GREGORY THE GREAT: READER, WRITER AND READ

by DANIEL ANLEZARK

An episode unique to the late ninth-century *Life* of Gregory the Great by John the Deacon reports a famine that occurred in the year of Gregory's death; a hostile party blamed the lavish generosity of the late pope for Rome's suffering. The fury of the people was roused and they set out to burn Gregory's books. However, the deacon Peter, Gregory's *familiarissimus*, intervened to dissuade them, telling the people that Gregory's works were directly inspired by God. As proof he asked God to take his life, and promptly dropped dead.[1] This episode is not found in the earlier accounts of Gregory's life: the brief account in the mid seventh-century *Liber pontificalis*, the early eighth-century *Life* by an anonymous monk of Whitby, and the mid eighth-century account by Paul the Deacon.[2] Doubtful as John the Deacon's account of the exchange between Peter and the mob may be, it does tell us something about the status of Gregory and his works in the mid 870s, when Pope John VIII commissioned the new hagiography.[3] Gregory the Great became one of the most widely read authors of the Middle Ages, and even in his lifetime some of his works were eagerly sought after. With his popularity and influence Gregory not only added to the body of Christian literature, but also made a lasting contribution to the debate over what kinds of works it was appropriate for Christians to read. This essay will survey his works and discuss his ideas on reading and literature, and on the estab-

[1] *Vita Gregorii Magni* 4.69 (PL 75, 59–242, at 222); Jeffrey Richards, *Consul of God: The Life and Times of Gregory the Great* (London, 1980), 72–3. See Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1952), 12, on the inspired nature of Gregory's works.

[2] *Liber pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Paris, 1955–7), 2: 312; *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby*, ed. Bertram Colgrave (Lawrence, KA, 1968); Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* 3.21–5, 4.1–19 (MGH SRL, 45–187, at 103–5, 114–22); accounts of Gregory's life are also found in Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* 1.23–30, 2.1; ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), 68–109, 122–35; some (unreliable) detail is found in Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum* 9.20, 10.1 (MGH SRM 1/1, 437, 475–81); see also n. 19 below.

[3] Richards, *Consul*, 2.

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lishment of a Christian literary canon. The influence of Gregory's works and ideas will be examined in relation to one particular medieval nation – Anglo-Saxon England. As the instigator of the Anglo-Saxon mission, Gregory enjoyed a great reputation as an author in Anglo-Saxon England, where his ideas on literature and society had a lasting impact.

Gregory was born around 540, elected pope in September 590, and died in March 604. The sixth century was disastrous for the city of Rome. It had been buffeted by Barbarian attacks since the beginning of the fifth century, but the events of the sixth left the city depopulated and falling into decay.[4] The Emperor Justinian launched his campaigns to reconquer lost territories in the West, and the Lombards later invaded Italy from the north. The crumbling city of Gregory's papacy would have borne a shattered resemblance to that of his early childhood. It is no surprise that his works are peppered with references to transience. He writes in his *Moralia in Iob*: 'But a man, who is thoroughly subject to God, knows how to remain fixed among transient things, knows how to plant firmly the footsteps of his mind, amid the lapses of passing years'.[5]

Years of war and plague contributed to drastic economic, social and demographic changes. The Italian economy began to revert to rural subsistence, while cities became depopulated and their defences were neglected. Many of the old aristocracy fled Italy for Constantinople; their position in the government of Italy was eroded. For art and letters this meant a much diminished leisured class to patronize such pursuits. By the end of the century the Roman Senate had ceased to function. The old ruling class was gradually displaced by the military and the Church. Gregory was born into one of these old families, but one which was already known for its piety and service to the Church. He became Prefect

4 R. A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and his World* (Cambridge, 1997), 1.

5 'Vir autem bene Deo subditus scit inter transeuntia stare, scit inter lapsus decurrentium temporum mentis gressum figere': Gregory, *Moralia in Iob* 31.28.55 (CChr.SL 143–143B, 1590); ET *Morals on the Book of Job* 18, 21, 23, 31, Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, 3 vols in 4 (Oxford, 1844–50), 3: 468; see Markus, *Gregory*, 3. On Gregory's integration of Stoicism, see below. In this essay Gregory's works are quoted in translation, with the original in the notes; works by other authors in Latin (and Old English) are given only in translation, unless a textual relationship is being discussed.

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of Rome in 573 but adopted the monastic life not long after.[6] However, his desire to leave the secular world was not fulfilled for long, as either Pope Benedict I or Pelagius II made him a deacon of the Roman Church. Soon he was papal representative at the imperial court in Constantinople. It was there he came to know Leander of Seville and gave the talks which were later published in a revised form as his *Moralia in Iob*. Gregory was recalled to Rome in 585/6, and returned to his monastery. War with the Lombards resumed in 587, and when Pope Pelagius II died of the plague in 590 Gregory was elected to succeed him.

A number of works by Gregory survive; some are known to have been lost; and some are disputed.[7] By Gregory's time the papal *scrinium* was keeping a record of papal correspondence in a 'register'. Various extracts from his register survive as eight hundred and fifty letters, written to a range of correspondents on matters sublime and mundane. Letters from the *Registrum* were excerpted by John the Deacon during the papacy of Hadrian I (772–95).[8] The *Moralia in Iob* is a vast historical, allegorical and mostly moral exposition of the Book of Job based on talks Gregory gave to the monastic brethren who accompanied him when he was *apocrisiarios* in Constantinople. This was revised and published soon after his accession to the papacy; its great length, density and interest meant that it was a work for monastic readers in following centuries. The *Liber regulae pastoralis* ('Pastoral Rule' or 'Pastoral Care') was written during the first year of Gregory's pontificate (590–1).[9] It was addressed to bishops, but was later widely held to be useful for kings and other rulers, all of whom were *rectores*.[10] The *Dialogi* ('Dialogues', composed in 593–4) celebrated the holiness of sixth-century Italian saints.[11] The work's authenticity has been questioned but not disproved.[12] In any case, the fact that it

6 Markus, *Gregory*, 8, notes that there is no record of the family's bearing secular office until Gregory himself.

7 Ibid. 14–16.

8 Gregory, *Registrum epistolarum libri* (CChr.SL 140, 140A) [hereafter: *Epist.*]; see John R. C. Martyn, transl., *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, 3 vols (Toronto, ON, 2004).

9 Gregory, *Règle pastorale*, ed. and French transl. B. Judic, 2 vols (Paris, 1992); ET *Pastoral Care*, transl. H. Davis, ACW 11 (Westminster, MD, 1950).

