THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

Per Creaturam Invisibilem: Divine Providence in the Thought of St. Gregory the Great

A DISSERTATION

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The legacy of Gregory the Great (540-604) has been, at best, a mixed affair. While widely respected for his contributions to Christian morality and spirituality, or even his own practical administration as pope, his belief in such things as miracles, demonic and angelic interventions, the imminent end of the world, visions, relics, and the like has typically only garnered him criticism and confusion. The problem with such an evaluation of Gregory’s thought is that it fails to perceive the place and role of the miraculous within the larger spectrum of his theology. Providence, as an architectonic doctrine within Christian theology, is conceptually linked to nearly every aspect of Christian theology, thus it is uniquely suited for evaluating Gregory’s belief in the miraculous within the larger spectrum of his thought. The purpose of this study is to examine Gregory’s belief in the miraculous within the larger context of his theology of providence.

Gregory’s theology of providence, while principally concerned with God’s operation within history, conceptually relied upon a distinct cosmology. Within Gregory’s cosmological perception God governed the universe through its hierarchical structure, wherein he governed the universe from the top downward, utilizing the invisible aspects of creation to govern the visible. As such, visible creation retained no causality independent from God or the operation of the invisible world. Within this cosmological perspective all creation was miraculous, and invariably controlled by God, not only cosmologically, but historically as well. Gregory believed God ordered all of history by means of invisible
creation and grace, such that his predestined plan was invariably fulfilled through the free action, and effort, of created beings. Within this theological system, God ordered all things and events by mediating his will and power to invisible agents, angels, demons, and human souls, who then fulfilled God’s divine plan within creation and history on his behalf. Gregory’s belief in the miraculous, therefore, was an essential expression of his theology of providence, as well as the entire system of his thought.
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ABBREVIATIONS

ACO   Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum
CCL   Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina.
PG    Patrologia Graeca
PL    Patrologia Latina.
SC    Sources Chrétienes
CHAPTER 1

GREGORY THE GREAT IN MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

The legacy of Gregory the Great (540-604) has been, at best, a mixed affair. He was popular and extremely influential in his own day, as well as in the Middle Ages that followed.¹ His spirituality, morality, papacy, and conception of the Church were all staples of medieval Christianity. Yet, often for the very reasons he was revered as “great” by those of the Middle Ages, he fell into disfavor during the Reformation and Enlightenment.² His fantastic tales of miracles, demons, and excursions into the afterlife, as well as his focus on relics and saints, have often been at odds with the spirituality and sensibility of Christians coming from a post-Enlightenment perspective, so much so that Gregory has received the title pater superstitionis.³

Recently, there have occurred attempts to “rehabilitate” Gregory and his contributions to Christian thought and spirituality.⁴ Typically, the methodology of such studies has been to manifest the coherency of Gregory’s thought by distinguishing the ideas and views that characterized his thought and gave them their structure and cogency. In the course of such studies a number of core ideas have emerged. One Gregorian theme frequently commented

² For a brief history of this reaction to Gregory, see Francis Clark, The ‘Gregorian’ Dialogues and the Origins of Benedictine Monasticism (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 9-17.
³ A classic example of this critique of Gregory came from Adolf von Harnack, who imputed to Gregory the invention of the superstitious Christianity that he believed defined the Middle Ages. See Adolf von Harnack, The History of Dogma, trans. Neil Buchanan (Freiburg, 1886-90; New York: Dover, 1961), 5:262-263.
⁴ This “rehabilitation” was the declared intent of Claude Dagens in his study of Gregory. See Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 21. Carole Straw, while not outright declaring her intent to rehabilitate Gregory, achieved a similar outcome by virtue of situating Gregory’s belief in the miraculous within the larger framework of his cosmology and spirituality, so as to manifest their unity, coherence, and internal logic. See Carole Straw, Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 7-8.
on was his eschatology, which was characterized by the expectation of the imminent end of
the world.\(^5\) Another idea was the role of antonyms or complementary opposites in his
thought, which structured his views on the human person, sin and redemption, and even the
cosmos itself.\(^6\) A related idea was Gregory’s view of the created universe as a sacramental
allegory, wherein the visible world was a sacramental expression of the invisible.\(^7\) He has
also been conceived as initiating a Biblical culture, having proposed the Bible as the sole
source of all valuable knowledge.\(^8\) A number of other ideas have been proposed, such as the
role of contemplation,\(^9\) the human experience of pain,\(^10\) and even Gregory’s own pastoral
care.\(^11\)

Surprisingly, inasmuch as it was so often a topic of Gregorian discourse, no study,
with a few minor exceptions, has postulated the idea of divine providence as a core idea for

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\(^5\) Gregory’s eschatology, as it was so often a topic of his discourse, has been discussed by a number of
authors, all suggesting it as a hallmark of Gregory’s spirituality and theology. See Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*,
26-27, 376-428; Pierre Boglioni, “Miracle et nature chez Grégoire le Grand,” in *Epopées, legendes et miracles*
(Montreal: Bellarmin, 1974), 62-66; Robert A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (Cambridge:

\(^6\) Dagens spoke to how Gregory utilized the antonyms of exterior and interior to structure his thought on
the human person and spiritual life. See Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 133-243. Straw further added a number of
other such complementary opposites, which she believed structured Gregory’s entire theology. These
additional opposites were: body/soul, spirit/flesh, interiority/exteriority, activity/contemplation,

\(^7\) See William McCready, *Signs of Sanctity: Miracles in the Thought of Gregory the Great* (Toronto:
Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1989), 258; Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 20, 257-60.

\(^8\) See Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 31-81; G. R. Evans, *The Thought of Gregory the Great* (New York:

\(^9\) Bernard McGinn has suggested that the idea of contemplation defined Gregory’s entire conception of
salvation history. See Bernard McGinn, “Contemplation in Gregory the Great” in *Gregory the Great: A

\(^10\) Kevin Hester proposed that the two major themes of Gregory’s theology were his eschatology and the
human experience of pain, which Gregory reconciled and united through his Christology. See Kevin Hester,
*Eschatology and Pain in St. Gregory the Great: The Christological Synthesis of Gregory’s Morals on the Book
of Job* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2007), 1-3, 129.

understanding and explaining Gregory’s thought. Whether commenting on the approach of the Antichrist and the end of the world, or the devastations and wars of his day, or even events of his own personal life, God’s providence was a topic that continually occupied Gregory’s mind and was the subject of much of his exposition. Moreover, as an architectonic idea within Christian theology, divine providence touches nearly every aspect of Christian theology. Consequently, it is uniquely suited for explicating and understanding the internal logic and views that unified Gregory’s thought. On this supposition, then, the present study will seek to explicate and explain Gregory’s concept of divine providence as a means for both understanding and evaluating his thought.

Formulating Gregory’s theory of divine providence is no easy task, as it has not been a topic frequently examined within modern scholarship. Generally, modern scholarship has approached Gregory from the perspective of history, examining his person and thought in the era in which he lived. The other common approach has been the attempt to characterize

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12 Both Pierre Boglioni and Carole Straw treated Gregory’s understanding of divine providence, but only in passing, as a piece within their larger studies of his thought. See Boglioni, *Miracle*, 51-62; Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 11-12, 28-65.

13 Gregory conceived himself as living in the eve of the world’s end. He saw in the events of his day providential markers that the predestined end was about to occur, which would be made manifest by the occurrence of a number of prophesized indicators, such as the coming of the Antichrist. See *Ep*. 3.29, 31; 5.37-38, 44; 7.28; 9.157, 232; 10.21; 11.37; 13.1; *Mor*. 2.59; 4.15-17; 9.15-17; 12.48; 13.12-13; *HEv*. 1.1.

14 Gregory saw each event in history as the unfolding of God’s providence. For example, he saw the wars, plagues, and destruction of his day as God’s punishments for sin. See *Ep*. 1.17; 2.2; 5.37; 9.153; 10.21.

15 Even events of his own life, such as his election to the papacy, were ascribed by Gregory to the hand of God’s providence. See *Ep*. 1.41.

and explain his particular mentalité or world-view.\textsuperscript{17} Topical treatments of Gregory’s theology, while existing, are less common. In the course of such topical treatments, a number of aspects of Gregory’s theology of providence have been studied, such as his conception of miracles,\textsuperscript{18} nature,\textsuperscript{19} eschatology,\textsuperscript{20} God,\textsuperscript{21} sin,\textsuperscript{22} grace,\textsuperscript{23} Christ,\textsuperscript{24} redemption,\textsuperscript{25} angels,\textsuperscript{26} and aspects of his cosmology.\textsuperscript{27} Nevertheless, there has been no study that has sought to correlate these various topics of Gregorian thought within the context of his understanding of divine providence. This study intends to fill this existing gap in Gregorian scholarship.

One of the benefits for examining Gregory’s theology of providence is that it has the capacity to integrate the various strands of his thought, thereby showing the unity and coherence of his thinking on the various topics upon which he commented. In a particular way, Gregory’s theology of providence has the ability to provide a context for understanding his thought on miracles. Throughout his corpus, but most noticeably in his \textit{Dialogues},

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{18} There have been a number of studies that have indirectly treated Gregory’s conception of miracles. Only a few have made his conception of miracles the particular aim of their study. These studies are: McCready, \textit{Signs of Sanctity}; Boglioni, \textit{Miracle}; Sofia Boesch Gajano, “Demoni e miracoli nei ‘Dialogi’ di Gregorio Magno,” in \textit{Hagiographie, Cultures et Societes, 4-12e Siècles} (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1981), 263-280.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} McCready, \textit{Signs of Sanctity}, 206-38; Boglioni, \textit{Miracle}, 14-37.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Gregory’s eschatology was a central theme of his theology and world-view, and as such, it has been treated by a number of authors. See Dagens, \textit{Saint Grégoire}, 346-428; Markus, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 51-61; Boglioni, \textit{Miracle}, 62-66.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Evans, \textit{Thought of Gregory}, 55-60.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Dagens, \textit{Saint Grégoire}, 165-171; Straw, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 107-146.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Dagens, \textit{Saint Grégoire}, 247-272.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Straw, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 150-168.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Dagens, \textit{Saint Grégoire}, 173-201, 245-272; Straw, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 147-235.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Steven Chase, \textit{Angelic Spirituality: Medieval Perspectives on the Ways of Angels} (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 91-95, 272-73.
  \item \textsuperscript{27} Straw, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 28-65.
\end{itemize}
Gregory spoke of a number of miraculous events. Whether it was a boy being raised from the dead, food being miraculously multiplied, demons appearing and causing mischief, miraculous relics, people seeing angels, or even excursions into the afterlife, all were reported by Gregory and used by him to illustrate spiritual and moral truths. The question these stories have raised for Gregorian scholarship is their place within his thought. Are such stories an aberration within Gregory’s otherwise praiseworthy thought? Are such stories merely fictitious tales he told to teach spiritual truths? Are such stories a true expression of his belief in the miraculous? As miracle stories so often appear in Gregory’s corpus, the answers to these questions are essential for understanding his thought.

Moreover, insofar as miracles comprise an important component of divine providence, their role in his thought must be distinguished in order to explicate fully his conception of divine providence. Consequently, some time will be spent here examining Gregory’s understanding of miracles. This examination will be used to support the purposes and need of the present study, after which the particular methodology of this study will be explained.

**Gregory’s Understanding of Miracles**

It is not always an easy task to distinguish Gregory’s understanding of miracles, nor even his own personal belief in their existence. Comments he made seem to contradict each other, often leaving the modern reader perplexed as to his actual position. Gregory at times

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28 Besides those stories found in his *Dialogues*, Gregory reported 14 miracle stories in his *Homilies on the Gospels*. For an examination of these additional stories, see: McCready, *Signs of Sanctity*, 19-20, n.30. Similarly, a large number appeared in his *Letters*, see *Ep.* 3.61; 4.30; 7.23; 8.29; 11.26, 36, 48.

29 Two studies that have directly addressed this question are: Boglioni, *Miracle*; McCready, *Signs of Sanctity*.

30 Carole Straw made this point in the course of her study of Gregory. She stated: “This miraculous side [of Gregory] needs to be understood as an integral part of his thought, for it is emblematic of a larger vision of the world.” Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 8.
seemed to indicate that miracles were a common phenomenon in his day and one in which he certainly believed. At other times he seemed to minimize their occurrence and importance, relegating physical miracles to the Apostolic Age and stressing spiritual ones in his own day. Thus, the starting point for examining his particular conception of miracles will be his own personal belief in their existence.

**Gregory’s Belief in Miracles**

A helpful way to begin to understand Gregory’s belief in miracles is to examine his reports of miracles in the context of the hagiographical tradition of which his stories formed an important part. Hagiography is not history; the aims of each are quite different. While history aims at the veracity of the facts it relates, the purposes of hagiography lie elsewhere. Gregory himself, at the start of his *Dialogues*, stated that the intended purpose of his miracle stories were pedagogical ones: to teach and edify his audience. Besides this explicit intention, scholars have discerned many other motivations of Gregory in his work. Petersen has indicated that Gregory sought to manifest a new model of holiness, a new martyrdom,

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31 Besides the miracles he reported in the *Dialogues* and *Homilies on the Gospels*, Gregory reported a number of contemporary miracles in his letters. On numerous occasions he reported miracles occurring through filings from the chains of Saints Peter and Paul that he himself had sent. See *Ep.* 1.25, 29-30; 4.30; 7.25; 8.33; 9.229; 12.2. Moreover, he actually had to warn Augustine in England to remain humble in light of the many miracles that were taking place at his hands. See *Ep.* 11.36.

32 Gregory, as had Augustine before him, believed the importance of physical miracles to be conversion. Consequently, he stated that miracles were common in the Apostolic Age where they were needed to convert non-Christians, but in his own day, they were no longer as necessary because Christianity had become widely diffused. A couple of good discussions on this aspect of Gregory’s thought can be found in: Markus, *Gregory the Great*, 56; Adalbert de Vogüé, “Grégoire le Grand et ses Dialogues d’après deux ouvrages récents,” *Revue d’Histoire Ecclesiastique* 83 (1988): 290-91. As Christianity was widespread in his day, Gregory stressed the need for spiritual miracles rather than physical ones. See *Dial.* 3.17.

33 There has been considerable scholarship seeking to contextualize Gregory’s miracle stories within the hagiographical tradition, of which he was an eminent figure. See Joan M. Petersen, *The Dialogues of Gregory the Great in their Late Antique Cultural Background* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984); Pearse Cusack, *An Interpretation of the Second Dialogue of Gregory the Great: Hagiography and St. Benedict* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993); and Adalbert de Vogüé, “Introduction” in *Dialogues de Grégoire le Grand*, critical notes and text by Adalbert de Vogüé, trans. Paul Antin (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1978-80), 25-163.

34 *Dial.* 1.Praef.
which was suited to his own day. Another suggested purpose was that he was trying to highlight the spiritual importance of Rome in light of the loss of its political prestige.

Carole Straw added:

These examples of saints are a two-fold aid to the souls of the listeners, filling them with love and longing, yet humbling them before the greater deeds of others. Like medicine nursing the balance of health, the stories inspire hope and love, while preserving humility and salutary fear of judgment.

Peter Brown postulated that Gregory was issuing a warning call to Christians in his *Dialogues* in light of the impending “Last Days” that the *Dialogues* announced. Further still, Robert Markus suggested that Gregory used such stories to manifest the presence of the invisible world to his audience, so that they would not forsake it for the material world.

Miracle stories, then, functioned as a pedagogical tool for Gregory. They represent hagiographical *vitae* or *exempla* whose purpose, rather than biography, was to paint a portrait of the holy man possessing those characteristics expected of a holy man, preeminent of which was the ability to perform miracles. Gregory used these *exempla*, a form of teaching device he employed often, in order to better teach various spiritual truths in way that would appeal to a mixed audience. Gregory had mentioned several times that such *exempla* were

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35 Petersen suggested that Gregory distinguished between two types of martyrdom, martyrdom *in publico* and martyrdom *in occulto*. The first represented the traditional form of martyrdom where physical death occurred and which was representative of the first period of Christianity. The second form, which was constituted not by physical death but death to the desires of the flesh, was the new model of martyrdom Gregory was trying to construct through these stories. See Petersen, *Dialogues*, 89.

36 Ibid., 56-57.

37 Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 70.


40 Petersen, *Dialogues*, 54.

41 The question of the intended audience for the *Dialogues* has been a much discussed topic and one where conclusions vary. Evans suggested that the *Dialogues* were intended primarily for the uneducated laity,
well suited for instruction, particularly for the uneducated. They could understand the goal or truth of these exempla, like poetry or art, was found in the overall picture, rather than the individual, constitutive details. Consequently, the authors of such hagiographical exempla often modified or fabricated facts for the sake of the picture, the truth, they sought to present. Gregory, in line with this tradition, more than likely did the same.

Supporting this conclusion, there is much evidence to suggest that Gregory utilized antecedent hagiographical material, perhaps even the Bible, and modified them to suit his own pedagogical ends. For example, Adalbert de Vogüé has shown in the introduction to his critical French translation of the Dialogues that many of Gregory’s stories manifested great similarities to stories told about other saints by earlier authors, such as Augustine, Cassian, Sulpicius Severus, Athanasius, Palladius, Rufinus, Theodoret, Jerome, among others. Furthermore, he suggested that a couple of doublets exist among Gregory’s stories further indicating that he was drawing upon, and modifying, existing material. Petersen argued that Gregory drew from an existing hagiographical oral tradition to construct his own stories. Pearse Cusak concluded that Gregory’s stories of Benedict in Book II of the Dialogues were patterned after the prophets Elijah and Elisha, as found in 1 and 2 Kings of

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42 Gregory mentioned numerous times that examples, whether paintings, stories, or sculptures, had the ability to instruct the faithful, particularly the uneducated, in a way mere words could not. See Past. 2.3; 3.6; Ep. 9.209; 11.10.
43 William McCready provided a good overview of these characteristics of medieval hagiography, see McCready, Signs of Sanctity, 160-67.
44 At the start of his Dialogues, Gregory explicitly stated that he did modify some of the stories he told, but such modifications pertained only to wording rather than the actual substance or content of the stories themselves. See Dial. 1.Praef.
45 Adalbert de Vogüé, Dialogues, 110-140.
46 Petersen, Dialogues, 15.
the Old Testament. If Gregory modified existing stories to create his own, as these studies suggest, it leaves in doubt the veracity he would have attached to them in his own mind.

A helpful tool for clarifying Gregory’s position on miracles is to compare his understanding and use of them to his Scriptural exegesis. Gregory himself gave the foundation for such a comparison in the prologue to his Dialogues wherein he suggested that miracle stories could be used for similar purposes as Scripture. In Scripture, as in the world itself, Gregory recognized different levels of existence, the exterior and physical, as well as the interior and spiritual. It was from such different levels of existence that Gregory understood different levels of meaning both in Scripture and in the world. In Scripture, Gregory recognized three different levels of meaning: the historical, the allegorical, and the moral. The historical was the literal meaning of the words of Scripture, while the allegorical was the more profound sense of Scripture rooted in the meaning given through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Lastly, the moral consisted of the value Scripture had for shaping one’s life and actions. While the historical sense was always primary, Gregory’s focus in his exegesis was the attempt to draw out the various spiritual and moral meanings of a text. The same was true for his miracle stories.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{47} Cusak, An Interpretation, 9-11.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{48} Dial. 1.Praef.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{49} Carole Straw has suggested that Gregory’s entire world view, as well as his view of Scripture, was rooted in the complementary polarity between exterior and interior, physical and spiritual. See Straw, Gregory the Great, 18-20.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{50} On Gregory’s use of the three senses of Scripture, the historical, allegorical, and tropological, see Grover A. Zinn Jr., “Exegesis and Spirituality in the Writings of Gregory the Great,” in Gregory the Great: A Symposium, 168-70. Henri de Lubac concluded that Gregory recognized and used a fourth sense of scripture, the anagogical sense. Lubac even asserted that “saint Gregory was one of the principal initiators and one of the greatest patrons of the medieval doctrine of the fourfold sense [of Scripture].” See Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture, vol. 1, trans. Mark Sebanc (Paris, 1959; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 134.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{51} See Mor. 1.37-56.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{52} Markus, Signs and Meanings, 49-51.}\]
Gregory understood the miracle stories he told very much in the same sense as Scripture. Just as God acted in the events of Scripture, giving them a deeper sense and meaning, God likewise acted in the lives of the saints themselves. Consequently, just as Scripture had an historical and allegorical meaning, so also did the miracles performed by the saints. While in both cases Gregory’s purpose was highlighting allegorical and moral truths, those very spiritual truths were derived from the historical truth of the story told. Thus, it is only on the supposition that the stories told were true, whether Scriptural or of the saints, that the further allegorical meanings had any validity. This fact is obvious, for instance, when one looks at the miracle stories of Book IV, which Gregory reported to prove the existence and immortality of the soul. If Gregory did not believe the stories he told were true, they would not serve the very function for which he told them: to prove the soul lives on after death. Thus, just as Gregory believed in the historical truth of the stories in Scripture, he likewise believed in the substantial historicity of the miracle stories he told.

Different lines of argumentation have been brought forth in support of this conclusion. William McCready, explicitly addressing the question of Gregory’s belief in miracles, has suggested that Gregory named the sources for his stories as a testimony of his belief in them and as a sign of authenticity to his audience. He also argued that if Gregory did not believe in the truth of the stories he told, he would have betrayed his own principle against lying. Likewise, other authors have shown that such a belief in miracles is entirely

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53 See Dial. 1. Praef.
54 See Dial. 4.
55 Just because he believed that the stories he told were true does not indicate that all of them were. For instance, the story of Paulinus of Nola in Book III is known to be historically inaccurate. Paulinus died in 431, while the Vandals did not arrive in Italy until 455. Consequently, he could not have had the interaction with the Vandals that Gregory described. See Petersen, Dialogues, 16.
56 McCready, Signs of Sanctity, 111-17.
57 Ibid., 168-72.
consistent with the rest of Gregory’s thought.\textsuperscript{58} Such studies have indicated that belief in miracles was not an aberration to Gregory’s thought, but an authentic expression of it.

