertinent connections; **Sene** is rendered by **sun without hearing**, which seems to be only very loosely connected. There are two other conjectural translations: **Aion**, which is rendered: **my dying brother** and **Achinoe**, which is translated: **the repose of my brother**. These are not bereft of a clear sense of genius, along with a certain good humor. Finally, St. Gregory had to search for **Bethlehem** [house of bread], likewise omitted from Jerome's *Book of Interpretation* in some of his other works. However, this interpretation may be found in his *Concerning the Place and the Names*, and in his *Books on Hebrew Questions* regarding the Books of Kings, a book which today remains lost. But which it is most probable that Gregory knew and utilized.

Before leaving the theme of Jerome's influence on Gregory, it would be necessary to note the borrowings, explicit or not, that he makes in a number of passages in his *Commentary on First Kings*. The Preface cites him twice, explicitly, while not literally – and then in a tacit manner, but in his own words. In the body of the work there may be found two other implicit citations, one from his Letters and the other from his *Commentary on Isaiah*. Keeping in mind the continuous influence on his biblical text and his glossary, these references from several of his works, make of Jerome the most important source of the Gregorian *Commentary on First Kings*.

2. **Gregory and Augustine:** at the same time as with Jerome, the opening of the Preface mentions also St. Augustine. This initial reference to the 17th Book of the *City of God*, is where one finds explained several passages from 1 S, this would give the impression that St. Gregory is going to be much inspired by the exegesis of his predecessor. In fact, however, one notes very few points of contact between these two commentaries, since that of Gregory is quite personal. There are some similarities that are observed, but these are all without verbal correspondences which would permit affirming a clear dependence. As the *City of God*, so also the *Commentary on Primum Regum*, underlines the prophetic character of the Books of Samuel: it sees in the *powerful*, or the *princes*, [cf. 1 S 2:8], a figure of the Apostles; it also extends the *ends of the earth* [cf. 1 S 2:10] of the state of man at the end of his life it comprehends '*his Christ*, [cf. 1 S 1:10] as meaning the whole Christ, i.e., all the Christians, the Church.

These analogies and others as well, appear as the text unfolds and give rise to the question whether these are mere chance encounters. One hesitates to speak of reminiscences. When the habitual independence of Gregory is kept in mind, in this present case, two barriers come in between him and his predecessor: in addition to

this, the different texts that they comment upon, Augustine follows the Septuagint, quite far removed from the Hebrew and the Vulgate in the Canticle of Hannah. Then, the strictly Christological proposal is noted in Augustine's brief commentary, while Gregory who is more understood, there is joined a moral typology.

Despite this deceiving balance of a comparison of texts which seem rather promising, Augustine's entire work remains behind the ***Commentary on Primum Regum***, as it does behind other of Gregory's works. At least once, that mentions in attributing to the *Venerable Fathers*, an Augustinian interpretation that is well known, and in several places on notes clearly the echo in Gregory of the ***Ennarationes in Psalmos***, of the Bishop of Hippo. Other traces of St. Augustine will probably appear, in the measure that one will ponder ever more profoundly this great ***Commentary on Primum Regum***.

3. **Origen's Influence on St. Gregory**: No less than the ***City of God***, the Homily of Origen on the beginning of the Book of Kings, one would expect to find other reminiscences from Origen in Gregory. In the other work of the Great Pontiff, the ***Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles***, which also passed through the hands of the Abbot Claude, the Pope follows carefully and in a repeated fashion the commentaries of Origen on the ***Canticle***. However, in fact, the ***Commentary on Primum Regum*** owes very little to the insights of Origen, indeed so very little that one might repeat on this subject that which is often noted regarding Augustine: the sure traces from Origen are almost non-existent.

The point of contact that falls least under discussion is without doubt the remark of the two authors on the ***Prayer of Hannah***, upon which they agree, even though each of these authors interprets the fact in a different manner. Their joint insistence on 'a' [***unus***] in the first phrase of the sacred text: [... *There was a man...*] also draws attention, at least if it is taken into consideration the second comment in Gregory of the same text [cf. I Reg I, 61], which is found solely in the purely moral perspective of Origen. But this is far from the immutability in the soul of the just man, celebrated by Origen, of the sole desire of God which Gregory discovers in this Latin ***unus***. And if both these great authors are reminded with regard to the ***one heart and mind*** of the early Christians, noted in the *Summaries* of Acts [cf. 4:32]. This word assumed with Gregory a strong particular meaning, which recalls to mind less Origen, than it does St. Augustine.

One notes moreover further similitude between the Alexandrian scholar and his Roman imitator, but none of these could ever prove that Gregory actually 'borrowed' from Origen. On the whole, it seems that Pope St Gregory the Great was rather wary of this Homily, the Latin translation of which was not unknown to him. In the entire ***Commentary on Primum Regum***, Origen hardly appears at all, other than as the author

of a heresy opposed to that of Novatian. This heresy is besides presented in a more precise manner in the *Moralia* of St. Gregory, where the Pope seems to have confused it with the error of the *merciful* denounced by St. Augustine, in Alison with Origenism.

4. Traces of Cassian: with these two great writers who had already commented on the Book of Kings before St. Gregory did, some other authors seem to have influenced slightly Gregory's Commentary. First among these would be Cassian, of whom the careful reader might find several echoes in Gregory's Book V. On three occasions, he enumerates the principal vices, and each time one finds the eight species catalogued in his *Institutions* and *Conferences*. Gregory's variants are only slight: the first list joins larceny to avarice, called in Latin *the appetite for filthy gain [turpis lucri appetitus]*; the second list shifts greed, which passes over from the first rank to the third; the last which is limited to the first six vices, inverts the first two and the last two.

These differences are to be compared with the more profound re-organization which Pope St. Gregory in his *Moralia on Job*, had imposed on Cassian's catalogue. There he begins with the six last vices, presented in reverse [from pride to avarice], and finishes up with the first two, arranged in the normal order. Furthermore he places pride outside the series, as the root of all the vices, and this leads him to number only seven vices. Lastly, he replaces acedia with envy.

With regard to the list found in his *Moralia*, that noted in his *Commentary on Primum Regum*, mark a return to the order suggested by Cassian. As in his exposé of the doctrine of Origen, Gregory's *Commentary on Kings* is in this more exact than what is found in his *Moralia on Job*. To these very clear traces of Cassian found in Gregory, there might be added furthermore in the same book, a phrase borrowed from the first *Conference* of Cassian. Considering it as an act of *fornication* the least failure in contemplation, this allows it to be seen that Gregory appreciates with the Abbot of Marseille, beyond all classification of the vices, his sublime ideal of contemplation.

5. The Benedictine Rule: Echoes and Citations: these borrowings from Cassian remain tacit. On the contrary, the Rule of St. Benedict is the object of a formal citation, which is one of the more remarkable particularities of the *Commentary on Primum Regum*. Without naming Benedict, whom the text designates simply as an 'excellent Master of the most strict way of life', Gregory reproduces more or less exactly several phrases of his Chapter on the reception of Postulants, to which there is added a manifest reminiscence of the Exordium of the same Chapter. The author of the Rule is felicitated on the rigor with which he tries, proves vocations. On two occasions St. Gregory speaks of **discernment** [*discretio... discretius*]. This is a significant fact in that the same word returns in the praise heaped upon the Benedictine Rule at the end of the IInd Book of the *Dialogues*. There, too, it might be true that *discretio* signifies less discretion than discernment. In the place of pondering, as one ordinarily understands

this, of the moderation and of the humanity of the legislator, Gregory thinks rather of the severe probation to which he submits the newly arrived to his community.

Concerning this citation, which is unique throughout Gregory's work, as well as the entire body of literature dating from the 6th century, it is perceived that in this ***Commentary on Primum Regum*** there are many echoes of the Rule. In the surrounding Chapters primarily, the ear becomes accustomed to the Benedictine text and recognizes not only ***the harsh and difficult practices [dura et aspera]***, a banal expression, and the couple: precepts/ examples, which is current. However, even further there may be found: the 'desire of being under a superior'; the contrary aspiration to 'accepting the yoke' of the religious life; the technical term ***Novices***; several details of the ceremony of Religious Profession; the insistence on the duty which has the superior ponder the spiritual maladies of his subjects in applying the curative anointing! Taken separately, certainly, none of this similarity proves anything more than the fact that St. Gregory did remember the Benedictine Rule. However, having taken everything into consideration and in connection with the expressed citation that these encompass, they bestow on this passage the aspect of a ***florilegium*** of Benedictine expressions, of which the majority have the possibility of being authentic citations.

One might say further in this connection of still another section where the echoes of the Benedictine Rule abound. In the pages on the Vocation of Samuel, one finds expressions such as: the 'good of obedience', considered as the sole criterion of superiority; 'holy emulation'; 'obedience which leads those to life whom disobedience has separated from it'. This last noted phrase appeared as victory over death; so that by the labor of obedience, one rediscovers the interior goods, source of an indescribable sweetness of love. The insistence on the permission to obtain from superiors in every circumstance and on the distinction to be made between their authority and their conduct completes this ensemble of Benedictine resonances. While these are not all equally characterized, but nonetheless, several of them seem to be beyond all questions.

Outside of these two *pericopes* charged with reminiscences, the reminder that the Rule blossoms more than once in the ***Commentary on the Primum Regum***. One grasps here in a special manner the 'novice fervor' and 'singular combat.' While all this, of course, does not prove anything by itself, it does take on the value of an indication, from the very fact that any express citation assures us of the knowledge that Gregory had of the Rule of Benedict.

6. Latin Etymologies: among the very rare formal citations noted in the ***Commentary on Primum Regum***, it is still necessary to mention some among these, such as tracing the word ***victimae*** from ***victoria***. Such an etymology may be found in

Festus. Two other etymologies are given without any reference to specific authors: **tribunus** is seen to derive from **tribus** - and **arioli** from **ara**. While the source of this last mentioned remains still to be discovered, the former might have come from Vegetius.

7. **Echoes from the Liturgy:** this is sometimes noted in an explicit fashion when St. Gregory makes reference to a Confession of the Church – which seems to be the Symbol attributed to Athanasias. His other liturgical reminiscences, and these are quite numerous, remain implicit. In 1960, the scholar H. Ashworth compiled a list of 42 passages from the Gregorian Sacramentary [Hadrianum] which finds one or more echoes in our **Commentary** under discussion here. Some of these are found in the part of the text already edited. There might be cited here two of these as examples:

- Hadr. 41, 5: ... *so that we might see what should be done and that we might be able to do what are correct...* In I Reg. I, 62, 4: this phrase reads:... *they see all the right actions that they are to do, and they always seek to hide these...*
- Hadr. 57, 1:... *so that we might abstain from vices in the mind ...* In I Reg. II, 15, 1-2: this reads: ... *while abstaining perfectly from vices in the mind...*

These contacts from **Primum Regum** with the Papal Sacramentary are interesting from more than one point of view. This is so in the first place in that they confirm the authenticity of the work. Before noting them, Ashworth had assembled a collection of similar parallels between the Sacramentary and the other works of Gregory. The **Commentary on Primum Regum** is established therefore as homogenous to this in this domain as in others.

In the second place, the similarities of our text with the Sacramentary offer a particular interest in the fact that the liturgical formulations of this letter might be due to Gregory himself. The connections instituted between them and the other works of St. Gregory are therefore susceptible to a two-fold interpretation: has the *euchology* influenced the Pope-writer, or are these prayer-formularies not rather **his work**? In this second hypothesis which is verified without doubt the most often, the echoes of the Sacramentary encountered in the **Commentary on Primum Regum** are raised less from the study of the literary sources of the work than from the relationship with the remaining Gregorian enterprise - a matter which will occupy us here.

Furthermore, it is still necessary to note the connections of the **Primum Regum** with the other liturgical books. An ear familiar with the Antiphony of the Mass and that of the Divine Office recognizes many times in the Gregorian **Commentary** those formulae in identical form, or very close to them, which arouse analogous questions to

those which the Sacrament just posed to us. Do these resemblances, sometimes rather striking, arise from that which St. Gregory and Claude had in their memories from those texts chanted by the Church – or, would it be necessary to see here an indication of one part taken by the Pontiff from the composition from those antiphons and their responses?

8. The Gregorian Parallels: before explaining the Book of Kings in the manner followed, Gregory had cited and commented on it here and there in his different works. These fragmentary exegesis merit to be compared with the great complete **Commentary**. One notes then that St. Gregory, in writing his **Commentary on *Primum Regum***, scarcely seems to have remembered his explanations, even repeated, which he had previously given to this or that passage. In place of simply reproducing them, or being inspired by his earlier efforts, he provides a totally new commentary, which so very often has nearly nothing in common with the preceding work. There is even this fact to be noted that one of his truly remarkable insights regarding the sacred text, which had given rise to a very beautiful spiritual exegesis, is then totally neglected in his complete **Commentary on *Primum Regum***. Such is the case of the celebrated *Hymn of Hannah*, made in her heart, without it being heard [cf. 1 S 1:13: ... *for she was speaking under her breath...*], with her visage unchanged which she kept after having prayed [cf. 1 S 1:18].

This hermeneutic renewal is to be then compared with the independence with regard to its previous commentators that have been noted present in Gregory. Even more than the fact that he did not follow either Origen or Augustine, it seems that he did not even take much care in repeating even that which he himself had said earlier.

With these remarks, we hope to have offered a more or less complete survey of the literary antecedents of his **Commentary on *Primum Regum***. It is helpful now to look at whatever impact this great Commentary had on those who followed Pope St. Gregory.

[II] Gregory's Impact on His Posterity

Much different from Gregory himself, the commentators who followed him on the Book of Kings borrowed a great deal from both **Origen** and **Augustine** – rather than from their immediate predecessors. It is also all the more remarkable that the Gregorian Commentary has left hardly any trace whatsoever on them.

1. The Questions composed by Isidore: in his **Questions on the OT**, Isidore of Seville explains briefly some passages from Kings. A great part of his explanations has been taken literally from St. Augustine whose **City of God** and **Questions for Simplicianus** have been utilized. On the other hand, there is no borrowing from Origen,

nor from Gregory. The absence of this latter is striking, all the more so since Isidore shows that elsewhere he proves to be an assiduous student of St. Gregory. Clearly, then, the Pontiff's *Commentary on Primum Regum* was simply unknown to Isidore.

2. The Venerable Bede's Commentary: in contrast with the *Questions* composed by St. Isidore, but even more concise than the *Commentary on Primum Regum* of St. Gregory, the Commentary of Bede the Venerable has borrowed frequently from Origen, Augustine and Jerome, while remaining his own personal composition. Among his borrowings, of which some are made also from Isidore, **the question is asked whether one can discern in Bede any such borrowing from St. Gregory.** In 1956, Fr. Verbraken **denied** this. In 1962, D. Hurst affirmed it, in indicating some examples in 11 pages of Bede where there does seem to be inspiration taken from St. Gregory.

However, none of these parallels invoked by the American editor is, of itself, that close that would demand the conclusion that there is indeed a dependence. The fact that the Ven. Bede agrees with St. Gregory in seeing Helcanah [a man = vir unus] the figure of Jesus Christ is all the more notable in that Origen, followed by him in the entire context, did not know of such an interpretation. Like Gregory, furthermore, and again in sharp contrast with Origen, Bede pushes aside the idea that the unus might be a useless word, and he makes it so in employing the same adverbs. Lastly, this exordium of Gregory contains a phrase on the death and resurrection of Christ, of Whom one finds a more distant echo than in Bede.

These likenesses, even to the choice of words, make it most likely that Bede had indeed read St. Gregory. Further confirmations seem to appear as his text unfolds. The words *salutari tuo* [translated: **power of saving** in JB] from the Canticle of Hannah [cf. 1 S 2:1], are understood by both authors as an allusion to the Name of Jesus – of which neither Origen, nor Augustine make any mention in this regard. When the sacred text shows that the Israelites come down upon the Philistines in order to sharpen every ploughshare [cf. 1 S 13:20], both the Anglo-Saxon exegete, as well as the Pope, call to mind the usage that Christians make of pagan culture, even though each author is content in leveling against such studies a summary condemnation, without making their own view that of their predecessors in view of the culture to be found in such writings. Where the text speaks of the *Glory of Israel* [cf. 1 S 15:29], Bede refers to the interpretation of 'some', according to which this would not refer so much to the Lord God Himself, but rather to King David, and it is evident that this is the exegesis that Gregory follows.

Therefore, there are not lacking indications of some influence from Gregory on Bede. However, their discretion is somewhat surprising, when one compares the manifest traces from Origen, Augustine and others on Bede's work. If this Monk from Jarrow had indeed read Gregory's *Commentary on Primum Regum*, which does seem

probable, he seems to have taken every precaution not to let this appear. Why would this be so? There are indeed other works from the pen of Gregory that a visible present to his memory. It will remain something of a paradox that his borrowing from Gregory's *Commentary on Primum Regum* is hardly recognized by him.

3. **The Compilation of Claude of Turin:** in the first half of the 9th century, the iconoclast Bishop of Turin had gathered in one massive commentary all the explanations that he was able to find. Origen and Augustine, Jerome, Isidore and Bede follow one another in these pages where the student can even find some passages from St. Gregory, taken from his *Homilies on the Gospel*, from his *Moralia on Job* and from the *Pastoral*. Among all these borrowings, the rare and brief pieces which seem to have been taken from the pen of Claude have no connection whatsoever with the *Commentary on Primum Regum*. It is therefore clear that Gregory's great Commentary remained unknown to this very diligent compiler of ancient texts.

The surprise which a statement of this nature diminishes somewhat when one notes another glaring absence. From Bede, Claude has known only the *30 Questions on the Book of Kings*, and not the *4 Books in the First Part of Samuel*. The major work of the English exegete is missing in his Library, as Gregory's great *Commentary*.

4. **A Citation in Rathier of Verona?** While Gregory's *Commentary on Primum Regum* is indeed absent in Turin in the 9th century, can it at least be found in the Verona of the 10th century? In fact, the Bishop Rathier cites a word from Gregory which he discovered, under the form of a citation from the prophet Hoseah, which is also present in Gregory's *Commentary*.

However, this word may also be found in two other texts in Gregory's work. One of these is found in his *Pastoral*, where it is likewise attributed to the Prophet, and then in a Papal Letter to Queen Brunehart. This final passage offers a particular interest: without mentioning Hoseah in it, St. Gregory simply appropriates to himself the word of the Prophet. From this fact, one may rightfully wonder whether the mention made by Rathier was taken from the writings of the Prophet directly, or from Gregory use of it in his *Commentary on Primum Regum*, or from his *Pastoral*. Indeed, it is to Gregory alone that he attributes the phrase, and not to Scripture, as it had been natural to do if he had found it under its biblical formulary, in one of the two works in question.

This testimony of Rathier is therefore at least ambiguous, and once more a solid proof of the knowledge of Gregory's great work escapes us.

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SUMMARY

Without going beyond the year 1,000, after which there may be found a very clear citation, one can draw from this inquest that St. Gregory's ***Commentary on Primum Regum*** did not have a comparable diffusion with that of the great Pontiff's other works. It is not listed in the list of those works which is found in the ***Liber Pontificalis***, and is absent from the ***florilegi*** Paterius and of Tayon, as well as from the series of medieval commentaries on the Book of Kings. So, it receives the scarce mention – if any at all – in a few remarks of Bede.