10 Markus, *Gregory*, 86.

11 Gregory, *Dialogues*, 3 vols (SC 251, 260, 265); ET *Dialogues*, transl. O. J. Zimmerman (New York, 1959).

12 See Markus, *Gregory*, 15–16, who accepts the *Dialogues* as genuinely Gregorian;

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was indubitably regarded as Gregory's work for more than a thousand years after it was written means he has been the author for most of its readers. It appears to have been designed for as wide an audience as possible. Gregory's *Homiliae in Euangelia* had been delivered publicly in Rome in 590–2.[13] Some were preached by Gregory and recorded by notaries, others were written beforehand and delivered for him when he was too ill to speak; they were revised for publication. Gregory's *Homiliae in Hiezechihelem* were preached between 592 and 593 at the height of the wars with the Lombards, while Rome was under siege.[14] As in all of Gregory's works there is a strong apocalyptic flavour, though here the taste is intense. They were revised eight years later when requested by the brethren.[15] Gregory's *Expositio in Cantica canticorum* survives as two fragmentary homilies.[16] A commentary *In librum primum Regum expositio*, once attributed to him, is now seriously doubted to be authentically Gregorian.[17]

Gregory's attitude to learning in general, and secular learning in particular, has been a matter of debate. In his *Dialogues* he employed a paradox developed by St Paul, comparing a simple saint's 'learned ignorance (*illius doctam ignorantiam*)' with 'our ignorant knowledge (*nostra indocta scientia*)'.[18] The recurrence of this attitude across his works – that holiness knows more than taught knowledge – has fed into a perception of Gregory as one suspicious of an emphasis on book learning, especially secular letters. Gregory himself belonged to a social elite, and his Latinity and

Francis Clark, *The Pseudo-Gregorian Dialogues*, 2 vols (Leiden, 1987); Paul Meyvaert, 'The Enigma of Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*: A Response to Francis Clark', *JEH* 39 (1988), 335–81.

[13] Gregory, *Homiliae in Euangelia* (CChr.SL 141) [hereafter: *Hom. Euang.*]; ET *Forty Gospel Homilies*, transl. D. Hurst, Cistercian Studies 123 (Kalamazoo, MI, 1990).

[14] Gregory, *Homiliae in Hiezechihelem* [hereafter: *Hom. Hiezech.*] (CChr.SL 142); ET *Homilies on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, transl. T. Tomkinson (Etna, CA, 2008).

[15] St Columbanus requested a copy of the work: F. Homes Dudden, *Gregory the Great: his Place in History and Thought*, 2 vols (London, 1905), 2: 92.

[16] Gregory, *Expositiones in Canticum canticorum, in librum primum Regum* (CChr.SL 144); see Paul Meyvaert, 'The Date of Gregory the Great's Commentaries on Canticles and on I Kings', *Sacris Erudiri* 23 (1978–9), 191–216.

[17] See Adalbert de Vogüé, 'L'auteur du Commentaire des Rois attribué à saint Grégoire: Un moine de Cava?', *Revue bénédictine* 106 (1996), 319–31. Some works have been lost; see Markus, *Gregory*, xiv, 16.

[18] Markus, *Gregory*, 34; Gregory, *Dialogues* 3.37.20 (on 1 Cor. 1:18–25); Carole Straw, *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection* (Berkeley, CA, 1988), 6.

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learning reveal a man educated according to the best traditions available in a turbulent time. Unlike Boethius, who died some fifteen years before Gregory was born, he did not know Greek, and knew philosophy only at second or third hand.[19] His works show that Gregory was trained in grammar and rhetoric, with a Latinity remarkably good for its time, a mark of his patrician culture; his letters reveal knowledge of Roman law. Indeed, Justinian sought to guarantee the basics of such an education in the West to maintain the apparatus of the state.[20]

Following the statement of his exegetical principles and procedure in the letter to Leander of Seville which accompanies his *Moralia*, Gregory disdains the laws of rhetoric and grammar, and claims he has happily breached all the 'rules of Donatus' (a noted grammarian), because, as he says, the authors of Scripture ignored them.[21] There is some irony when this rejection of the noted grammarian is delivered in Latin excellent for its time and also represents a trope borrowed from Cassiodorus.[22] Markus has downplayed the significance of Gregory's statement, and points to a much more enlightened view of the role of secular learning – especially grammar and rhetoric – for the Christian reader outlined in the commentary on 1 Kings: 'Almighty God has provided this secular learning plainly as a step for our ascent by which we might reach the height of understanding the Holy Scriptures'.[23] However, this defence is no longer regarded as Gregory's.[24] The significance of Gregory's letter to Desiderius of Vienne, then, returns with its force undiminished:

> But something came to our attention afterwards that we cannot remember without embarrassment, namely that your fraternity

[19] G. J. M. Bartelink, 'Pope Gregory the Great's Knowledge of Greek', transl. Paul Meyvaert, in John C. Cadavini, ed., *Gregory the Great: A Symposium* (Notre Dame, IN, 1995), 117–36; Markus, *Gregory*, 34–5. Glowing praise of his learning from his contemporary Gregory of Tours must be treated cautiously (see n. 2 above).

[20] See James Bowen, *A History of Western Education. The Ancient World: Orient and Mediterranean* (London, 1972), 297.

[21] Markus, *Gregory*, 36.

[22] Ibid.

[23] 'Hanc quippe saecularum scientiam omnipotens deus in plano anteposuit, ut nobis ascendendi gradum faceret, qui nos ad diuinae scripturae altitudinem leuare debuisset': Gregory, *In I librum Regum* 5.84 (CChr.SL 144, 472). See Markus, *Gregory*, 38–9.

[24] See n. 17 above.