Moreover, Gregory’s own writings suggest that he firmly believed in the existence of miracles, even ones in his own day. Besides the many miracles he attested to in his \textit{Dialogues} and homilies, he reported current miracles occurring through relics he himself had sent.\textsuperscript{59} He also had to warn Augustine, whom Gregory had sent as a missionary to England, to be on guard against pride in light of the many miracles taking place.\textsuperscript{60} Additionally, later biographers of Gregory reported that many miracles had been performed by Gregory himself during his life, such as the Eucharist becoming bloody through his prayers,\textsuperscript{61} a relic cloth bleeding when Gregory cut it,\textsuperscript{62} and Gregory seeing a vision of St. Michael during penitential procession through the streets of Rome to avert the plague.\textsuperscript{63}

Gregory certainly believed in the existence of miracles. They constituted for Gregory a coherent manifestation of his understanding of God’s operation in the world, which is divine providence. Consequently, a rehabilitation of Gregory cannot be achieved simply by dismissing his miracle stories as works of fiction or an expression of naïve credulity. They were an essential aspect of his thought, and so, a rehabilitation of Gregory can only be achieved by means of understanding and articulating the place of miracles within his thought.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{58} Two very good examples are: Dagens, \textit{Saint Grégoire}; Carole Straw, \textit{Gregory the Great}.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Ep.} 1.25, 29-30; 13.43.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Ep.} 11.36.
\textsuperscript{61} Anonymous monk of Whitby, \textit{vita Greg}. 20.
\textsuperscript{63} Gregory of Tours, \textit{Hist. Franc.} 10.1.
\textsuperscript{64} Straw, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 8.
The Nature of Miracles

Part of the difficulty in understanding the role of miracles within Gregory’s thought is that he provided no clear or theoretical definition of his understanding of them. Such definitions were of little interest to Gregory. He cared little for metaphysical speculation or ontological categories; his concern was always that of a curator of souls whose purpose was moral reform or spiritual pedagogy. The existence of miracles, as in Scripture itself, was a self-evident fact that required neither justification nor explanation. Identifying his understanding of miracles is not an easy task. Nevertheless, there have been a number of recent studies that have made such an attempt.

Often, the methodological procedure for such studies has been to delineate Gregory’s understanding of miracle in contradistinction to his awareness of nature. The supposition here, very much a modern one, is that events are classified as miracles only on the condition they are constituted by a causality that falls outside that of nature itself. In such fashion then, miracles are defined in reference to a preexisting definition of nature. The difficulty with such a procedure is that in order to explain Gregory’s understanding of miracle, one

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65 Boglioni, Miracle, 72. The statement most closely approximating a definition of miracles occurred in Gregory’s Dialogues, where he stated that inasmuch as God created all things he had complete power over them and so could by-pass creation’s normal operation whenever he chose. See Dial. 3.32.

66 Such characterizations of Gregory can be found throughout recent studies of him. See Evans, Thought of Gregory, vii; Markus, Gregory the Great, 41; Boglioni, Miracle, 71; McCready, Signs of Sanctity, 63-64; Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 21-22.

67 Gregory’s belief in miracles, as well as his understanding of them, was ultimately tied to his cosmology. His view of miracles was not universal in his time, nor was it merely an expression of existing culture. As McCready has shown, miracles stories in Gregory’s time, as well as in preceding ages, had been greeted with skepticism and disbelief. See McCready, Signs of Sanctity, 206-10.

68 The two primary studies utilized in the present study are: McCready’s Signs of Sanctity and Boglioni’s Miracle. Another study treating the same subject, but not used in the present investigation, is Gajano, Demoni e miracoli, 263-280.

69 Both Boglioni and McCready approached the question of Gregory’s understanding of miracles from this perspective.

must first clarify his understanding of nature, which itself was not clearly defined by Gregory.  

Gregory had no clear conception of nature in its universal sense. In the first place, he did not distinguish a distinct causality operating in nature as opposed to miracles. He seemed to impute the same causality to each. Nevertheless, like Augustine before him, Gregory recognized distinct natures in individual things. These distinct natures governed the operation of each thing and thus constituted a secondary causality, but one that was never completely distinct from the first cause, God. In other words, he never recognized an independent *ordo naturae* that operated and had meaning independently of God. Rather, the significance of each thing and its meaning resided in God.

Gregory sees the world as a sacramental allegory, the parts of which are related by analogical thinking, his mind is drawn in the first instance to contemplate the divinely established significance of things rather than their place in causal order.

A neutral or scientific view of things was never Gregory’s focus; all his focus was on the

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71 Boglioni has pointed out that the term *natura* had many different meanings in late antiquity. Augustine himself used the term in three different senses. See Boglioni, *Miracle*, 29-31.
73 Augustine had suggested that the same divine causality acted in natural events as in miraculous ones, the difference being the speed and regularity in which they occurred. Nature was thus likened to a slow moving miracle. See Augustine, *Trin*. 3.11-13. Gregory’s position was very similar to Augustine’s. For example, Gregory suggested that Christ feeding 5000 men and a single seed growing into an abundance of grain were equally miraculous. See *Dial*. 3.37.
74 Gregory reported that the same causality occurred in resurrection as in a new birth. In fact, he believed new birth more miraculous than resurrection as it was more difficult to bring something new into existence rather than to restore it. See *Mor*. 6.18
75 Augustine recognized each individual thing as composed with a distinct structure or nature that governed its operation. These intrinsic structures, or *rationes seminales*, provided each thing with its own specific characteristics and operations. This understanding constituted a recognition of secondary causality, but one wherein causality was rooted in the structure of the thing itself, rather than in nature, in a universal sense. For an explanation of Augustine’s concept of *rationes seminales*, see Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, trans. L.E.M. Lynch (New York: Random House, 1960), 206-09. Gregory himself operated from a similar understanding. See McCready, *Signs of Sanctity*, 215-221; Boglioni, *Miracle*, 15-16.
76 Gregory did speak of an “*ordo naturae*,” but he used the term only to speak of the regularity found in creation, rather than as an order and intelligibility rooted in creation itself. See *Mor*. 29.22.
77 McCready, *Signs of Sanctity*, 258.
meaning each thing had by virtue of its relationship to God.78 The same was true for his understanding of the human person and history.

In human beings, as in other created things, Gregory clearly recognized distinct natures that governed their functions and activities. He spoke of human intellects, wills, souls, bodies, desires, and senses, all of which explained each human’s various qualities and attributes and were the vehicles of human action.79 Nevertheless, while humans had such intrinsic capacities, they never operated independently of the influence of the invisible realm of angels, demons, and God himself.80 In considering the human person, then, his interest was never a pure anthropology, but the playing out of the divine economy of salvation, that is, sin and grace.81

Human history was construed in a similar fashion. History was the locus of the unfolding of the drama of good and evil, God and Satan, angels and demons. The concern here was not to discern general laws, but God’s concrete acts and judgments in each event.82 The true meaning of an event was found then, as in Scripture, on the level of allegory: how it

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78 Boglioni, Miracle, 37: “Il ne s’agit pas de nier que Grégoire reconnaît les causes secondes et leur role, mais seulement de relever, sous une lecture attentive de ces texts, qu’elles sont comme oblitérées en faveur de la cause première: que le mécanisme intrinsèque d’un événement naturel ou social ne retient en rien son attention, toute concentrée sur la signification meme de l’événement; que, en somme, une vision neutre et scientifique de la nature est psychologiquement évacuée en faveur d’une lecture anthropocentrique, religieuse et morale.”

79 See Mor. 11.8.

80 According to Gregory, the human person never acted in isolation from a variety of invisible influences, whether demons prompting sin or grace illuminating the soul to conversion and repentance. There are numerous examples of this fact throughout his Moralia. See Mor. 4.49, 62-65; 5.50, 53; 6.45; 8.47; 9.29, 88; 10.13; 11.12-16; 13.19; 14.15, 40; 15.19.

81 Boglioni, Miracle, 50: “…ne s’est jamais préoccupé d’une anthropologie pure: il a toujours vu l’être humain et ses actions dans la perspective exclusive du péché et la grace.”

82 Ibid., 60: “Mais plus typiquement grégorien est le fait que les deux soient vus, non au niveau de la sagesse de Dieu qui ordonne des plans généraux, mais de sa puissance qui intervient ‘hic et nunc’ pour corriger, prévenir ou punir de façon infaillible: la ‘providentia est dispensatio’: ainsi la contemplation esthétique d’un ordre universel cède le pas à la stupeur craintive que suscite l’efficacité de l’action imprévisible de Dieu.”
revealed God and his divine intentions. Thus, while recognizing secondary causality in humanity and history, such considerations were bypassed in light of their allegorical and religious meanings.

Such allegorical meanings should not be construed as mere acts of intellection or interpretation, for they were rooted in Gregory’s view of creation itself. Creation, in its very form, testified to the existence of its Creator. This form within creation, its ontological structure, is what provided the basis for interpreting it allegorically. As Carole Straw explained in her description of Gregory’s cosmology:

God imbues the world with existence from the top downwards; just as he breathes life into man’s soul, and the soul in turn animates man’s body, so the invisible forces of the heavens activate the earth.

Here, the foundations for Gregory’s allegorical interpretation of creation, as well as his understanding of the miraculous, begin to take shape. His conception of the miraculous was not distinguished on the basis of a pre-existing conception of nature, but was rooted in his overall cosmology. Consequently, in the absence of any theoretical definition or explanation of miracles, the only way to understand their place within his thought is through explicating his cosmology.

**Gregory’s Cosmology**

A study of Gregory’s cosmology has been performed by Carole Straw in her work *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection*. While the primary purpose of her study was to examine Gregory’s world-view in light of its inherent polarities, Straw did provide, in

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83 Ibid., 75.
84 Mor. 11.4.
86 Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 50.
broad outlines, an account of his cosmology. She began this explanation by situating Gregory within his intellectual, historical, and cultural context.\(^{87}\)

Gregory’s world is still the late antique universe populated by Principalities, Thrones, and Powers; a reality whose boundaries witness an energetic traffic of visitors to and from the other world. Yet Gregory’s world differs subtly from the late antique world of Augustine, or that of the Desert Fathers, for theirs are worlds where one is still cautious of crossing these boundaries, still conscious of how this dull life differs from the shimmering brilliance of the other side.\(^{88}\)

Here, Straw began to provide the broad outlines of Gregory’s cosmology, showing both its debt to, and distinction from, the age that preceded him.

Straw contended that what was distinct about Gregory, and what distanced him from his predecessors, was the intimate connectedness he saw between the visible and invisible worlds. She stated:

> The supernatural is mingled with the world of ordinary experience, and in surprising ways. Visible and invisible, natural and supernatural, human and divine, carnal and spiritual are often directly and causally connected.\(^{89}\)

Of particular importance here is Straw’s reference to a causal connection between the visible and invisible worlds. According to Straw, Gregory operated from a “sacramental vision of reality.”\(^{90}\) This sacramental vision was rooted in the idea that the visible world was a sacramental expression of the underlying invisible world. “In Gregory’s world, invisible reality exists alongside the visible reality it sustains and determines.”\(^{91}\) Much as in the human person, where the invisible soul governs and operates the physical body, in the universe, invisible reality governs and operates the visible world.\(^{92}\) This cosmological

\(^{87}\) Ibid., I-27.

\(^{88}\) Ibid., 8.

\(^{89}\) Ibid., 9.

\(^{90}\) Ibid., 20.

\(^{91}\) Ibid., 10.

\(^{92}\) Straw spent an entire chapter showing how Gregory conceived the human person, much as in Stoic philosophy, as a microcosm of the universe itself. The human person, in its soul/body connection, displayed the
structure was the foundation for his understanding of miracles, wherein the invisible world manifested itself through the visible.

Straw’s study was very effective in drawing out the broad contours of Gregory’s cosmology, including the causal link between the invisible and visible worlds. Nevertheless, the scope of her study was much broader than Gregory’s view on miracles or even his cosmology, and consequently, numerous aspects of each were left largely unexamined. One particularly important issue not addressed was how miracles differed from God’s everyday governance of creation. Inasmuch as Gregory conceived all visible creation to be governed by the invisible, it is necessary to determine whether or not he saw a different causality operating in miracles as opposed to non-miraculous events. Here, an exploration of Gregory’s conception of divine providence would be very helpful, as it explicitly addresses this question.

Additionally, Straw did not fully distinguish the various levels of beings within creation, nor their place and role within the hierarchical chain of causality linking God to his creation and the invisible to the visible. These beings, whether angelic, human, or demonic, stood at the very center of Gregory’s conception of divine operation within creation, and likewise stood at the very heart of his conception of divine providence. They were for Gregory the actors of divine causality within creation, uniting his cosmology to its unfolding within history. Consequently, the doctrine of divine providence, inasmuch as it considers these agents of divine operation, uniting both cosmology and history, provides a better context for exploring Gregory’s understanding of the miraculous, as well as giving coherency to the rest of his thought.

connectedness of the invisible and visible aspects of creation. As the soul governed the body, so too did the invisible elements of creation govern the visible. See Ibid., 28-46.
Divine Providence

Divine providence, as a theological concept, has been understood over the course of human history in a number of divergent fashions. Each conception focuses on the operation and structure of the universe and its relationship to God. Divine providence is typically conceptualized in one of two fashions: historically or cosmologically. An historical conception of divine providence conceives providence in terms of God’s concrete judgments and actions within history itself, which in turn are presented often in a narrative fashion, almost forming a story of God’s providential activity. A very familiar example of such a conception of divine providence is the narrative of God’s activity that forms the Old Testament. A cosmological conception, on the other hand, focuses on the ontological structures within creation by which God orders and governs creation. Such a conception of divine providence, rooted heavily in philosophical categories, characterized the scholastic formulations of the Middle Ages. These two forms of divine providence do not constitute two distinct ways of God operating within creation, but rather two different ways of describing the one same providence. Consequently, while notionally distinct, the two are integrally related.

Gregory has been understood as conceiving divine providence in an historical fashion rather than a cosmological one. It was the practical administration of God’s judgments within history that concerned Gregory, not their intellectual justification. He never provided

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94 Boglioni equated the historical conception with the Roman intellectual tradition and the cosmological with the Greek intellectual tradition. See Boglioni, *Miracle*, 59-60.
97 Gregory’s focus was on God’s concrete acts within history so as to draw out their spiritual and moral meanings. See Boglioni, *Miracle*, 35-37, 51-62.
a discourse that specifically aimed at addressing the cosmological structures of divine providence. While silent about them, such cosmological structures were recognized by Gregory and were implicitly present throughout his thought. They acted as the conceptual basis for Gregory’s recognition of God’s action within history. Therefore, any attempt to address Gregory’s conception of divine providence must treat both aspects of his thought on the topic, the historical as well as the cosmological. The present study seeks to accomplish this task.

What is advantageous about approaching Gregory from the perspective of his theology of divine providence is that it provides a mechanism for showing the unity and internal coherence of his thought. Inasmuch as providence treats cosmological structures as well as God’s activity in history, it has the capacity for manifesting the unity inherent in Gregory’s thought. The concept of providence has the capacity to explain Gregory’s comments about God’s activity within history, as well as miracles, by virtue of connecting those comments to the intellectual infrastructure that provided their basis. In this fashion then, the concept of divine providence is very well suited for exploring and evaluating Gregory’s theology.

From this brief examination of Gregory’s conception of miracles, a few conclusions can be made. First of all, Gregory certainly believed in the existence of miracles of the type he reported in the *Dialogues* and elsewhere. While he may have altered various details, he believed in the substantial historicity of the miraculous events he reported. Secondly, this belief in miracles and his understanding of them was an expression of his cosmology, described as “sacramental,” wherein the visible world was a physical expression of the

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98 The presence of such cosmological foundations in Gregory’s thought was the basis of Carole Straw’s attempt to explicate them in her study of Gregory. See Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 28-46.
operation and activity of the underlying invisible world. Additionally, there still remain a number of aspects of Gregory’s understanding of miracles, as well as his cosmology, which need further clarification and understanding. Lastly, the concept of divine providence can act as a useful tool for understanding these additional aspects of Gregory’s thought that still need clarity, which in turn, is the foundational premise for the present study of Gregory’s theology of divine providence. Having now looked at the need and justification for the present study, the particular methodology that will be employed by this study will be explained.

The Methodology of the Present Study

A truism of Gregorian scholarship has been that Gregory was not a systematic theologian.99 His chosen methods of exposition never aimed at exploring a single topic in a full and comprehensive fashion. His writings always bore the character of description rather than definition.100 Nevertheless, to simply characterize Gregory’s theological contributions as unsystematic misses the true character and value of his thought and writings.101 In fact, it has been used as a pretext for a rather unfair assessment of Gregory and his work.

And, unlike Augustine, Gregory does not seem to have been particularly interested in exploring doctrine in a systematic way. We can see him appropriating the ideas of earlier writers, and nuancing various positions, but he neither staked out important new ground nor repackaged traditional teachings in novel ways.102

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99 It has been postulated that during Gregory’s time the doctrinal questions of the early Church had largely been settled. Consequently, Gregory’s focus was not doctrinal exposition, but moral reform. See Markus, *Gregory the Great*, 40-41. Dagens offered a similar conclusion. See Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 20, 79-81.

100 Boglioni, commenting on this aspect of Gregorian exposition, stated: “*Au niveau des définitions, on peut relever sa préférence pour les descriptions courtes, sentencieuses, presque proverbiales et à fort caractère d’exhortation, plutôt que pour les nettes délimitations conceptuelles.*” Boglioni, *Miracle*, 67.

101 Dagens has suggested that to summarily degrade Gregory’s theological contributions on the basis that he was neither a philosopher nor a systematician, anachronistically and improperly misses the true value of his work. See Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 21-22.

The problem with such an evaluation is that it fails to recognize the ways in which Gregory was a systematic thinker and theologian.

It is one thing to be a systematic thinker and quite another to be such a writer. The first distinguishes the character of one’s thought, while the second speaks to the methodology of one’s writing. Such a distinction has often been overlooked when evaluating Gregory and his theological contributions. The emphasis has typically been that his writings never bore the same systematic structure as other theologians, and thus he has been disqualified as a systematic theologian. The fact is that there was a profoundly coherent structure to Gregory’s thought. While those structures were never the subject of a deliberate discourse, they were present and gave shape to everything he wrote.

A good example of this fact occurred in Gregory’s exegesis. While his exegesis often appeared to be a haphazard expression of ideas filled with digressions, it bore a distinct structure and method. Robert Markus explained:

Gregory’s commentary has its own rich and complex logic; but it is not that of the modern, or indeed the ancient, Scripture-commentator. With a freedom unrestrained by the text he can assemble biblical texts to create ‘carefully crafted passages of teaching.’ Such passages, very frequent in his homilies, are held together not by an interest in the text, but by the overall theme the texts are assembled to support and to orchestrate. Whatever the exegetical cost, it is the continuity of the subject matter that dominates his exposition.

The idea being expressed here is that one must not get lost in the nature of Gregory’s expositions, or construe them as evidence of a lack of structure or system to his thought.

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103 Dagens concluded that while Gregory was not a speculative genius like Augustine, he did provide considerable contributions to theology, particularly in morality, as well as his theological analysis of spiritual experience. See Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 24.

104 Evans, commenting on this aspect of Gregory’s theology, stated: “Fragmentary though it is, however, there is a very great deal of theology diffused through Gregory’s writings, and taken as a whole it forms a complete system.” Evans, Thought of Gregory, 55.

105 Markus, Signs and Meanings, 49-50.
There was a very systematic and structured character to his thought, and to arrive at it, one must look beyond the texts themselves to the ideas and mentality they expressed.

This characteristic of Gregorian exposition has been noted by various scholars and has been utilized for the construction of a distinct method for examining Gregory’s ideas.\textsuperscript{106} Carole Straw explained:

To define this [mental] structure, to present Gregory’s complex mentalité, requires the skills of the literary critic, the anthropologist, and the historian. A close study of Gregory’s writings must focus not only on the explicit argument but also on the incidental and implicit information. By discovering the hidden logic of comparisons and associations and tracing the various interconnections of ideas, one can determine the criteria defining various mental categories and discern the function of specific ideas in the whole network of thought. From a knowledge of the underlying principles governing the operation and grammar of Gregory’s thought, we can understand more fully the intuitions, prejudices, and assumptions that shape his values and judgments, and perhaps appreciate more fully the subtleties that distinguish his vision of reality from those of other writers.\textsuperscript{107}

In other words, to obtain the particular character of Gregory’s thought on any subject it is not enough merely to recount what he wrote on the topic, but to seek the unity and structure, the intellectual system, his writings conveyed. The real value and meaning of any topic upon which Gregory wrote only comes to light in the context of the overall structure of his thought. Thus, any study seeking to understand Gregory’s thought on a particular topic must first aim at constructing his overarching intellectual perspective, which then provides the proper context for understanding and evaluating his individual ideas.

The import of these facts for the present study is that they give shape to the particular methodology that will be employed so as to explicate Gregory’s conception of divine providence. While references to providence are scattered throughout his literary corpus, these are typically descriptions of God’s providential acts within history rather than an


\textsuperscript{107} Straw, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 17.
exposition of his theory of providence. Gregory provided no deliberate discourse explaining his views on providence. Consequently, in order to understand Gregory’s conception of divine providence it is not sufficient to review only these passing comments and their meaning in isolation from the rest of his thought. In order to sufficiently construct his view of providence, the structure and system of his overall thought must be distinguished so as to situate his remarks on providence within this overarching intellectual schema. The goal, then, is to construct Gregory’s particular vision of reality, his intellectual presuppositions and structures, so as to explicate the place and role of divine providence within it. This goal will be accomplished by examining the breadth of Gregory’s literary corpus, rather than just those texts wherein he explicitly spoke of providence.

**Gregory’s Literary Corpus**

Fortunately, many of Gregory’s literary works survive today allowing scholars and enthusiasts alike access to his thought. His largest work, the *Moralia in Job*,\(^{108}\) was begun by Gregory after he was sent to Constantinople in 579 as *apocrisiarius* for the pope. There, under the urging of his “brethren,” he undertook to explain the Book of Job according to its literal, allegorical, and moral meanings.\(^{109}\) Consisting of thirty five books, the *Moralia* encompasses the full breadth of Gregory’s thought and so is used extensively in the course of this study.

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\(^{109}\) In a letter Gregory sent to Leander of Seville in July of 595, which accompanied a copy of the *Moralia*, Gregory explained the details of its composition. See *Ep.* 5.53a. Gregory reported that he wrote the *Moralia* at the request of his fellow monks who had accompanied him to Constantinople, along with Leander who was also in Constantinople at the time. At the time the letter was sent to Leander, as Gregory explained in it, he had not completely finishing revising the third part of the *Moralia* and so only sent the first two parts. Evidence of Gregory’s continued editing occurs in *Mor.* 22.11.21, wherein he included a mention of Augustine’s conversion of the English, which did not begin until 596.
In the first year of his pontificate (590-591), Gregory composed another work, the *Regula pastoralis liber*,\textsuperscript{110} wherein he reflected upon the needed qualities and virtues for effective governance, particularly so in the Church.\textsuperscript{111} Although not specifically addressing any of Gregory’s theological doctrines, the book manifests Gregory’s thought on a wide variety of topics and expresses his overarching spirituality. Consequently, while not specifically used in this study to construct Gregory’s thought on divine providence, it is used to construct the larger framework of his thought and spirituality.