This almost total effacement is also to be placed along aside the abject scarcity of the manuscript tradition, which is reduced for us to two witnesses that have come down to the age of printing. One of these was put to print, before disappearing entirely, in the edition of Venice. The other is found in Cava, where it seems to have been copied. In any case, the extreme rarity of the manuscripts of the ***Commentary on Primum Regum*** contrasts sharply with the elevated number of the Pontiff's *Commentary on Canticles*. Our Commentary is not isolated solely from the group of the great uncontested works of Gregory, but even more from the little work with which it shares their reputation of being 'illegitimate.'

Once it is discarded as unfounded, the weak diffusion of this ***Commentary on Primum Regum*** does not become any the less disconcerting. It is all the more urgent, as a consequence, to give the true value to a text so long misunderstood.

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**Excursus II: Recent Studies of the Authorship of
this Commentary on 1 Kings [Samuel] ¹⁶**

Introduction:

[1] The debate on the authorship of this Commentary continues gaining interest as is evident from the following. The French edition of the works of St. Gregory has been entrusted to *Sources Chretiennes*. In 1998, Volume 432 was published, with this title: *Gregoire le Grand [Pierre de Cava], Commentaire sur le Premier Livre des Rois III*. On p. 9. An “announcement” was made to the effect that: Adalbert de Vogue’, Gregorian scholar, through a chance reading, uncovered what for him was a “troubling” discovery: in a chronicle unedited still, in the Abbey of Venosa, uncovered by a certain Herbert Houben. He stated that one of the Abbots of that Monastery of Cava was the true author of this voluminous Commentary on First Kings [Samuel], often suspected as being from the pen of St. Gregory the great.

[2] Houben noted that this early Abbot of that Monastery of Cava, Peter II [1141-1156], was the real author of a very scholarly Commentary on Kings that took up this Commentary of the first Book of Kings from Chapter 1, up until the anointing of King David, 1 K 16. This work covers precisely the same territory of the work long attributed by some, to St. Gregory – although there was often much disagreement with this claim. The truth of the matter is that the oldest manuscript to come down to us is one from the 12th century found in the Library of Cava. Peter, friend of St. Gregory, was indeed a Monk of that Abbey and had been sent with a dozen or some fellow Monks to bring support to the failing Abbey of Venosa.

[3] As has been noted this statement confirms the position held by many Gregorian scholars, that the Great Pope was not the real author of this Commentary, but Abbot Peter was. Scholars do point out, however, that the work is thoroughly “Gregorian”, and yet quite different than all the other writings of this prolific St. Gregory the Great. It can be readily admitted that these distinctive particularities might indeed be due to the hand of the redactor, the Abbot Claude of Ravenna. He was entrusted with the task of editing the work of Pope St. Gregory, but the fact is that the Great Pontiff was not fully satisfied with his work. There appeared a relatively ancient work of the biographies of the first four Abbs of Cava, and this is styled along St. Gregory’s work in the *Dialogues*. This adds for some scholars, further credence that the Commentary which St. Gaspar Bertoni employed in his weekly meditations to the seminarians of

¹⁶ Gregoire le Grand, *Commentaire sur le Premier Livre des Rois*. Vol. III, Paris: du Cerf 1998, pp. 9- 27, *passim*.

Verona – thinking it was the work of Pope St. Gregory the Great – was rather the work of Peter of Cava, imitating the style of the Great Pontiff.

1. An Over-all View: in this work of the Monks, there are several passages, one of which has already been treated [cf. Vol. I, 60]: this passage defines a Monk as “One Man” – the other passage is in Vol. III, which provides information on the reception of Benedictine Postulants [cf. IV, 70].

a. Sections 5 & 6: in this sector, the extent of the biblical passages commented on by St. Gregory have more than doubled: of the 38 and 47 biblical Passages from 1 K [Samuel] found in the previous two volumes of the *Sources Chretiennes* [## 351 & 391], here we find more than 96 such citations. In other words, in these sections 5 & 6, the Commentator seems to be twice as succinct in the place of a half of a page here each page now treat of at least one verse. This does not prove all that much in these two sections that are joined in Volume II [SC # 432] these 2 sections notably differ from one another. Section 5 is clearly distinguished by its length from all that preceded, and with a rapid speed it seems – while Section 6 resembles them from two points of view: the sacred text is commented on not just twice [literal and typical, or allegorical] but the verses are considered 3 separate times for each biblical verse from 1 K.

b. The 5th Section [III, 38-173] notes that the young Samuel is then called and accredited by God as a Prophet. The unhappy predictions that he was directed to give to Eli the Priest, bring this out quite well. The 5th section, which recounts other career of the Prophet prior to the establishment of the kingdom, is divided into three parts that are quite unequal. First of all, one comes to witness the disasters in the war with the Philistines: they defeated Israel, Eli dies at the invasion of the Holy of Holies, and there is noted also the dramatic delivery of his daughter-in-law.

1.] This section is much longer, and the second act is full of one of the effects of all this tragedy: the peregrination of the Ark of the Covenant. It was seized by the Philistines, the Ark of the Covenant is presented as circulating throughout their land, showing it to their population, then it is eventually won back by Israel. It sojourns at Bethsames and at Cariathiarim [cf. III, 72-14 1].

2.] There is then the third act where Samuel enters into action: after having called the People to conversion, he triumphs over the Philistines, brings peace to Israel, and exercises his judgeship for a long time, traveling about between Bethel, Galgal, Masphat and Ramatha [III, 143-173].

3.] this trilogy of which the median part is more ample than the other two, opens with a typological interpretation. In the Israelites, conquered by the Philistines, Gregory sees the figure of the NT Jews, dominated by demons [III, 38-41], and confounded by the Preachers of the Gospel [cf. III, 2-51]. As they rebelled they assisted at the ruin of their people under Vespasian [III, 52]. The Death of Eli's sons represented the disappearance of the priesthood of the Old Covenant [III, 53]. The death of the Great High Priest, who being over-whelmed falls off his chair, which signifies the defeat of the Judaic interpretation, conquered by the Christian preaching, and its fatal obstinacy in their lies [III, 64-67]. In delivering a son, the daughter-in-law of Eli figures in her turn the perpetuation of error in Judaism.

4.] In the second act, Gregory continues first of all with his typology. The Ark of the Covenant, captured by the Philistines, signified the Old Law, which has fallen into the hands of the converted Christians, coming over from paganism and passing over the literalism of the Jews – arriving at a spiritual interpretation of the Church [III, 53, 1 & 63:3]. At the present the wanderings of the journey of the Ark into Philistia are considered along these same lines: carried by the pagans, the Ark of the Covenant, i.e., the message of Scripture, overturns Dagon, the figure, statue of idolatry [III, 72-76]. Those Philistines, who are struck by God, are the non-believing sinners who at the origins of the Church, have been converted to the Christian faith [III, 77-82].

5.] However, this typology very soon takes a more moral direction: the return of the Ark of the Covenant, along with the objects being offered in reparation, brings about the repentance of those who have sinned, after expressing the fiat from that point on [III, 84-101]. The march of the regiment toward Bethsames is a figure for the progress of souls, guided by their Shepherds, on the narrow path which leads to perfection [III, 102-114]. The arrival of the Ark of the Covenant in Bethsames represents the access to a superior state where the soul becomes capable of guiding itself and gives herself over to the contemplation [III, 115-129]. The 20 years that the Ark of the Covenant remained at Cariathiarim marked the fullness of that contemplative life.

6.] The third part of the section maintains this moral interpretation, but yet once in a while, there is a return to a typical interpretation. The assembly of Masphat is comprised naturally as a symbol of penance [III, 143-151], and the attack of the Philistines represents that of the demons who redouble their efforts against those making progress. These receiving their grace with the assistance of Christ [III, 152-163]. Along the same line, the humiliated Philistines call to mind the wicked angels, sent into eternal fire, while the Elect rejoice in their beatitude, without their peace being troubled by the thought of those who chose to be damned who are figured by the Amorrites [III, 164-168]. In order to draw this section to a close the reader is led to the eschatology of the Church here below, of which there are three components

sectors - the Clergy, the Laity and Monasticism - these may be recognized in the three places visited by Samuel. But his own native place, Ramatha, is the consummate vision, called once more the eternal happiness, at the contemplation of which the soul of the Shepherd ought to return and busy himself with without any interruption [III, 169-173]

c. The Sixth Section [IV 1-78]: presents again three separate interpretations – but the principle of this division is totally different. In place of being determined by the phrases of an historical account, these three directions consist in three different successive exegeses of the same text. First of all, the literal sense [IV 1-14], the interpretation then becomes spiritual. Then it doubles back from a negative sense [IV 15-38] and a positive sense [IV 39-78]. This latter being much more developed than the preceding paragraphs.

1.] Therefore, the same material is commented upon in three different ways, keeping in mind the slight variations was far as the beginning and the end are concerned, and this is the installation of royalty in Israel. Samuel by this time had aged much and lives to see his sons rejected by the people who demanded a king. Interrogated by the Prophet, the Lord reproves this desire of the people – but rather commands Samuel to satisfy their wish, but not without predicting the ravages of the royal government [the “right of the King”]. In his literal commentary, St Gregory meditates on the mystery of the divine judgment: God acquiesces to a petition that seems to offend Him. While remaining within the realm of the literal interpretation, this Great Pope sometimes applies lessons these lessons to the Church [IV 8, 2, etc.] – and more precisely to the Church of his own time, where the ageing of humanity unleashes a certain obstinacy in evil, which resembles that of ancient Israel [IV 14].

2.] The first spiritual commentary is negative, i.e., that which he understands as the “Right of the King” as an allegory of these evil misdeeds caused by wicked Prelates of the Church. In employing Israelites in his service, both men and women, the King is like the carnal and worldly Bishop who corrupts the innocent souls of the faithful by the direction he offers and by his example. These laity are both strong [like the men] or weak [like the women???]. Following this interpretation of the “Right of the King” [iV, 15-28] that pertaining to the undertakings of Samuel with the People and with the Lord [IV, 28-33] is less uniformly somber. The Prophet is indeed a Model of loving intimacy with God [IV, 31] but the obstinacy of the people blossoms into the designation of Saul as King [IV, 34-38]. Saul is one of these ‘strong’ men, but in evil choices, as he represents those ecclesiastical superiors who bring only to their task their own temporal ambition and their own human gifts.

3.] Prepared by a transition, the second spiritual commentary will be the opposite of the first: this time, the exterior qualities of the King are understood as

pertaining to the good [IV, 38, 3]. However, Gregory begins by taking up anew a few of the verses discussed a bit above, the ageing of Samuel and the degeneration of his sons, a symbol of the Church growing old with the world and of those priests who do not hold to the promises of their ordination [IV, 39-41]. It is solely with the “Right of the King” that the Commentary becomes positive. Each point of this program of government which signifies something happy. The sons of Israel that the King enrolls represent those Christians who progress and perfect themselves under the leadership of a Shepherd worthy of this name [IV, 48-48]. The royal demands are taken in a sense equally favorable: the Ecclesial “Preacher” challenges the carnal appetites of his Faithful [IV, 59-62]. As for the service imposed by the King on the Elite of the People, signifies the conversion of sinners and the benefitting authority which the ministers of the Church exercise over them.

4.] Despite this view taken from the theme of optimism, which will once more prevail in these last chapters of the section. St. Gregory cannot help but recognizing in some verses which follow the “Right of the King”, a concern that preoccupies him, meaning “saddens” him. When Samuel predicted to the Israelites that the royal oppression will force them to cry out to the Lord, regretting that that they are bound to obey and want to leave religious life. Their superiors who represent the Prophet himself ought to be been warned about all this in advance. The engagement that they undertook at their profession, and which their superiors have presented to God in this liturgical ritual, remains inviolable. It is necessary to do alone can to retain them.

5.] In order to finish this segment, the second spiritual commentary returns to the more happy perspective. The portrait of Saul [is extended as an unreserved praise. The new King is the image of the Head of the Church, eminent and irreproachable, who surpasses in virtue all his subjects and teaches by his example as well as by his word [IV, 74-78]. In the manner of the first writing of his Pontificate, his Pastoral Rule, St. Gregory concludes the section by formulating the vow which the Shepherd, figured by Saul, who is meant to be perfect in his conduct, admirable by his word, and elevated above all to the very summits of contemplation.

2. Certain Major Data: Even though this summery is indeed what it is, nor analysis does open the way to notice the richness of the content of these first two sections.

a. Having passed through the first few pages, which conduct a long polemic against ancient Judaism, the 5th section traces an itinerary of the soul toward God, and this passage is brought about through an allegory of the Christian People, made up of three elements: the Clergy, the Laity and Monasticism. These states of life are figured by Bethel, Galgal, Masphat. And thus, Ramatha [where the one man and his

wife came from at the outset of 1 K [Samuel] – calls to mind the beatific vision, in that world beyond and contemplation which anticipates eternal life here on earth.

b. As for the 6th Section there will be found there at the same time rather pessimistic views regarding the weary ageing of the world and of the Church. This is demonstrated in particular by the rock, a quality of a number of bishops, and a priestly ideal of activity, which reacts to oppose any and all degradation. Here and there, among these views on the Church in general and on the Clergy in particular, St. Gregory inserts notions regarding the monastic, or the “contemplative” life, without neglecting veiled references to the Benedictine Rule, which the Pontiff cites even expressly just before finishing his views here.

1.] The Priesthood and the Sacraments: avoiding as is customary for the Great Pope employs a terminology which would be excessively technical, but repeatedly uses words such as Preachers or Pastors, Shepherds. This would imply the bishops, the priests and those Philistines divines consulted on the matter of the Ark of the Covenant [III, 90, 2-3]. Earlier he had already spoken about the Preachers of Jesus Christ, but above all regarding those early times of the Church’s life, it is the Apostles who announce the Gospel to the Jews [III, 41, 1, etc], and to the Pagans [III, 80, 3, etc.]. These notations represent here and now a visible reflection of the ecclesial reality of Gregory’s own times. In the Sacerdotes and the Pagan Divines, whom the Philistines interrogate, St. Gregory discerns the two principal tasks of the Christian Clergy: that of Offering the sacrament and the ministry of Preaching.

a.] In the Priestly line, the offering of the Sacrament demands the ‘holiness of life.’ In the idea of the “divines”, authentic preaching demanded that level of learning which provides wisdom. These two aspects of the priestly service are at the service of a two-fold purpose: to purify souls from sin and to draw them from error. The Christian Shepherd ought therefore at the same time, to be an intercessor and a guide. He needs to live in a truly holy manner in order to be heard by God in his prayer for sinners, and should speak wisely enough in order to instruct his listeners, protecting them from error.

b.] In this first over-view, the Eucharist is placed in relationship with the abolition of sin, that there would be in the life of the priest, or in the conscience of the faithful. This same relationship would appear a little further ahead in the text in reference to the Bethsamites, who were holding onto the capture Ark of the Covenant. These are struck by God and convinced to conserve the sacred object. In this people living in Bethsames – translated as the ‘House of the Sun’ – Gregory recognized “those who pass their lives in the House of God, in presenting the sacred offertory. If indeed these are struck, it comes to be that these “dead priests”, these ministers of the holy altar, have been reproved, so that they might note fulfill the

ministry in an unworthy manner. Lacking in the fact that they are indeed not saints, they profane the “sacred mysteries”, “the Body and Blood of the Redeemer”, the “Great Sacrament”. The Eucharistic ministry, with which these are charged, is incompatible with sin.

c.] The arrival of the ark at Cariathiarim occasioned a new reference to this subject. The fact that Eleazar was “sanctified” in order to guard the Ark, there is in this the image of the “Consecratory Blessing” that those “persons placed in the highest places” bring to their ministry before they can ever offer the oblation [III, 136, 1]. And the very name of Eleazar, which signifies “the aid of God”, indicates that which one expects of every priest: that he cooperate efficaciously by his exterior action in the work for souls. More precisely, St. Gregory is thinking once again of life and the teaching, so which there is added this time, fervent love, a robust constancy and the universal motif of dilection.

d.] Returning once again to these Bethsamites and to their fear of taking daily care of the Ark, the Commentator proposes to explain this sacred care-giving not only by the awesome majesty of the Eucharist, but even more by the heavy burden no less overwhelming of their charge as Prelates. The fact is that there is not needed less holiness in order to offer the sacred mysteries. In this regard two perils are pointed out: on the one hand, that worldly glory which enshrouds here and now ecclesiastical responsibilities, and on the other hand, the seductions of women [III, 37, 2-4].

e.] In addition to the Eucharist and Teaching the priest administers penance. This new aspect of his appears with regard to Samuel’s activity of judging at Masphat. This name of “Masphat” calls to mind contemplation – and St. Gregory the Great underlines the necessity of this when he exercises the power of remitting sins. In order to judge in accord with God, it is necessary to listen to that which God says, in giving ear to his interior inspiration [III, 151].

f.] More generally, “contemplation” which this toponym symbolizes, constitutes with Sacred Scripture and the practice of the Church, represented by Galgal and Bethel, one of the major sources of pastoral action. This should alternate constantly with a contemplation polarized here and there. Samuel, with his duties accomplished, returns to Ramatha which represents the blessed vision of eternity. Reaching there is like the return in love of the celestial goods and the task of each of the priests is to render conform all human beings here below.