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> was teaching grammar to some people. We were so disturbed by this matter and rejected it so strongly that we turned what you had said before into sighs and sadness, because in one mouth praises of Christ do not harmonize with the praises of Jupiter. And consider how serious and wicked it is for a bishop to recite poetry that is not even suitable for a religious layman.[25]

This is more than a reiteration of canonical prohibitions on bishops teaching grammar or reading profane texts: such poetry, for Gregory, is not really appropriate for any Christian. And it is probably no coincidence that this was written in the same month that Gregory heard of the baptism of the pagan king Ethelbert of Kent and ten thousand others; when winning the war on paganism on one front, Gregory would have been unwilling to give ground on another.[26] The attitude outlined in the pseudo-Gregorian commentary has noble antecedents in Cassiodorus and Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana*, in which secular study is acceptable as an aid to the understanding of divine letters.[27] However, as Markus notes, Augustine and Gregory belong to different times: in Augustine's day secular education was a given, and even Cassiodorus could take it for granted. But on the whole, and very much more so without the caveat of the commentary, Gregory's anti-secularism reveals the spirit of a new age. Gregory distances himself from the knowledge of this world (*scientia doctrinae saecularis*) from the point of view of an ascetic monastic culture.[28] In Gregory's more radically apocalyptic worldview, the knowledge of the dying age had much less value, and he is simply dismissive of the *uanas poetarum*

[25] 'Sed post hoc peruenit ad nos quod sine uerecundia memorare non possumus, fraternitatem tuam grammaticam quibusdam exponere. Quam rem ita moleste suscepimus ac sumus uehementius aspernati, ut ea quae prius dicta fuerant in gemitu et tristitia uerteremus, quia in uno se ora cum Iouis laudibus Christi laudes non capiunt. Et quam graue nefandumque sit episcopo canere, quod nec laico religioso conueniat, ipse considera': Gregory, *Epist.* 11.34 (June 601; Martyn, transl., *Letters*, 3: 777); cf. Markus, *Gregory*, 37.

[26] The letter dates from June 601. Compare three other letters dated 22 June 601: Gregory, *Epist.* 11.35, to Queen Bertha; ibid. 11.36, to Augustine; ibid. 11.37, to King Ethelbert. All three emphasize the fight against paganism. *Epist.* 11.38 (22 June 601), to Virgil of Arles, mentions the English mission, and warns Virgil on avarice, a form of idolatry.

[27] See Markus, *Gregory*, 36–9.

[28] Gregory, *Moralia* 33.10.19; see Straw, *Perfection*, 128–46.

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fabulas ('vain fictions of the poets').[29] By the time of the grammatical works of Isidore of Seville, Leander's younger brother, the two cultures had separated.[30]

In Gregory's world there was really only one book that needed to be read: the Bible. In his *Moralia* Gregory does much to cement a way of reading Scripture which he inherited from earlier commentators, and which would become the norm in the Middle Ages; the system would be further refined and defined by his literary heir, Bede the Venerable.[31] Gregory sees Scripture as a door, a light and nourishment; it is more food than drink because it must be chewed up before being swallowed.[32] His *Letter to Leander* explains how Gregory reads:

> Let it be known, that we run through some passages with a historical exposition, some we trace out allegorically for their typical meaning; others again we discuss by means of allegory only for their moral bearing; some, finally, we investigate thoroughly in all ways by a threefold method. First we lay the historical sense as a foundation; then by following the typical sense, we erect a mental edifice as a stronghold of faith; as the last step, by the grace of the moral sense we, as it were, cover the building by a coat of paint.[33]

This great edifice catered for a range of readers, and was based on the adaptability of the Scripture itself: 'For as the word of God through its mysteries exercises the understanding of the wise, so generally by its surface meaning it nurses the simple-minded.'[34] For

[29] Gregory, *Moralia, Ad Leandrum* 3.

[30] See Markus, *Gregory*, 36–7.

[31] See Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, transl. M. Sebanc and E. M. Macierowski, 2 vols (Grand Rapids, MI, 1998), 2: 24–5, 37–8; Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 32–5.

[32] See Grover A. Zinn Jr, 'Exegesis and Spirituality in the Writings of Gregory the Great', in Cadavini, ed., *Symposium*, 168–80; Markus, *Gregory*, 42; cf. *Hom. Hiezech.* 1.10.3–4.

[33] 'Sciendum uero est, quod quaedam historica expositione transcurrimus et per allegoriam quaedam typica inuestigatione perscrutamur, quaedam per sola allegoricae moralitatis instrumenta discutimus, nonnulla autem per cuncta simul sollicitus exquirentes tripliciter indagamus. Nam primum quidem fundamenta historiae ponimus; deinde per significationem typicam in arcem fidei fabricam mentis erigimus; ad extremum quoque per moralitatis gratiam, quasi superducto aedificium colore uestimus': Gregory, *Moralia, Ad Leandrum* 3.

[34] 'Diuinus etenim sermo sicut mysteriis prudentes exerciet, sic plerumque

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Gregory signs were not as complex as they had been for Augustine.[35] This is true in the real world of events, whose signs may be read in eschatological terms 'as we read in books (*quam in codicibus legimus*)'.[36] Reading the world for Gregory is 'like the pages of our scriptures'.[37] As the world can be read, so can pictures, as Gregory pointed out to Gallic iconoclasts: 'For a picture is provided in churches for the reason that those who are illiterate may at least read by seeing on the walls what they cannot read in books'.[38] Meanings – which are taken to be easily intelligible – have priority over words.

In a letter to Innocent, a praetorian prefect in Africa, Gregory recommends that he should read the works of his countryman Augustine, which are fine flour (*siligo*) and not Gregory's bran (*furfur*).[39] In his preface to his homilies on Ezekiel, addressed to Bishop Martinian, Gregory suggests better reading is available:

> I believe it highly inappropriate that you partake of this poor water, you who are known assiduously to drink the profound and astute streams that flow from the blessed fathers Ambrose and Augustine. But again, as I ponder that amid daily delights simple food also often tastes sweet, I have delivered the least to the one who reads the better, so that when you consume cruder food, you may, as if through aversion, the more eagerly return to subtler feasts.[40]

Gregory's pun on Ambrose's name – his works are a new ambrosia – suggests he was not completely unfamiliar with the *uanas fabulas*

superficie simplices refouet': ibid. 4.

[35] For a full discussion of Gregory's adaptation of Augustine's complex ideas on signification, see R. A. Markus, *Signs and Meanings: World and Text in Ancient Christianity* (Liverpool, 1996), 45–70; idem, *Gregory*, 49.

[36] Gregory, *Hom. Euang.* 1.1.1.

[37] Gregory, *Epist.* 3.29 (Martyn, transl., *Letters*, 1: 255); cf. Markus, *Gregory*, 53.

[38] 'Id circo enim pictura in ecclesia adhibetur, ut hi qui litteras nesciunt saltem in parietibus uidendo legant, quae legere in codicibus non ualent': Gregory, *Epist.* 9.209 (Martyn, transl., *Letters*, 2: 674). See Markus, *Gregory*, 175; Celia Chazelle, 'Memory, Instruction, Worship: "Gregory's" Influence on Early Medieval Doctrines of the Artistic Image', in Cadavini, ed., *Symposium*, 181–215.