In the course of the first few years of his pontificate, Gregory delivered two series of homilies that he later collected and published, the *Homiliae in Hierzechielem prophetam*\textsuperscript{112} and the *Homiliae in Evangelia*.\textsuperscript{113} The series of homilies on Ezekiel, delivered from 591-593 to a monastic audience, were not collected and published by Gregory until 601.\textsuperscript{114} The homilies on the Gospels, delivered over the course of 593 to a mixed audience of clergy and laity, were immediately recorded and published.\textsuperscript{115} Like his *Moralia*, these two sets of homilies treat the full range of Gregory’s theological thought and so are used extensively in this paper to construct his theology of providence.


\textsuperscript{111} Gregory sent a copy of this work, along with a letter, to Bishop John of Ravenna in February of 591. See Ep. 1.24a.

\textsuperscript{112} The Latin text used in this dissertation for all quotations comes from: *S. Gregorii Magni Homiliae in Hierzechihelem prophetam*, ed. Marcus Adriaen, CCL 142 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1971). All translations are mine.

\textsuperscript{113} The Latin text used in this dissertation for all quotations comes from: *S. Gregorii Magni Homiliae in Evangelia*, ed. Raymond Étaix, CCL 141 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999). All translations are mine.

\textsuperscript{114} Gregory explained in his dedicatory letter to Bishop Marianus of Ravenna, sent in July of 601, that the delay in publication was due to the multitude of cares Gregory had incurred as pope. See Ep. 12.16a.

\textsuperscript{115} Gregory sent a copy of these homilies and a dedicatory letter to Bishop Secundinus of Taormina in April of 594. See Ep. 4.17a.
The *Dialogi de vita et miraculis patrum Italicorum*, written by Gregory from 593 to 594, consists of a number of miracle stories he told about recent saints, mostly from Italy, in order to teach moral and spiritual lessons. Due to the style and contents of the *Dialogues*, Gregory’s authorship has been the subject of much scholarly debate. Nevertheless, Gregory’s authorship is virtually unanimously accepted by modern scholars. The *Dialogues*, due to its descriptions of miracles and other divine interventions, is particularly useful for explicating Gregory’s notion of providence and so is used extensively throughout this dissertation.

In a letter to John the subdeacon in January of 602, Gregory reported that he had composed scriptural commentaries on Proverbs, the Song of Songs, the Prophets, the Heptateuch, and the first book of Kings. Of these works, only a few fragments of his commentary on the Song of Songs, *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum*, and his commentary on the first book of Kings, *In librum primum Regum expositiones*, are still extant. Inasmuch as Gregory’s authorship of the commentary on the first book of Kings is questioned, it will not be used in the course of this study. Gregory’s commentary on the Song of Songs,

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119 Ep. 12.6.
121 Adalbert de Vogüé has proposed that this work should really be ascribed to a medieval Benedictine monk, Peter of Cava. See “L’auteur du Commentaire des Rois attribué à saint Grégoire: un moine de Cava?” in *Revue Bénédictine* 106 (1996): 319-31.
although only a fragment and so of limited value, is used in this study of Gregory’s thought on providence.

In addition to these various literary works, Gregory composed a multitude of letters over the course of his pontificate. These letters, the *Registrum Epistolarum*, were organized into fourteen books to accord with his fourteen years as pope. Although not all were composed by Gregory himself, these letters give invaluable insight into the thought and activity of Gregory as he responded to the multitude of duties and inquiries placed upon him as pope. Besides providing important historical information about his life, these letters address a wide range of theological topics and so will be used in the delineation of Gregory’s thought on providence.

Lastly, it is known that Gregory made some changes to the liturgy during his tenure as pope. These changes became a part of the sacramentary, the “Hadrianum,” that Pope Hadrian sent to Charlemagne around 790, whose composition Hadrian had attributed to Gregory. While Gregory was not responsible for composing this entire sacramentary, he was responsible for composing about a hundred of its prayers. These prayers are interesting in terms of what they display about Gregory’s spirituality and prayer life, but they will not be used in this study for determining his conception of divine providence.

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122 Gregory’s *Registrum Epistolarum* consists of the various letters he wrote during his papacy (590-604). Perhaps originally consisting of several thousand, only 850 survive.


124 Gregory actually had to write a letter to John of Syracuse in October of 598 to defend himself against John’s accusations that he was meddling in the liturgy. See *Ep.* 9.26.

125 Straw, “Gregory the Great,” 60.

Procedure for the Present Study

The goal of this present study is to explicate Gregory’s view of divine providence, along with the ontological and epistemological structures upon which it depended. The starting point, in the next chapter, will be to first situate Gregory within his historical context. Gregory’s historical context had an important formative impact on the shape of his theology, particularly his theology of divine providence. Profound historical, societal, and religious changes were taking place during the time in which he lived, all leaving their impact on the shape of his thought. Certain of these changes, such as the movement of the Empire and its resources to the East, the Lombard invasion and occupation in Italy, the many natural disasters, the new role of the papacy and Church in the West, the cult of the saint, the growth of monasticism, a new awareness of the afterlife and small sins, and even Gregory’s own personal history, will all be examined in terms of their formative impact on Gregory’s view of divine providence.

Next, Gregory’s cosmology will be examined, giving attention to the ontological structures that provided the foundation for his understanding of God’s providence within history. Here, Gregory’s concept of God and his relationship to creation will be examined, giving special attention to the hierarchical chain of being linking God to creation. In his thought, there was a chain of being, and beings, which constituted the mechanisms and agents of God’s providence within creation and history. Such hierarchies, evident throughout his writings, were essential to the Gregorian view of the universe, and consequently, they will be examined in detail so as to provide an understanding of his view of divine causality and providence.
The next chapter will aim at explicating God’s providential action within history.

At the very center of Gregory’s understanding of divine providence was the human person. Gregory was not an abstract or theoretical theologian; his concern was always the human souls for which he had pastoral care. This fact gave a particular shape and focus to his understanding of divine providence. His major theme was human salvation and the various elements that contributed to it, such as the nature and causes of sin, the role of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the Church, conversion, and grace. It was within the context of these various theological concepts that Gregory’s notion of divine providence took shape, and so, it will be explicated using these same categories and concepts.

Lastly, Gregory’s view of divine providence will be evaluated in terms of its core ideas, its inherent rationality, and any contributions it provided to the development of the Christian notion of divine providence. Here, the synthesis of Gregory’s ideas on providence will be examined in terms of their systematic coherence and rationality. Within this context, Gregory’s belief and understanding of miracles will be shown to be an entirely coherent manifestation of his conception of providence. Additionally, attention will be given to areas in Gregory’s thought wherein some ambiguity remained, such as his notions of change and nature. Finally, it will be shown how Gregory’s conception of divine providence, even in its ambiguities, contributed to the development of the Christian understanding of providence.
CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF GREGORY THE GREAT

The sixth century, the century in which Gregory lived, was one marked by dramatic changes in the western half of the Roman Empire, changes that affected nearly every aspect of life. Wars, the establishment of new “barbarian” kingdoms, natural disasters, plagues, changing populations, new movements within Christianity, all brought into being a society and culture that was quite different from that only 200 years earlier, as witnessed to by Augustine. These changes were not merely structural or institutional, but affected even the way people understood themselves and the world in which they lived. They constituted, as described by Robert Markus, the “End of Ancient Christianity.”¹ In comparison to that of Augustine, Gregory lived in a very different world.

The world in which Gregory did live, and the events that brought it forth, have often been inaccurately categorized as a “Fall,” or an entering into a “Dark Age.”² Such characterizations fail to appreciate the real tenor of the events of this time. These events were not a decline, but rather a restructuring and movement of populations, economies, and resources.³ It was a time of transition, wherein the ideas, institutions, and social structures that formed the Late Antique world were being replaced with new ones. These changes

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¹ This was the title of Markus’ book on this era, roughly 400-600, wherein he discussed the profound changes that took place and their effects on society and Christianity in the West. See Robert A. Markus, The End of Ancient Christianity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

² Peter Brown concluded that such characterizations fail to understand the true nature of the events that took place during this time. The age, rather than a “Fall,” was a time of great transition and restructuring in the West. Populations and resources were shifting and in flux, and rather than a decline, such changes are better characterized as a restructuring after the departure of the Empire to the East. See Brown, Rise of Western Christendom, 1-34.

³ For a good account of the movements and changes in these populations and economies, see Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).
represented a new realization of society and thought in the West, one of which Gregory himself was a major representative.

Gregory’s own thought and work, his theology, very much manifested the profound movements and transitions that occurred during this time. Certainly dependant upon the Late Antique world, he was not a mere imitator of that which preceded him. In his theology, his spirituality, and particularly his papacy, Gregory contributed to the new forms and structures coming into being in the West, ones which would characterize the Middle Ages to follow. It is only in this context that his theology, particularly that of divine providence, can be properly understood and appreciated. Therefore, in this chapter, Gregory’s life history, as well as the events and movements of his time, will be examined in order to give a context for understanding his theology of divine providence. This examination will begin with Gregory’s own life history, and then look at the historical events and religious movements that contributed to shaping his thought.

**Gregory’s Life History**

Gregory was born in Rome around 540 A.D. into what Gregory of Tours called one of the foremost senatorial families. No longer believed to be of the gens Anicia or Decia, his family was of a noble lineage and very wealthy. Besides the family estate on the

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4 Gregory has certainly received the criticism of being only a theological imitator of those that preceded him. See Moorehead, *Gregory the Great*, 27.
5 Claude Dagens has suggested that Gregory was very influential in shaping the Middle Ages that followed him, particularly in the areas of morality, spirituality, and mystical theology. See Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 13-16, 22-25. Likewise, Carole Straw remarked that Gregory has been credited with founding the medieval papacy, and through his writings, as having contributed to the formation of medieval spirituality. See Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 2.
7 Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 4.
Caelian Hill, his family owned extensive properties both in Rome and in Sicily. Along with property and prestige, his family had very strong ecclesiastical connections. Pope Felix III (483-92) was his great-great-grandfather and Pope Agapitus (535-36) may also have been a relative. Gregory’s father, Gordinianus, was an official of the Roman Church, and as depicted in the *Dialogues*, three of his aunts entered the religious life. It suffices to say that Gregory came from a family of some standing and affluence in Rome, which in turn was reflected in his own education and career.

**Gregory’s Education**

Gregory received the best education available in his day. What that education would have entailed during Gregory’s time is a matter of debate, as there had been a steady decline in education in the West over the preceding century. Gregory of Tours had said that Gregory was second to none in grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic. His education most likely included training in grammar and rhetoric, along with civil law. Gregory bore ample witness to skill in each of these arts in his various writings.

Along with this formal education, Gregory displayed a vast theological expertise that he had gained through his own study. The largest formative impact on him, theologically, was Augustine of Hippo. Robert Markus has even gone so far as to say: “When you scratch

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8 Gregory mentioned his relationship to Pope Felix III in *Dial.* 4.17.
9 *Dial.* 4.17.
10 In the century preceding Gregory many cities in the West could no longer afford the expense of maintaining schools. Furthermore, much of their need had dwindled as the educated elite departed East and the military came to dominate the upper classes. See Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 233-34. Justinian did, however, reopen schools in the West in his Pragmatic Sanction (554) and provided finances for them. These universities, according to Dudden, taught grammar, medicine and law, which would have then constituted Gregory’s education at the time. See Dudden, *Gregory the Great*, 1:71.
12 Dagens, Straw, and Markus all agreed on these general lines of education received by Gregory. See Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 33; Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 5; Markus, *Gregory the Great*, 34.
Gregory, the blood you draw always seems to be Augustinian.” Nearly every aspect of Gregory’s theology bore some semblance to Augustine’s, but still, Gregory was not a mere imitator. Gregory lived in a very different world than had Augustine, and consequently, his theological focus and emphasis showed subtle but marked differences. Some notable differences include their respective theological anthropologies, the causes of sin, the nature and effects of grace, the role of the afterlife, eschatology, and the role of the

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14 Almost all of Augustine’s theological effort was composed in response to theological controversies, whether Manichaeism, Donatism, or Pelagianism, or as a response to specific theological questions. Christian doctrine was much more settled in the West by Gregory’s day, and consequently, his theological effort was more orientated towards pastoral care rather than speculative theology. This difference in orientation produced decisive differences in the shape of each person’s respective theologies. See Evans, Thought of Gregory, vii.
15 Augustine’s theological anthropology underwent considerable development and change over the course of his theological career. Augustine’s initial anthropology, drawn from Neo-Platonic ideals, was characterized by a philosophical optimism about the human person and its capacity to be united to God in contemplation. This initial anthropology changed considerably as a result of his study of the Pauline Epistles and in response to various theological controversies, such as Manichaeism, Donatism, and particularly, Pelagianism. By the end of his career he had developed a particularly pessimistic view of the human person. The human will was entirely corrupt due to original sin and salvation was only possible by virtue of divine grace operating in the human person so as to elicit faith, good works, and perseverance. For a good overview of this development, see J. Patout Burns, The Development of Augustine’s Doctrine of Operative Grace (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1980). Gregory tended to align his anthropology with the earlier writings of Augustine, maintaining an essential optimism about the human person. Original sin did not so much corrupt the human person, as it deprived the human person of the necessary grace needed to know God. Consequently, given that grace, the human person would not fail to respond and return to God through interior contemplation. See Mor. 4.6, 19-25, 45-49; 7.2, 36-37; 8.49-51; 11.15. It should be noted that this description of change and development within Augustine’s theological anthropology, as well as the rest of his theology, has been recently challenged by Carol Harrison in Rethinking Augustine’s Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Nevertheless, for the purposes of the present comparison, her thesis does not matter inasmuch as Augustine’s latter views would be merely ascribed to earlier in his career, from which Gregory would still differ.
16 Both Gregory and Augustine recognized sin as a turning away from God and self towards the exterior world, but the source of this movement was different for each. Augustine located sin in the fractured human will, which inordinately desired created goods above God. Gregory located sin in the human intellect, which was blinded to the invisible world due to sin, and so only knew the exterior world to which it attached itself. Additionally, Gregory, contrary to Augustine, linked the source of sin to demonic suggestion. For Gregory, demons were the ones responsible for initiating sin through suggesting it to the human person, which the human person then consummated through their consent. See Mor. 4. 24-25, 49; 11.8. See also Straw, Gregory the Great, 122, 132-34.
17 For both Augustine and Gregory grace was a function of the Holy Spirit acting on the human person. Also, both recognized grace to be efficacious, bringing about its intended effect of salvation. Both differed, though subtly, on the action of grace. Augustine located the effect of grace in the human will, wherein it brought about the desire and choice for God. For his mature exposition on the workings of grace, see De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio and De Correptione et Gratia. Gregory, on the other hand, located the effect of grace in the

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invisible world.20 Within these differences Gregory manifested the influence of a number of other theologians.

Augustine was certainly Gregory’s theological father, yet he had many theological uncles. Not least of these was John Cassian, who bore a distinctive influence on many aspects of Gregory’s theology and spirituality.21 Cassian’s influence can be detected in such various Gregorian ideas as the relationship between the active and contemplative life,22 the role of discretio and its relationship to moral purity,23 the role of confession and intellect, wherein it illuminated the soul to sin effecting repentance and conversion. See Mor. 4.65-67; 5.53; 9.29.

18 The afterlife, along with God’s judgment and the fate of the soul, held a primacy in Gregory’s theological concern not present in Augustine. Gregory’s focus on the afterlife was the result of a then current debate on the state of the soul after death. This debate, resulting from the emergence of a sixth century Christian Aristotelianism, centered on whether the soul could exist and act independently of the body, and its continuing relationship to the body after death. Book IV of Gregory’s Dialogues can be construed as a direct response to this debate. See Matthew J. Dal Santo, “Philosophy, Hagiology, and the Early Byzantine Origins of Purgatory” in The Church, the Afterlife, and the Fate of the Soul, eds. Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon (Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2009), 41-51.

19 Unlike Augustine, Gregory professed that the eschatological end of the world was at hand. Each person witnessed disasters in their own day, but Gregory recognized in the events of his day a warning that the prophesied end of the world was near. See Boglioni, Miracle, 64-65.

20 Augustine, in his old age, writing the City of God, in some ways anticipated the theological outlook of Gregory in terms of the presence of the invisible world. Augustine spoke of the role of relics and miracles, but still never went as far as Gregory in terms of the presence and immediacy of the invisible world. See civ. Dei, 22. On the other hand, Gregory believed everything visible, whether nature, the weather, disasters, wars, and even human actions, were the result and effect of invisible forces. Thus, the invisible world had a primacy in Gregory’s theology not evident in Augustine’s. See Mor. 4.55; 11.8. This aspect of Gregorian theology will be explained in more detail over the course of this paper, as it constituted an essential element of his theology of divine providence.

21 Robert Markus suggested that Gregory read Cassian extensively. See Markus, Gregory the Great, 17. Dagens has also noted Gregory’s dependence upon Cassian for a number of his ideas. See Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 118, 190-91, 203, 256-257, 266, 416-417.

22 The relationship between the active and contemplative life was a much discussed topic by Gregory. See Ep. 1.24; 7.5; Mor. 6.56-64. Gregory, just as had Cassian in his Conferences, used the example of Martha and Mary to explain the roles of each the contemplative and active lives. Compare Gregory’s Mor. 6. 61 and Cassian’s Coll. 1.7. For an explanation of the relationship of the active and contemplative life in Gregory’s thought, see Markus, Gregory the Great, 18-21; Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 135-58.

23 Discretio played a significant role in both Gregory’s and Cassian’s conceptions of the spiritual life. Both conceived it as a gift of grace and the necessary moderator of the other virtues. Compare Gregory’s Mor. 4.24-25; 7.41-45; 9.106 and Cassian’s Coll. 1.22-2.10. Gregory also showed a reliance on Cassian in his connection of discretio to moral purity. See Leyser, Authority and Asceticism, 52-53, 68-69. Dagens stated Cassian was Gregory’s master for his conception of discretio. See Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 118.
compunction in conversion,\textsuperscript{24} and the image of spiritual life as a battle with demons.\textsuperscript{25} Gregory’s theology, to a large extent, can be construed as an amalgam of both Augustine’s and Cassian’s thought.

There were a number of other theologians who bore a distinctive influence on Gregory’s thought.\textsuperscript{26} In terms of his cosmology, Pseudo-Dionysius was a major influence.\textsuperscript{27} Gregory’s understanding of the role of hierarchy in God’s government of creation, as well as the hierarchies within the angels and the Church, were more than likely derived from Pseudo-Dionysius.\textsuperscript{28} Gregory drew from Gregory of Nazianzen’s second \textit{Oration} in the composition of his \textit{Regula Pastoralis}.\textsuperscript{29} A number of other names are found throughout his literary corpus, such as Ignatius of Antioch, Cyprian, Hilary of Poitier, Basil, Epiphanius, Ambrose,

\textsuperscript{24} Compare Cassian’s \textit{Coll.} 2.11 and Gregory’s \textit{Mor.} 8.38; 9.88-94; 10.28; 11.15; 27.33, 38-41.
\textsuperscript{25} Gregory’s understanding of spiritual and monastic life as a battle was certainly drawn from Cassian. See Boglioni, \textit{Miracle}, 40-46; Dagens, \textit{Saint Grégoire}, 190-91, 256-57.
\textsuperscript{26} Gregory drew from a wide array of sources in constructing his own particular thought and theology. He rarely cited the sources from which he drew his thought and so connections of his ideas to earlier authors are not always easy to establish. Nevertheless, where connections can be found they will be cited over the course of this dissertation.
\textsuperscript{27} Pseudo-Dionysius, during Gregory’s age, was thought to be Dionysius the Areopagite that Paul referred to in \textit{Acts} 17:34. Since the nineteenth century, this identification has been proven false. Pseudo-Dionysius was a Greek speaking theologian working in the East at the end of the fifth, and the beginning of the sixth, centuries who sought to reclaim Neo-Platonism and fully integrate it within Christian belief. See Sarah Klitenic Wear and John Dillon, \textit{Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition: Despoiling the Hellenes} (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 1-4. Gregory’s awareness and use of Pseudo-Dionysius has not been the object of a formal study. Gregory did explicitly cite Dionysius in a homily particularly devoted to angels and their hierarchical structure. See \textit{HEv.} 2.34.8. Nevertheless, Neo-Platonism was widely diffused within Christian thought in Gregory’s day, and so a direct correlation between Gregory’s ideas and Pseudo-Dionysius’ is difficult to establish. Where such correlations can be reasonably asserted they will be indicated over the course of the paper.
\textsuperscript{28} While having a slightly different list of the nine choirs of angels than had Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory certainly drew heavily from Pseudo-Dionysius in his understanding of the angels and their function and role within Christian cosmology. See \textit{HEv.} 2.34; \textit{Mor.} 4.29.
\textsuperscript{29} Straw, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 182.
Jerome, Leo the Great, and Philastrius. Gregory also drew from such classical authors as Cicero, Seneca, Virgil, and Juvenal.

There has been much scholarly debate on the degree to which Gregory knew the Greek language and so was able to draw from the Greek tradition in forming his own theology. While Gregory probably obtained some familiarity with the language while living in Constantinople, and was able to translate various Greek words, he repeatedly professed ignorance of the Greek language. More than likely, the various Greek influences on his theological thought came to him by means of Latin translations.

**Gregory’s Career**

Besides his family and education, Gregory’s career had a distinct impact on shaping his theological outlook and sensitivities. The first office he recorded holding, and one that certainly manifested his family’s standing in Rome, was that of prefect of Rome. With the absence of the senate, this position was the highest civil post at the time. Later in life, in a letter to his friend Leander, Gregory described the internal struggle he experienced occupying this position, as it entangled him in the cares of the world, not only externally, but

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32 Gregory manifested some knowledge of Greek in his ability to translate various Greek words into Latin in his *Moralia*. See *Mor*. 7.36. In his letters, however, Gregory repeatedly asserted his inability to either read or write in Greek. See *Ep*. 7.29; 11.55.
33 For a list of such possible translations, see Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 13, n. 52.
34 *Ep*. 4.2. There is some debate over the manuscript tradition on whether Gregory used the term *praetura* or *praefectura* in describing his office. Most modern scholars prefer the second reading. See *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, translated with introduction and notes by John R.C. Martyn (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2004), 288, n. 7.
more seriously, interiorly as well. Eventually, Gregory abandoned the cares of the world and his high position, seeking the refuge of the monastery and the solace of contemplation.