2.] The Monastic, Contemplative Life: while totally representing one of the essential elements of the priestly life, Masphat is also a figure of a type of life that is quite distinct and is one which might be called – which Gregory did not do - the

Monastic Life. Samuel throughout is the image of the Priest, passes by Masphat, but others remain to live there. These men vowed to contemplation are Monks. To look on reality from on high is the task which defines them, in contrast with the Clerics, who are pressed into service in the House of God – and the Laity who are involved in the turbulence of the enterprises of this world [Galgal].

a.] Prior to mentioning the Monks of Masphat, St. Gregory had already greeted them at Bethsames. The arrival of the Ark in this place occasions a long development regarding the contemplative life. As “the House of the Sun”, Bethsames calls effectively to mind that contemplation of the celestial homeland. The Bethsamites are the perfect contemplatives, burning with love. Their first and characteristic virtue is humility: at the arrival of the Ark, it is in this valley that they reap their harvest. These men are in league with both modesty and sublimity, the very low opinion they nurture of themselves, and the elevation of their regard to the infinite.

b.] While humbly accepting postulants, symbolized by the Ark, in whom there is admiration for the grace of God they already received, the superiors of this “retired life” exercise over their subjects the “discernment of spirits”. This language shows clearly that Gregory had in mind those monastic communities governed by their *Praepositi*, - rather than saying Abbots - and that there was much concern already with the sorting out of the candidates for the monastic life, regarding the necessity of which the following section will insist more, in citing the Rule of St. Benedict.

c.] While striving to inculcate those adept for the life into the joy of contemplation, the Paradise of the Saints, the “retired life” demands a constant effort symbolized by the stationing of the Ark. It is only that assistance provided by Christ which makes this at all possible. The teachings of the Bible and the examples of the just which nourish these flames of ardor. But it is above all the teachings of the most elevated passages of the Scriptures of which each one has need.

d.] In the march toward Bethsames, the Arks followed by the satraps of the Philistines, and these, once the ox-cart stopped, they left if there in order to return to their own land. This account calls to mind for Gregory that solicitude of the secular priests who accompany souls in quest for the contemplative life and they retire when souls such as these do find that for which they were seeking. The Clergy needs to be concerned above all with those carnal men, whom they strive to convert. It is for others – such as for the monastic superiors - to whom it pertains to take charge of the aspirants for perfection.

e.] This arrival of the Ark at Bethsames is clearly understood by Gregory regarding that passage from the secular way of life to Monasticism. More difficult to interpret, however, is his commentary on a previous episode: the departure of the Ark, which the Philistine satraps permitted to leave. This time, the commentator thinks of those subjects who are left free to live according to their own judgment, after having been assured that they are sufficiently provided for in spiritual doctrine and strengthened in the practice of good works.

f.] This substitution of independence to obedience is not situated in a clear manner. This would seem to indicate perhaps a passing over from cenobitism to the life of a Hermit, according to the teachings of Cassian, then represented by Benedict the beginning of his Rule. However, the antecedent context where the matter of penance after sin is not considered and this renders this interpretation rather uncertain. As for the subsequent context, this does not seem to be clarified. Gregory notes there that these thoroughly “emancipated” subjects continue under surveillance in a discreet manner by their elder guides, anxious as they are to be sure that they are on the right track. When this surveillance of the “satraps” comes to an end, the Ark has arrived at Bethsames, i.e., they have reached the level of contemplation. The Commentator begins to think then, as we have already seen, of their entrance into the Monastic life. We remain somewhat perplexed in the presence of such unbridled emancipation which resembles both the entrance into a cenobitic way of life in solitude, all the while giving the impression that this is situated as an earlier step along the spiritual itinerary.

g.] On two occasions to the Monks, Gregory affirms the superiority of contemplation over the exercise of good deeds, or of the active life [III, 141-142]. According to the first of these two passages, he notes that perfection does not consist in doing, but rather in contemplating the ineffable joys from that City on high. This “ravishing” by divine matters procures an invincible mastery with regard to human passion. As for the second passage, this Commentary on the “servants” of the King is in some opposition to that servitude of the active life, managed under the direction of someone else, toward that liberty of the contemplative. In this one’s perfect conduct dispenses him from all tutelage and provides for such a one a certain latitude of charity. As in the exegesis concerning the departure of the Ark, to which this little peace shares a marked resemblance, the institutional backdrop- either ecclesial or monastic - remains uncertain.

h.] To draw these reflections to a close, it is necessary to pay particular attention to those pages in which, towards Section 6, the Monk of old of the Celio [in Rome] and the Abbot of Ravenna bring up a particular phenomenon of the cloistered life: the disaffection for the monastery that is experienced by certain of the professed subjects who were asking to leave and to return to the world. This piece

begins and ends in affirming that the Promise which they made long before remains indissoluble and that the superiors should not listen to their petition, but to do all that within them lies to keep them and to heal them. Between this beginning and its ending further ahead Gregory raises his guard against the “ease” with which the initial engagement is sometimes taken. This then calls to mind the Ritual of Profession, in the course of which this engagement along with the accompanying power of the superior passes over from human relations to those with God.

i.] It is in these considerations on the “faculty” that is brought to the fore in citing the Benedictine rule [58, 2]. Preceded by several expressions that may be found in St. Benedict’s Rule [58, 5, etc.], and followed by two others which make the student of the Life of Benedict [written by St. Gregory, in *Dialogues*] – this two-fold explicit reference to the Rule of St. Benedict is quite unique in the overall *opus* of St. Gregory and in all the literature of the 6th century – it should be kept in mind the precise date of the composition of the Benedictine Rule is not precise for many scholars.

j.] In addition to this singular citation, which has given rise to many suspicions [cf. F. Clark, for latest dates on this matter], the research on the Ceremony of Profession, with its clear mention of the central Ritual of Prayer and of its two possible allusions to a written code, is of great interest to the history of the Monastic Ritual.

3.] The Laity: among the sporadic perceptions regarding both Priests and Monks, St. Gregory also speaks often regarding the simple Faithful. Let us be content with noting in this regard, the principle posed at the rejection of the two sons of Samuel. While these indeed were unworthy, in their representation of wicked Priests, the People would be punished for having risen up against them. Indeed, when, Priests lead an evil life, they ought not be judged by the Laity [a dangerous principle in modern times!]

3. A Few Remarks regarding the Literary Style of this Work: one of the real literary faults noticed by many scholars in this work of 1 K [Samuel] is the ungracious repetition of certain useful [“throw-away”] terms:

- the preposition ad - the conjunctions dum, sed; ut;
- the word quod taken successively as a conjunction and also as a pronoun;
- the pronoun is designating two or three different realities: [eos..ea eis];
- the redactor has no difficulty at all in coupling a pronominal adverb with the corresponding pronoun [eo...ea].
- But the most frequently employed conjunction is quia.

a. These repetitions seem clearly due to the negligence are extended likewise to the verbs – such as despicit; habent; ait. The verb despicit for example is applied closely together regarding an evil deed and is likewise applied to good works – the lack of elegance in all this brings about, as would be expected, a great deal of ambiguity.

b. Another frequent phenomenon is the omission of et after a preceding et, which is then applied to the second. There is also to be found the frequent use of non solum ... sed - where the omitted term that would be expected after sed would be etiam.

c. Certain accidents are produced in that which concerns the agreement of numbers: often the verb is in the singular, and the subject is plural – or, vice versa.

d. Following the use of in - one finds sometimes unexpectedly the ablative; or the accusative - furthermore, the final “m” is considered by linguists to be too “fragile” for many readings to be rendered totally sure – since the base manuscript often does not help to clarify. There are often also downright misprints [as in perfectionem should read in delectatione]. The absence of the final “m” might indeed often indicate the ablative, as noted by the context.

e. There are further choices of words, peculiar to the author: one finds nollet in place of non mallet - l in place of ulla - quando for quomodo. One finds truly invented words, such as horribilitates; inconprehensibilitatis. As an adjective memor and the participle, memorans, are followed by the genitive. IN an “un-real” hypothesis in the past, the author uses the subjunctive in the imperfect – and the indicative in a direct question. In a series of indirect questions introduced by car, the first two verbs are in the subjunctive, and the third in the indicative.

Summary

In noting these particularities, it is that they might assist us in defining more precisely the literary contribution of the Redactor of 1 K [Samuel] as the Abbot Claude, of Ravenna. These strange usages seem to shed some light on why the Great Pope was unhappy with the results of his friend and Redactor, the Abbot Claude.¹⁷

¹⁷ For these pages, cf. *Gregoire le Grand (Pierre de Cava)*, Commentaire sur le Premier Livre des Rois, III. # 432 Paris: du Cerf, 1998, pp. 9- 27, *passim*.

Appendix I: Suffering in Gregory the Great and John Paul II's *Salvifici Doloris*

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One of the consistent and universal questions built into the human condition has to do with suffering. Why do we suffer? What does it mean? Why does a good and loving God permit suffering? For many, the inescapable fact of human suffering is one of the most challenging realities to reconcile with the belief in a good and loving God.

As faith seeks understanding, this question of suffering has provoked a great deal of fertile reflection, exegesis, and speculation. Pope Saint Gregory the Great (c. 540 – 604 A.D.) has been called “a great theologian of suffering.”¹⁸ Dom Jean Leclercq goes so far as to say, “It seems that in the realm of theological analysis of the Christian experience, nothing essential has been added to Gregory the Great.”¹⁹ He experienced great suffering in his own person, and in the Church and society of his time. His longest work, and one of his most influential, is the exegetical *Moralia in Job*²⁰. Job, perhaps more than any other book in the Old Testament, is about suffering, and asks many enduring and difficult questions. Gregory examines this work in much detail and in 3 senses: the literal, allegorical or Christological, and tropological or moral. Gregory also addresses suffering in his other works, notably in the *Pastoral Care*²¹ and *Forty Gospel Homilies*²².

¹⁸ LaPorte, Jean, “Gregory the Great as a Theologian of Suffering,” *Patristic and Byzantine Review* 1:1 (1982): 22.

¹⁹ Jean Leclercq, *The love of learning and the desire for God: a study of monastic culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961) 44.

²⁰ Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job* (hereafter *Moralia*). The critical edition is *S. Gregorii Magni opera: Moralia in Iob*, 3 vols., ed. Marcus Adriaen, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 143a (libri i-x), 143a (libri xi-xxii), 143b (libri xxiii-xxxv) (Turnhold: Brepols, 1979-1985). The English translation referred to in this paper is *Morals on the Book of Job*, 3 vols. in 4, trans. anonymous (Oxford: Parker & Rivington, 1844-50).

²¹ Gregory the Great, *Regula pastoralis* (hereafter *Regula*). The critical edition is *Règle pastorale / Grégoire le Grand*, ed. Floribert Rommel, trans. Charles Morel (Paris: Cerf, 1992). The English translation referred to in this article is *Pastoral Care*, trans. Henry Davis (New York, Newman, 1950).

²² Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelia* (hereafter *Homiliae*). The critical edition is *Homiliae in Evangelia / Gregorius Magnus*, ed. and trans. Raymond Etaix, Corpus Christianorum Latinorum 141 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999). The English translation referred to in this article is *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Dom David Hurst (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1990). Citations will use the numbering and page number of the English edition.

In our own time, Pope John Paul II, to whom many are already giving the rare title “Great,” also wrote about suffering in some detail, in his apostolic letter *Salvifici Doloris: The Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*²³. He also experienced great suffering. Indeed, his courage and perseverance in the face of the suffering of the last years of his life have been a powerful witness to an age focused on avoiding suffering and seeking pleasure at all costs.

Precisely because our world has so often lost track of the true value and meaning of suffering, seeing it only as something to be eliminated, or at least hidden, it is all the more necessary to boldly proclaim the truth of the Cross. A careful examination of Gregory and John Paul II’s thought will deepen understanding of this inescapable part of the human condition. Thus we will be able not only to proclaim the Gospel, but to proclaim it with discernment and wisdom. Well may we keep in mind Jeremiah’s warning, “Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord with slackness.”²⁴

Gregory lived in a time of great upheaval, turmoil, and calamity. In Rome, “...the people of the newly ‘liberated’ Italy were to find themselves in a nightmare, as plague, famine, war and death, the veritable four horsemen of the Apocalypse, stalked that unhappy land, stilling the rejoicing and inducing the belief that the world’s end was at hand.”²⁵ Italy had been liberated from the Ostrogothic empire by the Byzantines, but it was soon attacked by the Lombards, and swept by the plague.²⁶ As pope (590-604), Gregory worked diligently to defend and protect the city and people of Rome, eventually feeding a considerable number of them out of papal funds.²⁷

We can by no means describe, most holy brother, what we suffer in this land at the hands of your friend, the lord Romanus. Yet I may briefly say that his malice towards us has surpassed the swords of the Lombards; so that the enemies who kill us seem kindlier than the imperial governors who by their malice, rapines and deceits wear us out with anxiety. And to bear at the same time the charge of monasteries and people, and to watch anxiously against the plots of the enemy, and to be ever suspicious of the deceitfulness and malice of the governors; what labours and what

²³ Pope John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris: on the Christian meaning of human suffering* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1984). Hereafter *SD*, with citations by paragraph number.

²⁴ Jeremiah 48:10, RSV. Quoted by Gregory in *Moralia* 3.13.24, referring to Job’s friends who, although they spend a week in silence suffering with him, nonetheless incur punishment through rash and wrong speech.

²⁵ Jeffrey Richards, *Consul of God: the life and times of Gregory the Great* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 5. Richards provides very helpful chapters on Gregory’s world. An older and more extensive resource on Gregory’s life and context is Dodden, *Gregory the Great: His place in history and thought*, 1905.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 88-89. See also John Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: the Church 450-680 A.D.* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1989), 300-307.

sorrows all this involves, your fraternity may the more truly estimate as you more purely love me who suffer these things.²⁸

Beside the suffering of the Body of Christ, and his own physical suffering, Gregory also knew defeat and discouragement. Although he led the Church with great vigor and skill, many of his projects came to naught. A good example of this was his deep involvement in Episcopal elections. One of his great desires was to promote the election of competent and holy bishops in as many dioceses as possible. Initially he tried to achieve this by any means possible, including sending men from his own circle to pressure the leaders of the diocese into choosing the candidate he preferred.²⁹ However, in many cases, these situations devolved into long-standing disputes and power struggles between Gregory's men and the local parties. Besides these failures, he had less than complete success in seeking peace, rapprochement with imperial functionaries in Ravenna, or the conversion of all from Arianism to the orthodox faith.

Finally, he himself was a sickly man. At times he was too weak even to preach.³⁰ Although he escaped the plague, he ruined his stomach with fasting in the monastery and was also much stricken by fevers, nervous stress, and gout.³¹ He wrote the *Moralia* in the midst of sickness:

It was recited in a state of sickness; for when the body is worn down by sickness, the mind being also afflicted, our exertions to express ourselves likewise become faint. For many a long year has passed since I have been afflicted by frequent pains in the bowels. The powers of my stomach having broken down, I am continually weak; and I gasp under the weight of successive slow fevers.³²

He refers not infrequently to sickness in his writings and letters, even offering advice to friends in their sickness. The extent to which his sickness penetrated his

²⁸ *Epistolae* v.40 quoted in Richards, p. 86. He cites them from *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, epistolae i and ii*, ed. G. H. Pertz etc. (Berlin/Hanover, 1826-). The critical text is *S. Gregorii Magni: Registrum Epistularum*, ed. Dag Norberg, *Corpus Cristianorum Latinorum* 140-140A (Turnholt: Brepols, 1982). There is a partial translation of them in English: *Selected Letters of St. Gregory the Great*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. James Barmby, A Select Library of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series: vols. 12, 74-243 and 13, 1-111. New York: The Christian Literature Company, reprint Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994. Apparently all three sources use different numbering.

²⁹ Richards, 143-145. Richards presents Gregory's policy with regards to the episcopate in great detail in two full chapters.

³⁰ *Evangeliae*, 22: 164.

³¹ Richards, 45-46.

³² *Epistolae* v.53a quoted in Richards, p. 45.

thought is also noticeable. Even the famous *cura animarum* is on one level a medical image.

He worked vigorously to alleviate the sufferings of others, repeatedly negotiating for peace and feeding the hungry. From our current perspective, he might be expected to reject and vilify suffering, seeking to constantly eliminate it. Nevertheless, we do not find Gregory simply rejecting or cursing suffering. Rather, he sees it as integral to God's plan of salvation for all humanity. He especially cautions those who encounter their lives devoid of suffering, experiencing every consolation and worldly success. These are the ones he fears are abandoned by God. "The more I am weighed down by present troubles, the more confidently I breathe with hope of eternal comfort. And perhaps this was the divine plan, that in my trials I should tell of the trials of Job and that I would better understand the mind of one so scourged if I felt the lash myself."³³

On these various levels of suffering, Gregory is forced to consider its meaning in his own life. He is also prepared to practice the *ars artium*, the art of arts, the cure of souls:

Let no one blame me if after this address I preach no more, since, as you all see, our tribulations have increased beyond measure. On all sides we are surrounded by swords, on all sides we face the imminent peril of death. Some men are sent back to us with their hands severed, others we hear are taken prisoners, others are put to death. Now I am compelled to refrain my tongue from preaching, since my soul is weary with living. Now let no one expect from me the study of the sacred Scripture. . . . Now the eye of my heart is no longer open for the discernment of mysteries. . . . For how can one to whom life itself is denied find pleasure in declaring the hidden meaning of sacred Scripture? How can I, who am forced to drink daily from a bitter cup, offer sweet draughts to others? What therefore remains, except for us to render thanks with our tears in the midst of this chastisement which we suffer for our sins?³⁴

It is little wonder, then, that in the midst of all of this he pondered deeply on suffering and was attracted to the figure of Job. "For it is sympathy that lowers itself to his state of suffering, that knows how to estimate aright the meaning of the sufferer."³⁵

³³ Gregory, *Moralia*, Epistle, 5.

³⁴ Gregory the Great, *Homilies on Ezekiel* II. 10.4; see also II. 6.22. Quoted in Francis Clark, "St. Gregory the Great, Theologian of Christian Experience," *American Benedictine Review* 39:3 (1988): 272. The critical edition is *Homiliae in Hiezechielem Prophetam*, Gregorius Magnus, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 142 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1971)

³⁵ Gregory, *Moralia*, Preface.3.7.

Gregory was not a systematic theologian, nor did he engage in the same kind of speculative exploration that Augustine did.³⁶ His thought on suffering has significant antecedents in Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Chrysostom, and Augustine.³⁷ However, he combined "...a pedagogical view of suffering with the Neoplatonic framework of hierarchy and ascent. . . . for Gregory, the experience of adversity lies at the heart of the ambiguous nature of reality."³⁸ Although he is influenced by Neoplatonism, Gregory is not bound into a dark dualism that is often attributed to him:

"It would be easy to heap up a mountain of lugubrious passages from Gregory's writings testifying to how terrible things are in this life from day to day. And yet Gregory retains an underlying sense of the triumph of joy and peace, if not in this world, certainly in the one to come. To love and long for this goal in the midst of suffering is what we are called to as followers of Job-Christ."³⁹

Suffering may oppress but also enlighten. Gregory, on the whole, emphasizes the positive, but often perplexing, role of suffering.⁴⁰ "The trials and sorrows of earthly existence are as nothing compared to the sublime joy that comes from even a fleeting experience of the light and unitive love of God."⁴¹

His thought must be placed into the context of a basic tension: interiority and exteriority.⁴² We are called to seek truth and God in the silence of our hearts. Whatever is exterior is in some sense inferior to Grace and Truth, but also a good and useful instrument. All creation, as creature, is to be subordinated to the Creator, not idolized. "This inward turn is made possible through suffering."⁴³ This dynamic pair is put into relation with another pair, contemplative and active. So, when we look at suffering we must start with what is apparent, which may actually obscure initially, and then be led deeper.

This insight is actually a key not only to Gregory's understanding of suffering, but also his method of exegesis and understanding of creation itself:

³⁶ Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, vol. 2 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, 4 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 38.

³⁷ LaPorte, 22.

³⁸ Susan Schreiner, "Perception in Gregory's *Moralia in Job*," *Studia patristica* 28 (Louvain: Peeters, 1993), 88.

³⁹ McGinn, 46.

⁴⁰ Schreiner, "Perception", 89.

⁴¹ Clark, 273.

⁴² McGinn, 39. Also, Susan Schreiner, *Where shall wisdom be found? : Calvin's exegesis of Job from medieval and modern perspectives* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994), 24. (Hereafter cited as *Calvin*)

⁴³ Schreiner, *Calvin*, 24.

We can only recover the coherence of this diffuse commentary by recognizing the hermeneutical function of two such assumptions that inform Gregory's entire interpretation of Job: his metaphysical presupposition that reality is hierarchical, and his assumption that the perception of the true nature of reality is gained only by an inward ascent made possible through suffering.⁴⁴

The seemingly aimless wandering and abundance of sidetracks and cul-de-sacs in the *Moralia* are not the result of methodological carelessness or incompetence, but rather a coherent working out of these underlying metaphysical assumptions. As our reflection and understanding of life starts with the bare events and our reactions, so also exegesis starts out in the literal. Then both move inward (and for the most part, upward) towards a Christological and moral understanding.

Gregory had a very broad and all-encompassing view of God's providence, and saw suffering as *flagella Dei*, that is, scourges of God. It is sent by God with a purpose.⁴⁵ He outlines four possible reasons for God to send suffering:

For of scourges there are sundry kinds; for there is the scourge whereby the sinner is stricken that he may suffer punishment without withdrawal, another whereby he is smitten that he may be corrected; another wherewith sometimes a man is smitten. . . for the prevention of future [deeds]; another which is very often inflicted . . . that when unexpected deliverance follows the stroke, the power of the Deliverer being known may be the more ardently beloved, and that while the innocent person is bruised by the blow, his patience may serve to increase the gain of his merits.⁴⁶

So, suffering may be punishment for sin, correction for sin, prevention of future sin, or the revelation of God's glory in the virtuous person. Job's friends make their mistake, in part, by assuming that one of the first three possibilities must apply to Job. The validity of this fourth possibility is deeply tied up the Paschal Mystery and the Gospel. It is only really in light of Christ and His suffering that the meritorious suffering of an innocent person could be seen to have value. If Job is seen as a type of Christ, much becomes meaningful that is otherwise profoundly obscure.