[39] Gregory, *Epist.* 10.16 (Martyn, transl., *Letters*, 3: 727); Straw, *Perfection*, 6.

[40] 'sed ualde incongruum credidi ut aquam despicabilem hauriret quem constat de beatorum patrum Ambrosii atque Augustini torrentibus profunda ac perspicua fluenta assidue bibere. Sed rursum dum cogito quod saepe inter cotidianas delicias etiam uiliores cibi suauiter sapiunt, transmisi minima legenti potiora, ut, dum cibus grossior uelut pro fastidio sumitur, ad subtiliores epulas auidius redeatur': Gregory, *Hom. Hiezech.* Praefatio.

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concerning Olympian gods, but the (recurrent) metaphor of eating sacred knowledge comes directly from Ezekiel 3: 1–3.

Gregory owed his intellectual vocabulary to Cassian, Augustine and Ambrose.[41] Augustine's work served as a reference library for Gregory, though he was often closer to Eastern traditions and he read Augustine in their light.[42] He doubtless knew sections of the *Vitae patrum*, particularly those translated by the deacon who became Pope Pelagius I (556–61) and the subdeacon who became Pope John III (561–74). Carole Straw comments: 'This spirit of asceticism from the desert is always a silent partner in his work, leading Gregory in new directions away from Augustine ... The monastic sensibility, the restless vision of the athlete's battle with the devil, left a deep impression.'[43] Gregory encountered eschatological themes across his reading, but his own apocalypticism was more sharply defined, and not relegated to an unknown future moment. While he used the 'end times' as a rhetorical device, Gregory's reading of the history of his age at times led him to see the end quite close at hand. This is particularly so in his Ezekiel homilies, though his attention to administrative matters in his letters also suggests a practical attitude to the affairs of the last age. It would be surprising if Gregory had not had some direct encounter with the writings of Cicero and Seneca, and he certainly encountered Stoic ideas in Ambrose and Augustine.[44] His understanding of balance and self-discipline (*consideratio* and *discretio* are favourite terms) points to a stream of influence incorporating Cassian, the Desert Fathers and the Stoics.[45] Gregory's understanding of the human condition echoes the ideal of the Stoics and Christians who incorporated Stoic thought, in the belief that the soul should achieve a balance (or *constantia mentis*) through self-control and moderation.[46] The problem of the human condition, for Gregory, is that it is beset by instability. In this way the microcosm reflects

41 See Straw, *Perfection*, 61, 75.
42 Ibid. 14–15.
43 Ibid. 15.
44 See Bartelink, 'Knowledge of Greek', 119; Straw, *Perfection*, 15.
45 See G. R. Evans, *The Thought of Gregory the Great* (Cambridge, 1986), 19–25. Straw, *Perfection*, 16, notes other influences.
46 Straw, *Perfection*, 76.

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the macrocosm; there is an inner likeness shared by the ageing world and man, as both become prone to sickness and disaster.[47]

A constant source of tension in Gregory's life, which is clearly delineated across his works, lies between the active and contemplative life. Gregory's desire for a quiet life of prayer, reflection and sacred reading was ultimately frustrated by the demands of the Roman Church. The prefaces to his works set out these competing demands in clear terms. This sense of burden is found in Gregory's Preface to his *Regula Pastoralis*, a book on how best to incorporate the moral and contemplative life into an active life of service:

> Most dear brother, you reprove me with kind and humble regard for having wished to escape by concealment from the burdens of the pastoral care. Now, lest these burdens might appear light to some, I am explaining, by writing this book, how onerous I regard them, so that he who is free from them may not imprudently seek to have them, and he who has been so imprudent as to seek them may feel apprehension in having them.[48]

Gregory's preferred mode of life, however, is clear.[49] It is only the necessity of work which calls him away from contemplation; there is no joy in earthly office. The same tension is found in the Preface to his *Dialogues*, which begin with Gregory retreating from doing business with worldly men (*saecularium tumultibus*) to a secret place:

> I sat there for a long time in silence and was still deeply dejected when my dearest son, the deacon Peter, came in. ... Seeing me so sick at heart, he asked me 'Have you met with some new misfortune? You seem unusually sad.' 'Peter,' I replied, 'this daily sadness of mine is always old and always new: old by its constant presence, new by its continual increase. With my unhappy soul languishing under a burden of distractions, I

47 Ibid. 50.

48 'Pastoralis curae me pondera fugere delitescendo uoluisse, benigna, frater carissime, atque humillima intentione reprehendis; quae ne quibusdam leuia esse uideantur, praesentis libri stilo exprimo de eorum grauedine omne quod penso, ut et haec qui uacat, incaute non expetat; et qui incaute expetiit, adeptum se esse pertimescat': Gregory, *Règle pastorale*, Praefatio.

49 See Bernard McGinn, 'Contemplation in Gregory the Great', in Cadavini, ed., *Symposium*, 146–67.

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> recall those earlier days in the monastery where all the fleeting things of time were in a world below me.'[50]

There is undoubtedly humour in Gregory's self-representation here: he parodies his own miserable disposition, with an emphasis on his *new* misfortune, his *unusual* sadness. However, the preferred mode of living is again clear. His letter to Leander of Seville at the head of his *Moralia* makes the same point regarding his refuge among his brethren in Constantinople:

> To their society I fled as to the bosom of the safest port from the rolling swell, and from the waves of earthly occupation; and though that office which withdrew me from the monastery had stabbed to death in me the life of former tranquillity with the point of its employments, yet in their society, by appeals of diligent reading, I was animated with the yearnings of compunction.[51]

Gregory's maritime metaphor (another favourite) runs throughout the letter; he goes on to confess that he sank under the burden of producing his commentary on Job. The desired ideal inscribed by the monastic Gregory in these introductions is far from practical, and in fact stands in contrast to Gregory the practical administrator found across his letters. But it is also noteworthy that his idea of retreat and contemplation necessarily includes reflective reading.

Gregory's sense that the age of the world is coming to an end – a primary motivation to contemplative withdrawal – does not preclude political tussles.[52] Not all of his followers, even those closest to him, necessarily caught the distinction or appreciated the required balance. Gregory's exasperation is tangible in his dealings

[50] 'Ibi itaque cum adflictus ualde et diu tacitus sederem, dilectissimus filius meus Petrus diaconus adfuit, ... Qui graui excoqui cordis languore me intuens, ait: numquidnam noui aliquid accidit, quod plus te solito moeror tenet? Cui inquam: moerorem, Petre, quem cotidie patior et semper mihi per usum uetus est et semper per augmentum nouus. Infelix quippe animus meus occupationis suae pulsatus uulnere meminit qualis aliquando in monasterio fuit, quomodo ei labentia cuncta subter errant': Gregory, *Dialogues* 12.