Around 575, Gregory resigned from his office, dispossessed himself of his inheritance, and turned the family house on the Caelian Hill in Rome into a monastery, St. Andrew’s, into which he entered as a monk. He also established six other monasteries on the family estates in Sicily. Gregory later recalled these days of idyllic peace as some of the happiest of his life. Here Gregory was imbued with the ideals of monasticism, renunciation of the world, contemplation, lectio divina, and asceticism, all of which had a formative impact on both his papacy and theology. The quiet peace Gregory enjoyed in the monastery did not last long, for after only a few years, he again was called into the cares and anxieties of the world.

Around 579 Pope Pelagius II (579-590) appointed Gregory as a deacon of Rome and then sent him to Constantinople as a papal representative (apocrisiarius) to the imperial court. Gregory was sent there to elicit support from the emperor for Italy in its ongoing difficulties with the Lombards. While thrust back again into the worldly cares from which he had sought respite in the monastery, Gregory could at least be consoled by the group of brethren, fellow monks, who accompanied him there. Though professing a desire for freedom from worldly cares, Gregory still got into a heated debate with the patriarch

35 Ep. 5.53a.
38 Ep. 5.53a.
40 Ep. 5.53a.
Eutychius over the resurrection of the body while in Constantinople.\footnote{For Gregory’s own account of the debate, see Mor. 14.56. In the debate, only finally settled by the emperor Tiberius, Gregory argued that the resurrected body would be palpable, while Eutychius argued that it would not. Tiberius sided with Gregory and Eutychius’ book was burned.} It was also in Constantinople, under pressure from his brethren, that Gregory began his first, and largest, literary work, the \textit{Moralia in Job}.\footnote{Gregory’s work, Moralia in Job, consisted of a long exegesis on the Book of Job, in which Gregory focused on a moral interpretation of the text. While begun in Constantinople, Gregory did not send the text to Leander until July of 595 AD.} It would be to Leander, future bishop of Seville and whom Gregory met in Constantinople, to whom he dedicated this work.\footnote{Gregory dedicated the Moralia to Leander in Ep. 5.53a.} Unable to secure the support Italy needed from the emperor, Gregory soon found himself back in Rome.

Upon returning to Rome in 586, Gregory entered again into the sanctuary of the monastery he had left only a few years before. This respite was short for Gregory as he was called upon to enter the sea of worldly care once again. In February of 590, Pope Pelagius II died, and against his own wishes, Gregory was elected pope.\footnote{An anonymous monk of Whitby told the story that, upon being elected to the papacy, Gregory attempted to flee the city to avoid being made pope. As the story related, God manifested Gregory’s hiding place and so was forced to return to the city and become pope. See Anonymous Monk of Whitby, vita Greg., 7.} Shortly after his election to the papacy, he lamented in a letter to the emperor’s sister, Theoctista, how the cares from which he had sought respite were now again thrust back upon him.\footnote{Ep. 1.5.} Given the state of affairs taking place in Rome and Italy at the time of Gregory’s ascension to the throne of Peter, one can certainly sympathize with his lament.

Gregory said of Job, in his \textit{Moralia}, that his virtue was made known only in trial.\footnote{Mor. Praef. 6.} The same could be said of Gregory during his tenure as pope; his virtues were made known through the trials incurred. The cares and duties awaiting Gregory as pope were immense. Not only was he the leader of Christianity in the West, but due to the eroded civic
government in Rome, he had to take on many of those duties as well. Gregory’s endless list of duties included caring for ecclesial appointments and jurisprudence, securing Italy and Rome from the Lombard threat, supervision of the Church patrimonies, care for the poor of Rome, dealing with Church controversies and schisms, dealing with the imperial court and its representative exarch in Ravenna, missionary activity, responding to an endless number of letters and inquiries from a variety of personages from the West and East alike, as well as his sacramental and preaching duties as Pope. All these Gregory accomplished with robust skill, even amidst personal illness of his own. Gregory would only find rest from these cares with his death in 604. The epitaph put on Gregory’s tomb read consul Dei, “God’s consul.”

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47 Markus, Gregory the Great, 107-111.
48 In the course of defending Rome and Italy from the Lombards, Gregory at times directly negotiated with various Lombard leaders, provided for payments to them, organized military defenses, and even funded the costs of such defenses. For a full account, see ibid., 99-107.
49 At the time of Gregory’s papacy the Church was the largest and richest land owner in Italy, holding extensive property throughout southern Italy, Sicily, and Campania. Care for these properties and their revenue required an extensive network of officials, and judging by Gregory’s correspondence, these matters occupied a great deal of his time. See ibid., 112-121.
50 Ibid., 121-124.
51 While Gregory had to deal with a resurgence of Donatism in North Africa, the “Three Chapters Schism” was by far the most problematic for Gregory. This schism occurred in 553 when Justinian, in an attempt to unify the Empire under a single faith, called a fifth ecumenical council in Chalcedon. There, in hopes of winning over the Monophysites in Syria and Egypt while upholding Chalcedon I, it condemned certain controversial writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrhhus, and Ibas of Edessa. The pope at the time, Vigilius, was forced to accept the condemnation, which then became the stance of the succeeding popes, including Pelagius I (556-561), Pelagius II (579-590), as well as Gregory himself. See Markus, Gregory the Great, 125-42; 188-193.
52 Ibid., 143-156.
53 Gregory’s most famous missionary activity was the sending of Augustine to convert the English in Britian. See Ibid., 177-187. Gregory reported that among numerous miracles associated with the missionary activity in Britain, 10,000 English were baptized on Christmas day in 598. See Ep. 8.29.
54 Robert Markus suggested that Gregory’s correspondence constituted about a couple thousand letters during his papacy, but notes that other scholars have suggested up to as many as twenty thousand letters. See Markus, Gregory the Great, 206, n.2.
55 Examples of Gregory’s preaching survive today in two series of homilies he gave during his papacy. The first, the Homiliae in Evangelia, were given between 590-592 AD and the second, the Homiliae in Hiezechiel, were given between 592-593 AD.
56 Gregory suffered from stomach ailments and gout, illnesses which he lamented in his letter to Leander. See Ep. 5.53a.
Theological Effects of Gregory’s Life History

Gregory’s career had decisive effects on the shape of his theology. As pope, while a myriad of duties occupied his time, his primary concern was always *cura animarum*, the care for souls.\(^{57}\) All of his theological works were orientated towards this goal.\(^{58}\) His preaching and writings all bore a call to flee the desires of the world, a warning of the strict judgment to come, and a call to repentance and conversion.

Let us flee earthly desires. Nothing here below should delight us, because we have a Father in heaven. And this must be considered very carefully by us, that he who ascended calmly returns frightfully, and that which he commanded with gentleness, he will demand from us with strictness. No one therefore should take lightly the time of repentance granted. Let no one neglect to have concern for himself while he can do so, because our Redeemer will come in as strict judgment then, as much as the great patience he gave to us before judgment. Reflect on these things, my friends, constantly turn them over in your minds. However much the disturbance of things still toss about your heart, henceforth fix the anchor of your hope now in your eternal homeland.\(^{59}\)

Moreover, at the time of his papacy the world in which he lived was very much Christian and so doctrinal clarifications and conversion of non-Christians were not an immediate concern, but rather the conversion and morality of lax Christians.\(^{60}\) Consequently, all of Gregory’s exegesis, preaching, and writing, had a moral tenor and goal.

Another decisive effect of his career on his theology was his concern for the proper relationship between the active and contemplative life, upon which he so frequently

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\(^{57}\) Richards, *Consul of God*, 54.

\(^{58}\) Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 117.

\(^{59}\) HEv. 2.29.11: “Desideria terrena fugiamus, nihil nos iam delectet in infinitis, qui Patrem habemus in caelis. Et hoc nobis magnopere perpetendum, quia is qui placidus ascendit terribilis redit, et quidquid nobis cum mansuetudine praecepit, hoc a nobis cum districtione exigat. Nemo ergo indulta paenitentiae tempora paraipendat, nemo curam sui, dum uaelat, agere neglegat, quia Redemptor noster tanto tunc in iudicium districtior ueniit, quanto nobis ante iudicium magnam patientiam praerogavit. Haec itaque uobiscum, fratres, agite, haec in mente sedula cogitatione versusate. Quamuis adhuc rerum perturbationibus animus fluctuet, iam tamen spei uestræ ancorem in aeternam patriam figite. ”

\(^{60}\) Markus, *Gregory the Great*, 41-45.
commented in his writings. While he longed for the contemplative life of the monastery he left behind, he saw his papacy as an act of God’s providence. The conclusion upon which he arrived was characterized by condescensio, wherein what was gained from contemplation should be used in service of the active life. Thus a balance was struck between the two, wherein each served the other. This unity and balance of bipolar opposites, whether it was contemplation versus action, exterior versus interior, invisible versus visible, or corporeal versus spiritual, characterized Gregory’s entire cosmological and theological schematizations. His entire theological enterprise could be construed as an attempt to find balance between such opposites.

Gregory’s personal life and career certainly made an imprint on his theology, yet the historical events of his day also had their impact. Plagues, wars, “barbarian” incursions, natural disasters, shifting populations, all had their effects on the world and people Gregory was called to lead and care for as bishop of Rome. Likewise, they very much shaped his theology, and particularly, his theology of divine providence.

**Gregory’s Historical Context**

**Rome’s Devastation**

Gregory’s theology of divine providence was undoubtedly influenced and shaped by the manifold changes that were occurring in the world at his time. Nowhere were these changes felt more keenly than in Rome itself. Holmes Dudden described the Rome of

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61 Gregory confronted this issue in a number of places in his writings. Some examples are *Ep.* 1.24; 7.5; *Mor.* 6.56-64.
62 *Ep.* 1.38.
64 This conclusion was the thesis of Carole Straw’s study of Gregory. See Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 18-20, 257-60.
Gregory’s day as one of faded glory, with its population decimated and its buildings crumbling. Justinian’s wars in the middle of the sixth century had caused unparalleled destruction in Italy. Rome itself had been sieged at least four times, the latest during Gregory’s papacy in 592-93. Rome, once the bustling capital of the Empire, had dwindled to a population of less than 200,000. Upon becoming pope, Gregory compared Rome to a broken ship tossed by the waves of the sea. Such changes, certainly not limited to Rome, were experienced in varying degrees throughout the western half of the Empire.

**The “Barbarians” and Lombards**

One of the most profound changes that Gregory had to respond to during his tenure as pope was the political situation that had occurred in the West due to a series of “barbarian” incursions that had carved up the lands once belonging to the Empire into a number of discrete kingdoms. While the Empire, controlled from the capital in Constantinople, still held North Africa, Sicily, and portions of Italy within its realm, the rest of the West had come to be governed by “barbarian” kings. Gregory took full advantage of this situation,

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66 Justinian began his re-conquest of the Italian peninsula in 535, but withdrew much of his force by 540 due to the war with the Persians on the eastern front. Taking advantage of the situation, Totila and the Goths attacked Italy in 541, but eventually were defeated by imperial troops led by Narses in 552. These wars were very taxing on the population and economy, particularly in Rome. See Neil Christie, *The Lombards: The Ancient Longobards* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 110; Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 181-82; Dudden, *Gregory the Great*, 1:31-40.
67 Straw recorded that Rome was seiged four times since Justinian began his reconquest attempt. See: Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 2. Gregory referred to the destruction of Rome caused by a Lombard siege (592-93) in his homilies, see: HEz. 2.6, 23.
68 There is no agreement on the population of Rome during Gregory’s papacy. Straw suggested that the population had been as high as 700,000, but dropped to less than 200,000 by Gregory’s day. See Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 2, n. 6. Peter Brown, on the other hand, put the population at a mere 50,000. See Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 190.
69 Ep. 1.4.
70 Peter Brown suggested that these so called “barbarian” attacks were not really barbarian at all. Rather, barbarian warriors had for some time been utilized by the Empire to fill the ranks of its military. Such warriors were in effect indoctrinated into the culture of the Empire such that they were indistinguishable from the rest of the military. When the Empire retreated from its western frontiers it left a power vacuum these warriors were only too happy to fill. Thus these “barbarian” invaders were in some sense already part of the Empire of which now they sought control. See Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 101-106.
establishing relations with these kingdoms, and utilizing these relations to further establish Christianity in these realms. One could speculate that Gregory perceived in these new kingdoms the future of Christianity in the West, as the Empire, with its interests and culture, receded into the East. While Gregory enjoyed good relations with most of these new kingdoms, there was one for which he only had odium and distrust, the Lombards.

The Lombards, led by Albion, first entered Italy in 568 and would not leave until conquered by Charlemagne in the late eighth century. During that time they came to hold the northern and central portions of the Italian peninsula, while the Empire continued its control of the coastlines, as well as Rome. While perhaps welcomed by many regions of Italy, the Lombards to Gregory were the “most unspeakable nation.” He even lamented in one of his letters, “I have been made bishop not of the Romans but of the Lombards, whose treatises are swords and gratitude revenge.” His attitude towards the Lombards was the result of what he saw as the destruction and chaos they brought to Italy, over and above the time and labor their activities forced upon Gregory himself. The Lombards were

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71 Gregory, on many occasions, wrote to the kings and queens of these kingdoms, often giving gifts of relics, asking for assistance, and establishing Church order. For the Franks, see Ep. 6.51, 58; 9.214, 216. For King Reccared of Spain, see Ep. 9.229 a,b,c. For Bertha and Ethelbert of England, see Ep. 11.35, 37.
72 Hillgarth has argued that Gregory’s concern with these new kingdoms in the West was not primarily political, but to spread and protect Christianity in these realms. See Hillgarth, “Eschatological,” 212-31.
73 For a full treatment on the history of the Lombards and their effects on Italy see Christie, The Lombards.
74 Brown, Rise of Western Christendom, 192.
75 Peter Brown suggested that many regions, particularly the countryside, preferred the local government of the Lombards rather than being ruled, and taxed heavily, by the Empire. See Ibid., 192.
76 Gregory called the Lombards “nefandissima gens” in Ep. 5.38.
77 Ep. 1.30: “Non Romanorum sed Langobardorum episcopus factus sum, quorum sinthichiae spatae sunt et gratia poena.”
78 Gregory, in numerous letters, was seen responding to the devastation caused by the Lombards. See Ep. 1.3, 8; 2.38, 42; 3.20; 9.11. Also, Gregory was occupied with coordinating troops to fight the Lombards (Ep. 2.24, 27, 38), providing payment for soldiers (Ep. 5.30, 39), and even trying to arrange a peace agreement with the Lombards (Ep. 4.2; 5.34, 36; 9.44, 66; 10.16).
responsible for devastating and depopulating the regions of Italy they occupied,\textsuperscript{79} driving monks from their monasteries and people from their homes,\textsuperscript{80} and leaving large populations destitute of pastoral care.\textsuperscript{81} Grieved by the destruction he witnessed, the only reassurance that Gregory could offer, both to himself and those in his care, was that all of these events fell within God’s providential ordering.

\textit{Natural Disasters}

The Lombards were by no means the only source of destruction and instability experienced by the West. Over the course of the sixth century a number of natural disasters and plagues had a profound impact on Italy, and particularly Rome. Although the natural disasters were devastating,\textsuperscript{82} it was the plague that had by far the most lasting impact on Italy. The plague, an Empire wide problem, occurred in Italy in 543, the mid-560s, the early 570s, and again in the 590s.\textsuperscript{83} It is estimated that nearly a third of the existing population was killed each time the plague broke out in a region.\textsuperscript{84} While certainly crippling to Rome and other cities, such plagues had an even more deleterious effect on the countryside, depopulating it, which in turn disrupted agricultural production and the economy.\textsuperscript{85} As with the wars and other devastations, Gregory saw in these natural disasters the hand of God’s providence.

\textsuperscript{79} Ep. 1.8; 2.42; 3.20.
\textsuperscript{80} Dial. 3.38.
\textsuperscript{81} Ep. 2.42; 3.20. Richards postulated that 42 sees had been abandoned due to the Lombard invasions. See Richards, \textit{Consul of God}, 100-04.
\textsuperscript{82} Gregory spoke in the \textit{Dialogues} of the Tiber flooding Rome five years earlier causing much damage to the city. Dial. 3.19.
\textsuperscript{84} Markus, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 4.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 5-6.
Disasters as Acts of Divine Providence: Flagella Dei

Part of Gregory’s genius was his capacity to see in the devastations of his day an opportunity for pastoral care. Although lamenting the destruction around him, Gregory utilized such afflictions as a call to conversion and humble acceptance of God’s correction. Such afflictions were God’s just and merciful chastisement for sin, by which he corrected sin and prepared his elect for future glory.

So the grape is pounded by feet and is liquified into flavorful wine. So the olive being pressed by squeezing abandons its oil and becomes liquid olive oil. So upon the threshing floor grain is separated from chaff, and being purged comes into the storehouse. Therefore anyone who desires to completely overcome vice, should humbly apply oneself to endure his cleansing afflictions, so that after he will come to judgment cleaner, as much as now the fire of tribulation purges him of rust.86

These divine chastisements constituted a core element of Gregory’s theology of divine providence, for which they provided an opportunity of expression.

In Gregory’s mind all disasters were the natural effect of sin. Whether it was war, drought, famine, disease, or even such things as bodily coldness, hunger, and death, all were the result of human sin.87 Such effects of sin were a part of God’s very structure of the universe. They constituted the flagella Dei, whereby God punished and corrected humanity’s sin.88 These punishments were not construed by Gregory as an evil thing, but an action of both God’s justice and mercy, for through such just chastisements God mercifully brought about both conversion and the atonement of sin. “Wounding, he [God] recalls to health his

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86 HEv. 1.15.4: “Sic uva calcibus tunditur, et in uini saporem liquatur. Sic oliua contusionibus expressa amurcam suam deserit et in olei liquorem pinguescit. Sic per trituram areae a paleis grana separatur, et ad horreum purgata perueniunt. Quisquis ergo appetit plene uita vincere, studeat humiliter purgationis suae flagella tolerare, ut tanto post ad iudicem mundior ueniat, quanto nunc eius rubiginem ignis tribulationis purgat.”
87 Mor. 13.36; 4.68; Ep. 8.37.
88 This aspect of Gregorian theology has been well documented in modern scholarship. See Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 188; Straw, Gregory the Great, 194-99; Boglioni, Miracle et Nature, 36-36.
elect by afflicting them exteriorly, so that they live interiorly.”  Such afflictions had a salutary and sanative purpose for Gregory. Human flesh, which was the source of sinful passions and appetites, became through these afflictions a source of conversion by directing the soul away from the exterior pain and suffering inward and so to God. Thus, the experience of pain and suffering, so prevalent in his day, was construed by Gregory as an essential component of God’s providence.

Besides the correction of sin, Gregory outlined a number of other providential purposes for God’s flagella: the growth in personal merit, to increase a person’s desire for God, to keep the just from pride, an opportunity for atoning sins, and even as a means for manifesting charity and revealing friendship. In the preface of his Moralia, Gregory explained these various purposes of God:

Indeed there are many different kinds of scourges. For there is the scourge, by which the sinner is stricken so as to be corrected; another in which sometimes one is stricken, not for the correction of past wrongs, but for the prevention of future ones; another which is very often inflicted, by which neither a past transgression is corrected, nor a future one prevented, but that, when unexpected deliverance follows the stroke, the power of the deliverer being known is more ardently loved; and while

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89 Mor. 6.25.42: “Uulnerando ergo ad salutem reuocat cum electos suos affligit exterius, ut interius uiuant.”
90 This salutary purpose of pain and suffering played a significant role in both Gregory’s pastoral care and conception of divine providence. Using Heb. 12:5-6 as a paradigm, Gregory conceived such afflictions as a merciful God correcting the children whom he loved. See Mor. 9.45.68; 14.30.35; 15.33.39; 22.20.50; 26.21.37. In another place, Gregory compared such afflictions to the purification of gold, whereby the sins of the sufferer were atoned and remedied. See Mor. 16.32.39. Thus, such afflictions were perceived by Gregory as an action of a merciful God, and though such pain might initially cause fear in those afflicted, it was meant to draw souls to love the God who mercifully corrected and healed them. See Mor. 7.24.28. For a good examination of this role of pain in Gregory’s thought, see Hester, Eschatology, 71-76, 105-110.
91 The preeminent example of this purpose of suffering in Gregory’s thought was Job, who, through innocently and patiently enduring the suffering God allowed, grew in merit before God. See Mor. 23.1.1; 24.19.45; 28.Praef.1.
92 Gregory explained that God sometimes allowed his elect to experience his absence though such suffering so as to increase their desire for God. See Mor. 20.24.51.
93 Mor. 9.85.
94 Mor. 9.54.
95 Mor. 7.29.
the innocent person is hurt by the blow, through patience the utmost merit is accumulated to him.  

Gregory called attention to the disasters of his day so as to manifest these purposes of God, using them as an opportunity to call people to conversion and repentance.  

These same disasters provided for Gregory the opportunity to make manifest another core element of his theology: the instability of the world and the stability of God.  

Gregory understood God’s defining characteristic as *stabilitas*. It is how Gregory ontologically distinguished God from creation. God was immutable, stable within himself, while creation was inherently unstable.  

Nothing manifested this theological fact more clearly than the devastations of his day, which he then used to exhort others to turn from this unstable and fallen world and cling to God, the source of stability and safety.  

This certainly, dearest brothers, even if the Gospel were silent, the world proclaims. Its ruins are its words. Worn away by so many blows, it has fallen from its glory. It is as if the world shows to us now that another kingdom is near, which follows it. It is abhorrent now to the very people who loved it. Its very ruins preach that it should not be loved. If one’s house being shaken was threatened with ruin, whoever lived in it would flee, and who having loved it when standing, hurries to leave it as soon as possible when falling. Therefore, if the world is falling and we embrace it by loving it, we are choosing to be oppressed by it rather than to live in it. For no reasoning separates us from its ruin, when love binds us to it by our passions.