Nonetheless, "God's purpose in human suffering is far from being always clearly perceived or humbly accepted."⁴⁷ Suffering is ambiguous. Is it the result of sin—past, present, or future? Is it to show God's glory? In light of Job's experience, and terrifyingly, has the devil been given permission? Astute discernment is very much

⁴⁴ Schreiner, *Calvin*, 22. c.f. Schreiner's "Perception," note 20 above, and "'Where shall wisdom be found?': Gregory's interpretation of Job" *American Benedictine Review* 39:3 (1988): 321-342.

⁴⁵ LaPorte, 22, 26-27.

⁴⁶ Gregory, *Moralia*, Preface.V.12.

⁴⁷ LaPorte, 26.

needed as “both adversity and prosperity have an equivocal nature.”⁴⁸ “Both gifts and temptations can precede election or damnation.”⁴⁹ Again, we are struck by the plausibility and even appropriateness of Job’s friends’ conclusion that he must have sinned. However, knowing how God rebukes Job’s friends, and even Job, we are able to glean wisdom from this all:

Though the appointments of God are very much hidden from sight, why is it that in this life it is sometimes ill with the good and well with the wicked, yet they are then still more mysterious when it goes well with the good here below, and ill with the wicked. . . .Therefore, because in the midst of the divine appointments the human mind is closed in by the great darkness of its uncertainty, holy men, when they see this world’s prosperity to be their lot, are disquieted with fearful misgivings.⁵⁰

What, then, is the appropriate attitude toward suffering? The sinner should be “happy in their soul” since God chastises those he has chosen. While one should never presume merit and sinlessness in one’s life, nonetheless, any suffering is an opportunity to be led by God into greater trust and interiority. In this, His greater glory may be known. As the bride in the Song of Songs, we are healed by wounds of love.⁵¹ “Behold, happy is the man whom the Lord corrected. For by this means, that the sinner is straightly visited with the pain of correction, he is sometimes trained to happiness, which knows no intervention of pain.”⁵² In fact, rather than fearing and hating pain and suffering, we should welcome them as a sign of God’s training us and freeing us. “The natural horror for suffering should turn into a positive desire for adversity, not for itself, but in order to master the flesh and to obtain humility.”⁵³ This is not masochism. The suffering is not appreciated or valued for itself, but rather for the results it may bring about: self-mastery and humility. “For what has man done of himself but sin? And it is written, *Pride is the beginning of sin*.”⁵⁴ It is rightly said, then, that when man is withdrawn from what he has done, he is freed from pride.”⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Schreiner, *Calvin*, 27.

⁴⁹ Carole Straw, *Gregory the Great: perfection in imperfection* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1988), 239.

⁵⁰ Gregory, *Moralia*, 5.1.1.

⁵¹ Schreiner, *Calvin*, 28.

⁵² Gregory, *Moralia*, 6.23.40.

⁵³ LaPorte, 28.

⁵⁴ Ecclesiasticus, or Sirach, 10:13

⁵⁵ Gregory, *Moralia*, 23.22.44. Here Gregory comments on Job 33:17, “That He may withdraw man from the things that he has done, and may deliver him from pride.”

The appropriate response, then, is exemplified by a certain balance and purity of heart. Suffering may serve to purify, prune, and humble. Nonetheless, one must avoid despair. Again, prosperity may reward and heal and soothe, but it must be carefully circumscribed so as not to lead one to pride and self-sufficiency. "...the good Christian preserves a balance soul. He has the strength and courage of Ezechiel . . . and he shares the equanimity of Job, the stability Gregory calls *constantia mentis*.⁵⁶ Here is seen the important influence of John Cassian and his *apatheia*.

This balance and constancy is not passivity or indifference. It is the ability to suffer well and fruitfully. Fruitful suffering leads to greater self knowledge, both in terms of knowing one's own strength, and the depth of one's sin.⁵⁷ Paul's words are brought into dialogue with Job,

But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.⁵⁸

In light of this, Gregory says:

Thus by the plain voice of God it is shown that the guardian of power is frailty. For we are then kept to good effect within, when by God's appointment we are tempted to a bearable degree without, sometimes by bad propensities, sometimes by pressing misfortunes."⁵⁹

Affliction, then, can free us and deepen our humility and self-knowledge.

This then leads us to the connection with Gregory's deep engagement with the idea of a "mixed life," that is, a life of both contemplation and action. As mentioned above, Gregory was not systematic or speculative theologian:

"His primary concern with theology is *praxis*, with the Christian life. . . . Gregory feels a basic theological imperative to bring succor to the Christian people in their experience of the human predicament, and in so doing to bring them to thirst after God and their

⁵⁶ Straw, 236.

⁵⁷ Schreiner, *Calvin*, 27-29.

⁵⁸ 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. RSV

⁵⁹ Gregory, *Moralia*, 19.6.12.

heavenly fatherland, and to put themselves on the sure path to him, which is the life of Christian virtue and duty.”⁶⁰

He reflects on suffering not so as to be able to write about it or discuss it, but so as to better live his own life of service, and to exhort others to do the same. His purpose for writing the *Moralia* is to instruct “. . . now by the work of exposition, now by the flights of contemplation, and now by moral instruction,” and to “. . . be careful to search out thoroughly whatever furnishes moral instruction to his hearers.”⁶¹

In our own day, Gregory’s teaching is particularly relevant in the area of sin in the Church. The Church suffers in and through her sinful members. They suffer in their own sin, and cause the suffering of others. But this suffering can be suffered well and fruitfully:

God places evil people in the Church to help his faithful to grow in holiness. Ultimately, the evil members of the body of Christ are there to teach the other members humility, patience, mercy, and hope. . . . For Gregory, it was clear God uses the evil members to teach us that we should not be presumptuous about either our status or the status of others in the Church.⁶²

This is an integral part of the Church as the Body of Christ. It is not a Donatist church of the allegedly perfect, but a church made up of real people and real communities that are a mix of good and bad in each person and in aggregate. We are called to “‘Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so you shall fulfill [sic] the law of Christ.’ For the law of Christ is charity in unity, which they alone compass who do not fall away from it even when oppressed.”⁶³ Authentic love and faithfulness in the Church call one to humility, a careful discernment, and to bear each other’s burdens in real sympathy and solidarity. Most especially, hope is never lost: “...all, who for His sake are stricken in grief in time, He vouchsafes true salvation for their comfort.”⁶⁴

Pope John Paul II, born Karol Wojtyla, also knew suffering first hand. He lived through most of the bloodiest century yet recorded, in a country repeatedly torn apart and sold off piece by piece. He was born in 1920 in Wadowice, Poland. Poland is a nation that has suffered profoundly over the last 150 years, knowing true freedom and self-rule only briefly. By the time he was 21, he had lost his mother, brother, and

⁶⁰ Clark, 267-268.

⁶¹ Gregory, *Moralia*, Epistle.2.

⁶² C. Colt Anderson, “Bonaventure and the sin of the Church,” *Theological Studies* 63 (2002):673.

⁶³ Gregory, *Regulae Pastoralis*, 3.9, p. 108-109. Gregory cites Galatians 6:2.

⁶⁴ Gregory, *Moralia*, 6.16.23.

father. His homeland was invaded, first by the Germans and then by the Russians. The Church there was brutally persecuted by each regime. During the German occupation, he was hit by a German truck and nearly killed. As a priest and bishop he had to struggle constantly for the free practice of the faith. As pope, he was shot at close hand in 1981 by Mehmet Ali Agca. In the last years of his long papacy, he served in spite of progressive sickness. In the midst of all of this, he was known especially for his deep abiding and visible joy and love. Thus, like Gregory, his teaching on suffering does not occur out of theological speculation only, but out of lived experience, both personally and as head of the Body of Christ.⁶⁵

Although John Paul II wrote and spoke on suffering in a variety of places, his most concentrated and complete thought on the matter is in *Salvifici Doloris: on the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*. It is interesting to note that this apostolic letter was written just a few years after the nearly fatal shooting. The key biblical text for the Pope is Paul's mysterious statement in Colossians 1:24, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church." Although this statement seems on the surface to be a scandalous casting of doubt on the completeness and efficacy of Christ's sacrifice, in it John Paul II finds the key to unlocking the "salvific meaning of suffering."⁶⁶

He begins by looking at the way in which suffering seems to be an inescapable part of the human condition:

What we express by the word "suffering" seems to be particularly *essential to the nature of man*. It is as deep as man himself, precisely because it manifests in its own way that depth which is proper to man, and in its own way surpasses it. Suffering seems to belong to man's transcendence: it is one of those points in which man is in a certain sense "destined" to go beyond himself, and he is called to this in a mysterious way.⁶⁷

Further, it is deeply tied to our redemption, as it was in and through suffering that Christ saved us on the Cross. So, this mystery of suffering is deeply tied up in what and who we are, and how we are saved. It is here in suffering, especially, that the Church "should meet man."⁶⁸

⁶⁵ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The biography of Pope John Paul II, 1920 – 2005* (New York, Harper Collins, 2005).

⁶⁶ John Paul II, *SD* 1.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 2. Emphasis in the original, likewise in the quotes below.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

At this point, John Paul II examines the subjective and passive character of suffering, and its connection with evil. Suffering seems to be always associated with evil and thus gives rise to questions about evil. In the Old Testament, “suffering and evil are identified with each other.”⁶⁹ Thus, suffering necessarily prompts the question, What is evil? “Man suffers on account of evil, which is a certain lack, limitation or distortion of good. We could say that man suffers *because of a good* in which he does not share, from which in a certain sense he is cut off, or of which he has deprived himself.”⁷⁰

Recognizing this connection with the human condition and with evil, the sheer enormous scale of human suffering leads us to ask, “Why?” These difficult questions are put to others, and to God. Lacking a satisfactory answer, people are put into conflict with each other and may even deny God. “. . . God expects the question and listens to it, as we see in the revelation of the Old Testament. In the book of Job the question has found its most vivid expression.”⁷¹ Job brings the deep conviction of the Old Testament that evil and suffering result from sin into dialogue with Job, a just man suffering, as the reader knows, due to no sin but to God’s allowing the devil to torment him. In the end, “it is *sufficient argument* why the answer to the question about the meaning of suffering is not to be unreservedly linked to the moral order, based on justice along.”⁷²

Evil and suffering, then, cannot be simply linked to the moral order. Punishment is linked not only to repayment of evil, but also to the creation of “the possibility of rebuilding goodness in the subject who suffers.”⁷³ There is here an openness to what is coming, to suffering that serves “for conversion.”⁷⁴ In the Old Testament, however, there is no further or complete answer to the problem. This awaits the fullness of time. “Christ causes us to enter into the mystery and to discover the ‘why’ of suffering, as far as we are capable of grasping the sublimity of divine love.”⁷⁵ Suffering is understood not only in the order of justice, but necessarily also in the order of love and grace.

Salvation, liberation from evil, is bound up with suffering. This liberation is achieved through the suffering of the only-begotten Son. “For God so loved the world

⁶⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 10.

⁷² Ibid., 11.

⁷³ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 13.

that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”⁷⁶ Christ strikes at the roots of evil and conquers sin and death, “not only evil and definitive, eschatological suffering . . . but also—at least indirectly—*evil and suffering* in their *temporal and historical dimension*.”⁷⁷ While any particular suffering cannot always or clearly be connected to concrete sins, nonetheless sin and suffering are bound up together. The uniqueness of who Christ is bridges this gap:

Here we touch upon the duality of the nature of a single personal subject of redemptive suffering. He who by His passion and death on the cross brings about the Redemption is the only-begotten Son whom God “gave.” And at the same time, this *Son who is consubstantial with the Father suffers as a man*. His suffering has human dimensions; it also has—unique in the history of humanity—a depth and intensity which, while being human, can also be an incomparable depth and intensity of suffering, insofar as the man who suffers is in person the only-begotten Son himself: “God from God.” Therefore, only He—the only-begotten Son—is capable of embracing the measure of evil contained in the sin of man: in every sin and in “total” sin, according to the dimensions of the historical experience of humanity on earth.⁷⁸

Here the question of Job’s innocent suffering is heightened to a radical degree. Christ answers this question in His teaching, but only fully and definitively in his suffering. It “is integrated with this teaching of the Good News in an organic and indissoluble way. And this is *the final*, definitive word of this *teaching* . . .”⁷⁹

“One can say that with the passion of Christ all human suffering has found itself in a new situation. . . . In the cross of Christ not only is the Redemption accomplished through suffering, but *also human suffering itself has been redeemed*.”⁸⁰ So, suffering itself now functions in a different way, in a new reality. Suffering could not be tied directly and always to concrete sin. Now, it still is connected to sin, but, by Christ, also tied to the definitive and final defeat of sin and death. What was once the terrible price and consequence of sin is now part of the conversion and victory over sin. And, each person, “in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ.”⁸¹

⁷⁶ John 3:16.

⁷⁷ *SD*, 15.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

This sharing in suffering creates a sharing in the cross of Christ, and a sharing in the kingdom of God, and finally in Christ's glory.⁸² This brings us full circle back to Paul – making up what is lacking in the suffering of Christ, and the paradox of strength in weakness.⁸³ "In such a concept, *to suffer* means to become particularly *susceptible*, particularly *open to the working of the salvific powers of God*, offered to humanity in Christ."⁸⁴

We see this truth of suffering particularly made present in and through the Church, who's human and divine nature is sacramental of Christ. The Church hands on the message and Gospel, and lives it each day. Christ's suffering is made present and real in each person's suffering, and His sacrifice is made present and real in the Eucharist in and through the Church.

Further, this call to share in Christ's suffering is also a call to share in each other's suffering. The parable of the Good Samaritan⁸⁵ models this for us especially, showing us how to enter into and share the suffering of another. Here the Pope touches one of the key aspects of his anthropology, "Man cannot 'fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.'"⁸⁶ The Christian is not called to passivity in the face of suffering, but to engagement, once again in imitation of Christ.⁸⁷

So, in John Paul II's presentation of suffering, we see a deep engagement with human experience and with Scripture. Although the letter is quite short, it is a tour-de-force of concise and pithy analysis. Suffering does have meaning, in Christ. It opens us to grace and to service of others. It's meaning is accessible inasmuch as we are able to plunge the depths of love, especially divine love.

Both John Paul II and Pope St. Gregory the Great engaged suffering in light of their own deep experience of suffering, conversion and grace. It is interesting to note the many similarities between their lives and service to the church. Both saw the need to speak at some length on the issue of suffering. Both saw great value and grace possible in a deep offering of one's suffering in and to Christ for salvation of souls, including one's own. And, both worked assiduously to alleviate suffering in others.

However, there is a marked difference in their theological method. Whereas Gregory engaged Job over the course of almost 2000 pages, and wrote almost exclusively in light of exegetical pastoral application and praxis, John Paul II worked in a

⁸² Ibid., 21-22.

⁸³ Col. 1:24, 2 Cor 12: 9, Phil. 4:13.

⁸⁴ SD, 23.

⁸⁵ Luke 12:29-37.

⁸⁶ SD, 28, quoting *Gaudium et Spes* 24.

⁸⁷ SD, 30.

much more philosophical and speculative context. He certainly engages experience and Scripture and directs himself to it, but the language and style is not that of simple moral teaching. It is interesting to note that his encyclicals are often considered long and difficult. However, in light of the *Moralia*, they appear as models of pithy conciseness and organization.

Gregory understands suffering of a way of turning inward to a deeper encounter with God. John Paul II presents suffering as calling us to an every greater engagement. Although this seems to be a strong contrast, it is perhaps more appearance than reality. Gregory's own life of holiness and heroic engagement belies any attempt to make him a dualist. John Paul II, on the other hand, a mystic and man of deep prayer, could by no means be called an activist.

While there is much development over the course of 1400 years of human history and theological study, and enormous changes in the concrete circumstances that Gregory and John Paul II worked in, it is perhaps most noteworthy that the question of human suffering drew both their attention and labors. Once again, the language and method they use is quite different in some respects, but they both labor in light of the Scriptures. The Gospels, Job and Paul supply them with the basic texts of their work, along with their own experience. Both lead us to a greater and deeper appreciation of the deep Christian meaning of suffering, one of the places where we are most open to a salvific encounter with ourselves, with each other, and finally, with Christ.



Appendix II:
Gregory the Great and Astronomy

[cf. Jb 9:10-12; 38:31]

[cf. also Am 5:8]

He determines the number of the stars, he gives to all of them their names. [Psalm 147:4] Then Job answered: 2 “Truly I know that it is so: But how can a man be just before God? 3 If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times. 4 He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength — who has hardened himself against him, and succeeded? 5 he who removes mountains, and they know it not, when he overturns them in his anger 6 who shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble; 7 who commands the sun, and it does not rise; who seals up the stars; 8 who alone stretched out the heavens, and trampled the waves of the sea; 9 who made the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the chambers of the south; 10 who does great things beyond understanding, and marvelous things without number. [Job 9]

“Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, or lose the cords of Orion? 32 Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season, or can you guide the Bear [Arcturus?] with its children? 33 Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on the earth? 34 “Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, that a flood of waters may cover you? 35 Can you send forth lightnings, that they may go and say to you, ‘Here we are’? 36 Who has put wisdom in the clouds, [b] or given understanding to the mists? 37 Who can number the clouds by wisdom? Or who can tilt the water skins of the heavens, 38 when the dust runs into a mass... [Job 38]

He who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out upon the surface of the earth, the Lord is his name .. [Am 5:8]

“Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created.” [Rv 4:11]

12 When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale; 14 the sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. 15 Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the generals and the rich and the strong, and every one, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?” [Rv 6].

12 The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light was darkened; a third of the day was kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night... [Rv 8]

2 he opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft... [Rv 9].

7 And I heard the altar cry, 8 The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch men with fire; 9 men were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory.

10 The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was in darkness; men gnawed their tongues in anguish 11 and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

12 The sixth angel poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. 13 And I saw, issuing from the mouth of the dragon and from the mouth of the beast and from the mouth of the false prophet, three foul spirits like frogs; 14 for they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day[a] of God the Almighty. 15 ("Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed!") 16 And they assembled them at the place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon... [Rv 16]

22 And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, 25 and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; 26 they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. 27 But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life... [Rv 21]

3 There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; 4 they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. 5 And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever...[Rv 22].

†††

TEXTS from GREGORY**[Moralia, Book IX, nn. viii, ff. nn. 8-19]⁸⁸**

n. 8: Now sometimes in Holy Writ by the title of ‘sun’, we have the brightness of the Preachers represented as it is said by John, *And the sun became black as sackcloth of hair* [Rv 6:12]. For at the end of time the sun is exhibited ‘like a sackcloth of hair’, in that the shining life of them that preach is set forth before the eyes of the lost as hard and contemptible. And they are represented by the brightness of stars also, in that while they preach right doctrines to sinners, they enlighten the darkness of our night.

And hence upon the removal of the Preachers, it is said by the Prophet” *The stars of the rain are withholden*. Now, whereas the sun shines in the day time, the stars illumine the shades of night. And very often in Holy Writ by the designation of the day is denoted the eternal Country, and by the name of *night*, the present life.

Holy Preachers become like the sun to our eyes, inasmuch as they open to us the view of the true light; and they shine like stars in the dark, when for the purpose of helping our necessities they manage earthly things in an active life. They, as it were, shine as the sun in the day, while they raise the eye of our mind to contemplate the land of interior brightness, and they glitter like stars in the night, in that even whilst they are engaged in earthly action, they guide the foot of our practice, every moment on the point of stumbling, by the example of their own uprightness.