[51] 'Ad illorum quippe consortium uelut ad tutissimi portus sinum terreni actus uolumina fluctusque fugiebam, et licet illud me ministerium ex monasterio abstractum, a pristinae quietis uita mucrone suae occupationis exstinxerat, inter eos tamen per studiosae lectionis alloquium, cotidianae me aspiratio cumpunctionis animabat': Gregory, *Moralia, Ad Leandrum* 1.

[52] See Jeffreys, *Consul*, 174–7.

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with Marinianus, archbishop of Ravenna. Gregory had successfully installed Marinianus, one of his monks, as archbishop after the pope's long dispute with the town and see. Gregory's political victory was frustrated by Marinianus's lack of political skill and his monkish habits. Gregory wrote to the deacon Secundinus, another protégé, urging him to urge the new archbishop to action:

> Tell him therefore to change his mind with his place. He should not believe that reading and praying are sufficient for him on their own, so as to be keen to sit apart from others, and not bear fruit with his hand at all. ... But I did admonish him through a letter of mine over some matters concerning his soul, but he has not replied to me at all. This leads me to believe that he did not even deign to read it. For this reason, it was no longer necessary that I should give him any warnings through my letter, but I only wrote what an adviser could dictate in worldly matters. For I should not tire myself out in dictating a letter to a man who does not read it.[53]

There is no self-deprecating suggestion of bran here: Gregory thinks his words are worth reading, and he is very much the master of style and tone. However, others were happy to read Gregory and follow his advice, and his reputation as a spiritual writer was established already in his lifetime. Having sent his *Moralia* to Leander, Gregory was asked for copies of the *Pastoral Rule* and *Moralia* by Bishop Licinianus of Cartagena; he joked in his letter of thanks that if Gregory's advice were followed – that ignorant men not be ordained – there would be no bishops in Spain.[54] By the ninth century Gregory was celebrated as a saint in the East, and his *Dialogues* had been translated into Greek by Pope Zacharias (741–52); the work became popular especially among monastic readers, earning him the surname *Dialogos*. The *Pastoral Rule* was trans-

[53] 'Dic ergo ut cum loco mutet mentem. Non sibi credat solam lectionem et orationem sufficere, ut remotus studeat sedere et de manu minime fructificare. ... Quaedam uero eum per epistulam meam de anima sua admonui, sed nil mihi omnino respondit; unde credo quia ea neque legere dignatus est. Pro qua re iam necessarium non fuit debuissem, sed tantum illa scripsi quae in causis terrenis consiliarius dictare potuit. Nam ego ad hominem non legentem fatigari in dictatu non debui': Gregory, *Epist.* 6.33 (Martyn, transl., *Letters*, 2: 427–8); see also ibid. 6.24, 28, 33; 7.39, 40; cf. Richards, *Consul*, 175.

[54] Richards, *Consul*, 210.

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lated into Greek in his own lifetime by Anastasius of Antioch.[55] Gregory's international reputation had clearly consolidated by the eighth century, in the East mainly as an author for ascetics, while in the West this was augmented by his reputation in governance. In no place, however, was his reputation stronger or more enduring than in Anglo-Saxon England, where his close involvement in the creation of the English Church gave direction to its developing canon law and theology, an influence witnessed from Bede to Alfred the Great.[56]

Bede and Gregory

The story of the Gregorian mission to England, led by Augustine, one-time prior of the monastery of Sant'Andrea in Rome, is well known and need not be rehearsed here.[57] The origins of the mission and Gregory's motivation for initiating it have been lost in folklore about Angles, angels and alleluias. Gregory's legendary slave-market punning probably is related to his own comments added to the revised version of his *Moralia*: 'For the almighty Lord had covered with his lightning cloud the ends of the sea ... Behold the tongue of Britain which only knew how to utter barbarous sounds has long since begun to sound the divine praises with the Hebrew Alleluia!'[58] Gregory's standing in Anglo-Saxon England was unassailable. For the anonymous monk of Whitby who authored the earliest life of Gregory (704 x 14), Gregory is 'our master' and 'our teacher' and 'our Apostle'.[59] In his *De virginitate*, Aldhelm of Malmesbury calls him 'Gregory, our teacher and instructor ... our teacher – ours, I say, who took away from our parents the foul error of heathendom and handed to them the norm of regenerating grace'.[60] In Bede's *History*, which interweaves the story of

[55] Ibid. 259.

[56] See Rolf H. Bremmer Jr, Kees Dekker and David F. Johnson, eds, *Rome and the North: The Early Reception of Gregory the Great in Germanic Europe* (Leuven, 2001).

[57] The story is told in Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.1.

[58] 'Omnipotens enim Dominus coruscantibus nubibus cardines maris operuit ... Ecce lingua Britanniae, quae nihil aliud nouerat, quam barbarum frendere, iam dudum in diuinis laudibus Hebraeum coepit Alleluia resonare': Gregory, *Moralia* 27.11.21; cf. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.1; Colgrave, ed., *Earliest Life*, 90, 94 (ch. 9).

[59] Paul Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory the Great* (Jarrow, 1964), 115. See also Kate Rambridge, '*Doctor Noster Sanctus*: The Northumbrians and Pope Gregory', in Bremmer et al., eds, *Rome and the North*, 1–26.

[60] Cited in Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory*, 115.