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96 *Mor*. Praef.12: “Percussionum quippe diuersa sunt genera. Alia namque est percussio, qua peccator percutitur ut corrigatur; alia qua nonnunquam quisque percutient, non ut praeterita corrigit, sed ne ventura committat; alia qua plerumque percuti; per quam nec praeterita culpa corrigitur nec futura prohibetur sed ut, dum inopinata salus percussionem sequitur, saluantis uirtus cogitata ardentius ametur; cumque innoxius flagello atteritur ei per patientiam meritorum summa cumuletur.”  
97 *Ep*. 2.2, 42.  
98 *Mor*. 5.63.  
99 Carole Straw asserted that Gregory’s cosmology was conceived in terms of degrees of mutability. One had being to the degree that one was stable or immutable. Thus, according to Straw: “Creation ranges along a hierarchical scale graded in degrees of being and value: the immutability or mutability that determines one’s level of existence carries a moral significance. The more reason and resistance to mutability one possesses, the more spiritual one becomes. Concomitantly, one is closer to God, true being, and perfect goodness.” Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 32.  
100 *Mor*. 2.34-37.  
101 Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 77.  
102 *HEv*. 1.4.2: “Hoc iam, fratres carissimi, etiam si Euangelium taceat, mundus clamat. Ruinae namque illius voces eius sunt. Qui enim tot attritus percussionibus a gloria sua cecidit, quasi iam nobis e
Among the devastations of his day, nothing could have been more appealing than stability to both Gregory and his audience. Thus, by calling attention to this essential aspect of God, and highlighting it, he could use it as a call to conversion.

The other side of God’s stability was that God was in complete control of his creation and nothing happened except by his providential ordering. Inasmuch as God did not change, he foreknew before all creation how everything would occur and nothing would come to pass except in accord with his preordained plan. Even acts and events that would appear evil still fell within God’s providential ordering. Illness, birth, death, wars, and even salvation itself, all were simply a manifestation of God’s preordained plan. Such thoughts would have been very consoling to Italy during Gregory’s time and he made full use of its force. In Gregory’s mind, all things were predestined, even the end of the world.

**Gregory’s Echatology**

Gregory believed himself to be living in the world’s “old age” and the prophesied end was soon to come. While Augustine was reluctant to speculate about the timing of the end, Gregory saw in the events and disasters of his day distinctive signs that the end of the world was near. He wrote:

> proximo regnum aliud quod sequitur ostendit. Ipsis iam et a quibus amatur amarus est. Ipsae eiusmod praedicant quod amandus non est. Si enim ruinam suum domus quasiassata minaretur, quisquis in illa habitaret fugeret, et qui stantem dilexerat, recedere quantocius a cadente festinaret. Si igitur mundus cadit et nos eum amando ampleximur, opprimi uolumus potius quam habitare, quia nulla nos ratio a ruina illius separat, quos eius passionibus amor ligat.”

Like Augustine before him, Gregory dismissed everything other than God that might be looked to as ordering history, such as astrology. See Mor. 2.34; 29.67. Mor. 3.4, 31; 12.2. Mor. 6.28-33; 14.46. Mor. 3.31; 14.53. Mor. 15.72. Gregory asserted that God even preordained the length of 5,000 years from the beginning of the world to the time of the Antichrist, which marked the end. See Mor. 15.72. HEv. 1.1.1; Mor. 10.54: “senectus mundi.” The idea of the world being in its old age was not new with Gregory, but had previously been expressed by Ambrose (De Bon. Mort. 10.46), Jerome (In Is. 14.51.16), John Chrysostom (In Matt. Hom. 10.5), Sulpicius Severus (vita Mart. 22.3), and Augustine (Serm. 93.7-8). Like Gregory, these authors used the approaching end as an impetus for conversion.
world was soon to appear. As prophesied in Scripture, prior to the end of the world, wars, disasters, and other omens would appear announcing its approach. Gregory saw these events as having begun in his day, with the rest of the predicted signs soon to follow:

From these things we certainly perceive have already all been accomplished, we dread that the others will soon come. For nation rises up against nation and distress treads upon the earth more now in our tribulations than we have read in books. You know that frequently we hear from other parts of the world that an earthquake has destroyed countless cities. We have suffered pestilence without cessation. We see the signs in the sun and moon and stars have certainly not appeared, but from the current change in the air we gather that these are not far off. Before Italy was handed over to be struck by the pagans’ sword, we vividly saw fires in the sky manifesting the blood of the human race that afterwards was shed. No new confusion has yet prevailed upon the sea and waves. But since many of the things foretold have been completed, there is no doubt but that even the few that remain will follow.

In light of this impending end, which functioned as the context for Gregory’s eschatology, he often commented on the various signs and events that would mark its coming.

Gregory, in the course of his homilies, letters, and other literary works, provided a very detailed description of the “last things.” While Gregory conceived the Church of his own day as triumphant, having bent the neck of the “rhinoceros” of earthly rulers to its own yoke, he warned that just prior to the end the Church would undergo one last

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109 Augustine would not speculate about when the end would occur. He believed that God did not want humans to know and to speculate could be harmful to the faith of others if the predictions were wrong. See Augustine, Ep. 199.54; En. in Ps. 6.2.

110 On numerous occasions, Gregory interpreted events of his day as signs of the end’s imminent occurrence. See Ep 9.232; 10.21; HEv. 1.1; HEz. 2.6; Dial. 4.43.

111 HEv. 1.1.1: “Ex quibus profecto omnibus alia iam facta cernimus, alia e proximo uentura formidamus. Nam gentem super gentem eussurgere earumque pressuram terris insistere plus iam in nostris tribulationibus quam in codicibus legimus. Quod terraenomotus urbes innumeram subruat, alis mundi patribus scitis quam frequenter audimus. Pestilentias sine cessatione patimur. Signa uero in sole et luna et stellis adhuc aperte minime uidimus, sed quia et haec non longe sint ex ipsa iam aeris immutatione colligimus. Quamuis priusquam Italia gentili gladio ferienda traderetur, igneas in caelo actes uidimus et ipsum qui postea humani generis fusus est sanguinem coruscantem. Confusio autem maris et fluctuum necdum noua exorta est. Sed cum multa iam praemuniatia completa sunt, dubium non est quod sequantur etiam pauca quae restant.”

112 The rest of Gregory’s eschatology, namely heaven, hell, and judgment, will be covered over the course of this study.

113 Mor. 31.2., 4.4-5.
persecution. This final persecution of the Church would be inaugurated by the coming of the Antichrist, whose advent Gregory already saw displayed in the pride of the Patriarch of Constantinople’s use of the term “ecumenical patriarch.” The Antichrist, “that damned man,” would be a person so possessed by Satan that he would act directly through him. Proclaiming himself to be God, the Antichrist would through miracles and deception gather an army about himself and wage war against Christ and his Church. The Antichrist’s reign would last three and a half years, during which time Enoch and Elijah would return to fight on behalf of the Church. The Antichrist’s reign would only end with the return of Christ, who was to come in judgment and cast all the wicked, including the Antichrist, into eternal punishment.

Gregory’s description of the end, although very detailed, retained a certain amount of ambiguity, particularly in regards as to when the final judgment of Christ would occur. It is unclear whether Christ’s return entailed his immediate final judgment of all creation, or whether there was to be a thousand year reign of Christ with his saints prior to the final judgment. Differing slightly from traditional “millenarian” accounts, Gregory suggested that the time from the beginning of the world until the time of the Antichrist would be five thousand years, which would then be followed by a thousand year reign of Christ prior to his

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114 Mor. 18.67.
115 Gregory, throughout his writings, repeatedly asserted that the Antichrist was soon to appear. See Ep. 5.39, 44; 7.28; 13.1; Mor. 4.17; 12.48; 13.12-13; 14.25-27; 15.19. The Patriarch of Constantinople’s use of the term “ecumenical patriarch” was another sign for Gregory of the Antichrist’s imminent approach. See Ep. 5.39; 7.28.
116 Mor. 15.69: “illo dmanato homine.” See also Mor. 13.13; 14.25; 25.34; 27.49.
117 Mor. 15.69; 32.15.24-25.
118 Mor. 14.27; 15.72.
final judgment. Gregory seems to have interpreted the thousand year reign allegorically rather than marking an actual amount of historical time. Indicating this point, Gregory stated: “by the number 1000, he denoted not the quantity of time but the universality with which the Church exercises dominion.” In such a case, the thousand year reign would apply, as it had with Augustine, to the current period of the Church in which it exercised dominion. Christ’s return, then, would mark the immediate resurrection of the dead and final judgment. While a certain amount of ambiguity remained, Gregory’s account of the end was still clear in terms of its climax in Christ’s judgment. It was this terrible and exacting judgment of Christ, whose imminent approach Gregory saw in the disasters of his day, which constituted the impetus for Gregory’s many admonitions for conversion and repentance.

Gregory’s expectation of the end of the world, certainly a strongly held personal belief, was utilized by him as a powerful pastoral tool. As with the disasters marking the instability of the world, the expectation of the imminent end was brought forth by Gregory to

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120 “Millenarianism,” utilizing Rev. 20:4-10, postulated a thousand year reign of Christ and the saints after his second coming and before the final judgment. Typically, this interpretation of world history rested on the supposition, in accord with God’s seven days of creation, that history was divided into seven ages each consisting of a thousand years. Christ’s second coming would coincide with the end of six thousand years, marking the inauguration of the thousand year reign. Such thought had long been a part of Christian eschatology, having been supported by Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Lactantius, and Hilary of Poitier. See Brian E. Daley, The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991; Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 30-31, 35, 39, 41, 67-68, 94. Gregory, while speaking in terms of distinct ages of the world, did differ from traditional “millenarianism” inasmuch as he postulated only five thousand years until the coming of the Antichrist and Christ’s return. See Mor. 15.72.

121 Mor. 18.67: “Millenario enim numero quantitatem temporis, sed universitatem qua regnat Ecclesia, designavit.”

122 Augustine had applied the thousand year reign to the current period of the Church, wherein the saints already reigned with Christ. See Augustine, civ. Dei, 20.7-9. Gregory, suggesting a similar position, indicated that the Church already exercised dominion in the world. See Mor. 9.3; 11.33. Hester has suggested that this understanding of the “millenium” was in fact Gregory’s. See Hester, Eschatology, 40-41.

123 Mor. 3.24; 4.26-27, 71-72. Dagens made mention of how Gregory used such eschatological expectations as a moral and pastoral tool. See Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 368-69, 383. Gregory spoke often of the awful and terrifying judgment of God, seeking to elicit fear of that judgment, so as to produce repentance and conversion.
warn his audience of a too close attachment to this visible world, for it was passing away. In Gregory’s mind, God’s strict judgment was soon to occur, so he warned those in his care to do penance before it was too late.

How shall we describe these terrors unless called heralds of the wrath to come? Whence it is necessary to consider that these troubles are as dissimilar from the final one as the power of the judge is distant from the person of the herald. Therefore, dearest brothers, consider this day with all attentiveness, correct your lives, change habits, resisting conquer evil temptations, punish evil deeds with tears. For the more secure will you behold the coming of your eternal judge, the more you now anticipate his severity by fear.

The echaton was thus used by Gregory as a call to conversion and asceticism. Yet devastation was not the only hallmark of his historical age. Many other changes were occurring around Gregory that had a formative impact on his theology of divine providence.

**Political Changes in the West**

Over the course of the sixth century, the Empire continued its governmental and military presence in the West by means of *exarchs* in Ravenna and Carthage. Yet Italy, and particularly Rome, lost its traditional forms of government. In the aftermath of the upheavals in Italy of the sixth century many of the “old aristocracy” and wealthy leisured class fled Rome and Italy, either to Constantinople or other eastern cities. With their departure, many of the traditional forms of government within Italy and Rome were lost, along with the culture and traditions they represented. Ancient Rome was no more. The

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124 *Mor.* 8.26. Peter Brown interpreted Gregory’s *Dialogues* as an example of this purpose, seeing it as Gregory’s warning call to Christians in light of this imminent end. See Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 214.

125 HEv. 1.1.5: “Quid autem terrores quos cernimus nisi sequentis irae praecones dixerim? Vnde et considerare necesse est quia ab illa tribulatione ultima tantum sunt tribulationes istae dissimiles, quantum a potentia iudicis persona praeconis distat. Ilum ergo diem, fratres carissimi, tota intentione cogitate, uitam corrigit, mores mutate, mala tentantia resistendo uincite, perpetrata autem fletibus punite. Aduentum namque aeterni iudicis tanto securiores quandoque uidebitis, quanto nunc districctionem illius timendo praeventis”


128 Ibid., 6-7.
senatorial aristocracy, classical education, civic building projects and celebrations, the thriving literary traditions, all, if not lost, certainly dwindled in the wake of the catastrophic events of the sixth century.\textsuperscript{129} With the loss of centralized government, it was to the military and the Church that the West looked to for unity and protection.\textsuperscript{130}

At the end of the sixth century, the Church, and particularly the pope, was in a unique position to provide stability and interconnectivity in the factionalized West.\textsuperscript{131} Consequently, more and more the Church and its bishops were called upon to replace the eroding civic leadership in the West. As early as Pope Leo I (d. 461), the pope was seen establishing the papacy at the head of civic government.\textsuperscript{132} Further evidence of this trend was indicated in Justinian’s \textit{Pragmatic Sanction} issued in 554 AD. In it Justinian conferred upon the pope the responsibility of governing the weights used in trade and conferred upon bishops the responsibility of selecting appropriate local leadership.\textsuperscript{133} The pope at this time was also responsible for maintaining the vital aqueducts, maintaining the grain supply, and feeding the poor.\textsuperscript{134} By the time Gregory became pope, the lines formerly separating the Church and Empire had largely eroded in the West.\textsuperscript{135} Gregory understood this new role of the Church to be not a matter of historical chance, but an act of God’s providence.

\textsuperscript{129} Robert Markus spoke of this loss of intellectual and social traditions as an “epistemological crises” that occurred in the West at this time. The epistemology of the Antique world was lost, being replaced with that of a “biblical culture,” one that marked the beginning of the medieval world. See Markus, \textit{End of Ancient Christianity}, 224-25.

\textsuperscript{130} Markus, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 6-7.


\textsuperscript{132} Markus, \textit{End of Ancient Christianity}, 126.

\textsuperscript{133} Dudden, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 1: 58-59.

\textsuperscript{134} Straw, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 3.

\textsuperscript{135} Gregory, in his letters, manifested that he had taken on responsibilities that in the past would have fallen upon civic leadership. For example, in many instances he was seen coordinating and providing for troops in the war with the Lombards. See \textit{Ep}. 2.2, 27, 38, 47. He was seen giving payment to the soldiers. See \textit{Ep}. 5.30. He also indicated that he had attempted a peace agreement with the Lombards, for which he was reprimanded by Emperor Maurice. See \textit{Ep}. 5.34, 36; 9.44, 66; 10.16. He even at one point paid off the Lombards for peace. See \textit{Ep}. 5.39.
The Church as Vehicle of Divine Providence

The Church, as Gregory understood it, was God’s providential vehicle of salvation within the world. In fact, he believed there was no salvation outside of it.\footnote{Gregory explicitly stated this belief in \textit{Mor}. 14.5. Such a conclusion would be expected in light of the fact that he believed that those who died without baptism, even if only having the stain of original sin, went to hell. See \textit{Mor}. 9.31.} He believed that the Church fulfilled this role in different ways over the course of history, and as such, he recognized distinctive ages within the history of the Church.\footnote{Dagens, \textit{Saint Grégoire}, 347, 396.} These ages began with the apostles, then the martyrs, followed by the teachers or doctors, which preceded the end.\footnote{\textit{Mor}. 9.11; 19.12.19. Dagens, \textit{Saint Grégoire}, 347.} Gregory believed he lived in the age of teachers, wherein the Church was secure and triumphant.\footnote{Gregory believed that prior to the end, in the age of the Church in which he currently lived, God was to exalt the Church both in its understanding as well as in its position over the kings and rulers of the world. \textit{Mor}. 9.10-16. See Dagens, \textit{Saint Grégoire}, 366-67.} While heresies and schisms remained, his age of the Church was marked by growth in its understanding of the faith.\footnote{There were a number of Christian heresies that remained during Gregory’s age, and which he was seen responding to in his letters. Donatism, a heresy rampant in Augustine’s day, still remained in portions of North Africa. See \textit{Ep}. 1.72, 75; 4.32, 35; 5.3; 6.36, 64. Monophysitism was still present in the East. See \textit{Ep}. 12.16. Arianism still occurred in areas, particularly among the Lombards. See Markus, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 106. Of all of these doctrinal issues, the most aggravating faced by Gregory was the “Three Chapters Schism.” For an account of this schism and its affect on Gregory, see Markus, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 125-42. For Gregory’s own response, see \textit{Ep}. 3.10; 4.2-4, 33, 37; 5.52, 56; 6.65; 9.148.} Its mission at this time, while still allowing for the conversion of remnant pagans,\footnote{Occasionally Gregory received news of remnant paganism and idol worship, which he quickly responded to in his letters to stamp out. See \textit{Ep}. 4.23, 25, 27, 29; 8.4, 19; 9.205. In a similar fashion, Gregory responded to reports of magic and wizards. See \textit{Ep}. 5.32; 11.33.} was primarily directed to Christians themselves, who, in Gregory’s opinion, stood in need of conversion and repentance.\footnote{Markus, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 41-45; \textit{Mor}. 3.35-37.}

Gregory, in the first year of his pontificate, outlined how the clergy and bishops of his day were to fulfill this mission of the Church.\footnote{Gregory gave these instructions in the first literary work of his pontificate, the \textit{Liber Regula Pastoralis}.} While the sacraments certainly served an...
essential function, Gregory’s focus was always on effective preaching, which had the capacity to bring lax Christians to repentance and conversion. It was the tears of the repentant Christian, a second baptism, which Gregory sought, and preaching was the most effective means for accomplishing it. Gregory, for his part, fulfilled this mission of the Church by seeking conversion among the clergy, who, as his letters manifested, often stood in need of conversion themselves.

In order for the Church to effectively fulfill its providential role, Gregory believed it had to adhere to proper order and structure. He understood the Church, like the celestial order of angels, to be hierarchically structured; a hierarchy that was necessary for its proper functioning. This fact explains why Gregory so forcibly rebuked monks and clergy for failing to obey proper order, for it compromised the Church’s effectiveness for the salvation of souls. This structure and order of the Church was necessary in Gregory’s mind. It is why, after Augustine was sent to convert the English, the first order of business for Gregory was to establish proper Church structure and hierarchy there. Similarly, in his letters to the monarchs of the kingdoms of the West, he requested their aid in enforcing such proper order.

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144 Gregory held that baptism was a necessary requirement for salvation. See Ep. 9.54. Also, in his Dialogues, he spoke to the efficacy of the Mass for obtaining grace, particularly for those souls experiencing purgation in the afterlife. See Dial. 4.57.
145 Straw spoke to Gregory’s conception of the role of the preacher to effect such conversion. See Straw, Gregory the Great, 194-212.
146 Gregory, in many of his letters, was seen correcting sins and abuses among his clergy and bishops, often assigning them forced penances to atone for their sins. See Ep. 1.66; 2.3; 4.24; 5.18; 10.2.
147 Gregory compared and patterned the hierarchical structure of the Church to the hierarchical structure of the nine choirs of angels. See Ep. 5.59.
148 Gregory was often seen in his letters rebuking, monks, priests, and bishops for failing to observe proper order. A good example occurred wherein Gregory repeatedly warned the Bishop of Ravenna to stop wearing the pallium outside of Mass. Seemingly a small matter, it disrupted proper Church order in Gregory’s mind. See Ep. 3.54; 5.11, 15.
149 One of the first duties Gregory gave Augustine after his successful conversion of the Angli was to establish proper ecclesial structure within the realm. See Ep. 11.39.
Church order. Gregory’s recognition of a hierarchical structure within the Church was a reflection of his understanding of God’s divinely established hierarchical order in the cosmos.

The concept of hierarchy was the ontological lens by which Gregory viewed every aspect of creation. Just as the Church’s order and function was an expression of an hierarchy, the proper order and function of the universe relied on a divinely established hierarchy within creation. In fact, God utilized such hierarchies to structure every aspect of creation. The hierarchical structure of the Church proposed by Gregory was only a recognition of this divinely established principle of order. Furthermore, it would seem appropriate that during the chaos and destruction of his day, Gregory would continually stress a divinely established order within creation and the Church. Such hierarchical order would again highlight God’s stability and his ultimate control over the events in the world.

Effects of Gregory’s Historical Context on his Theology

From this brief exposition of Gregory’s historical context, a number of key components of his theology come into view. In the first place, all of Gregory’s theology had a moral tenor and goal. He utilized the events and changes of his time as a call to conversion. Towards this end he theologically stressed God’s stability, the instability of the visible world and its pleasures, the approaching end of the world, along with God’s terrible judgment that all would incur. These themes and ideas, while representing moral exhortation, came to be primary components of his theology of providence.

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150 In particular, Gregory requested that they stamp out simony in their realms, for it was a disruption of proper order when ecclesial office was purchased. Also, lay people were not to be raised to the episcopal office, for, in Gregory’s mind, one must first learn to obey authority before one could properly administer it. See Ep. 9.214, 216.
Additionally, these historical events allowed Gregory to stress God’s providential control over all things. He stressed that all events, even such things as disasters, wars, or droughts, happened in accord with God’s divine providence. God ordered such things for the correction and punishment of sin and to garner greater reward for the just in the life to come. This providence was the result of God’s divinely established order within creation, which was a function of its hierarchical structure. Hierarchy, for Gregory, was a divinely established mechanism for order, and as such, he used it himself to order human institutions such as the Church. In this way, then, the Church itself became an extension of God’s providence in the world, leading souls to God, punishing sin, and castigating the wicked.

The historical events of Gregory’s time obviously had a profound impact on his theology. Nonetheless, there were a number of other factors that were equally influential on the shape of his theology. A number of dramatic changes had been occurring within Christianity during the centuries preceding Gregory which, in large measure, were responsible for his own spirituality and Christian sensibility. These movements within Christianity will now be examined in terms of their impact on Gregory’s theology of providence.

**Gregory’s Religious Context**

In late antiquity divine providence was rarely the subject of specific theological discourses. Divine providence was not the subject of heated debate or doctrinal clarifications such as was the case with Christology, the relationship of grace and human

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151 There were some notable exceptions to this otherwise general rule. Augustine, both at the beginning and the end of his theological career, wrote treatises that dealt explicitly with God’s providence. See Augustine, *De ordine* and *De civitate Dei*. 
freedom, or eschatology. Divine providence functioned, rather, as a conceptual backdrop for all these various debates and movements within Christianity. Consequently, in order to develop the context for Gregory’s thought on divine providence, one cannot merely examine how this individual doctrine was treated over late antiquity. Instead, it is necessary to examine this doctrine as it operated in the various trends and ideas that emerged within Christianity leading up to Gregory, which in turn formed the context for his own ideas on providence.