But, because when the Preachers were driven out, there was none who might either show the brightness of contemplation, or disclose the light of an active life to the Jewish people continuing in the night of their unbelief [for the Truth, which being cast off abandoned them, when the light of preaching was removed, blinded them in reward for their wickedness], it is rightly said: *Which commandeth the sun, and it riseth not, and shutteth up the stars as under a seal*. For He would not let the sun rise to that people, from who He turned away the heart of the Preachers, and He “shut up the stars under a seal”, in that while He kept His Preachers to themselves in silence, He hid the heavenly light from the darkened perceptions of the wicked.

9: But it is to be considered, that we shut up anything under seal with this view, that when the time suits, we may bring it out to the light. And we have learnt by the testimony of Holy Writ, that Judea, which is now left desolate, shall be gathered into the bosom of the faith at the end.

Hence, it is declared by Isaiah, *For though thy people Israel should be as the sand if the sea, yet a remnant of them should be saved*. [Is 10:22]. Hence, Paul says: *Until the fullness of*

⁸⁸ *Moralia in Job, or, Morals on the Book of Job*, by Saint Gregory the Great. Vol. I, Part I & II. Ex Fontibus Company 2012, pp. 460-468].

the Gentiles should come in, and so all Israel should be saved. [Rm 11:25, f.]. Therefore He that removes His Preachers now from the eyes of Judaea, and afterwards exhibits them, has as it were “shut up the stars under a seal”, that the rays of the spirituals stars being first hidden and afterwards being forth, she both being now cast off may not see the night of her misbelief, and then by being enlightened may find it out.

It is hence that those two illustrious Preachers were removed, but their death delayed, that they might be brought back in the end for the purpose of preaching; of whom it is said by John, *These are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks, standing before the Lord of the earth* [Rv 11:4]. One of whom, “Truth” by His own lips gives promise of in the Gospel, saying, *Elias truly shall first come and restore all things* [Mt 17:11].

They then are as if the “stars” were “shut up under a seal”, who both at this present are concealed that they appear not, and hereafter shall appear that they may stand Him in good stead. Yet the Israelitish people, which shall be gathered in full measure in the end, in the immediate infancy of Holy Church is pitilessly hardened. For it rejected the Preachers of the Truth, it spurned the message of succor. Yet this is effected by the marvelous contrivance of the Creator with this view, that the glory of the persons preaching, which if received might have laid hid in one people, being rejected might be spread abroad among all the nations. Hence, too it is fitly added afterwards:

v. 8: *Which alone spreadeth out the heavens...*

ix. 10: For what is denoted by the name of “the heavens”, but this very heavenly life of the persons preaching, of whom it is said by the Psalmist, *The heavens declare the glory of God.* [Ps 19:1]. Thus the same persons are recorded to be the heavens, and the same to be the sun; the heavens indeed, in that by interposing [*intercedendo*] they shield; the sun, in that by preaching they display the power of light.

And so, upon the “earth being shaken” the heavens were spread out, in that when Judea ravened in the violence of persecution, the Lord spread wide the life of the Apostles, for all the Gentiles to acquaint themselves withal. And whilst she in judgment being made captive is scattered over the world, they by grace are everywhere amplified in honor.

For “the heavens” were of small compass so long as one people contained so many mighty preachers. For to which of the Gentiles would Peter have been known, if he had not continued preaching to the Jewish people alone?: Who would have known Paul’s virtues unless Judaea by persecuting him had transmitted him to our knowledge See how already they, that were held in honor through the length and breadth of the world. The Lord alone, then, “has spread out the heavens, who by the wondrous ordering of His secret counsel, from the very cause that He let His Preachers be persecuted in one people caused them to spread out even to the corners of the world.

But yet neither did this Gentile folk itself, which was devoted to the present world, when the tongues of the Apostles rebuked iniquities, gladly welcome the words of life. For it forthwith swelled up in the pride of opposition, and roused itself to the cruelty of persecution. But she that sets herself to gainsay the words of [preaching, is speedily subdued in wonderment at miraculous signs. Hence too the words are fitly added in praise of the Creator...

...v. 9⁸⁹: *Which maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Hyades and the chambers of the south...*

xi 12: The word of the Truth never follows in vain fables of Hesiod, Aratus or Callimachus, that in naming Arcturus it should take the last of the seven stars for the tail of the bear, or as if Orion were holding a sword as a mad lover; for these names of the stars were invented by the votaries of carnal wisdom, but Holy Scripture for this reason makes use of these words, that the things which it aims to convey instruction about, may be represented by the customariness of their usual designation. For if he had spoken of any star he might wish by names unknown to us, man, for whom this very Scripture was made, would assuredly have known nothing what he heard.

Thus in Holy Writ the wise ones of God derive their speech from the wise ones of this world, in like sort as therein God the very Creator of man, for man's benefit, takes in Himself the tones of human passion, i.e., so to say, *It repenteth Me that I have made man on the earth...* [Gn 6:6, 7]; whereas it is plain and undoubted that He, who beholds all things before they come, after He has done anything, never repents by feeling regret.

What wonder is it then if spiritual men use the words of carnal men, when the Ineffable Spirit Himself, Which is the Creator of all things, in order to draw the flesh to the understanding of Him, in His own case frames His speech in the flesh? Thus, in Holy Writ, when we hear the familiar names of the stars, we learn what stars the discourse runs on. And after we have well weighed what stars are described, it remains that from their motions we be led to raise ourselves to the mysteries of the spiritual meaning.

For not even after the letter is there anything strange, in that it is said that God created Arcturus, and the Orions and the Hyades, concerning Whom it is an acknowledged truth that there is nothing of any sort in the world, but He Himself made it. But the holy man declares that the Lord made these by which he means properly to denote things that are done in a spiritual way.

13. For what is represented by the name of Arcturus, which being set in the polar region of the heavens, shines bright with the rays of seven stars, except the Church universal, which is represented in the Apocalypse of John by the seven Churches and the seven candlesticks? Which same, while She contains in Herself the gifts of seven-fold grace,

⁸⁹ o.c., pp. 464, ff.

beaming with the brightness of the highest virtue, as it were gives light from the polar region of Truth.

And it is furthermore to be considered that Arcturus is ever turned about, and never sunk from sight, in that Holy Church ever undergoes the persecutions of the wicked without ceasing, and yet endures without failing “even unto the end of the world”. For often times because the sons of perdition have persecuted her even to the death, they have been persuaded that they had as it were utterly extinguished her, but she returned with manifold increase to the rearing of her full growth in proportion as she travailed in dying amidst the hands of her persecutors. Thus while Arcturus is turned about, he is set on high, for Holy Church is then more strongly reinvigorated in the Truth, when she spends herself more fervently for the Truth.

14: Hence, too after Arcturus he immediately subjoins the Oriones with propriety. For they arise in the very heaviest of the winter season, and they stir up storms by their rising, and put sea and land in common. What then is denoted by “the Oriones” after “Arcturus” saving the Martyrs? Who while Holy Church is set on high to take her stand of preaching, destined to undergo the weight of the persecutors and harassing treatment, came into the fact of heaven, as it were, in the winter season.

For when they were born, the sea and the land were troubled, in that when the Gentile world grieved that its method of life was undone, on their courage appearing, it set up for their destruction not only the fiery and the turbulent, but the mild among men also. And thus the winter lowered in ‘the Oriones’ in that when the constancy of the Saints shone out, the frozen soil of the unbelievers lashed itself into a tempest of persecution. And so “the heavens” gave forth the Oriones, when Holy Church sent out her Martyrs, who whilst they had boldness to speak what is right to the uninstructed, brought upon themselves everything most heavy from the adverse bitterness of the world.

15: Now he justly subjoins the Hyades directly, which when the springtide is waxing, go forth into the face of heaven, and, when the Sun is not putting out the power of his heat, are given to sight. For they are attached to the beginnings of that sign, which the wise of this world call “the Bull”, at which the Sun begins to increase, and arises with more fervent heat, to lengthen out the periods of the day. Who then, after “the Oriones” are denoted by the title of the “Hyades”, saving the Doctors of Holy Church who, when the Martyrs were taken away, came at the period to the world’s knowledge when faith now shines forth the brighter and the winter of infidelity being forced back, the Sun of Truth flows deeper through the hearts of the faithful.

These, then the storm of persecution was overpast, and the nights of long infidelity consummated, then arose to Holy Church, when the year now opens brighter in the vernal season of belief. Nor are the holy Doctors improperly denoted by the designation of Hyades have received their name from the rains, surely because at their rising they bring showers. Thus they are well represented by the title “the Hyades” who brought out in the settled

frame of Holy Church, as it were into the face of heaven, upon the parched earth of the human heart poured down the showers of holy preaching.

For if the word of God were not rain, Moses would never have said, *Let my doctrine be waited for as the rain* [Dt 32:2] – ‘Truth’ would never have been said by the lips of Isaiah, *I will also command the clouds that they rain no more upon it* [Is 5:6] and that which we brought forward a little above, *Therefore the stars of the showers are withholden* [Jr 3:3]. Thus while the Hyades come brining showers, the Sun is led onto the higher regions of heaven; in that when the knowledge of the Doctors appears, while our minds drink in the showers of preaching, the heat of faith increases.

And the earth being irrigated is rendered productive in fruit, when the light of the sky is fired; in that we yield the fruit of good works the more plentifully, the brighter we burn within our breasts through the flame of sacred instruction. And while heavenly lore is displayed to view by them more and more day by day, it is as if the springtide of interior light were opened upon us, that the new Sun may glow brightly in our souls, and being by their words made known to us, may daily surpass itself in brilliancy. For the end of the world being close at hand, the knowledge from above advances, and waxes bigger with the progress of time. For hence, it is said by Daniel, *Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased* [Dn 12:4].

Hence, the Angel says to John in the former part of the Revelation, *Seal up those things, which the seven thunders uttered* .. [Rv 20:4], and yet at the end of that Revelation he bids him, saying, *Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book* [Rv 22:10]. For the first part of the Revelation is commanded to be sealed, but not the end to be sealed; for whatever was hidden at the beginnings of Holy Church, the end clears up day by day. But some imagine that the Hyades are named from the Greek letter which is rendered by ‘y’ [upsilon] which, if it be so, is not opposed to the sense which we have given: the Doctors are not unsuitably represented by those stars which have their name from letters; but though the Hyades are not unlike the look of that letter, yet it is a fact that a shower called Hyetus, and that those at their rising bring with them rain.

16: Therefore, let the holy man, viewing the order of our redemption, feel wonder, and wondering let him cry out, in the words, *Which alone spreadeth out the heavens and treadeth upon the waves of the sea. Which maketh Arcturus, the Oriones and Hyades*. For when the heavens were spread out, the Lord made “Arcturus” in that when the Apostles were brought to honor, He established the Church in heavenly conversation, and when Arcturus was made, He framed the “Oriones” in that the faith of the Church Universal being established, He launched for the Martyrs against the storms of the world. And when the “Oriones” were launched in heaven, He set forth the “Hyades” in that when the Martyrs proved strong against adversities, He vouchsafed the teaching of the Masters, to water the drought of human hearts. These then are the ranks of the spiritual stars, which while they stand out conspicuous by the highest virtues are ever shining from above.

17. But what remains after these things, saving that Holy Church receiving the fruit of her toils, should attain to behold the inner depths of the Country above? And hence, whereas he had said, *Which maketh Arcturus, and the Hyades;* he rightly added directly *and the chambers of the South.* For what is here denoted by the name of the “South”, saving the fervor of the Holy Spirit? With which he that is replenished, kindles to the love of the spiritual Country. And hence it is said with the voice of the Spouse in the Song of Solomon, *O north wind, and come thou south, blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.*

For upon the “South Wind” coming, the “North Wind” arising departs, when our old enemy, who had bound up our soul in inactivity, being expelled by the coming of the Holy Spirit, takes himself away. And *the South Wind blows upon the garden* of the Spouse, that *the spices thereof may flow down;* in that, when so ever the Spirit of Truth has filled Holy Church with the excellences of His gifts, He scatters far and wide from her the odors of good works. And thus *the chambers of the South* are those unseen orders of the Angels, and those unfathomed depths of the heavenly Country, which are filled with the heat of the Holy Spirit. For thither are brought to the souls of the Saints, both at this present time divested of the body, and hereafter restored to the same anew, and like stars they are concealed in hidden depths.

There, all the day, as at midday, the fire of the Sun burns with a brighter lustre, in that the brightness of our Creator which is now overlaid with the mists of our mortal state, is rendered more clearly visible; and the beam of the orb seems to raise itself to higher regions, in that “Truth” from its own Self enlightens us more completely through and through. There the light of interior contemplation is seen without the intervening shadow of mutability; there is the heat of supreme light, without any dimness from the body; there the unseen bands of Angels glitter like stars in hidden realms, which cannot now be seen by men, in proportion as they are deeper bathed in the flame of the true Light.

Thus it is altogether marvelous that, in the sending of the Apostles, the Lord stretches out the Heavens that, in moderating the swellings of persecution, He trode the waves of the sea, and kept them down; that in the establishing of the Church, He sent Arcturus in his place; than in making the Martyrs proof against afflictions, He sent forth “the Oriones”; that in the Doctors being replenished in peace, He gave forth “the Hyades”; but after these it is beyond all comparison marvelous, that He should have provided for us the haven of the Heavenly Land as the Chambers of the South.

18: All this is beautiful, that is seen as it were in the face of heaven of God’s ordering; but infinitely and incomparably more beautiful is that, to which we are brought without its being able to be seen. Hence, the Spouse, justly repeats a second time in the commendation of His Bride, *Behold thou art fair, my love; behold thou art fair: thou hast doves’ eyes, besides that which lieth within* [Sgs 4:1].

He describes her *fair*, and says again, '*fair*' in that there is one sort of beauty in life and conduct, wherein she is now seen, and another beauty of rewards, wherein she will then be lifted up in the likeness of her Creator; and because her members, which are all the Elect, go about all things with simplicity, her eyes are called doves'" eyes; which shine with extraordinary light, for they glitter even with the signs of miraculous power.

But how great is all this marvel, which is able to be seen! That marvel relating to things of the interior is more wonderful, which is not now able to be seen, concerning which it is fitly added in that place, *Besides that which lieth hidden within*. For the glory of the visible world is great, but the glory of the visible world is great, but the glory of the secret recompensing far beyond our comparison.

That, then, which is denoted but the name of "stars" by blessed Job, is in the words of Solomon represented by the title of "eyes"; and what is described by Solomon, *Besides that which lieth within*, blessed Job conveys to us when he extols the Chambers of the South. But see, the holy man in admiring things without, and contemplating those of the interior, telling of things manifest, and diving into things secret, aims to describe all that is done both within and without; but when shall the tongue of the flesh unfold the works of the Supreme Greatness? And hence with just propriety directly afterwards, by giving up the attempt, he measures the compass of these same works the more effectually, saying,

v. 10: *Which doeth great things past finding out; year, and wonders without number...*



MORALIA IN JOB⁹⁰

[JOB 29, 31. 67-68, etc.]

v.31: will thou be able to join together the shining stars, the Pleiades, or wilt thou be able to break up the circuit of Arcturus?

[Literal] xxxi. 67: The stars of Pleiades, are so called from the Greek *PLEISTOS*, i.e. from plurality. But they were made so near to each other, and yet so distinct, that they can be near together, and yet cannot possibly be united, since they are united in nearness, but disunited as to contact. But, *Arcturus* so illuminates the seasons of night, as placed in the axis of heaven, to turn itself in divers ways, and yet, never to set. For it does not revolve out of its orbit, but placed in its own position, it inclines to all quarters of the world, though it will never set.

⁹⁰ *Morals on the Book of Job, by St. Gregory the Great*. Vol. III, Pars VI & VI. Ex Fontibus 2012, pp. 325-334.

What then is it, that man, who was formed from the earth, and placed upon the earth is questioned as to the government of heaven, that he cannot join together the Pleiades, which he sees were made close to each other and almost united, and that he cannot break up the circuit of Arcturus, though he can behold it almost dissipated by its own rapidity of motion? Is it not, that considering in those His servants, the power of their Creator, he should remember his own weakness, and consider how beyond our comprehension is He, in the very government of His heavenly ministers, Whom he cannot as yet behold in His own majesty?

[Mystical] 68. But why do we say these things, who are urged by the stimulus of reason, to learn the sense of these words pregnant with mystical meaning? For what else do the shining Pleiades, which are also seven in number, indicate, not all the Saints, who amid the darkness of this present life, illumine us with the light of the Spirit of sevenfold grace, who, from the first beginning of the world, even to its end sent at divers times to prophesy, are in some degree united, and in some degree separate from each other? For the stars, the Pleiades as it was before said, are united to each other in their contiguity, and disunited as to contact. They are situated indeed together, and yet pour forth separately the rays of their light. In like manner all the Saints appearing at different times for the purpose of preaching, are both disunited in our sight of their person and united in their intention of mind. They shine together, because they preach One; but they touch not each other, because they are divided by different times.

69. At what different times did Abel, Isaiah, and John appear! They were separated in time, but not in the subject of their preaching. For Abel offered up a lamb in sacrifice, typifying the passion of our Redeemer; of Whose passion Isaiah says: As a lamb before its shearer, He will be dumb and will not open His mouth, [Is 53:7]. Of whom John also says: Behold the Lamb of God; behold Who takes away the sins of the world [Jn 1:29]. Behold they were sent at different times indeed, and yet agreeing in their thought of the innocency of our Redeemer, they spoke of the same Lamb, John by pointing to Him, Isaiah by foreseeing and Abel by offering; and Him, Whom John set forth by pointing to Him, and Isaiah set forth in his words, Abel held, in signification in his hands.

70: Because then as we have said how the Pleiades in accord together concerning the Humanity of our Redeemer, let us now point out how they shine in concord in setting forth the Unity of the Trinity. For David, Isaiah and Paul appeared at different periods of the world. But yet none of them thought differently from another; because though they know not each other in face, yet they had learned one and the same thing by Divine Knowledge.

For David, in order to set forth God in the Trinity as the Creator of all things, said, *Let God bless us; our God, let God bless us.* [Ps 67:6, 7]. And for fear he should be considered to have spoken of three Gods, from his mentioning God three times, he immediately added, teaching thereby the Unity of the same Trinity, *And let all the ends of the earth fear Him*. For by adding not “them” but “Him”, He intimated that the Three Whom he had names were One.

When Isaiah also was uttering praises of the Unity of the trinity, he says, in describing the words of the Seraphim, *Holy,. Holy, Holy* [Is 6:3]. But lest he should seem by mentioning “Holy” thrice, to sever the unity of the Divine Substance, he added: *Lord God of Hosts*. Because then he added not “Lords” ,”Gods” but the “Lord God” he pointed out that that Being, Whom he had thrice called Holy existed as one.

Paul also. To set forth the Holy Trinity, says: *Of Him, and through Him and in Him, are all things* [Rm 11:36]. And in order to teach the Unity of this same Trinity, he immediately added; *To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen*. One in nature, three in Persons, Whom he had thrice addressed by the same word. The Pleiades therefore are both situated as it were in one place, because they think alike concerning God; and yet, they touch not each other, because as has been said, they are distributed through different periods of this world.