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Britain with that of Rome, Gregory is in many ways the hero of the tale: 'by his zeal he converted our nation, that is, the nation of the English, from the power of Satan to the faith of Christ, and we can rightly, and should, call him our apostle'.[61] The Anglo-Saxon scholar had an extra reason to be grateful to Gregory: by converting them to Christianity, he had also taught them how to read. Bede tells us that among the equipment brought to England by the Augustinian mission were 'many books'.[62] Bede's scriptural commentaries follow closely the format articulated and developed in Gregory's *Moralia*, and in imitation of Gregory he produced his own collection of Gospel homilies.[63] Gregory's preferred allegorical and moral way of reading Scripture was of direct practical importance in the mission field. When Augustine wrote from Kent asking for advice on marriage and sexual matters, Gregory wrote back dismissing the literal importance of many Old Testament sexual taboos, and instead offered a more spiritual interpretation.[64]

Bede not only read Gregory, but recommended him to others. In his letter of November 734, he recommended the *Pastoral Care* to his pupil, Archbishop Egbert of York, as a work:

> in which he described in the clearest terms the kind of men who should be chosen to rule the Church, how they should live, with what discretion they ought to instruct the great variety of persons they address, and with what care they should daily bear in mind their own weaknesses.[65]

In recommending Gregory, he was following Pope Honorius I (625–38), whose letter to Edwin of Northumbria Bede included in his *History*. Honorius wrote to the newly converted king, exhorting him in the faith: 'So employ yourself in frequent readings from the works of Gregory, your apostle and my lord, and keep before your eyes the love of that teaching which he gladly gave you for the

[61] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.1 (Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory*, 1). Cf. Bede, *In Cantica Canticorum*, Book 6 (CChr.SL 119B, 359, lines 5–6): 'Gregory, that man beloved of God and men, who is also our father'; Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory*, 115.

[62] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.29; Markus, *Gregory*, 179–80.

[63] Bede's homilies often borrow directly from Gregory's; see *Opera homiletica*, ed. D. Hurst (CChr.SL 122), vii.

[64] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.27; see Markus, *Gregory*, 184.

[65] Cited in Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory*, 111.

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sake of your souls.'[66] The question of what was appropriate reading matter for churchmen (and laypeople) is one that we have seen exercised Gregory's mind in his correspondence with Desiderius of Vienne. This concern is also found in Alcuin's letter to Speratus in 797. The traditional identification of Speratus with Higbald of Lindisfarne has been disputed, but the letter is certainly a response to, and reflection on, the recent raids of Vikings: 'Let God's word be read at the priestly banquet. There it is fitting for the reader to be heard, not the harper: sermons of the fathers, not the songs of heathens. What has Ingeld to do with Christ? The house is narrow: it will not be able to hold them both.'[67] Whether or not Alcuin is deliberately recalling Gregory is hard to say, but there is no doubt that he has inherited a thoroughly Gregorian attitude on the propriety of reading pagan literature.[68] Gregory's habit of reading the events of history in simple terms as divine communications has been thoroughly absorbed, as has his attitude to the wider significance of reading, or indeed singing, pagan poetry. Praise of pagans, let alone their gods, cedes ground in the fight against the devil. The point shared by Alcuin with Gregory is not so much the potential moral harm of pagan literature, but rather its danger in the spiritual war played out in the history of the last age.

If bishops and rulers were not to read about wicked pagans, what should they read? Alcuin suggests patristic sermons. Bede suggests that his *Ecclesiastical History* will make good reading for King Ceolwulf of Northumbria, incorporating the king's desire to know of the deeds and wisdom of the famous men of his race (*nostrae gentis uirorum inlustriam*). Bede does not mean pagan heroes like Ingeld; for him, the illustrious men of the race are warrior

[66] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.17 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 94); see Richards, *Consul*, 73.

[67] 'Verba Dei legantur in sacerdotali convivio. Ibi decet lectorem audiri, non citharistam; sermones patrum, non carmina gentilium. Quid Hinieldus cum Christo? Angusta est domus: utrosque tenere non poterit': MGH Epp. 4, 183; see Richard North, *The Origins of Beowulf: From Virgil to Wiglaf* (Oxford, 2006), 132–56. Ingeld is a hero of Germanic legend, referred to in the Old English epic *Beowulf*; see *Klaeber's Beowulf*, ed. R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (Toronto, ON, 2008), 68–9, lines 2020–5. Anglo-Saxon aristocratic taste for heroic legend is demonstrated by *Beowulf* itself.

[68] It would be surprising if Alcuin did not know the *Registrum*; see *Registrum*, ed. Norberg, v–xii, esp. vii.

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saints such as St Edwin and St Oswald.[69] An important influence on Bede is signalled by the phrasing of his letter to Ceolwulf:

> Now, in order to remove all occasions of doubt about those things that I have written, either in your mind or in the minds of any others who listen to or read this history, I will make it my business to state briefly from what sources I have gained my information.[70]

This statement has long been taken to establish Bede's credentials as a careful historian, though the marvellous nature of some of the events he describes is not generally accepted as contributing to this reputation. Why Bede says what he says is explained by his source here, the preface to Gregory's *Dialogues*. Gregory explains to Peter:

> I shall not hesitate to narrate what I have learned from worthy men. In this I am following the consecrated practice of the Scriptures, where it is perfectly clear that Mark and Luke composed their Gospels, not as eyewitnesses, but on the word of others. Nevertheless, to remove any grounds for doubt on the part of my readers, I am going to indicate on whose authority each account is based.[71]

This is more than the recollection of a felicitous turn of phrase, and Bede's borrowing points to his own attitude to the miracles he has included in the *History*. This also tells us something about why he has included marvellous material in the first place. Bede, imitating Gregory, thought miracles usually belonged to the Church's first age.[72] Gregory's *Dialogues* seem to have been written in response to a demand in Rome for hagiographical stories outside the martyrological genre. When Gregory was a young man, two Roman deacons, Pelagius and John, translated into Latin sayings of Eastern monastic fathers; both men went

[69] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Preface, 2.

[70] 'Vt autem in his quae scripsi uel tibi uel ceteris auditoribus siue lectoribus huius historiae occasionem dubitandi subtraham, quibus haec maxime auctoribus didicerim, breuiter intimare curabo': ibid. 2–3 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 2).

[71] 'Ea quae mihi sunt uirorum uenerabilium narratione conperta incunctanter narro sacrae auctoritatis exemplo, cum mihi luce clarius constet quia Marcus et Lucas euangelium quod scripserunt, non uisu sed auditu didicerunt. Sed ut dubitationis occasionem legentibus subtraham, per singula quae describo, quibus mihi haec auctoribus sint conperta manifesto': Gregory, *Dialogues* 16–17.

[72] Markus, *Gregory*, 62.

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on to become popes. Gregory's *Dialogues* must have fed the same sort of demand, but in a new way. They show this monastic spirit flourishing in sixth-century Italy, producing holiness and miracles. Bede's stories of English saints like Cuthbert and Chad, but also of the early Italian missionaries, do the same in yet another new landscape. There is, in this way of telling, a direct connection between Bede's seventh-century English saints and Gregory's sixth-century Italian ones. Bede not only marks the continuity, but also signals the literary debt to Gregory in his Preface. The *Dialogues* update sanctity, showing that holiness is possible in familiar surroundings. Within the wider context of the great history he is telling, Bede does the same thing: he presents seventh-century English sanctity, something close to home.