Gregory’s theological and religious context was invariably linked to four movements, or developments, within Christianity over late antiquity, which were themselves intricately related to each other. These four Christian movements were monasticism, the cult of the saints, the Christian notion of the afterlife, and a growing awareness of *peccata levia* (light sins). It was the flux and mutual interactions of these four aspects of Christianity over late antiquity that formed the immediate context for Gregory’s own spirituality and theology, particularly so his theology of providence. Consequently, some time will be spent here examining these four aspects of Christianity as they operated within late antiquity.

**Rise of Monasticism**

Monasticism was not a new entity within Christianity in Gregory’s day. It had been in existence in various forms for three centuries. Nevertheless, the role and place of monasticism within Christianity in the West was undergoing profound changes during Gregory’s time. Initially, monasticism was rooted in an ascetic ideal that sought detachment and death to the world; a life marked by the study of Scripture and contemplation. This represented within Christian imagination a new model of martyrdom, one not rooted in
physical death but death to the world.\textsuperscript{152} Manifesting this ideal, monasteries were initially poor and small, often located on the perimeter of society and Christian thought.\textsuperscript{153} During the fifth, and particularly the sixth century, the role and place of monasticism began to change.

While initially a solitary affair, monasticism eventually moved within the cities. Monasteries and convents became fixtures of the Christian landscape, often becoming centers for Christianity in the cities and countryside where they were located. Aiding this movement was the new wealth of the kingdoms of the West, particularly in Gaul, which used its wealth to found new monasteries and convents.\textsuperscript{154} These monasteries and convents became an oasis of the sacred amidst the profane world, acting as powerhouses of prayer for all who provided their patronage.\textsuperscript{155}

Monks, previously seeking isolation from the world, now were being called to serve it. This change, introduced to the West by John Cassian, was rooted in the ideal of union between the contemplative and active lives, wherein contemplation was to be used in service of the world.\textsuperscript{156} This ideal of service manifested itself over the course of the fifth century as a growing trend occurred of selecting bishops who had been monks. A classic example occurred in Gaul over the fifth century where many of its bishops were taken from the monastery at Lerins.\textsuperscript{157} Even Gregory himself was brought from the monastery to be pope. These new monk-bishops brought with them their own monastic ideals into the churches they served.

\textsuperscript{152} Brown, \textit{Rise of Western Christendom}, 69-74.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 220-222.
\textsuperscript{154} Brown cited Columbanus as a prime example of this new utilization of wealth in Gaul to found monasteries during the time of Gregory. See Ibid., 252-54.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 224-225.
\textsuperscript{156} Markus, \textit{End of Ancient Christianity}, 181-91.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 181.
As monasticism began to impregnate all aspects of Christianity, it brought with it its own ideals of Christian spirituality and theology. Monasticism was rooted in a particular ascetic ideal, wherein one sought to judge one’s sins in this life and make atonement, so as to avoid judgment in the next life. With this end in view, monks would often reflect in as vivid detail as possible on the afterlife, its rewards and punishments, in order to motivate themselves in this life. According to Peter Brown, these ideals of monasticism effected profound changes in the imaginative patterns within Christianity, putting new emphasis on sin and atonement, as well as focus on the afterlife and judgment. All of these themes and ideas, rooted in monasticism, came to characterize Gregory’s own theological outlook and sensibility.

**Effects of Monasticism on Gregory’s Theology**

Gregory, having come from the monastery himself to be pope, was always a champion of monasticism. Besides founding monasteries on his family estates, he aided the foundation of many more as pope. Similarly, he was always quick to defend the rights of monasteries and monks against intrusive bishops, or even the emperor himself. Besides fostering such monastic endeavors, he himself championed the theology and spirituality of monasticism. In fact, his own personal hero, after whom he sought to pattern his own life,

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158 Daley suggested that this view of judgment constituted a form of “realized eschatology.” As the ascetic monk passed through judgment in this life, he already began to experience resurrected life. See Daley, *Hope of the Early Church*, 70-71.

159 Ibid., 69-70. Gregory himself was seen expounding these same ideals. He frequently suggested the need to reflect on God’s judgment and, taking into account one’s sin, to punish oneself so as to avoid God’s punishment. See Mor. 4.26-27, 71-72; Ep. 1.33.


161 See Ep. 1.50; 3.17, 58; 4.8, 10, 18, 44; 9.165.

162 Gregory denounced Emperor Maurice’s law that prevented men in the military from becoming monks. See Ep. 3.61.
was no one else but the great monastic, Saint Benedict.\textsuperscript{163} Nearly everything he wrote, including his theology of divine providence, bore the imprint of monastic ideals.

In late antiquity, monasticism was characterized by an ideal of asceticism, wherein monks renounced the world and its attachments, so as to be more open to God through interior contemplation.\textsuperscript{164} This ideal was rooted in a particular cosmological perception, coming from Stoicism and Neo-Platonism, which treated sin as the movement exterior to the visible world, whereas holiness was rooted in the turn inward so as to access the invisible world and God.\textsuperscript{165} Such ascetic ideals characterized nearly every aspect of Gregory’s thought. In the first place, he believed holiness could only be found through rejecting the visible world, along with all of its attachments, enticements, and pleasures. “For the mind of man being miserably discharged without, is so dissipated in things corporeal, as neither to return within itself nor is it able to think of him who is invisible.”\textsuperscript{166} In Gregory’s opinion, the more a person was bound to the visible world through the physical senses, the less a person was free to enter into the spiritual world through interior contemplation within one’s soul.\textsuperscript{167}

Such a rejection of the world not only entailed a battle with one’s own desires, but even more so a battle with evil spirits. Gregory, bearing the influence of eastern

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\textsuperscript{163} Gregory, in Book II of the \textit{Dialogues}, recounted Benedict’s great virtue, holiness, and miracles, offering him as the model for all to imitate, including himself. See \textit{Dial.} 2.

\textsuperscript{164} See Cassian, \textit{Coll.} 3.6-10.

\textsuperscript{165} Dagens suggested that this Stoic doctrine, found in Gregory, had been a common theological theme within early Christianity, having been utilized by Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, and Athanasius. See Dagens, \textit{Saint Grégoire}, 168-71.

\textsuperscript{166} Mor. 15.52: “\textit{Mens enim hominis male exterius fusa, sic in rebus corporeis sparsa est, ut neque ad semetipsam intus redeat neque eum qui est inuisibilis cogitare sufficiat.”}

\textsuperscript{167} Mor. 5.61-62.
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monasticism, conceived the spiritual life as a battle with demons, who at every instance sought to entice the soul to sin.\footnote{Mor. 4.42; 6.45. Here, Gregory manifested the influence of Cassian more than Augustine. Cassian described the monastic life as one entailing continual spiritual combat with demons. See Coll. 2.11.}

The wolf [Satan] snatches and scatters the sheep, when he drags one to excess, another he inflames with avarice, another he raises into arrogance, another he destroys by passion; this one he pricks with envy, that one he trips by deceit. When the devil slays believers through temptations he is like a wolf dispersing the flock.\footnote{HEv. 1.14.3: “Lupus rapit et dispergit oues, cum alium ad luxuriam pertrahit, alium in avaritiam accendit, alium in superbiam erigit, alium per iracundiam diuidit; hunc inuidia stimulat, illum in fallacia supplantat. Quasi ergo gregem lupus dissipat, cum fidelium populum diabolus per tentantiones necat.”}

The goal of such spiritual warfare, in which all Christians were ultimately engaged, was to be freed from attachments to the flesh, so as to free the mind and soul to be elevated to God through interior contemplation.

The spiritual goal for Gregory, one to which he called all souls in his care, was union with God through contemplation.\footnote{Gregory, throughout his corpus, proffered this goal of contemplation. See Mor. 5.8-9, 62; 6.56-64; 7.53.} From such contemplation the soul was raised above itself and united to God, wherein the soul received the invaluable gift of discretio. Discretio, or right judgment, gave the soul the ability to see the world and oneself with God’s judgment.\footnote{Mor. 6.24-25; 7.41-45. The role of discretio in Gregory’s thought resulted from the influence of Cassian, and was a hallmark of Eastern monasticism. See Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 118-20. Cassian described discretio as the mother of all the virtues, for it was the first and most excellent of the virtues, as well as guarding and regulating all the other virtues. See Cassian, Coll. 1.23; 2.1-4.} Such insight invariably caused each person to see one’s own sinfulness, which in turn produced conversion and repentance. It was through such repentance that the soul was able to atone for its sins, so as to prepare for the strict judgment of God.\footnote{This conception of repentance and atonement for sin was a characteristic of Gregory’s own spirituality as well as the primary goal of all his pastoral efforts. As such, he frequently commented on it in his writings and letters. See Ep. 3.27, 29; 11.18; Mor. 9.54-56, 67; 11.48.}

\footnote{Mor. 4.42; 6.45. Here, Gregory manifested the influence of Cassian more than Augustine. Cassian described the monastic life as one entailing continual spiritual combat with demons. See Coll. 2.11.}

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as to initiate such repentance and moral conversion.\textsuperscript{173} Ironically, then, the source of moral life was to focus on death.\textsuperscript{174}

Scripture played an important role in this moral goal of Gregory and was central to monastic spirituality. \textit{Lectio divina}, divine reading, was the essential art of monastic life and was central to Gregory’s own spirituality and theological thought. The Bible was the supreme authority, God’s own word, from which was derived all true and valuable knowledge.\textsuperscript{175} It constituted a vital aid to contemplation, bringing to the soul not only spiritual knowledge and \textit{discretio}, but in convicting the soul of its sin, it had the capacity to bring about moral conversion. Likewise, it was also the source for all effective preaching. Gregory adamantly proposed that all Christians, and particularly the clergy responsible for preaching, were to direct all their efforts to understanding Scripture.\textsuperscript{176} In such fashion Gregory is credited with founding the biblical culture that defined the Middle Ages after him.\textsuperscript{177}

These tenets and practices of monasticism, particularly that of contemplation and the role of Scripture, were also very evident in Gregory’s theory of knowledge. For Gregory there were two types and modes of knowledge, secular knowledge gained through the senses, and spiritual knowledge gained through the soul’s contemplation of God and Scripture.\textsuperscript{178} The goal of all knowledge was ultimately God and salvation. Secular knowledge only had

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{173} Ep. 1.33; 3.29; 11.18; 13.33.
\bibitem{174} Mor. 13.32-33.
\bibitem{175} Gregory held the Bible to be the supreme authority and constituted the source of all valuable knowledge. See \textit{Ep}. 5.53a; \textit{Mor}. 20.1.
\bibitem{176} In one instance, Gregory even condemned a bishop for wasting his time teaching grammar, rather than teaching Scripture. See \textit{Ep}. 11.34. Similarly, he wanted Scripture read rather than his own writing at vigils, so as not to confuse the uneducated. See \textit{Ep}. 12.6.
\bibitem{177} Dagens, \textit{Saint Grégoire}, 54.
\bibitem{178} Dagens, in his study of Gregory, spent a good amount of time examining Gregory’s theory of knowledge. See Dagens, \textit{Saint Grégoire}, 31-54. For Gregory’s own explanation, see \textit{Mor}. 18.40-60.
\end{thebibliography}
value to the degree it served these ends. Consequently, Gregory denounced all secular knowledge that he saw as contravening this ultimate purpose of knowledge, particularly classical education with its ties to pagan philosophy and its tendency to foster pride. True knowledge, on the other hand, was derived interiorly through contemplation and was a gift of the Holy Spirit acting on the soul. Thus Gregory recognized a hierarchy of knowledge, with the spiritual being superior to the secular, and the secular only having value to the degree it served the spiritual. This theory of knowledge represented a distinctive break with antique culture, as it constituted “the replacement of the existing vestiges of classical culture by a codification of knowledge based on religious truth.”

This new theory of knowledge, as manifested by Gregory, constituted one of the key characteristics of Christianity within the Middle Ages.

*The Cult of the Saints*

Alongside the monastic movement, another profound development of the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, doing just as much to change the face of Christianity, was the cult of the saints. The cult of the saints, as it blossomed in this era of Christian history, was not merely a replacement of pagan practices and superstition with Christian ones. As Peter Brown pointed out, the cult of the saints represented a profound shift in the imaginative frameworks

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179 Gregory has been construed as an opponent to all secular knowledge. The example often used to illustrate this conclusion was the letter Gregory wrote wherein he reprimanded Bishop Desiderius of Vienne for teaching grammar. See *Ep. 11.34*. The point of Gregory’s letter was not to devalue grammar or secular knowledge, but to subjugate it to the higher goal of spiritual knowledge, to which he thought the bishop’s time would be better served. See Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 31-54; Markus, *Gregory the Great*, 38-39.


182 This theory of knowledge was also reflected in Gregory’s scriptural exegesis. While the historical sense was always the starting point, Gregory’s ultimate goal was always the allegorical and moral senses of the text. See Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 63; Markus, *Gregory the Great*, 45-46.

183 Markus, *Signs and Meanings*, 70.

184 Markus suggested that this new theory of knowledge, along with the new place of the Church in relation to the State, marked the end of ancient Christianity and the emergence medieval Christianity. See Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 222-25.
within the Christian mind of this time. More so in the West than in the East, it represented the development of a new self-consciousness and identity within Christianity.

While honoring dead heroes had always had its place within classical society, the memorializing and honoring of the dead had typically been a private, family affair. What was new about the cult of the saints as it emerged within Christianity during the fourth century was that it became a public devotion tied to the liturgical celebrations of the Church. A classic example, and one of the first, occurred in Milan in 385, when Ambrose transferred the dead bodies of Saints Gervasius and Protasius to under the altar of his newly constructed basilica. In this fashion, the dead saints and their holiness were made present and available to the living. As a result there was a rapid expansion of the cult of the saints over the fourth century, and by the sixth the liturgical calendar was overflowing with their feasts. The saints of old, in this way, were made accessible and available to all, allowing for a new association and identification with them and the Church of old.

Besides the bodies and relics of these dead saints, another mode of identifying with these saints, which developed over the course of the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, was the stories or vitae that described their lives and miracles. While the passiones of the martyrs had been a stable part of Christian literature since the second and third centuries, these new

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185 Peter Brown, *Cult of the Saint*, 1-22.
186 Joan Petersen suggests that the East focused more on living saints or holy men, while it was the West that really developed the veneration of dead saints and their relics. See Petersen, *Dialogues*, 100-117.
188 Ibid., 36-37. See also Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 143-46.
190 After Constantine had legalized Christianity and Theodosius II had made it the religion of the Empire, a sort of identity crisis occurred within Christianity. The crisis centered on the continuity and identification of the Church of the fourth and fifth centuries with the Church of the martyrs of the second and third centuries. The solution to this crisis was two-fold. First, a new ascetic ideal developed with the emergence of monasticism, wherein martyrdom might not be achieved, but one could achieve similar holiness through death to the world. Secondly, the cult of the saints emerged wherein the Church could continue to identify with the heroes of old and benefit from their prayers and patronage. See Markus, *End of Ancient Christainity*, 89-95.
vitae were not merely accounts of the saint’s death, but rather testimonies to the holiness of the lives of these saints, often revealed through the miracles they performed. The import of these stories, besides celebrating the life of their heroes, was to provide a new ideal of holiness that all could identify with and emulate. Additionally, by manifesting the holiness and miracles of these saints, it provided a basis for the living to call upon them in order to tap into their holiness and miraculous power.

The saints, and particularly their relics, came to occupy a central place and function within the churches of the West at this time. First of all, these saints, by means of the presence of their relics, came to occupy the position of patroni for the people and towns where they dwelled. Like the pagan gods of antique culture, these saints, by means of their relics, provided protection and access to miraculous powers to all who showed them proper devotion. Such relics also provided for a source of solidarity and common identification for the towns in which they were located, a quality much desired in the fragmented West of the time. These relics were also very important to the bishops who oversaw their veneration and public devotion, for they brought renown to their diocese and pieces of such relics were valuable gifts to be granted. Gregory himself, as witnessed in

191 Petersen, Dialogues, 59-75.
192 Ibid., 130-31.
193 Brown, Cult of the Saint, 38-41.
194 Peter Brown has suggested that the role of saints in late antiquity was modeled after imperial power. Saints in the heavenly court acted like “parrésia,” those who had freedom of speech, in the imperial court. By virtue of their freedom and access to the heavenly emperor, the saints were able to bring the cause of their clients to him for mercy. See Peter Brown, “The Decline of the Empire of God: Amnesty, Penance, and the Afterlife from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages,” in Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages, eds. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 47-49.
195 Brown, Cult of the Saint, 42.
196 Ibid., 93-105.
his letters, received many requests for relics, and typically he was only too happy to comply.\textsuperscript{197}

As the cult of the saints spread, questions arose to its connection to the pagan practices commonly practiced in the antique West. Such questions centered on whether the cult of the saint was merely a continuation of past pagan superstitions.\textsuperscript{198} Peter Brown has suggested that this was not the case, rather it was an expression of changes within Christianity’s own self-understanding.\textsuperscript{199} In fact, often the practices of the cult of the saints were used to eradicate pagan beliefs and practices. A common practice during this time was to place tombs and relics of saints at old pagan shrines, thereby effectively turning them into Christian ones.\textsuperscript{200} A similar practice was the replacement of pagan feasts with Christian ones.\textsuperscript{201} Thus, while both the pagan and Christian practices may have been rooted in a similar cosmology and view of the relationship of the visible and invisible worlds, the cult of the saints drew upon those existing beliefs and transformed them from superstition into an understanding of the world that was thoroughly Christian.\textsuperscript{202}

\textit{Effects of the Cult of Saints on Gregory’s Theology}

This new realization of the saints and their function within Christianity was evident within Gregory’s theology, and as with everything else, he capitalized on it to further his

\textsuperscript{197} On numerous occasions throughout Gregory’s letters he indicated both requests made and granted concerning relics. One example occurred in \textit{Ep.} 13.43, where Gregory sent filings from the chains of Saints Peter and Paul to the bishop Eulogius in order to help with his eyesight. As Gregory claimed in the letter, “many miracles have taken place through that blessing.”

\textsuperscript{198} Brown, \textit{Cult of the Saint}, 25.

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 1-22.

\textsuperscript{200} Markus, \textit{End of Ancient Christianity}, 142. Gregory himself, in a letter to Augustine, told him to convert pagan shrines to Christian ones in this fashion. See \textit{Ep.} 11.56.

\textsuperscript{201} Markus, \textit{End of Ancient Christianity}, 100-106.

\textsuperscript{202} Brown, \textit{Rise of Western Christendom}, 162-63.
pastoral agenda. In the first place, the lives of the saints served as models for imitation.\footnote{Mor. 9.89; Ep. 1.24.}

Like Scripture, they had the capacity to instruct and convict those who meditated on them.\footnote{Gregory made use of this idea as the foundational purpose of his Dialogues. See Dial. 1.Praef.}

Consequently, as evidenced in his Dialogues and homilies, Gregory was very fond of telling stories of the saints for such pedagogical purposes. Similarly, Gregory told these stories so as to manifest the presence of the invisible world, made apparent through the miracles and virtues of these saints.\footnote{Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 222-23.} Sin blinded the soul to the invisible world, and such stories had the capacity to awaken the listener to the invisible world, a first step to conversion. Ultimately, however, Gregory told such miracle stories because he believed in their substantial truth.

Gregory wholeheartedly believed in the efficacy of the saints’ prayers as well as the miraculous power of their relics.\footnote{Dial. 1.1-2; 3.22; 4.6; Ep. 4.30.} He manifested this belief in the numerous gifts of relics he made to people throughout his papacy, to which he attributed miraculous powers.\footnote{The most common gift of relics Gregory gave were filings from the chains of Peter and Paul, the patrons of Rome. See Ep. 1.25, 29-30; 6.58; 7.25; 8.33; 12.2; 13.43. In doing so, Gregory often gave them in a key shaped reliquary, the significance of which was to manifest the spiritual preeminence of Rome and the papacy. Gregory bestowed many other such relics upon people. See Ep. 4.30; 9.29.} The power of such relics was rooted in their connection to the soul of the saint that continued to live on after death.\footnote{208} Inasmuch as the prayers of the saints were efficacious during their earthly lives, their prayers continued to be effective in their life after death, and all could tap into it by means of their relics.

\footnote{203 Mor. 9.89; Ep. 1.24.} Mor. 9.89; Ep. 1.24.
\footnote{204} Gregory made use of this idea as the foundational purpose of his Dialogues. See Dial. 1.Praef.
\footnote{205} Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 222-23.
\footnote{206} Dial. 1.1-2; 3.22; 4.6; Ep. 4.30.
\footnote{207} The most common gift of relics Gregory gave were filings from the chains of Peter and Paul, the patrons of Rome. See Ep. 1.25, 29-30; 6.58; 7.25; 8.33; 12.2; 13.43. In doing so, Gregory often gave them in a key shaped reliquary, the significance of which was to manifest the spiritual preeminence of Rome and the papacy. Gregory bestowed many other such relics upon people. See Ep. 4.30; 9.29.
\footnote{208} Gregory very much believed that the souls of all people continued to live immediately after death. He sought to prove as much in Book IV of his Dialogues. Gregory believed that due to the integral connection of the body and soul, visible and invisible, the soul of the departed was still in some fashion related to their earthly remains, which would one day be reunited to the soul in the resurrection. Consequently, a person had access to the saints and their prayers by means of these earthly relics. A great example of this fact and belief of Gregory was that on occasion he had people swear oaths before the relics of saints, where, in essence, the dead saint acted as a living witness. See Ep. 13.5, 35. Matthew Dal Santo has suggested that Gregory, like Maximus the Confessor in the East (c. 580-662), understood the connection of the body and soul in terms similar to the idea of communicatio idiomatum, which was used to describe the unity of Christ’s two natures. See Dal Santo, “Philosophy,” 46.
Such a belief in relics and the saints manifested an essential component of Gregory’s cosmology, as well as his theology of divine providence. Gregory believed God had created and structured the world such that there was a vital connection between its visible and invisible aspects, wherein the visible gave expression to the invisible that governed it. This belief constituted what both Carole Straw and William McCready described as a “sacramental view” of reality. The visible world was a sacramental expression of the presence and operation of the invisible world. Consequently, the visible world, particularly through relics, continued to manifest the presence and activity of the invisible souls of the saints. This idea of the sacramentality of creation, expressed in nearly every aspect of Gregory’s thought, stood at the very heart of his theology of divine providence.