71. Which the Prophet Ezechiel well and briefly describes, who, when saying that he had beheld living creatures of different kinds, added: *Their wings were joined one to another* [Ezk 1:9]. For the wings of living creatures are joined one to another, because though the things which they do are different, yet the voices and the virtues of the saints are united together in one and the same place. And though one may be a man, from doing all things rationally, another, who is bold in suffering, may be a lion, from not fearing the adversities of the world; another, from offering himself through abstinence as a living victim, may be a calf; another from soaring on high on the wings of contemplation, may be an eagle; yet, do they touch each other with their wings, whilst they fly, because there are united to each other by the confession of their words, and the accordance of their virtues. But because it belongs to the power of God alone both to join together in the preaching of the faith those who were sent at different times, and to unite in brightness of intention those that were endued with dissimilar virtues, it is rightly said: *Wilt thou be able to join together the shining stars, the Pleiades?* As if He said: “As I Who alone fill all things, and Who by filling the minds of the Elect join them in a sense of unity.”

72. But by Arcturus, which illumines the night season in its orbit, and never sets, is designated, not the doings of the Saints separately manifested, but the whole Church together with time. For Arcturus comes not with the night season to the lowest part of the heavens, but even while it is revolving itself, night is brought to a close. Because doubtless, while Holy Church is shaken with numberless tribulations, the shade of the present life comes to an end; and the night passes by, as it continues stationary, because while the Church remains in her own original condition, the life of this mortal state passes away.

There is in Arcturus a point for us to observe most carefully. For it revolves with seven stars, and at one time raises three to the highest point, and represses four to the lowest; at one time raises four on high, and depresses three below. Holy Church also when she preaches at one time to unbelievers the knowledge of the Trinity, and at another the four virtues, that is, prudence, fortitude, temperance, justice, to believers, changes, as it were, by a kind of rotation in its preaching, the appearance of its position.

For when she strips of confidence in their own doings those who boast of their own works, and exalts faith in the Trinity, what else does Arcturus, but elevate three stars, and depress four? And when she forbids some, who have no good works, to presume on their faith, and orders them to work out more earnestly the things which are commanded, what else does Arcturus do, but raise up four stars, and bring down three?

Let us see how it elevates three and depresses four. Behold it is said by Paul to those who were priding themselves on their works in opposition to faith: *If Abraham were justified by works he hath glory, and it was counted unto him for righteousness* [Rm 4:2, 3]. Let us see how it elevates four and depresses three.

Behold it is said by James to those that we boasting of faith in opposition to works: *As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead* [Jas 2:26]. Arcturus revolves, because she is whirled around in the tribulations of the night. But the Lord breaks up at last this circuit of Arcturus, because all the Saints are then doubtless joined to each other even in outward appearance, when Holy Church at the end of this world is released from those labors which now she endures. Let Him says then: *Wilt thou be able to join together the shining stars of Pleiades, or wilt thou be able to break up the circuit of Arcturus?* Thou understandest “As I, Myself, Who then unite the life of the Saints even in outward appearance, when I bodily dissolve the circuit of the Church Universal.” And what man is ignorant that this is the act of Divine

Power alone? But, let man, in order that he may know what he is himself, be constantly reminded what it is that God alone can effect.

73. We have still some other meaning to give the stars of *Pleiades* and *Arcturus*. For the *Pleiades* rise from the east, but *Arcturus* on the side of the North. But wherever *Arcturus* turns itself in its circle, it presents to view the *Pleiades*; and when the light of the day is now approaching, the order of the stars is extended. By *Arcturus*, then which rises in the quarter of the cold, can be designated by Law; but by the *Pleiades* which rise from the East, the grace of the New Testament. For the Law had, as it were, come from the North, which used to alarm those subject to it with such asperity of rigor. For while it was ordering some to be stoned for their faults, others to be punished by the death of the sword, it was, like a frozen region, far removed, as it were, from the light of charity, rather nipping the seeds of its precepts with cold, then nourishing them with warmth.

Peter had shuddered at the weight of this oppression, when saying: *Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?* [Ac 15:10]. Nor is it any wonder that the Old Testament is set forth by the seven stars of Arcturus, because both the seventh day was held in veneration under the Law, and the vows of the appointed sacrifice were extended through the whole week.

But the *Pleiades*, which themselves are also seven, as we have before said, point out the more plainly the grace of the New Testament, the more clearly we all see, that by it the Holy Spirit enlightens His faithful ones with the light of the sevenfold gift. Wherever therefore *Arcturus* turns, it presents the *Pleiades* to view, because by everything the Old Testament says, the works of the New Testament are announced. For under the text of the letter it conceals the mystery of prophecy,

And *Arcturus* inclines itself, as it were, and points them out, because while it bends itself to the spiritual sense, the light of the seven fold grace, which is signified thereby, is laid open. And as the light of day approaches, the order of its stars is extended, because after the Truth became known to us by itself, It released the precepts of the letter from carnal observance.

74: But our Redeemer, coming in the flesh, joined together the *Pleiades*, because He possessed the operations of the sevenfold Spirit all at once, and abiding in Himself. Of Whom it is said by Isaiah: *There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall grow up from his root, and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of*

knowledge, and of godliness, and the Spirit of the fear of the Lord shall fill Him [Is 11;1-3]

Of whom Zechariah says: *Upon one stone are seven eyes [Zc 3:9]*. And again, *And on the golden candlestick seven lamps [ib. 4:2]*. But no man ever possessed all the operations of the Holy Spirit at once, except the sole Mediator between God and Man [1 Tm 2:5], Whose is the same Spirit, Who proceedeth from the Father “before all ages”. It is well said, therefore, *Upon one stone are seven eyes*. For, for this Stone to have seven eyes, is to possess at once in operation every virtue of the Spirit of sevenfold grace. For one receives prophecy, another knowledge, another virtues, another kinds of tongues, another the interpretation of tongues, according to the distribution of the Holy Spirit. But no one attains to the possession of all the gifts of the same Spirit.

But, our Creator, in taking our weakness, because He taught us that by the power of His Godhead He possessed all the virtues of the Holy Spirit at once, doubtless joined together the shining *Pleiades*. But whilst He joins the *Pleiades*, He breaks up the circuit of *Arcturus*. Because when He made it known that He, having become Man, possessed all the operations of the Holy Spirit, He loosened in the Old Testament the burden of the letter, that each of the faithful may now understand that in the liberty of the Spirit, which he used, amid so many dangers, to serve with fear.

Let blessed Job therefore hear: *Wilt thou be able to join together the shining stars of the Pleiades?* As if it were openly said: “Thou canst indeed possess the light of certain virtues, but art thou able to exercise at once all the operations of the Holy Spirit?” Behold Me, therefore, uniting the *Pleiades* in all virtues, and be kept from boasting thyself of a few only.” Hear what is said: *Or wilt thou be able to break the circuit of Arcturus?* As if it were openly said to him: “Even if thou thyself now understandest what is right, canst thou do away by thy power, even in the hearts of others, the labor of grosser understanding?”

Consider Me, therefore, who corrected the follies of the carnal, while I manifest myself in the foolishness of the flesh, that though mayest the more bring down these, which thou countest the mightiness of thy virtues, the more thou canst not apprehend even the footsteps of My weakness.” But, because in the very mystery of the Lord’s Incarnation, the light of truth is manifested to some, but the hearts of others are darkened by an offence; it is lightly subjoined:

v. 32: Dost thou bring forth the morning star at its time, and dost thou make the evening star to rise over the sons of the earth?

XXXII 75. For the Father brought forth the morning in his season because, as it is written, *When the fullness of time was come, God sent His Son born of a woman, made tinder the Law, to redeem them that are under the Law [Ga 4:4]*, Who being born of a Virgin, appeared as the morning star, amid the darkness of our night, because, having put to flight the obscurity of sin, He announced to us the eternal morn. But He made Himself known as the morning star because He arose in the morn from death, and overcame, by the brightness of His light, the hideous darkness of our mortality, Who is well called by John, *the bright and morning star* [Rv 22:16].

For, appearing alive after death, He became our morning star; because while He furnished us in His own person an instance of resurrection, He pointed out what light comes after. But the Lord makes the evening star to rise over the sons of earth, because He permits Antichrist to hold sway over the unbelieving hearts of the Jews, as their desert demands. And they are therefore justly subjected by the Lord to this evening star, because they chose of their own accord to be sons of earth. For by seeking after earthly, and not heavenly things, they were so blinded as not to behold the brightness of the morning star; and while they seek for the evening star to rule over them, they are plunged in the eternal night of subsequent damnations.

Hence, the Lord says in the Gospel: *I came in My Father's name, and yet received me not; another will come in his own name, and him ye will receive* [Jn 5:43]. Hence, Paul says: *Because they receive not the love of the truth, that they should believe a lie, that they might all be judged who believed not in the truth, but consented to iniquity* [2 Th 2:10-12]. The evening star therefore would never rise over them, if they had wished to be u. But while they seek after visible things, having lost the light of the heart, they are in darkness under the prince of night.

[Moral] 76: But, if we examine this in a moral sense, we find how it is daily occurring; because both the morning star doubtless rises on the Elect, and the evening star, by God's permission rules over the reprobate. For there is one and the same word of God in the mouth of the preacher. But while these hear it with you, and those with envy, they change for themselves the brightness of the morning star into the darkness of the evening. Whilst these humbly receive the voice of holy preaching, they open the eyes of the heart to be the light of the star. But whilst those feel envy at one who advises them well, and seek not the cause of their salvation, but the glory of boasting, when the evening of their iniquity bursts forth, they close their eyes in the sleep of death.

By a secret sentence, therefore, he who is in the morning star to elect, is the evening star to reprobate hearers. Because by that holy exhortation, with which the good came back to life, the reprobate perish more fatally in sin. Whence it is well said by Paul: *We are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish, to the one the savor of death unto death, but to the other the savor of life unto life* [2 Co 2:15, 16]. He saw then that his word by which he beheld some roused from their iniquity, and others on the contrary lulled to sleep in their iniquity, was both the morning and the evening star to its hearers. And because this takes place by the secret judgment of God, which cannot be comprehended by men in this life, he rightly there subjoined: *And who is sufficient for these things?* As if he were saying: “we are sufficient indeed to consider that these things occur.” Whence, also, the Lord in this place, because He had said that the morning star is brought forth for some, but that the evening star rises for others, that man might not dare to scan the secret judgments of God, immediately subjoins,

v. 33: Knowest thou the course of heaven and wilt thou set down the reason thereof on the earth?

xxxiii 77: To know the course of the heavens, is to see the secret predestinations of the heavenly disposals. But to set down the reason thereof on the earth is to lay open before the hearts of men the causes of such secrets. To set down, namely, the reason of heaven on the earth, is either to examine the mysteries of the heavenly judgments, by consideration, or to make them manifest in words. Which certainly no one can do who is placed in this life. For, to pass from little to greater things, who can understand what is the secret reason, that a just man frequently returns from a trial, not only unavenged, but even punished besides, and that his wicked adversary escapes, not only without punishment but even victorious?

Who can understand why one man, who plots for the deaths of his neighbors, survives and another, who would be likely to preserve the lives of many, dies? Who can understand why one man, who plots for the deaths of his neighbors, survives, and another, who would be likely to preserve the lives of many dies? One man, who is only eager to do hurt, attains the height of power, and another, only desires to defend the injured, and yet he himself is lying under oppression.

One man wishes for leisure, and is involved in innumerable occupations, another wishes to be engaged in employments, and is compelled to be disengaged. One beginning badly is drawn on from worse to worse, even to the end of his life; another beginning well, proceeds through a long period of time to the increase of his merits. But on the other hand, one, who is an evil liver, is spared for a long time, in

order that he may improve; but another seems to be living properly, but continues in this life till he breaks out into evil ways. One, who has been born in the error of unbelief, perishes in his error; another, who has been born in the soundness of the Catholic faith, is perfected in the soundness of the Catholic Faith. But, on the other hand, one who has come forth from the womb of a Catholic Mother, is swallowed up, at the close of his life, in the gulph of error, but another terminates his life in Catholic piety, who born in misbelief, had sucked the poison of error with his mother's milk. One both wishes and is able, to aim at the loftiness of holy living; another is neither willing nor able. One wishes and is not able; another is able, and is not willing.

Who can examine into these secrets of the heavenly judgments? Who can understand the secret balances of hidden equity? For no one attains to understand these recesses of secret judgments.

Let this be said then to a man, that he may learn his own ignorance; let him know his own ignorance, that he may fear; let him fear, that he may be humbled; let him be humbled, that he may not trust in himself; let him trust not in himself, that he may seek for the assistance of his Creator, and that he who is dead from trusting in himself, may seek the assistance of his Maker, and live. Let the righteous man then, who knows himself in deed, but who still knows not those things which are above him, hear the words, *Knowest thou the course of heaven and wilt thou set down the reason thereof upon the earth?* That is, Dost thou comprehend the secret courses of the heavenly judgments, or art thou able to disclose them to the ears of men?

Blessed Job, therefore, is questioned concerning his investigation of the incomprehensible judgments, as if it were plainly said to him, "All things that thou sufferest, thou oughtest to endure the more patiently, the more in thy ignorance of heavenly secrets, though knowest not why thou sufferest them.

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INTRODUCTION

PART 3



St. Gregory, the Great in St. Gaspar Bertoni's

Original Constitutions

[CF ## 186, 288]

**Part 3: St. Gregory, the Great in St. Gaspar Bertoni's Original Constitutions
[CF ## 186, 288]**

There are two direct quotes and both of which fall in that area which St. Gaspar found in his favorite author for these Constitutions, Francis Suarez, SJ and his *De Religione Societatis Iesu*:

CF # 186: *Furthermore, no one will contrive to be sent in one place rather than in another, but each will allow himself to be transferred, although it is not wrong to show oneself prepared for some undertaking. For Isaiah [6:6, ff] offered himself, and Jeremiah [1:6] excused himself. However, Jeremiah did not resist God sending him, nor did Isaiah presume to go before being purified by the coal of the altar. As Gregory has said, no one should dare to undertake the sacred ministries without first being purified, nor should anyone chosen by a superior grace, proudly refuse to go, under the pretext of humility.*

This Constitution is actually the Conclusion of the very central Part IX of St. Gaspar's Constitutions, in its Chapter 7: **Concerning the Principal Scope of the 'Professed' Fathers**. This Constitution is taken *verbatim* from Fr. Suarez' Book VI [*De Professione quae in Societate fit...*], regarding the Jesuit Fourth Vow, Chapter 4⁹¹.

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The other Constitution is taken from Part XI, Chapter IV of St. Gaspar's **Original Constitutions # 288** - 'Concerning the two conditions through which the means of Conversation might be an accommodated ministry of the Religious State':

CF # 288: **There are two principles by which there can be ascertained the decency of such familiar conversation, or the lack of decency for the whole matter.**

The first principle would be if this activity was already prohibited, either because of itself it is evil, or because it is prohibited to clerics by common law, and religious are comparable to them in this matter [cf. II-II, q. 187, a. 2], or, if it is forbidden by one's own institute and special law.

Another principle is whether this endeavor is of such a nature that it could hardly be undertaken without danger of sin, as St. Gregory has said [Hom. 24, in Evangelia]. This same principle holds with due proportion if the

⁹¹ Cf. Suarez, p. 862 a & b.

undertaking would excessively occupy the spirit with the care and solicitude of temporal matters.

However, since there can be such latitude in this matter, therefore, having put aside any legislation in this regard, obedience to the Superior, no certain rule can be prescribed. There has to be employed here prudent judgment, and the custom of the observant and respectful religious is to be observed, as well as the common sense of those rightly considering and judging what this whole enterprise is, and that it is not in their view, alien to the religious state.

This Constitution # 288 is taken practically *verbatim* from Suarez' Book IX, Chapter VIII [*'De Medio iuvandi proximos, conversando familiariter, etc.'*], n. 13: [*'Quibus regulis dignoscatur dicta indecentia.'*]. St. Gregory's **Forty Gospel Homilies** have been translated into English⁹². Homily 24 is a reflection on Jn 21:1-14, 'Jesus Standing on the Shore'. Jesus' tribulations led to comparing Him as a broiled fish to be consumed! Gregory concludes:

*Jesus ate the honeycomb and the broiled fish because those who endure affliction for the sake of the truth are satisfied there with true delight...Act upon these things, my friends...*⁹³

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It might be of interest to offer an insight derived from a great modern Benedictine Scholar – which might shed some light on the phenomenon of Fr. Bertoni's copying vast segments from other authors. Fr. Jean Leclercq, OSB, already quoted above, has noted in the old monasteries, regarding "**The Monastic Scriptorium**":

... The task of the copyist was an authentic form of asceticism...It was work that was both manual and intellectual... copying a book was, like prayer and fasting, a means [of asceticism]... When the book was completed, offering it to God was, at times, a kind of Liturgy: *Suscipe, sancta Trinitas, oblationem huius codicis*... it was also a way to exercise an apostolate in the Church... [For those unable to take to the plow], Then let him take up the pen, he will sow the seeds of the divine words... He will preach without opening his mouth; without breaking silence...The transcribed books are so many proclamations of the truth....⁹⁴

⁹² Cistercian Publication. Kalamazoo MI. Homily 24 is on pages 179 – 186.

⁹³ o.c. pp. 184,f.

⁹⁴ cf. Jean Leclercq, OSB, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God. A Study of Monastic Culture*. NY: Fordham 1994.

Fr. Bertoni often used what he copied for the instruction of others, and was more at ease using other people's words than his own. This phenomenon has been noted by Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove, CSS, the Stigmatine Founder's most important biographer:

... [Fr. Cesari] gave to Fr. Bertoni a copy of the *Spiritual exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola. He studied them night and day, and indeed, even copied them entirely in his very neat hand-writing. He would then preach these retreats to the Clergy with such enthusiasm and unction of piety, that this produced extraordinary fruit in those who heard them...⁹⁵

... [For his continuing meditations to the Clerics of the seminary, Fr. Bertoni] ... transcribed St. John Chrysostom's Commentaries on Matthew, without adding any of his own reflections. He delivered 41 such meditations, which correspond to the 28 Homilies of the Holy Doctor of the Church. Thus he felt much more secure in nourishing his clerics with a totally heavenly doctrine without mixing into it anything of himself...⁹⁶

... After these 73 Meditations on the First Book of Kings, and the 41 Meditations on St. Matthew, Fr. Bertoni believed that his seminarians were now ready to take on a deepening of their understanding of Genesis [and once more, from St. John Chrysostom's Commentary]...⁹⁷

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⁹⁵ cf. Nello Dalle Vedove, *Vita e pensiero del Beato Gaspare Bertoni agli albori dell'800 veronese*. Roma Stigmatini 1977, p. 108. [It is worthwhile noting here that clergy formation was long a privileged Stigmatine Ministry, legislated by the Founder – cf. CF # 164 - where Fr. Bertoni considers the 'Grade' of the 'Professed Apostolic Missionaries'.

⁹⁶ Cf. Nello, o.c., p. 391.

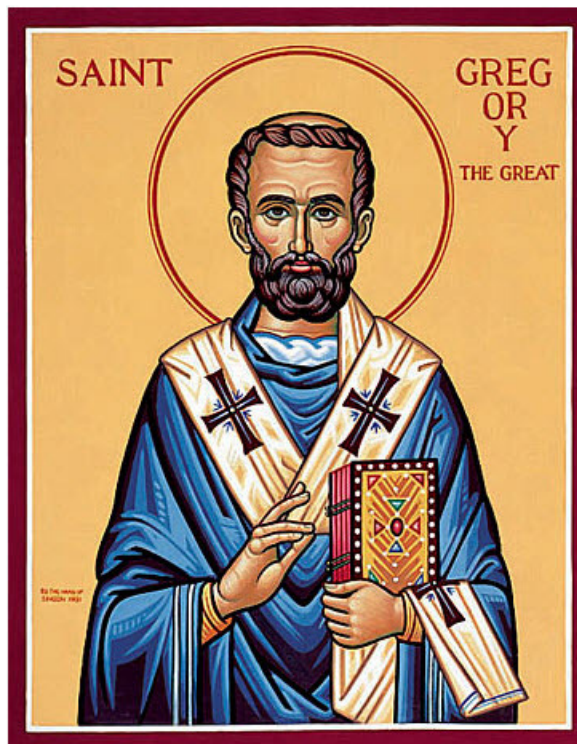
⁹⁷ Cf. Nello, o.c., pp. 606, f.