Like Gregory, Bede is interested in ascetical, often coenobitic, sanctity. This is unsurprising given Bede's retrospect on the first age of the Anglo-Saxon Church, which saw a remarkable growth of monasticism, of which Bede himself was a product. The monastic ideal is held up in another of Bede's direct borrowings from the *Dialogues*' Preface, in the account of Gregory's life included in the *History*:

> his soul was then above all transitory things, so that he rose superior to all things subject to change. He used to think nothing but thoughts of heaven, so that, even though still imprisoned in the body, he was able to pass in contemplation beyond the barriers of the flesh ...[73]

Bede's written corpus is more resolutely other-worldly than Gregory's, however. Reading can be dangerous, especially if readers take writers at their word. Honorius's recommendation of Gregory's works (included in Bede's *History*) has already been noted. Anyone who took Gregory's prefaces seriously might shun public life altogether. Marinianus of Ravenna made this choice; he had read enough of Gregory, it seems. And indeed this is what King Ceolwulf, Bede's reader, did too. Having become king in 729, Ceolwulf was deposed and tonsured in 731; he then returned to his throne.[74] Bede dedicated the *History* to him in 734; failure

[73] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.1 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 124).

[74] See Peter Hunter Blair, *Northumbria in the Days of Bede* (London, 1977), 59; D. P. Kirby, 'Northumbria in the Time of Wilfrid', in idem, ed., *Saint Wilfrid at Hexham*

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in dynastic politics led Ceolwulf to retire (perhaps forcibly) to Lindisfarne in 737, where he continued as a monk for thirty years. The tensions within the Gregorian ideal found expression in the political crisis engulfing eighth-century Northumbria, a kingdom which had seen its power, prestige and territorial extent decline since the death of King Ecgfrith in 685.[75] With a monastic detachment, Ceolwulf could easily have contemplated the further decline of the kingdom he once had ruled. A century later another English king, Alfred the Great, was able to achieve a more careful balance between the responsibilities of public life and the desire for reflective retirement. A key to this balance was his close reading of Gregory the Great.

Alfred and Gregory

When Alfred was a boy, he accompanied his father King Æthelwulf of Wessex on a journey to Rome in 851/2. Alfred would have been about ten years old and may have spent up to a year in the city. Still extant at the time was a portrait of Gregory, beside other members of his family, painted on a wall of their old family villa; it is more than likely that Alfred saw this portrait.[76] What we know with certainty, however, is that Alfred was a close reader of Gregory. Alfred, the fourth son of Æthelwulf, came to the throne in 871, having survived his older brothers.[77] At the time the Vikings controlled much of the territory of the English kingdoms; their first raids on Northumbria in the late eighth century had led into a century of warfare and destruction. Indeed, not long after his accession Alfred lost control of Wessex to Viking raiders and was forced to retreat to the marshes of Athelney. Alfred's eventual triumph over the Vikings and consolidation of his rule over Wessex and large parts of Mercia was accompanied by a programme of

(Newcastle upon Tyne, 1974), 1–34, at 20–1; John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), 109, 111.

75 See Blair, *Northumbria in the Days of Bede*, 36–61.

76 Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory*, 109–10, has argued that the unique decorated initial in the mid eighth-century manuscript known as the Leningrad Bede begins the section which is the life of Gregory, and probably contains his portrait. This may well have been based on observation of this portrait of Gregory; it still survived in the mid 870s, when John the Deacon described it in his *Life* of Gregory.

77 See Richard Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Edinburgh, 1998), 136–68.

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cultural and institutional renewal,[78] which included the translation of a number of Latin works into Old English. The first of these was Gregory's *Pastoral Rule*, which is prefaced by a letter from Alfred to his bishops:

> King Alfred sends words of greeting lovingly and amicably to Werferth ... I would have it known that very often it has come into my mind what men of learning there were formerly throughout England, both in religious and secular orders; and how there were happy times throughout England; and how the kings, who had authority over this people, obeyed God and his messengers; and how they not only maintained their peace, morality and authority at home but also extended their territory outside; and how they succeeded both in warfare and in wisdom.[79]

The portrayal of this happy time by Alfred suggests that he has been reading Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. This golden age, however, gave way to decline as 'everything was ransacked and burned', especially books. These lost books, however, were in a Latin nobody now could read. Consequently, Alfred proposes a programme of translation:

> Therefore it seems better to me ... that we too should turn into the language that we can all understand certain books which are the most necessary for all men to know ... so that all the free-born young men now in England who have the means to apply themselves to it, may be set to learning.[80]

Alfred will lead this programme by example. The example is not only literary, however, as his choice of the first text draws on an important historical example:

> When I recalled how knowledge of Latin had previously decayed throughout England, and yet many could still read

[78] See Barbara Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1995), 192–239.

[79] Michael Lapidge and Simon Keynes, transl., *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983), 124–5; *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. Henry Sweet, 2 vols (Oxford, 1871). See Jennifer Morrish, 'King Alfred's Letter as a Source on Learning in England', in Paul E. Szarmach, ed., *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose* (New York, 1986), 87–108.

[80] Lapidge and Keynes, transl., *Alfred the Great*, 124–5.

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> things written in English, I then began, amidst the various and multifarious afflictions of this kingdom, to translate into English the book which in Latin is called *Pastoralis*, in English, Shepherd-book, sometimes word for word, sometimes sense for sense, as I learnt it from Plegmund my archbishop, and Asser my bishop, and from Grimbald my mass-priest and John my mass-priest.[81]

Exactly which part of the translation (or even the Preface) is Alfred's is a contentious matter,[82] though there can be no doubt that the work was produced at his court and instituted one of the king's most important policies. His plan for an educational renewal led to the creation of a ruling class with some literacy in English, and to the translation of a number of Latin works for them to read. However, the inclusion of the *Pastoral Rule* comes as a surprise: how could it be considered so necessary for all men to know? The king tells us that copies are to be sent to all his bishops, though we also have his indication that this work, before all others, was to be read by young English noblemen. By the ninth century, the *Pastoral Rule* was certainly required reading for all bishops in Francia and was placed in their hands when they were consecrated.[83] This explains Alfred's desire that there should be a copy for each of his bishops, including Werferth of Worcester, whose copy survives.[84] It seems beyond doubt that Alfred's advisors saw the king's role very much as one of Gregory's *rectores*, making the work suitable for his own reading and for those who shared in his government of the refounded English kingdom.