**The Afterlife**

Another important development that emerged over the course of late antiquity, and one particularly evident in Gregory’s thought and spirituality, was a growing awareness and concern about the afterlife. Eschatology had always been a stable part of Christian expectation and reflection. What was new in the fifth, sixth, and particularly seventh centuries, was the degree to which Christians probed and questioned the contours and characteristics of life after death. The cult of the saints and prayers for the dead had raised pressing questions about the afterlife, such as when each person experienced God’s judgment, the location and condition of the deceased soul before the resurrection of the body,

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209 Gregory believed that God governed the visible aspects of creation through the invisible, namely, angels, demons, and human souls. See *Mor.* 9.26.
210 Both McCready and Straw characterized Gregory’s cosmology using this expression. See Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 20; McCready, *Signs of Sanctity*, 258.
211 Brian Daley has provided a thorough account of the eschatological hope of Christians, its themes and developments, over the patristic era. See Brian E. Daley, *The Hope*. 
and the possibility of post-death atonement for sins. These questions about the afterlife became a new locus of Christian discourse in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Furthermore, they constituted the immediate context for Gregory’s own reflection and thought about the afterlife.

One of the central questions concerning the afterlife in late antiquity, and one upon which so many other aspects of the afterlife depended, was when life after death began. Debate over this question was particularly manifest in the middle of the sixth century in response to a ressurgence of Aristotelian philosophy within Christianity, particularly in the East. This Christian Aristotelianism, as it was espoused by John Philoponus, equated human beings with their natures, which were corruptible in both matter and form, body and soul. This fact meant that upon the death each person completely passed out of existence, and in the resurrection a completely new person was fashioned in a new state of incorruptibility. The debate that resulted from these views at the end of the sixth century was the context for Book IV of Gregory’s Dialogues, wherein he sought to stress the soul’s immediate entance into the afterlife, immediate post-death judgment, and the intercessory role of the saints. Gregory, like most Christian writers before him, believed that upon

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212 Dal Santo, “Philosophy,” 44.
213 This fact was evidenced at the Council of Constantinople in 553, which, led by Justinian, issued fifteen anathemas against a number of “Origenist” doctrines about the afterlife that had resurfaced, particularly in Palestine. ACO 4.1, 248-9. Evagrius (346-399) and Didymus (313-398), later exponents of Origen’s theology, were more than likely the targets of a number of these anathemas, even though neither were formally mentioned by name. See Daley, The Hope, 188-90; Julia Konstantinovsky, Evagrius Ponticus: The Making of a Gnostic (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 20-22, 153.
214 This Christian interest in Aristotle peaked around 550 with John Philoponus (c. 490-570s) in the East and Boethius (c. 480-524) in the West. See Dal Santo, “Philosophy,” 42-43.
215 Daley, The Hope, 195-96. This Christian Aristotelianism, which was particularly strong in Constantinople, may have been the context for Gregory’s argument with the Patriarch Eutychius over the nature of the resurrected body. Eutychius supported a position very similar to that proposed by John Philoponus, which was that an entirely new, incorruptible body was fashioned in the resurrection. For Gregory’s account of this debate, see Mor. 14.56.
216 Dal Santo, “Philosophy,” 43-44.
death the soul immediately entered resurrected life, while the body would rise to join the
soul at the end of the world.\footnote{Gregory sought to manifest the fact of the soul’s immediate entrance into the afterlife through the numerous death-bed scenes he reported in Book IV of his \textit{Dialogues}. For antecedent Christian writers suggesting a similar account of the soul’s immediate entrance into the afterlife, see Tertullian (\textit{De Anima} 55-58), Origen (\textit{De Princ.} Praef.5), Ambrose (\textit{In Ps.} 1.47-54), and Augustine (\textit{civ. Dei} 13.8).}

One of the most debated questions concerning the afterlife in the patristic era, and one where answers widely diverged, was the location and conditions of the soul in post-death existence as it awaited the resurrection of the body. Tertullian spoke of souls dwelling in Hades after death, where they experienced either punishment or glory in accord with the merits of their lives, and there awaited the resurrection of the body and final judgment.\footnote{Tertullian, \textit{De Anima} 55-58.}

Origen believed all souls immediately experienced judgment upon death, but then underwent purgation and a form of schooling (\textit{schola animarum}) to prepare each soul for union with God at the time of the resurrection of the body.\footnote{Origen, \textit{De Princ.} 2.11.3-7; 3.6.9.} Ambrose spoke of the saints immediately going to heaven upon death, whereas the souls of sinners passed into a storehouse where they waited for the resurrection of the body.\footnote{Ambrose, \textit{In Ps.} 1.47-54; \textit{De Bono Mort.} 10.45-48.} Jerome and Augustine likewise proposed that souls immediately underwent judgment upon death and entered into punishment or reward as a result.\footnote{Jerome, \textit{In Eccl.} 9.10; Augustine, \textit{civ. Dei} 13.8.} It was this fact of the soul’s immediate judgment upon death that allowed for the development of another important aspect of Christian belief, and one particularly evident in Gregory’s thought, which was the concept of post-death purgation of sin.

The idea of post-death purgation had long been a part of Christian speculation about the afterlife, but it was only in the sixth and seventh centuries, Gregory’s age, that the various
lines of speculation came together to form a stable and cohesive component of Christian eschatology. The first to speak of post-death purification of sin, in the context of Christian eschatology, was Clement of Alexandria. Origen, developing and extending Clement’s ideas, conceived all post-death punishment as purgative, leading to the universal restoration (ἀποκατάστασις) of all creation, including humans, to its original harmonious constitution. Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa all conceived post-death purgation in similar terms to Origen. They believed salvation to be a restoration (ἀποκατάστασις) of humans to their original constitution before sin, which was achieved either through asceticism in life, or through purgation after death. In the West, Ambrose, Jerome, and Caesarius of Arles all proposed a post-death purgation of sin. In all of these accounts of the afterlife, while purgation of sin was postulated, the picture and details of that purgation tended to be quite vague and contradictory.

Josephine Laffin has argued, based upon early Christian art, that the notions of post-death judgment and purification did not become a part of the Christian imagination until the third to fifth centuries. These early judgment scenes eventually grew into the extremely vivid depictions of the afterlife that characterized the Middle Ages. See Josephine Laffin, “What Happened to the Last Judgment in the Early Church,” in The Church, the Afterlife, and the Fate of the Soul, eds. Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon (Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2009), 29-30.

Daley, The Hope, 46-47.

Origen, De Princ. 1.6.2; 3.6.1-9. Aspects of Origen’s theology of post-death purgation became the subject of serious debate and censure. In the first place, it is not completely clear whether he believed that some souls would undergo eternal punishment in hell, as suggested in Hom. In Ez. 4.8, or if all such punishment was merely purgative leading to union with God (De Princ. 3.6.1-9). Additionally, Origen postulated the possibility that Satan and the demons themselves would at some time be restored to their original constitution and union with God through such purgation. See De Princ. 1.6.2; 3.6.5. For an overview of Origen’s eschatology and reactions to it, see Daley, The Hope, 47-64, 89-91.

Daley, The Hope, 81-89.

Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 3.7; 30.6; 39.19; Gregory of Nyssa, Or. Cat. 26; De An. et Res. [PG 46.28-29].

Ambrose, In Ps. 1.47-54; Jerome, In Is. 18.66.24; Caesarius, Serm. 167.6-7; 179.1-8.

Sarah Foot has suggested that by the early Middle Ages there was a general agreement in the West that purgatory existed, even though there remained disagreement about its location and contours. See Sarah Foot, “Anglo-Saxon ‘Purgatory,’” in The Church, the Afterlife, and the Fate of the Soul, eds. Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon (Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2009), 89-90.
Among the various conceptualizations of post-death purgation in the patristic era, Augustine’s portrait served as the immediate context for Gregory’s own ideas on the topic. Augustine believed that all souls immediately experienced God’s judgment upon death, with the saints immediately going to heaven and all the rest entering a sort of waiting room (abditis receptaculus) in hell where they underwent punishment. This punishment served either as a prelude to eternal punishment after the resurrection of the body, or as a form of purgation of sin leading to the soul’s ultimate union with God. Augustine believed that souls in the afterlife, prior to the end of the world, were still temporal and so capable of change. Thus the fires of hell, prior to the end, could serve to purge souls of the sins that they failed to amend and make atonement for during life. It was only on the condition of such a post-death purgation of sin that prayers and alms for the dead could benefit souls after death. This conception of post-death purgation served as the basis for many of Gregory’s own ideas about the afterlife.

The Afterlife in Gregory’s Thought

The afterlife loomed large in the thought and theology of Gregory. His concerns about the afterlife were a result of the ongoing debates about the afterlife that had erupted in the middle of the sixth century and as a response to the pastoral needs of those for whom he had care. Death, particular judgment, and ambiguity over post-death existence were all a

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232 Upon this basis, Augustine suggested that Christ’s descent into hell after his death was not to liberate the patriarchs detained there, but to liberate sinners undergoing purgation there. See Augustine, *Ep.* 164.7; *De Gen. ad litt.* 12.33.63.
233 Augustine, *Ench.* 29.110; *Serm.* 172.2.
234 These debates about the afterlife, which were referred to above, resulted from the ressurgence of both Christian Aristotelianism and “Origenist” eschatology in the middle of the sixth century. For an account of these debates and their effect on Gregory’s eschatology, see Dal Santo, “Philosophy,” 41-51.
real cause of anxiety and fear in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{235} Gregory sought to allay those fears by providing an outline of what could be expected in the next life, as well as indicate those ways by which souls could prepare for their own entrant into it and help those already there. It was in this context that Gregory spoke of his favorite themes about the afterlife, which were the possibility of post-death purgation, prayers and Masses for the dead, and God’s severe judgment.

Gregory’s \textit{Dialogues}, while having the appearance of fanciful tales, really constituted an attempt by Gregory to address serious questions about the afterlife.\textsuperscript{236} He told stories of souls ascending into heaven,\textsuperscript{237} or even angels, saints, and demons appearing at someone’s death,\textsuperscript{238} in order to indicate that the soul continued to live after death and immediately experienced the fruits of its earthly life, whether that was reward or punishment. He told stories of souls manifesting themselves after death to ask for prayers in order to indicate that post-death purgation of sin was possible.\textsuperscript{239} Furthermore, he told stories of Masses and prayers freeing souls from various kinds of post-death suffering to show that the prayers of the living could benefit the dead.\textsuperscript{240} Thus, the stories told by Gregory in his \textit{Dialogues} gave expression to his essential beliefs about the afterlife.

One of Gregory’s most lasting contributions to the Christian understanding of the afterlife was his suggestion, and explanation, of the possibility of the post-death purgation of sin. He wrote: “Yet, it is believed there is a purgatorial fire before judgment for some minor

\textsuperscript{235} Brown, “The Decline,” 44-45.
\textsuperscript{236} Adalbert de Vogüé has suggested that the intention of Gregory in Book IV of the \textit{Dialogues} was to treat serious doctrinal issues. See Adalbert de Vogüé, \textit{Dialogues}, 42.
\textsuperscript{237} Gregory told a couple of stories in his \textit{Dialogues} where the soul of a deceased person was seen ascending up into heaven. See \textit{Dial}, 4.8-11.
\textsuperscript{238} Gregory reported a number of stories where angels, or one of the saints, or even demons appeared to someone on their deathbed in order to bring the soul to its final destination. See \textit{Dial}, 4.12-25, 37, 40, 55.
\textsuperscript{239} \textit{Dial}, 4.26, 42, 57.
\textsuperscript{240} \textit{Dial}, 1.12; 2.23; 4.57.
faults.”

Here, Gregory gave expression to the idea that certain sins, if not properly atoned for in this life, could be expiated in the afterlife. He was careful to explain, however, that only venial sins could be remedied in such a manner, not mortal sin.

And so, as I said, this we believe is able to be done for small and light sins, such as persistent idle talking, immoderate laughter, or sin from the care of domestic things, which can scarcely be done by anyone without fault, even by those who ought to know the faults to be avoided, or the error of ignorance in not important matters. These are all a burden even after death, when now in this life they could be relieved with less effort.

Such post-death purgation applied neither to the saint, nor the serious sinner, whose judgments were already fixed, but to repentant sinners who sought to atone for their sins but had not sufficiently accomplished it during life. Gregory’s idea of post-death purgation, therefore, was not an allowance for moral tepidity, but rather an admonition to moral rigorism.

While suggesting the possibility of post-death purgation, Gregory was not entirely clear as to the nature and location of that purgation. Using the traditional imagery of fire from 1 Cor. 3:12-15, Gregory spoke of post-death purgation in terms of a purgative fire that

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242 *Dial.* 4.41: “Sed tamen, ut praedixi, hoc de paruis minimisque peccatis fieri posse credendum est, sicut est assiduus otiosus sermo, inmoderatus risus, uel peccatum curae rei familiaris, quae uix sine culpa uel ab ipsis agitur, qui culpam qualiter declinare debeant sciunt, aut in non grauibus rebus error ignorantiae. Quae cuncta etiam post mortem grauant, si adhuc in hac uita postitis minime fuerint relaxata.” In order to further elucidate the types of sins that could be expiated after death, Gregory told the story of Paschasius. Paschasius was an extremely holy person, as evidenced by the miracle that took place through his dalmatic after his death, but he still had to expiate the small sin of maintaining support for the wrong papal candidate. This sin, Gregory explained, resulted from ignorance rather than malice and so was forgivable. See *Dial.* 4.42.

243 Gregory repeatedly asserted that sins would only be forgiven in the afterlife for those whose earthly life had merited such forgiveness. See *Dial.* 4.42, 59. Gregory meant by these statements that those having committed serious sins, and so condemned to hell, would not be afforded the possibility of atoning their sins after death.
cleansed the soul by burning away slight offenses. In other passages of his Dialogues, Gregory told stories of souls returning to earth in order to perform certain menial tasks as part of their purgation for sin. Thus, Gregory never provided a specific location where such post-death purgation was to take place, nor what that purgation entailed. The only stable aspect of Gregory’s descriptions of such post-death purgation was that the soul suffered in some fashion and would not be allowed entrance into heaven until the sins for which the soul suffered had been sufficiently atoned.

There was one aspect of post-death purgation about which Gregory was very clear, which was that prayers and Masses could benefit souls undergoing such purgation. Gregory, on numerous occasions in his Dialogues, told stories wherein souls in the afterlife were relieved from post-death suffering through the prayers of the living or through Masses performed on their behalf. Gregory proposed that the Mass was particularly efficacious in aiding such souls. “If after death the sins are not unpardonable, the holy sacrifice of the saving victim is very helpful to souls even after death.” He additionally spoke of Masses alleviating the suffering of those who were living, thereby manifesting the possibility that

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244 Dial. 4.41. The imagery of fire, drawn from Paul’s use in 1 Cor. 3:12-15, had traditionally been used to denote a purgative function, rather than punitive, in the Christian imagination. See Brown, “The Decline,” 46.
245 On two occasions Gregory spoke of souls returning to earth to serve as attendants at the public baths in order to make atonement for their sins. See Dial. 4.42, 57.
246 Augustine had suggested that this purgation by fire took place in some portion of hell. See Augustine, De Gen. ad litt. 12.33.63. Gregory, on the other hand, never specified as to where such a purgation by fire might take place. He never spoke of purgatory in terms of a specific temporal or spatial location. He only stated that it took place somewhere outside of heaven. See Dial. 4.26.
247 Dial. 4.26, 42, 57.
248 Gregory reported in his Dialogues that he had Masses said thirty days in a row for one of his monks who had died in the state of sin. After the thirty days the dead monk manifested himself to his living brother in a vision and declared that until that day he had been suffering, but had been admitted that day into heaven. See Dial. 4.57. This story gave rise to the medieval practise of “Gregorian Masses,” wherein Masses were performed thirty days in a row for someone who had died to free them from purgatory.
249 Dial. 4.57 “Si culpae post mortem insolubiles non sunt, multum solet animas etiam post mortem sacra oblatio hostiae salutaris adiuare.”
Masses could also aid those who were dead. Gregory was quick to admonish, however, that one should not rely on the aid of others, but each should atone one’s own sin while it could still be done. “The safer course, naturally, is to do for ourselves during life what we hope others will do for us after death. It is better to depart free than to seek liberty after chains.” Gregory’s description of post-death purgation was call to conversion and penance in the present life.

Gregory’s reports and stories about the afterlife, while certainly addressing important doctrinal questions, were primarily directed towards pastoral concerns. Like a father warning his children of an impending danger, Gregory told these stories to warn the souls in his care of the danger they would face when they appeared before God’s strict judgment. Whether it resulted from the approaching end of the world or each person’s own death, all would have to face God and give a strict accounting for their sins. This accounting of sin in the afterlife concerned not only the serious or mortal sins each person may have committed, but each would have to render an account before God for even the smallest of sins. Every sin required atonement before the strict judgment of God. This image of the afterlife both reflected, and contributed to, the development of a new awareness of light sins within Christianity during Gregory’s time.

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250 Gregory reported the story that every time a woman had a Mass said for her husband he was released from his chains. In another story, Gregory recounted how a man was saved from a shipwreck through a Mass having been offered for him. See Dial. 4.59. Insofar as each of these stories were told by Gregory in the larger context of his description of how Masses aided the dead, one is right to interpret these stories as manifesting how Masses benefited the dead by way of comparison to how they benefited the living.

251 Dial. 4.60: “Inter haec autem pensandum est quod tutior uia sit, ut bonum quod quisque post mortum suam sperat agi per alios, agat dum uiuit ipse pro se. Beatius quippe est liberum exire quam post uinacula libertatem quaerere.”
The new attention given to the afterlife, along with the spread of the ascetical ideals of monasticism, gave rise to another important development within late antiquity that had a decisive impact on Christianity, as well as Gregory’s own theology. This development was a new found awareness and pastoral concern for *peccata levia*, light sins.\(^{252}\) Since the time of Tertullian (c. 160-220), the Church had dealt with serious sins (*crimina*) after baptism, particularly adultery, apostasy, and murder, through its liturgical public penance (*publica paenitentia*).\(^{253}\) *Peccata levia*, on the other hand, were not *crimina* and so neither required the public penance of the Church nor automatically resulted in eternal damnation.\(^{254}\) These light sins were the daily sins (*quodidian peccata*) that all Christians committed, but sins that still needed some pastoral remedy in light of the severe judgment of God.\(^{255}\) Over the course of late antiquity the matter of these light sins became an issue of ever greater pastoral concern with wide-ranging implications.\(^{256}\)

Augustine, in his *Enchiridion*, distinguished three different groups of Christian, the very bad (*valde mali*), the very good (*valde boni*), and the not very bad (*non valde mali*).\(^{257}\) The very bad, having committed serious sins, were the ones who were required to go through

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\(^{253}\) The public penitential system, from the time of Tertullian to Gregory the Great, consisted of the following: candidates confessed their sins to the bishop or appropriate clergy and were admitted into the order of penitents, they were then given a special penitential robe by the bishop to be worn at all liturgies and were seated with the other penitents in a special part of the Church. Then, during a specific liturgy, the bishop would lay his hands upon the penitent, absolving the person’s sins, and thereby readmitting the person back into full communion with the Church. See R. C. Mortimer, *The Origins of Private Penance in the Western Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), 1-2.

\(^{254}\) Augustine dismissed the idea that such light sins automatically entailed eternal damnation. See Augustine, *Ep.* 4.4.78. The light sins did, however, require atonement, for which Augustine suggested the daily recitation of the Lord’s Prayer: “forgive us our tresspasses.” See Augustine, *De Symb. ad Cat.*, 8.16.

\(^{255}\) Augustine gave a description of these light sins in a number of places. See Augustine, *Ench.* 21.78; *En. in Ps.* 37.36.

\(^{256}\) Brown, “The Decline,” 41-43.

\(^{257}\) Augustine, *Ench.* 29.110.
the Church’s liturgical penance to atone for their sins.\textsuperscript{258} The very good, on the other hand, were the living saints whose salvation no one doubted.\textsuperscript{259} The not very bad, which constituted the majority of Christians and whose lives were littered with light sins, presented a more difficult matter. The light sins of these \textit{non valde mali}, while not automatically resulting in eternal damnation, still represented an obstacle to heaven and union with God. As noted by Peter Brown, the question naturally arose within late antiquity as to how to pastorally respond to these \textit{non valde mali} and their sins.\textsuperscript{260}

Complicating the matter, over the course of late antiquity there grew an increasing awareness of the limitations of the Church’s liturgical penance. In the first place, due to the severe conditions attached to the Church’s liturgical penance, most Christians abstained from it until the last possible moment.\textsuperscript{261} Caesarius of Arles, not even a century before Gregory, often had to warn those in his pastoral care against the dangers of such a postponement of penance.\textsuperscript{262} Additionally, over the course of late antiquity, ambiguity increased as to what exactly constituted a serious sin and so had to be remedied by the public penance of the Church. Augustine gave expression to this dilemma by noting that there were three different categories of sin, sins of weakness (\textit{peccata infirmitatis}), sins of ignorance (\textit{peccata

\begin{footnotes}
\item[258] Augustine, \textit{De Symb. ad Cat.}, 8.16.
\item[259] Nevertheless, even saints had to give an accounting of their sins to God upon their death. As Gregory of Tours recorded, even one so holy as St. Martin had to undergo an inquisition concerning his sins upon his death. See Gregory of Tours, \textit{De virt. Mart.} 1.4.
\item[260] Brown, “The Decline,” 42.
\item[261] The conditions for public penance were as follows: first, public penance could only be done once in a person’s lifetime, and so if serious sins were committed again, a person would be perpetually excommunicated. Additionally, a single person was not allowed to marry after public penance and perpetual continence was recommended to those who were married. Also, penitents were banned from military service after having undertaken public penance. The purpose of these conditions was to stress a quasi-monastic mode of life after a person had undergone public penance, so as to aid the penitent not to fall into serious sin once again. See Mortimer, \textit{The Origins}, 1-2.
\item[262] Caesarius, \textit{Serm.} 249, 256, 257, 258, 259.
\end{footnotes}
imperitiae), and sins of wickedness (peccata malitiae). While a sin might be serious (crimina) in terms of its object, unless wickedness (militiae) was involved, the sin did not require public penance. Moreover, certain serious sins (crimina) had become so common by Augustine’s day that they were no longer considered serious and so a person committing them could not be required to undergo public penance. Thus, the Church’s liturgical penance, as it existed over late antiquity, became increasingly incapable of dealing with the full reality of sin in the Church, particularly so in the case of peccata levia and the non valde mali.