INTRODUCTION

PART 4

St. Gaspar Bertoni's

MEDITATIONS ON FIRST KINGS [1 S]



A Brief Presentation

St. Gaspar Bertoni's MEDITATIONS ON FIRST KINGS [I S]

A Brief Presentation

While Fr. Bertoni characteristically **copied** many of his texts, it is good to call to mind here also this other comment of Fr. Stofella regarding the Stigmatine Founder's *Spiritual Exercises* preached in the autumn of 1810 to the Clergy of Verona:

... Regarding the sources that Fr. Bertoni used in compiling his retreat notes, could anyone ask the question: 'But, these notes of the Founder, are they not **just a copy?**' The answer is a resounding '**no**': and even if they were, they always present the teaching that Fr. Gaspar **made his own**. None of the authors indicated by him as sources were in their original setting ever directed specifically for seminarians, or priests. And speaking generally, the same derivations - very often but few in number and presented as a kind of **compendium** - were then nourished by new scriptural and patristic texts, and thus with **an entirely new doctrine** adapted to his special audience. In the citation of the sources, perhaps more than anything else, there is evidence of the delicate scruples of conscience of St. Gaspar. As for their originality, perhaps there is here a bit less than would be found in other works of this type... The retreat is truly **a compilation of texts**: some from the Jesuit writer, Bartoli, taken directly; some from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, quoted either directly or as presented by other authors, such as explicitly noted by the Servant of God himself. However, there is always permeating throughout his characteristic scruple of attending to the authentic norms established and recommended by Saint Ignatius...⁹⁸

Copying the work of another had a much different understanding in earlier times: there is the story of St. Robert Bellarmine⁹⁹, who stated that once he was very tired and had no time to prepare a sermon of his own – and thought that he might lawfully appropriate one of St. Basil's – basing himself on St. Augustine¹⁰⁰ who noted that those who cannot compose their own sermons should learn by heart those of

⁹⁸ cf. P. Giuseppe Stofella, *Preface, Esercizi Spirituali agli Ecclesiastici...* in: CS I, fasc. II, p. 104.

⁹⁹ Cf. James Broderick, SJ, *The Life and Work of Bl. Robert Francis Bellarmine, SJ [1542-1621]*. London: Burns & Oates. In two volumes. Vol. I, p. 60.

¹⁰⁰ *The Teaching of Christianity. De Doctrina Christiana*. The Works of St. Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century. E. HILL, OP. Hyde Park NY: New City Press pp. 239, ff.

acknowledged masters! This is notwithstanding Jr 23:30. Yet, God's Word belongs to those who strive to do what He tells them!

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This issue has been clarified in recent times. And Fr. Bertoni set to his work. Early in November 1810, Fr. Bertoni was assigned to the spiritual care of the local Diocesan Seminary of Verona. At that time there were 97 students on the College level, and 46 students in the major Seminary. On **Sunday, November 18, 1810, the Feast of the Patronage of Mary Most Holy**, very early in the morning, he offered his First Meditation that would be continued then for several years. He began – as did Gregory – with a **Prologue**, called **First Prelude**, in which he announced the themes that he would develop during the year. He began¹⁰¹:

Since it is my duty to offer these meditations to Clerics, who are already initiated into the various levels of Holy Order, it is only right that the material should be proper to them. The Church, to which they dedicate themselves to serve, is a House of God. And the purpose of these reflections is so that they will know how they should conduct themselves in the House of God¹⁰².

'These things I write to you... so that you may know how you ought to behave yourself in the House of God...' [1 Tm 3:14, f.].

First it is necessary to know just what kind of a house this is, where it is, and so on, and who the Master of this Household is; secondly, the vocation to this house; and thirdly, guilty in fleeing from it; and good to pursue it. [MssB 4853].

Fr. Bertoni always sought to give a biblical foundation to his Meditations, and found that:

The Books of Kings contain this doctrine, according to the manner in which the holy Fathers of the Church have expounded on it. The house and the master of the house-hold: Elcana and his home.

The vocation: based on the call of Samuel.

The conduct: guilty in Saul, good in David.

Our meditations will be on this place of Sacred Scripture.

¹⁰¹ Translator's Note: Fr. Bertoni's own words will be in Bold Print - for a more ready identification of them – and *Scripture passages* in *Italics*.

¹⁰² It can be noted that Fr. Bertoni often made use of various forms of the Latin: *obsequi*; *obsequium* - 'ossequioso' [cf. CF ## 1; 7; 57; 62; 125; 172; 185; 195; 237; 296; 304 – this is from St. Ignatius who wrote his Constitutions in Spanish – his Secretary, Fr. Polanco translated these into Latin, and varied the more than 1,000 appearances of the Spanish: *servire-servicio-servo* – as: *obsequi-obsequium/ auxiliari-auxilium; servire-servitium* – the most common being the *obsequi - obsequium*.

And since long Introductions are annoying, we will begin right away with the title of the First Book of Kings, which will be the key, as it were, to enter into this House. [MssB 4854].

There then follow those genuine Ignatian Preludes, so evident in his *Spiritual Exercises*:¹⁰³

2. Imagine that our Master and Lord, Jesus Christ, of whom it is stated in Scripture that he has the keys in hand [cf. Ap 3:7], sends you now by an Angel of His the key to open His House: which is the very Title of this Book, saying: Consider first and see the manner how to use the key in order to open up this House, and so on.

3. 'Give me understanding' [cf. Ps 118:144], with which it might be fruitfully managed. 'Gate of Heaven': You who are the Gate through which one enters into the House of your Son, aspire for the propitious hour and receive us under your Patronage, under which we place all of our instructions [MssB 4855].

The First Book of Kings [Samuel] has been classified as an – Historical – Prophetic – Divine Book. This is the key in order to enter into it.

First of all, it is a Historical Book:

History is the Teacher of Life.

The difference between sacred history and profane history is this: the former – according to Cornelius à Lapide – is written with a divine spirit, it narrates human events as these are governed by Divine Providence. Profane history, on the other hand, is composed with a human spirit, and relates those matters which proceed according to the prudence and industry of human beings [MssB 4856].

So, Sacred History teaches that divine prudence with which the mind adheres to God with a pious worship, and upon which it specially supports itself with its work and with its religion. Then, on the other hand, profane history teaches human prudence and those minute cautions of human industry and which for the most part have little power of their own, and very often bring danger. Therefore, there is nothing more opportune for the instruction of clerics than sacred History [In 1 Reg 209, 2, c.]. [MssB 4857].

From Cornelius à Lapide, Fr. Bertoni records the example of Scipio who read the Cyropedes of Xenophon – Alexander the Great who read Homer – and he added a personal example of 'our politicians' who read Tacitus, and 'our generals' who read Polibius, or Caesar. With Fr. Cattaneo, SJ, Fr. Bertoni recalls that St. Jerome [cf. Letter

¹⁰³ Not only is Fr. Bertoni's style 'Ignatian' here, but the content of this classic by St. Gregory the Great could have also drawn him due to his familiarity with St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* – as his reflections on the choice of service under two realms, 'Two Standards', and the "Reign of Christ", the first conference of the Second Week. [cf. Fr. Stofella, *Collectanea Stigmatina*. Vol. I, Fasc.II].

22 to Eustochius, c. 13] was punished severely for having read more Cicero than Scripture! [MssB 4857]. Fr. Bertoni's challenge was therefore: ***Study, or some commitment to understand the Sacred Scriptures. Thank God that He has written for our instruction*** [MssB 4856]

The Book is also **Prophetic**:

Fr. Bertoni quotes from **Cornelius à Lapidè** and uses St. Augustine's declaration¹⁰⁴:

... the Scriptures, though they seem but a bare relation of the successive deeds of each King in his time, yet being considered with the assistance of God's Spirit, will prove either more, or as fully, prophecies of things to come, as histories of things past...

- and that of **St. Gregory** – which as might be recorded from the reflections above, could have been the work of the Abbot Claude:

... St. Gregory states regarding this history: Gentle in its recording of history, more sublime in the types of allegory, useful for the instruction of morals, lucid in manifesting examples. They narrate historical matters, that point out spiritual principles; they speak of exteriors, and allude to intimate matters; they propose earthly matters, so that they might lead to heavenly matters... [***Prologue***].¹⁰⁵

Then, on his own, Fr. Bertoni went directly to attain from the text of this second Father noted above, in order to draw from it the analogy of the Books of the Bible, with a stairway, that needs to be climbed, and concludes:

... Scripture, therefore, is a ladder, in order to arrive at knowing God through the faith. It is not required to stop just at the letter, but to ascend to the spirit. The letter is the foundation of faith: it is necessary to build on this, with hope in God, and charity through works. How many priests care the material of the letter in order to build the houses of others! [While] the people build up in the spirit on the letter, the Priest remains with the letter, quite bereft [of spirit]. They bring the ladder, and others climb it: they remain always down low, as the directors of St. Teresa... [MssB 4859]

Therefore, one should approach with the commitment of our own edification. *With fear and trembling work out your salvation...* [cf. Ph 2:12; 2 P 1:10]. [MssB 4858].

¹⁰⁴ *De Civ. Dei*, Bk 17, c. 1]

¹⁰⁵ cf. CCC ## 115-119

In the end, the Book of Kings is a **Divine Book**:

... All Scripture is inspired of God... [2 Tm 3:16] – St. Gregory quotes – and in proportion does it surpass the most illustrious intelligences, in so far as the most illustrious men themselves are inferior to God: and they see nothing in that spiritual sublimity, except that which has been revealed to them from the goodness of the divine condescension. No one, therefore, in his knowledge is so advanced that he cannot progress even further, because every human progress is inferior to the height of the divinity which inspired the Scripture... [MssB 4860].

Fr. Gaspar imagined that he was standing before **a vast forest** growing on a very high mountain. At first sight, everything seems equal – but, as soon as he enters into it, he sees that it contains level spaces and deep valleys, and the more that he remains looking at it he uncovers more than what he had first seen. This forest – he tells us himself – is Sacred Scripture [MssB 4855]. And therefore, one needs **humility to investigate these sacred pages. There can only be admiration for the divine sublimity.** [MssB 4860].

Once he had completed the Points for Meditation, Fr. Gaspar then offered a few pointers along the style of St. Ignatius:

... This, then, is the key. But, it will be necessary for you to learn well its use, by trying it yourselves, if you want the Lord to open up this house of His more to you. When the time comes that you actually understand less by your own efforts, that little will also provide you with greater consolation. This you will do if you would like for a few moments to make your own examination and reflection for about a quarter of an hour on this present meditation¹⁰⁶. And you will experience this yourselves, if for a few hours today, or this evening, you will go over this meditation¹⁰⁷ – and further, if you would briefly write down for yourselves, after the headings, not for the purpose of science but for wisdom [‘sweet science’], and not for others, but for yourselves. [MssB 4162].

Following the First Meditation, Fr. Gaspar did not abandon totally the work of **Cornelius à Lapide**, and also used other commentators, here and there, like the Venerable Bede. However, for the overwhelming most part, he will entrust himself almost entirely to that which he believed to be the work of St. Gregory the Great. St. Gaspar offers this Commentary that is both allegorical and incomplete [16 chapters out of 22] of First Samuel, known then as **First Kings [I Reg.]**. Fr. Bertoni does not seem aware of the views that some thought this Prologue was the work of the Abbot Claude. Fr. Bertoni did not pause over all the allegorical, or tropological applications of the

¹⁰⁶ Fr. Stofella offers a footnote here, indicating that this is from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, n. 77.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Spiritual Exercises*, n. 2.

original author of this *Expositio in I Regum*. Fr. Bertoni followed his own well thought out plan to the extent that from the images of *Pseudo-Gregory*¹⁰⁸ he often used only as the occasion to proceed in his own development, while at times he by-passed this imagery completely in order that his own plan would not be disrupted.

St. Gaspar was able to see developed in this *Expositio in I Reg.*, a central idea applicable in his own age to the renewal of the priestly ministry, based on the **precedence to be given to contemplation with respect to activity**¹⁰⁹, and on the real need of embracing **poverty and the self-renunciation lived by the Apostles**¹¹⁰, in order to pursue the salvation of their neighbors. Fr. Gaspar approved profoundly this program, because he realized its urgency for his own days. However, in presenting to the seminarians of Verona the necessity of preparing themselves for the priesthood, with **a renewed spirit** – he looked beyond the immediacy for what he was actually doing. In this, he pondered for the future to establish a group of priests and religious who would be closely united with him in order to **constitute a kind of advance squadron of highly trained operatives for the restoration of priestly ministry**.

[Fr. John Ceresatto, CSS, in his work noted that the secondary motive of Fr. Bertoni's plan for the Stigmatines, was to bring about the renewal of Church life, also through renewal of the priestly and consecrated way of life – and for this, among the central aspects of his Apostolic Mission, there is insistence in the Founder's *Original Constitutions*, especially among the *Means by which this Institute is to promote the Salvation of its neighbors*¹¹¹ – and emphasized very much in the early ministries of the Community¹¹². Furthermore, some questions would arise: would Fr. Bertoni's consummate prudence have him speak about his own future plan for his own personal vocation to prepare for a future Community of men to the already committed Diocesan Seminarians? A further question readily comes to mind: if it is legitimate also to apply St. Gregory's emphasis on the Risen Christ also to Fr. Bertoni's thoughts on the Stigmata¹¹³ ?]

¹⁰⁸ Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove reflects the view of some that St. Gregory the Great was not the real author of this original work.

¹⁰⁹ This principle is continued by Fr. Bertoni in his *Original Constitutions*, # 49 – as the end of the Congregation.

¹¹⁰ CF ## 3;6;90-104, etc.

¹¹¹ Cf. CF ## 67; 164

¹¹² cf. the Early Chronicles of the Community. It should be noted that with the problems facing him as Roman Pontiff, St. Gregory the Great had concerns about the basic need of preaching in every age for dedicated priests: cf. G.R. Evans, *The Thought of Gregory the Great*. Cambridge University Press 1986. 'The Art of Preaching' – 'The Preacher', pp. 75-86.

¹¹³ For this question, cf. this website: www.st-bertoni.com - under "Life & Spirituality", cf. *Stimate Integre*.

Fr. Bertoni's Sunday reflections were held early in the morning. For this purpose, he would go to the Seminary the evening before as his vigil. And these nights would not be spent much in the room provided for him, but rather before the Blessed Sacrament. This bit of information comes from Fr. Louis Bragato in a Letter to Fr. John Mary Marani, Superior General, dated December 12, 1856:

... You know that our Venerated Father, Don Gaspar, for many years gave the meditation, very early in the morning, every Sunday, to all the students and clerics of the Seminary. These were held in the little Church, which is now set aside for the use of the College, because the large chapel did not exist at the time. Therefore, Fr. Gaspar would go to the Seminary the evening before, where he would find there a room all set up for him, with a comfortable bed, right next to this little church.

You might also know that one time, I was sent to keep him company, with Fr. Gramego. I say 'one time' because I do remember this time quite well. I was given this invitation, on a Saturday evening, so I made my way to Fr. Gaspar's home, where I also met Fr. Gramego. As it was about 9:00 p.m., all three of us set out for the Seminary. Going along the way, we were able to recite with ease our night prayers, because the streets were quite empty and dark – there were not yet the gas-lights that would convert the night into day. Once we arrived at the Seminary and entered the room set aside for Fr. Gaspar, following a brief conversation, he told Fr. Michael and me that we ought to make ourselves comfortable in his room. As we stretched out, Fr. Gaspar prayed the words of Psalm 4:9 – *In Peace in the selfsame I will sleep and I will rest...* He then went on to explain these words and gave us one of those wonderful little talks that you remember so well, full of unction and wisdom.

Once this was over, he took his lamp, and went to the near-by choir loft of the Chapel, to pray over the meditation that he was to deliver to the Seminarians early the next morning, before the Most Blessed Sacrament. He left the room about 10:00 p.m. and I do not know when he returned. His subject matter for those meditations was the **First Book of Kings**. We had a very good rest, and on arising in the morning, we did not see Fr. Gaspar until we entered the Church. And, I believe that this was his custom every Saturday night¹¹⁴.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Summarium Additionale*, p. 279.

In those nights spent in personal prayer, abundant light and inspiration poured down on Father Gaspar – and not only for the meditations for the following morning – but also for the very broad scope in his plan for his Apostolic Missionaries.

This broad Apostolic Mission is well presented in **Part IX**, of the *Original Constitutions* [## 158-186]: *Verbi Dei quodcumque ministerium*. Some of the adjectives used by Fr. Bertoni to describe the *ministeria* included in the Apostolic Mission are: *graviora... accomodata... varia et propria*. [cf. CF ## 158; 185; 262]. Recent General Chapters through the Community's Actual Constitutions have presented the Founder's concept of the **Apostolic Mission** as follows:

... Through the particular charism received from God, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni intended it to be a group of religious, consecrated to the following of Christ, sent by the Father [Jn 20:21] as *Missionarii Apostolici in obsequium Episcoporum* [CF # 1], and assigned it the purpose of serving the Church through the various ministries proper to its vocation [CF # 185]. [n. 1].

The vocation of the Congregation is indicated by the expression *Verbi Dei quodcumque Ministerium* [cf. CF # 163]. This embraces an openness to all the apostolic ministries according to the needs of the times, places and circumstances by being available to the requests of Bishops. Certain types of the apostolate better respond to the Stigmatine tradition, beginning with the Founder and his first companions: preaching; counseling¹¹⁵ priests, religious and seminarians and the Christian education of youth... [n. 2].

Fr. Nello tells us how this particular commentary by Fr. Bertoni came to an end:

When the Easter festivals were over [in 1813]. Fr. Bertoni took up again his commentary on Gregory's *Expositio in I Reg.*, with **Meditation 71** [1 K 16:1-3] [MssB 7285, ff.]. His 73rd Meditation was his last one, commenting on 1 K 16:11-13 [MssB 7321]¹¹⁶.

This would seem to indicate that Fr. Bertoni gave about 30 months to these 73 Meditations – for Sundays and Feast Days at the Seminary – from late November 1810 until after Easter 1813, a considerable portion of his *Manoscritti Bertoni* [## 4853-7340]. He then went on to his 41 Meditations on Matthew, based on the 28 Homilies of St. John Chrysostom. These are found on this same website, also under 'Translations'.

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¹¹⁵ This may be a mis-translation of the Italian word: *assistenza*, which is more broad – and could include teaching; retreats; teaching; spiritual direction etc..

¹¹⁶ Cf. Fr. Nello, o.c., Vol. III, pp. 389. ff.

A Word about St. Gregory the Great's original work:

A SUMMARY

Two Major Themes¹¹⁷

These insights into the *Commentary on Kings* allow one to see that the two great themes mentioned in this work are not developed in an equal fashion. That which dominates by far is the consideration of the Priesthood. The **Monastic Life** appears only here and there, in those passages generally brief, but remarkably to the point and important.