Gregory's influence on the development of Anglo-Saxon culture and society was far-reaching, most obviously in his decision to send missionaries to England, but also through his works and the ideas they contained. The translation of some of his works into English only extended this.[85] Asser, the king's Welsh advisor,

[81] Ibid. 126.

[82] See Richard W. Clement, 'The Production of the *Pastoral Care*: King Alfred and his Helpers', in Szarmach, ed., *Earlier Old English Prose*, 129–52; Malcolm Godden, 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?', *Medium Ævum* 76 (2007), 1–23.

[83] Allen Frantzen, *King Alfred* (Boston, MA, 1986), 25; see Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Church and the Carolingian Reforms, 789–895* (London, 1977), 88–90.

[84] Oxford, Bodl., MS Hatton 20; see N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957), 384–6 (no. 324).

[85] See, e.g., Kees Dekker, 'King Alfred's Translation of Gregory's *Dialogi*: Tales for

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tells us in his biography of Alfred that Werferth was commissioned by the king to translate Gregory's *Dialogues*.[86] This must have been soon after the Old English *Pastoral Care* was completed. Alfred provides a preface here too:

> I, Alfred, honoured by the dignity of kingship through Christ's gift, have clearly perceived and frequently heard from statements in holy books that for us, to whom God has granted such a lofty station of worldly office, there is the most urgent necessity *occasionally* to calm our minds amidst these earthly anxieties and direct them to divine and spiritual law. And therefore I sought and petitioned my true friends that they should write down for me from God's books the following teaching concerning the virtues and miracles of holy men, so that, strengthened through the exhortations and love they contain, I might *occasionally* reflect in my mind on heavenly things amidst these earthly tribulations.[87]

It is significant that Gregory's own prefaces are not included by the Anglo-Saxon translators: new times present new contexts, even if these echo the old. The transience of this world and its glories would not have to be explained to a man like Alfred. Gregory had found himself in much the same situation in the Italy of the Lombards, whose destructive violence is closely described in the *Dialogues*. Reflection on the emptiness of this world's glories, however, does not necessarily lead to flight. An alternative, for a ruler of the kind described in the *Pastoral Rule*, is to establish good government on a sound Christian polity. Such an approach requires a balanced reading of Gregory – he is not just the monkishly reluctant pope, longing for his cloister, but also a powerful and capable administrator who understands the rapid change of the political order of his time and creates a new system. Alfred reads both the *Pastoral Rule* and the *Dialogues*, but the *Dialogues* are read only 'occasionally' (a word he

the Unlearned?', in Bremmer et al., eds, *Rome and the North*, 27–50; Nicole Guenther Discenza, 'The Influence of Gregory the Great on the Alfredian Social Imaginary', in ibid. 67–82.

[86] *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (repr. Oxford, 1959), 62.

[87] Lapidge and Keynes, transl., *Alfred the Great*, 96 (italics mine); *Bischof Wærferths von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*, ed. Hans Hecht (Leipzig, 1907), 1.

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uses twice in his Preface; Old English *hwilum*), when he has the chance to retreat from the cares of office.

Other works and translations are associated with Alfred's programme – Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, Augustine's *Soliloquies*, Orosius's *World History*, and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* itself – all of which are treated with a high degree of freedom by their translators.[88] Only Gregory's works are translated with close accuracy and without major omission or interpolation.[89] John the Deacon's *Life* of Gregory was commissioned by John VIII in the 870s, coinciding with the early crisis years of Alfred's faraway kingdom. It has been suggested that the pope was responding to the surprising devotion in the Germanic North to a saint who had become neglected in his own home in the city holding his relics.[90] John the Deacon's claim, in the mouth of his predecessor Peter, that Gregory's works were divinely inspired, is manifest in their careful translation into Old English. This is unlikely to be a coincidence. Alfred, uniquely among English kings, had spent a whole year of his childhood in Rome, Gregory's own city. There can be no doubt that like all Englishmen, he knew that Gregory was the apostle of the English, and that from Rome Augustine had come. But the grown-up Alfred also would have remembered a city in ruins, and as king recognized the similarities between his own precarious situation and Gregory's. Alfred, we know from Asser, suffered a serious and periodically debilitating illness, as had Gregory for much of his reign.[91] In response to pagan

[88] Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine, eds, *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's* De consolatione philosophiae (Oxford, 2009); *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Janet Bately (London, 1980); *König Alfreds des Grossen Bearbeitung der Soliloquien des Augustinus*, ed. W. Endter (Hamburg, 1922); *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Thomas Miller (London, 1890).

[89] See Dorothy M. Horgan, 'The Old English *Pastoral Care*: The Scribal Contribution', in Szarmach, ed., *Earlier Old English Prose*, 109–28; David Yerkes, 'The Translation of Gregory's *Dialogues* and its Revision: Textual History, Provenance, Authorship', in ibid. 335–44.

[90] Jeffreys, *Consul*, 260. John was archdeacon of Rome by 853, and may well even have met King Æthelwulf (and Alfred) during their Roman stay. Three surviving pieces of correspondence from John VIII to England each refer to Gregory and the Gregorian mission: to Burgred, king of Mercia (874); to the archbishops of York and Canterbury (873 x 875), which mentions Englishmen keeping St Gregory's Vigil in Rome; and to Ethelred, archbishop of Canterbury (877 x 78); see D. Whitelock, transl., *English Historical Documents, c.500–1042* (London, 1968), 810–13.

[91] See David Pratt, 'The Illnesses of Alfred the Great', *Anglo-Saxon England* 30

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Barbarian invasions, Gregory sent out missionaries; Alfred made efforts to convert the Vikings.[92] We know very little about how this proceeded, but do know that Alfred sponsored the Viking king Guthrum at baptism. One of the things which made Alfred 'great' like Gregory was that he was able to achieve the balance between the demands made on the ruler with those made on the human soul, the ruler properly understanding the emptiness of worldly glory while nevertheless working to build Christian society. This ideal, with all its inherent tensions, is one which is found across the Gregorian corpus, even if individual works point in opposite directions. Gregory's contribution to literature, however, lies not just in his works and their universal popularity, but also in the idea of literature he passed on to medieval readers. Christians should read Christian literature by Christian authors, and their reading should focus their minds on the things of heaven. This does not take away from the need to build on earth a society which mirrors the values and order of heaven, which Christian literature should also encourage. In Alfred the Great, Gregory the Great had found an ideal reader.

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(2002), 39–90.

[92] Lapidge and Keynes, transl., *Alfred the Great*, 121.

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