[1] This predominance of the theme of the Priesthood holds of course to the history as this unfolds in the sacred text. **Eli and his sons are priests. Samuel**, elevated to the temple by the **High Priest**, and charged with keeping him informed, is the invested himself with a prophetic role which makes of him the spiritual leader of his people. All of this is designated to **prefigure the Christian Shepherd**. Anointed by him, **Saul and David** are kings, of course, but their anointing leads the reader to think of Jesus Christ, and to those who represent Him here below. These four protagonists invited the commentator to speak habitually of the **Christian Priesthood**.

[2] Less obvious, the relationship of the text with **the monastic life** is only discovered in some secondary figures and episodes. This would be above all **in the couple, the parents of Samuel, Elcana and Anna - the "one", 'certain' man [1 S 1:1], the type of the Monk, and his preferred spouse, symbol of the contemplative life.** Then, **the young Samuel** in person, as he **serves** in the Temple and **obeys** Heli. Then a series of **minor personalities**, forming groups: the inhabitants of Bethsames who receive the Ark, the city of Masphat, visited by Samuel, the young women going to the fountain, the three men on their way toward Bethel, the Israelites who abandon, or rally to the army of Saul, the soldiers recruited by the King. As for Saul himself, his disobedience furnishes the occasion to come back again to a theme already suggested by the child Samuel.

a.] **Concerning the Priesthood:** as in the totality of his work, Gregory sees above all in the Christian Shepherd a **"preacher"** [with its very broad understanding of this term: **any communication of Jesus Christ**]. It is useless to offer much commentary on this omnipresent theme. More rare and remarkable are those notations relative to several sacraments [Penance, Eucharist, Order], rather than to conduct, good or bad, of the members of the priestly body.

¹¹⁷ cf. Gregoire le Grand, *Commentaire sur le Premier Livres des Rois*. Paris: duCerf 1989.

Is Penance at the hour of death sufficient to have one enter into life? Around this much debated question, which obliges one to hold for the author's view of a "full purgatory" following death, Gregory develops the general doctrine of penance, in noting the role of the intercessor played by the priest who hears Confessions. Furthermore, he might also impose the affliction of the fast, that is laid down in order to efface the sin. However, this does not obtain its effect unless it is placed upon the penitent by the judgment of the priest. He examines the acts submitted to him in the Confession, and establishes in accord with the importance of the fault, the measure of the fitting affliction. He does not do this, though, unless coming to this conclusion in contemplation, thereby coming to know the Will of God in this matter. In this very delicate role of the "judge of souls", the priest must keep in mind the merits of the past of the one who has been struck with the *Eucharistic censure*.

However, it is above all with regard to the faults of Saul that Gregory concerns himself with Penance. The beginning of the last Book in his *Commentary on Kings* abounds in observations on this point. The confession of carnal failures risks poisoning the spirit of the Priest who listens to their confession. When it is a matter of little sins, confession alone can efface them - and the priest puts them to death by an absolution imposed by "his apostolic authority". In other words, it does not suffice to confess the sin to the *priests* before God. It is necessary also to purge the penalty by penance. Regarding this last duty, a good number of sinners would like to dispense themselves in asking the priest to accomplish this for them. Very often, he charges himself imprudently with such burdens which he cannot bear alone, as the fault has to be expiated conjointly by the tears of the penitent and those of the priest.

Without prolonging this discussion too far with further remarks regarding the Confession, let us pass on now to the Eucharist. On three separate occasions, Gregory takes up the matter of priests and other "ministers" who dare to consecrate, to touch and to receive unworthily the Body and Blood of the Lord. As the faithful, whom they exhort to approach these mysteries in a state of purity - they themselves need to be even more pure when they offer the sacrifice. The case of sacrilegious communions leads to distinguishing between the Sacrament received exteriorly, and its interior "effect" which is not produced in the communicating soul. This is a distinction which Gregory will renew with regard to Baptism and Holy Order.

This last Sacrament is the one about which the *Commentary on Kings* speaks the most, both with regard to the sons of Samuel, as well as those of the two Kings, **Saul and David, anointed by the Prophet**. The choice of the one to be ordained is made primarily as the object of numerous recommendations. It is necessary to take him in a "religious house", or "community" [seminary?], where there is practiced the "perfect life", and to seek there without pause, a capable subject - as there is simply no excuse when the choice is of someone who is unworthy. One must seek out the signs of the

vocation, and those required aptitudes, notably the union of contemplation and deal, the application to tears not only for one's own sins, but also for the sins of others. This discernment of vocations ought to be conducted under the light of the Scriptures, where God indicates those men He wished for His service.

The **anointing of David** provides Gregory with the occasion of putting together a detailed list of qualities which the Episcopacy requires. The horn of oil which serves to anoint the new King symbolizes the combination of authority and goodness, of severity and mercy that must be found in him. These contrasting, paradoxical qualities come together in a single whole which summarizes all: this is called charity. However, **the future shepherd cannot be "simple", i.e., in the sense of a man of just ordinary goodness, but one who loves without possessing a clear and communicable knowledge.** To charity in the Bishop must be added "**instruction**", in the manner that he is able to teach and command, carrying out all that he himself preaches. "**Wisdom**", or "**knowledge**", or interior "**contemplation**", joined with an **exemplary exterior conduct** ["good works", *conversatio*]: this couple recurs endlessly under different forms. Furthermore, Gregory insists on either one or other of these elements: the capacity of commanding with discernment, contemplation, with ardent and clarifying word. **The knowledge that is necessary for the priest, the author emphatically brings out, is the opposite of the *savoir-faire* of this world which would plunge him into the affairs of this world.**

However, these diverse notations take up little space in comparison to the author's continual recommendation: that of humility. The importance of this capital virtue is not only in that it is in accord with the teaching and the example of Jesus Christ Himself, but even more due to the adverse temptations which assail the leaders of every society, and especially those of the Church of that time, given the privileged situation of the priesthood in a world which was becoming Christianized. There will be ample space to talk about this further in the matter of the unworthy shepherds.

Carefully chosen and proven, the future Bishop should also have passed through all the inferior orders of the Clergy, and the Prelate who is to ordain him ought to be assured, if need be, from the consent of the ecclesiastical superior. For one's nomination and ordination the 'consecrated' should associate himself with several colleagues. A fast should accompany these solemn acts which require freedom of spirit and recollection. From the one who ordains, the new Bishop receives advice and instructions on the manner of exercising his charge. For this admonition, he is to respond with a promise, which - sad to say - will not always be maintained.

The *Commentary on Kings* is in effect **full of complaints in the matter of the "preachers" of the contemporary Church.** Often the evil goes right back to the ordination itself, conferred on subjects who were simply not worthy, because of the

scarce spirituality with which they have been endowed. But the situation also arises of subjects who were irreproachable, but who subsequently allowed themselves to be subverted, in the course of their ministry, by temptations inherent within. For the priesthood is rich, respected, influential, and those who are invested with it risk being attached to temporary advantages, in the place of giving all their cares over for the good of souls. From the Preface on, Gregory takes up these ecclesiastics plunged into the care of this world, which keep them from being more committed to the word of God: 'We desire earthly goods, they maintain, we do allow ourselves to be absorbed by the exterior cares of this world.' His reproach is repeated endlessly, in terms that scarcely ever vary. The boredom and negligence which follow upon this are so expanded upon that Gregory can speak of an "aging" of the Christian priesthood, of which the last years of Samuel serve as a symbol.

Worse still, there are rapacious Prelates who actually use violence and injustice in order to satisfy their insatiable covetousness. Furthermore, their carnal failures are numerous. Gregory goes on to say: 'Today, one sees many chaste priests and failed bishops.' Their fault, despite their cover-up, or their confession, does not keep them from wanting to remain functioning to the great embarrassment of the one who has responsibility over them.¹¹⁸ There could even be found some among them who lived under the presumption that 'those men invested with sacred orders could also practice conjugal union.'¹¹⁹

The fact is that these failures in chastity were largely due to the pride of holding on to power. The root of this evil was in the **exteriority** which leads one to lose from sight those interior goods and assimilates the Pastor to a secular leader. Hence, Gregory's insistence on the secret and retired path of contemplation, **the soul of all pastoral ministry**. Young Samuel who was sleeping in the temple near the Ark of the Covenant, is for the Pope the symbol of that 'distance from earthly duties carried out in public' and of that 'retreat hidden in the sanctuary of that interior vision achieved by means of meditation.' Further, since the symbol deals with a boy, this represents for Gregory 'subjects' rather than their leaders. However, these latter also have the same responsibility of 'being rarely in public, and often in retreat.'

Certainly the shepherds cannot, nor should they abandon their flock in order to give themselves over to contemplation without pasturage. But while the integral monastic life is forbidden for them, it is still possible for them to imitate by withdrawing regularly from pastoral action in order to ponder over their own salvation,

¹¹⁸ In his correspondence, Pope Gregory absolutely interdicts any resumption of their sacred service on the part of any of these failed clerics.

¹¹⁹ For Pope Gregory chastity should be manifest in an exemplary manner by those preachers sent to convert seculars.

and ‘**to repose a while aside**’, giving time to contemplation and prayer. It is from ‘the secret of meditation’ that they will come forth with great usefulness into ‘the public of activity’, or for preaching. This should never serve as a simple pretext in order to rejoining the world which they only pretend to flee, as those badly intentioned seculars do not fail to say. In the very bosom of their of their preaching and activity, the Shepherd can and should to keep his view riveted on the Master Whom he serves, and to give way to a certain contemplation.

b.] Therefore, **priesthood** and the **monastic life** are **not opposed states in life**. While they are different, they nonetheless have many elements in common, particularly the aspiration to contemplate. In this regard, however, the monk enjoys a freedom that is denied to the priest - and for this the latter might experience some envy. Constrained to preach the contemplative life without being able to lead this way of life, the Bishops remain, from this point of view, inferior to the monks. These monks offer the bishops a model that is always useful for them to note, particularly when they take on their responsibilities. As a result, their teaching in this regard has its limits, beyond those, beyond which they can only remit to those souls taken up with perfection, the contemplatives.

This kind of superiority recognized as pertaining to the monks remains totally relative, however, for the priesthood is indeed, in the eyes of Gregory, as it is in the eyes of the entire Church, the summit of the Christian hierarchy. Even though he never loses sight of the fact that all the laity are indeed priests, the Pope often insists on the respect and the obedience that the ‘subjects’ owe to their ‘prelates’, basing himself on the word of Christ: **Whoever hears you, hears Me** [Lk 10:16].

Among the ‘subjects’ of the Bishops are also found those ‘prelates’ of the second order, who are the priests. Saul and Jonathan – Jonathan and his retinue figure at every turn this hierarchy on two levels. The Bishops have the duty of supervising their priests, both from the point of view of doctrine, as well as that of morals¹²⁰, but they do receive from the latter helpful advice.

c.] **Concerning the Monastic Life**: of lesser, but still of much importance for Gregory, the monastic life is not without its relationship, as has been seen already, with that of the Priesthood. Before going into detailing further these aspects, it is necessary to point out a vocabulary trait which is quite unusual in Gregory’s vocabulary: in his **Commentary on Kings**, the Pope twice employs the term **monachus**, and five times makes use of the words, **in monasteriis**. These departures

¹²⁰ This classical emphasis is noted in St. Paul’s [cf. 1 Tm 4:16] *attende tibi et doctrinae* - noted in St. Gaspar Bertoni’s insistence on progress: spiritual and intellectual, noted from his *Compendium Rude* - and then all through his Constitutions.

from the usual Gregorian terminology in designating the categories of the Christian People by such expressions are always situated, except for his first use of the word ***monachus***, in the second half of his work [cf. Books IV-VI]. By themselves, these terms denote an interest particularly vivid for the realities and the problems of the monastic life, which are here being considered more closely than in the rest of the scriptural commentaries of the Saint.

Outside of these explicit passages, the monastic life is designated in a more or less clear manner by the Pope's circumlocutions, without it being always able to be stated that he is speaking of this structure alone, to the exclusion of the clerical life. However, there is no doubt that Gregory thinks of this when he speaks of the ***secret***, or ***the remote life***. It is certainly **the type of life he personally lived**, at least this was **his basic priority**, in speaking of the renunciation of the world and contemplation.

These notes of the **renunciation** of creatures, withdrawal from the world and the sole aspiration of **seeing God** define in effect that which Gregory calls the **contemplative life** and which constitutes for him the essence of monasticism. It is this fundamental program which in his Commentary on the ***First Book of Kings*** that he indicates, or develops the more often: the ascent of Helcana to Shiloh and the circumstances of Anna's conception, the repose of Samuel in the Ark, and its arrival in *Bethsame*, a toponym for *Masphat*, and the going up of the three men toward Bethel, the names of Saul's two daughters, and the *holocaust* he offers: these very natural developments lead, in the manner they are interpreted, to the same contemplative ideal, of which Gregory never fails to point out, each time that he has the time, the rigorous demands and the difficult paths of access.

The contemplative life is indeed the source of the most sublime joys here below, the **prelude of those of eternity**. However, these come only at the price of a complete detachment and great personal efforts, aroused, sustained and crowned by divine grace. It is further no less difficult than this long spiritual ascension then to commit oneself to those unforeseen responses of grace that one might dare even to call 'capricious': sometimes it seems to leave without any response the most pressing appeals, and at times it arrives with a suddenness which is beyond all expectancy. Among the multiple presuppositions of contemplation are listed: reading, prayer, forgetfulness of the world, humble penance, tears and compunction. Gregory insists particularly on guarding one's senses and thoughts, words and deeds. After the two principal *exposés* in his ***Commentary on First Kings***, **this constant surveillance over himself is the basis of the entire contemplative experience**.

However, this quest for contemplation is not a simple matter of individual effort. In Gregory's eyes, this has to be situated **in the frame-work of a community**. This is what imposes itself on all as **the primordial duty: obedience** [*obsequium*], of

which we will treat. Furthermore, the members of the contemplative community ought to look out for one another, the stronger among them moderating their asceticism in the interest of the weaker among them. If certain ones among them can be restrained in their challenge, the life in common will serve them, as is intended for all, the benefit of mutual edification by the word of God and example. Furthermore, Gregory invites the superiors not to misunderstand the particular necessities and possibilities of their subjects by an excessively rigid fixation of the common regimen.¹²¹ The individual charisms should be taken into consideration, as well as the varying individual need for a more strict personal asceticism for the different men of which they may have need in their battle against vice.

Beyond the permanent problems, the monastic community has to face up to two crucial eventualities: **the arrival** of new subjects and the **departure** of members who return to the world. The reception of Postulants is envisaged by Gregory in three separate texts, and each time he mentions the key word: **discernment**. The arrival of the Ark at Bethsames is the first occasion is the first occasion that the commentator finds in order to typify it, and he uses the expression found in St. Paul: **the discernment of spirits** [1 Co 7:7]. Then, the 'Right of the King' permits the author almost immediately with the Benedictine Rule [cf. **RB** 58, 1-2, 8, 12], on those painful trials which require this discernment. A Ritual of Profession is drawn out in this passage: the exchange of questions and responses between the superior and the professed monk, followed by a secret prayer of the former, who offers to God the commitment made by the latter. Finally, the recruitment of Saul's army leads to the recommendation of a serious proof of these vocations, leading toward the retention only of those subjects who are at one and the same time 'strong' and 'apt', i.e., endowed with a correct will and with a certain **spiritual intelligence**.

As for the departure of the 'apostates', Gregory envisages this also three times: first of all in commenting on the 'right of the King'; then in connection with those Israelite warriors who cross over the Jordan, and of those who rally the army of Saul after the victory. Being forewarned on their entry of the trials which await them, the monks cannot be freed when these discourage them and they ask to leave. Resisting their pleas, the superior should not open the door for them, but should direct them to the monastery and care for them. Even when they have left the religious life, there are also those who return and persevere.

The last and the most important of the monastic themes developed by Gregory's **Commentary on First Kings**, is that of **obedience**. With this in any manner

¹²¹ Both St. Ignatius and St. Gaspar Bertoni [cf. CF ##43; 94; 97; 98; 112; 226; 229; 230; 233; 237; 249] offered a certain lee-way for superiors and spiritual directors in the matter of penances, or the need of food, to be proportioned according to a greater or lesser degree to find the happy medium for each person.

being reserved for the monks – Gregory speaks of this often with regard to other categories of Church life – **this virtue is particularly necessary**. It is this which should regulate the personal austerities in the bosom of the community, even more than their desires for a solitary and contemplative life. To his superiors, the contemplative ought also to submit for verification, the progress of his soul and the fruits of his contemplation. While ‘growing up’, in age and wisdom, as the young Samuel did, he must remain *servant*, of those men whom God has placed over him.

This figure of the Child Prophet inspires the Commentator to present his **first hymn to obedience**, to which will respond pages no less fervent with regard to the disobedience of Saul. These celebrations of obedience do not cede at all to that which Cassian and other monastic authors have written in the most strong manner regarding this subject. Gregory presents it as the sole means of salvation, remedying the disobedience of Adam, and assigns to it a sovereign role, which elevates it over all the virtues and observances of the monastic life. In becoming a monk, one commits himself in an irrevocable manner to practice it, even when it can be legitimate, in certain circumstances, to hide from his superior, out of humility, the good that one does.

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More in Particular

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Section 1: [I, 1-84]:

Christ, the Spouse of the Church, and the Ideal of the Monk:

First Interpretation [I, 1-60]: Elcana represents Jesus Christ, that **one, unique man**, Who has repaired by his virile force the baseness of Adam, and redeemed the human race. His two wives are symbolic, in that one is the **Church [Anna]** and the other is the **Synagogue [Phenenna]**. The conflict between the two wives represents the persecution that some of the Jews had inflicted on the nascent Church. Judaism, and especially its priests, is also called to mind by the two sons of Eli, and by Eli himself, in the person of whom there figures primarily the hostility of the old priesthood, then its partial rallying to the Christian faith.

The Christ “adores” by His obedient life, and “immolates” by His redemptive death. The Church, by her preachers, announces Jesus Christ with a perfect selflessness, has compassion on the blind Jews who persecute her and contemplates ceaselessly the divine will, the rule of her action. Born of Anna, Samuel is the figure of the body of Christian preachers who came forth from paganism and presented to Eli, i.e., instructed in the OT. The three calves offered at the same time signify on the one

hand, her two-fold pastoral task - that of converting sinners and assuring the perseverance of the just - and, on the other hand, that intimate contemplation which ought to accompany her action.

Second Interpretation [I, 61-84]: Elcana also represents the one who has left the world, that “man” who by his strong virtue, is “one”, “unique” by his exclusive and passionate desire to see God. This renunciation, of which the Monk is the completed type, knows in him the tension between the two ways, the contemplative [Anna] and the active [Phenenna]. The active life is easier, and more quickly produces fruit. The contemplative life does not bear its incomparable fruits of spiritual joy until following a long and sustained effort, which proceeds from the assiduous reading of the Bible to continual prayer, in passing by the orientation of one’s regard towards heaven, bitterness and tears of compunction, the firm proposal of remaining in the presence of God. In short, all depends on divine grace, the visits of which are sovereignly free, and disconcert the plans that men make, always demanding from him a constant effort.

On this moral register, to “adore” and to “immolate” are to be understood by the fearful veneration and that delightful rejoicing through which the soul which contemplates, passes. Eli, whose sons are not mentioned, plays the role of carnal superiors who are opposed to the desire of contemplation of their subjects, not without acceding to it when these persevere in their requests with humility. As for the three calves, of which one alone is immolated, these are the praises addressed by the contemplative to God, One and Three.

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