The solution that emerged over the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries consisted of the extension of the spiritual and ascetical ideals of monasticism to all Christians. There had been a long standing tradition for Christians to atone their light sins through prayer and almsgiving. In the words of Augustine:

But no man should despair that by the mercy of God his sins will be forgiven in holy Church however great they are, if he does penance according to the measure of his sin.

A century later, Caesarius of Arles suggested the very same thing: “Let every one examine his conscience, and if he finds himself guilty, let him cleanse his conscience by prayer and fasting and alms-giving.” This practise of privately atoning for one’s own sin, which was already in use for light sins and the sins of monastics and clergy, was extended over late

\[264\] Mortimer, The Origins, 62-63. Gregory likewise made such a distinction in his Dialogues. He suggested that the reason a sin could be remedied after death, through the prayers of the living, was that the sin derived from “ignorance” rather than “malice.” See Dial. 4.42.
\[265\] Mortimer, The Origins, 62.
\[266\] Augustine, Ench. 65: “Sed necque de ipsis criminiibus quamlibet magnis remittendis in sancta Ecclesia Dei misericordia desperanda est agentibus paenitentiam secundum modum peccati.” Latin text and English translation taken from Mortimer, The Origins, 74-75.
antiquity to cover all but the most serious of sins. Since at least the time of Pope Leo (d. 461), the rule of the Church had been not to subject bishops, priests, or religious to public penance, but each had to make private satisfaction for their own sins. See Mortimer, The Origins, 154-69.

Brown has suggested that this same perception of spiritual growth characterized both Augustine and Gregory. Accordingly, both suggested that if one’s spiritual growth was not completed in this life, it must then be finished in the next. See Brown, “The Decline,” 46-47.

Gregory’s conception of sin and atonement, and his notion of the afterlife, were mutually interdependent. Sin had to be remedied in this life through proper atonement, or else it would have to be remedied in the afterlife through post-death purgation. See Brown, “The Decline,” 46-47.

For a short discussion on the changes in penitence during Gregory’s age, see Straw, Gregory the Great, 174, n.70.

This practice constituted an extension of the ideals of monasticism, which conceived spiritual growth as a slow transformation of self, wherein the discovery of personal sin, and its proper atonement, was an essential component. This attempt to pastorally address the non valde mali and their peccata levia was particularly evident in Gregory, giving shape and form to his own pastoral effort and theology.

**Peccata Levia in the Thought of Gregory**

In keeping with the trend over late antiquity, and in fact extending it, Gregory’s primary concern with sin and atonement was the general sinfulness that characterized the life of every Christian and which needed a pastoral remedy. He rarely spoke of the public penance of the Church and on only two occasions spoke of the bishop’s role of binding and loosing sin. His concern was the peccata levia of all Christians, which, while not automatically resulting in eternal damnation, still kept the person committing them from heaven and union with God. Rather than public penance, Gregory preached personal repentance, wherein repentant sinners were to acknowledge and confess their own sinfulness, repent and amend their lives, and make proper atonement for their sins.

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270 HEv. 2.26.7; Dial. 2.23.

271 Gregory’s conception of sin and atonement, and his notion of the afterlife, were mutually interdependent. Sin had to be remedied in this life through proper atonement, or else it would have to be remedied in the afterlife through post-death purgation. See Brown, “The Decline,” 46-47.

272 For a short discussion on the changes in penitence during Gregory’s age, see Straw, Gregory the Great, 174, n.70.
dealing with sin, already used in the case of clergy and religious, was extended by Gregory to remedy the sins of all Christians.\textsuperscript{273}

Gregory’s notion of sin and atonement, by which he interpreted every aspect of human life, was ultimately linked to his understanding of the afterlife and God’s immediate post-death judgment of all humans.\textsuperscript{274} In Gregory’s understanding, there was only one judgment and punishment for every sin, which in turn could take place either in the present life or in the next. In order to avoid God’s severe judgment in the afterlife, along with its eternal consequences, Gregory admonished all Christians to judge themselves in this life.\textsuperscript{275} It was in this context that Gregory spoke of the \textit{internus iudex}, the internal judge, which was the conscience of each person wherein Christ convicted each person’s sin.\textsuperscript{276}

And in this secret place of interior judgment, the mind constraining itself with its own prosecution, they bear with penitence that which they performed with pride. For there they consider whatever comes against them and assails them; there they collect before their eyes all for which they weep; there they search out whatever could be discovered by the wrath of the severe judge; there they suffer with supplication as many things as they are afraid of suffering; and no agency is lacking in this judgment conceived in the mind, which it needs to fully punish those things. For the conscience accuses, reason judges, fear binds and pain tortures.\textsuperscript{277}

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\textsuperscript{273} As previously noted, clergy and religious were not expected to undertake the Church’s public penance for their sins, even in cases of serious sin. Rather, clergy and religious atoned for their sins in a private fashion, often under the direction of their superior. Gregory can be seen extending this form of penance to his own clergy and monks on numerous occasions (\textit{Ep.} 1.66; 2.3, 39; 3.6; 98.177; 11.53), but also to the laity as well (\textit{Ep.} 8.1). Mortimer has suggested that this modified form of public penance utilized by Gregory, while not outright constituting the private penance that was spread throughout northern Europe in the seventh century by Irish and Anglo-Saxon monks, certainly contributed to its widespread acceptance. See Mortimer, \textit{The Origins}, 186-87.

\textsuperscript{274} Brown has suggested that sin and repentance were the notions by which Gregory interpreted and understood every aspect of human existence. All of human life was interpreted in accord with the strict accounting of personal sin and merit each person would undergo at the end of life in God’s severe judgment. See Brown, \textit{Rise of Western Christendom}, 258-61.

\textsuperscript{275} Mor. 4.26-27; 11.48-49; 16.50.

\textsuperscript{276} Gregory, on one occasion, spoke of the human conscience and its internal judgment in the context of the parable of the lost coin in \textit{Luke} 15:1-10. Here, Gregory suggested that Christ troubled the human conscience with consideration of its guilt, and through such a troubling, the image of God was restored in the person. See \textit{HEv}. 2.34. For a fuller treatment of the role of \textit{internus iudex} in Gregory’s theology, see Hester, \textit{Eschatology}, 113-23.

\textsuperscript{277} Mor. 25.13: “\textit{Atque in hoc secreto interioris iudicii, ipsa mentis suae executione constricti, paenitendo feriunt quod superbiendo commiserunt. Ibi namque aduersum se quicquid se impugnat, enumerant;}”
Preachers were to aid this internal judgment by rebuking sin and bringing to light the sins of those in their care, a practice Gregory often employed himself in his homilies and letters. This internal acknowledgement of sin, when coupled with compunction, constituted for Gregory a true confession, which itself had the capacity to expiate the punishment due the sins that were committed.

In addition to judging oneself and acknowledging one’s sin, every person had to make proper atonement for each sin through penance. This penance could be performed through acts of mortification, prayer, or alms. According to Gregory, for every sin committed a just penalty was demanded by God, which was either paid in this life or the next. By anticipating God’s judgment and punishing oneself, one could avoid God’s punishment of the sin altogether. In such a manner, Gregory advocated a form of penance that covered the full spectrum of human sin and so was applicable not only to monastics and clergy, but to all Christians. All of Gregory’s theological and pastoral efforts were orientated towards

\[\text{ibi ante oculos suos omne quod defleant coacervant; ibi quicquid per iram districti iudicis decerni possit intuentur; ibi tot patiuntur supplicia, quot pati timent; nec deest in hoc iudicio mente concepto omne ministerium, quod punire reos suos plenius debeat. Nam conscientia accusat, ratio iudicat, timor ligat, dolor cruciat.}\]

278 Mor. 27.48.
279 In nearly every homily Gregory delivered, he continually challenged his audiences to recognize the sins in their own lives, to develop salutary compunction, and make atonement. Such ideas were also prevalent in his letters, see Ep. 1.33, 66; 2.17; 3.61; 4.24; 5.44; 10.2; 11.34, 53.
280 Gregory used the example of Mary Magdalene to show the effectiveness of confession and sorrow for obtaining forgiveness of sins. See HEv. 2.33. Gregory’s understanding of the role of confession for the forgiveness for sins was drawn from the monastic tradition, and particularly Cassian. In his Conference, Cassian told the story of a young monk being forgiven a sin by his superior merely by confessing it to him and manifesting sorrow. See Col. 2.11.
281 Mor. 4.26-27, 71-72; 9.54-56, 90; 11.48.
282 This notion of present judgment in Gregory’s theology is suggestive of a realized eschatology, wherein God’s final judgment has already been realized in the life of the repentant sinner and saint. See Hester, Eschatology, 122.
283 Brown has suggested that Gregory’s explanation of sin and atonement contributed greatly to the development of the medieval notions of sin and merit that took form over the seventh century. See Brown, Rise of Western Christendom, 261-65.
this goal of eliciting acknowledgment, compunction, and atonement of sin in the lives of those for whom he had pastoral care.

**Conclusion**

As this chapter has intended to make manifest, there were a great number of changes taking place within the world and Christianity leading up to Gregory’s day, all of which had a profound bearing on the shape of his own theology and spirituality. Gregory’s age was not one of doctrinal stagnation, but one that attempted to understand and explain the deep realities of sin and atonement, the intercessory role of the saints, and even the nature and contours of the afterlife. These same questions and themes were all reflected in Gregory’s own theology, and likewise, his theology of providence. The afterlife, with God’s severe judgment, post-death purgation, the intercessory role of the saints, were all the terminus towards which human life, and the life of the world, found its climax and ultimate meaning. Monasticism, atonement for sin, and even present suffering and disasters, were all the means by which each person reached this climax in the afterlife. Thus all of these themes, which Gregory so frequently discussed in the course of his literary corpus, had a profound bearing on his theology of providence, which in turn unified and explained these various ideas in his thought. The remainder of this dissertation will seek to explicate Gregory’s theology of providence and how these various themes functioned within it.

In the next chapter, the focus will be to develop Gregory’s cosmology. This study will begin by explaining Gregory’s conception of God, then how God was distinguished from his creation, and finally, how God was related to his creation. Creation itself will then be examined, giving focus to how God structured and governed it through its hierarchical

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structure. One of the primary purposes will be to highlight how Gregory conceived God to govern visible creation by means of invisible creation. This examination of his cosmology will provide the structure and basis for elaborating Gregory’s theology of divine providence in history, which will be the focus of the following chapter.
CHAPTER 3

GREGORY’S COSMOLOGY

This chapter is devoted to the study of Gregory’s cosmology, which acted as the intellectual infrastructure for his conception of divine providence.1 Never directly explained by Gregory, there existed just below the surface of everything he wrote a very well developed and coherent cosmology. His cosmology, while dependent upon the traditions that preceded him, was not merely a recapitulation of previous authors.2 Nor was it that of the later Middle Ages, with its clear distinction between the natural and supernatural.3 Rather, Gregory’s cosmology had a language and character that, while shared by others of his day, bore the distinct mark of his own unique personality and history.

In this chapter the various ideas and concepts that marked Gregory’s cosmology will be explicated and explored. Particular focus will be given to his conception of God and creation, whose distinction was the ontological bulwark upon which the rest of his cosmology was built. Additionally, Gregory’s use of hierarchies will be examined, as this concept, characterizing every level of being, acted as the causal mechanism by which God governed his creation. Within this analysis, attention will also be given to created beings,

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1 Cosmology is being used here, and throughout this dissertation, to denote Gregory’s perception and intellectual appropriation of the created universe, including its visible and invisible components.
2 Gregory’s cosmology bore many characteristics of the Neo-Platonic and Stoic influences that had been a part of Christian cosmology in the West since the fourth century. See Straw, Gregory the Great, 15-16, 28-29.
3 Unfortunately, authors have approached Gregory seeking to understand his cosmology, and his notion of miracles, from the perspective of such a distinction between natural and supernatural. For example, Evans utilized these categories and language in her attempt to explain Gregory’s concept of miracles. See Evans, The Thought of Gregory, 45-54. Such a distinction was not in place in Gregory’s time. The concept of nature, and so the distinction between natural and supernatural, was not fully developed until the 12th and 13th centuries. See Chenu, Nature, Man, and Society, 1-46. Consequently such an approach to Gregory’s cosmology can never arrive at the real tenor of his thought.

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angels, humans, and demons, which functioned as the agents of God’s providence within
Gregory’s cosmological schema. This investigation will serve the purpose of explicating the
ontological structures of Gregory’s providence, which in turn will provide the foundation for
the study of his conception of providence in history, the focus of the next chapter.

The Grammar of Gregory’s Cosmology

The language of Gregory’s cosmology, while certainly bearing the character of the
theologians and traditions upon which he depended for them, was still distinctly his own.
Carole Straw, in her study of Gregory’s cosmology, suggested that the unique character of
Gregory’s thought was rooted in his use of complementary opposites to structure and explain
his theology and cosmology. 3 These opposites, such as visible and invisible, stable and
mutable, spiritual and corporeal, constituted the language of distinctions by which Gregory
structured and understood the world and God. 4 While these distinctions were certainly used
by Gregory, and used quite often, they alone do not fully explain the grammar of Gregory’s
cosmology.

Gregory’s cosmology cannot be so easily packaged and explained within the
conceptual framework of complementary opposites. Often those things that Carole Straw
characterized as opposites in Gregory’s writings were not actually opposites within his
cosmology. For example, Straw suggested that the opposites of stability and mutability were

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3 Straw, Gregory the Great, 18.
4 Ibid., 18-22. Claude Dagens, in his study of Gregory, likewise reported that Gregory utilized bipolar
antitheses to explain his ideas, such as exterior and interior, active and contemplative. Yet, for Dagens, these
antitheses were more a matter of Gregory’s description of Christian experience, rather than the distinctions
around which Gregory framed his entire cosmology. See Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 77, 133-158.
the terms Gregory used to distinguish between God and his creation. Gregory did use these terms to distinguish God from creation, but these terms did not actually constitute opposites in Gregory’s cosmological schema. The opposites were actually God and nothingness, while mutability referred to creatures who occupied an intermediary place between the two. A similar issue occurred within her distinction between visible and invisible. The difficulty with these opposites is that in Gregory’s thought God never really fell into the realm of either. While Gregory spoke of God as invisible, he did so merely to situate God beyond the mutability of the visible realm. Visible and invisible were really two aspects of creation itself, not of God. Thus, while these distinctions certainly had a place within Gregorian thought, they alone do not fully explain the grammar of his cosmology.

The piece missing from Gregory’s cosmology is his use of hierarchies to structure and explain creation. In Gregory’s mind, it was not only opposites that explained the created order, but a hierarchically structured universe descending from God through creation down to nothingness. These hierarchies constituted the beauty and order within creation and acted as

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5 Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 75-80. Straw is certainly correct in her contention that Gregory utilized stability and instability to distinguish God from his creation. Gregory repeatedly stated as much. See *Mor.* 2.34; 5.63, 68.


7 *Dial.* 4.5.

8 In Gregory’s cosmology, while God is not visible, he did not belong to the company of invisible beings. God was the creator of all things visible and invisible, himself belonging to neither realm of being. Just as God stood beyond change, beyond time, and beyond all such characteristics of creation, God stood beyond the categories of visible and invisible, these being designations of created things. See *Mor.* 2.20; 9.72; 10.14; *Dial.* 4.5. In one place he spoke of God’s nature as “incomprehensible” as compared to angels, which were of an “invisible” nature. See *Mor.* 2.8-9.

9 Gregory’s use of hierarchies to structure his cosmology was of Neo-Platonic influence. See Colish, *Medieval Foundations*, 27-28; Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 29, n.6. The use of hierarchies to understand the structure of the universe was not unique to Gregory, but was shared by a number of other Christian authors of his era. See Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 29, n.7.
the mechanism by which God providentially controlled all things. Thus, the grammar of
distinctions used by Gregory to explain his cosmology, while utilizing opposites,
conceptually relied on a hierarchy of being and beings. In order to explain his cosmology,
these different levels of being, and beings, need to be distinguished and examined, beginning
with God.

**Gregory’s Concept of God**

The foundation of Gregory’s entire cosmology was his conception of God. His
understanding of God was derived principally from Scripture, the source of all true and
valuable knowledge. God was Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He was the Creator, the
Redeemer, the Judge, and the source of grace, truth, and light. Gregory’s chief concern was
how God manifested himself in history for the salvation of humans, rather than abstract
speculations about God’s nature. Yet, in his attempts to conceptualize and explain God,
Gregory often relied on analogies and categories that were of a philosophical, if not
metaphysical, character. He referred to God as “incomprehensible,” “omnipresent,”

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10 Gregory’s use of hierarchies is a key element to his understanding of divine providence. As he
conceived it, God ordered and structured the universe by means of such hierarchies, wherein the higher governs
and orders the lower aspects of creation. See *Dial. 4.5; Ep. 5.59; Mor. 4.55.*

11 This aspect of Gregory’s thought was recognized by Straw, who stated of his cosmology: “Creation
ranges along a hierarchical scale graded in degrees of being and value.” Straw, *Gregory the Great,* 32.

12 *Mor. 20.1.* Knowledge of God, according to Gregory, was gained through the study of Scripture

13 Ibid., 432-433. Similarly, Boglioni suggested that Gregory conceived God more as judge, rather than
a philosophically abstract God who is infinite and the source of being. See Boglioni, *Miracle,* 50. While it was
ture that Gregory’s focus on God was always in terms of salvation, he did often utilize abstract and
philosophical categories in order to speak of God.

14 *Mor. 2.8:* “incomprehensibilis.”

15 *Mor. 2.20:* “Unus idemque totus ubique praesidendo sustinens, sustinens praesidens, circumdando
penetrans, penetrando circumdans.”
“immutable,”16 “omniscient,”17 “transcendent,”18 “omnipotent,”19 “unbounded,”20 and “eternal.”21 Thus, while Gregory derived his understanding of God from Scripture, his conceptualization and explanation of God often relied on philosophical categories and terms.22 In order to fully understand his conception of God, both aspects of his thought need to be examined and explicated.

**The God of Scripture**

The principal source for Gregory’s vision of God was invariably Scripture. Characteristic of this vision of God was its vast diversity, reflecting the myriad ways that God has acted in history for the salvation of humanity. Gregory typically focused on those aspects of God that he could utilize for his pedagogical purposes: to explain the Gospel and to effect conversion and repentance in his audiences. The most recurrent image of God that he utilized was God as Judge.23 Gregory, time and again, portrayed God as the severe judge before whom each person must stand to render an exact accounting for their sins.24 God was

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16 *Mor.* 12:38: “in semetipsO solus immutabilis est.”
17 Gregory spoke of God’s omniscience as a function of his foreknowledge (*praesciens*). See *Mor.* 2.40; 12.2.
18 *Mor.* 27:8; 2.20: “Quia enim ipse manet intra omnia, ipse extra omnia, ipse supra omnia, ipse infra omnia; et superior est per potentiam et inferior per sustentationem; et exterior per magnitudinem et interior per subtilitatem; sursum regens deorsum continens; extra circumdans interius pentrans; nec alia ex parte superior alia inferior, aut alia ex parte exterior atque ex alia manet interior.”
19 *Mor.* 11.7; 12.2: “omnipotens.”
20 *Dial.* 4.5; *Mor.* 2.21: “incircumscriptam substantiam.”
21 *Mor.* 3.62: “substantia aeterna.”
22 Evans, in her study of Gregory, explained the difficulties and characteristics of his language of God. See Evans, *Thought of Gregory*, 36-40.
23 In this imagery of God as Judge, Gregory painted a picture of God as severe and strict, not so as to alienate his audience from God, but to produce salutary fear of their impending judgment. See *Ep.* 1.33, 75; 3.29; 11.18; *Mor.* 3.24; 4.26; 8.47, 90; 10.54; 27.48. Additionally, while Gregory often depicted God as the severe Judge to evoke fear and conversion, he very frequently presented God as merciful, who, despite human sin, did everything possible to coax sinners to return to himself. A good example occurred in *HEv.* 2.34.
24 The goal of such imagery was always to elicit conversion and repentance in his audience. See *Mor.* 7.47; 9.31.
also the Creator, who was the source of all the good and beauty in creation.\textsuperscript{25} Similarly, God was the source of all moral goodness and truth, supplying light and grace to all who approached him through interior contemplation.\textsuperscript{26} God was also the providential curator of his creation, who ordered all events for the salvation of the elect and the punishment of the reprobate.\textsuperscript{27}

Gregory’s conception of God was also invariably Trinitarian, inasmuch as that was how God had revealed himself in Scripture and in the history of salvation.\textsuperscript{28} God was the Father, who was the Creator and Ruler of all things.\textsuperscript{29} God was the Son, who became incarnate so as to reveal the invisible world to a blinded humanity, and who died to pay the debt of human sin.\textsuperscript{30} God was the Holy Spirit, who infused souls with light and grace, bringing forth conversion and repentance.\textsuperscript{31} In speaking of these various roles of the persons of the Trinity, Gregory delineated a conception of God in strict keeping with the councils of the Church: God was “three persons” sharing “one divine nature.”\textsuperscript{32} Generally, he spoke of these different roles of the Trinity as a means to explain salvation. Thus, his discourses on God’s Trinitarian nature were not a speculative or theoretical enterprise, but rather an explanation of the Gospel.

\textsuperscript{25} Good and beauty were a reflection of God’s ordered universe in Gregory’s cosmology. The order and structure within the cosmos was as such a reflection and participation in God’s own being and goodness. See \textit{Mor}. 9.18.
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Mor}. 4.19, 58; 5.50; 8.49.
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Mor}. 12.2; 16.45.
\textsuperscript{28} God was the Father, who was the Creator and Ruler of all things. God was the Son, who became incarnate so as to reveal the invisible world to a blinded humanity, and who died to pay the debt of human sin. God was the Holy Spirit, who infused souls with light and grace, bringing forth conversion and repentance. In speaking of these various roles of the persons of the Trinity, Gregory delineated a conception of God in strict keeping with the councils of the Church: God was “three persons” sharing “one divine nature.” Generally, he spoke of these different roles of the Trinity as a means to explain salvation. Thus, his discourses on God’s Trinitarian nature were not a speculative or theoretical enterprise, but rather an explanation of the Gospel.

\textsuperscript{29} See \textit{Dial}. 4.5; \textit{Mor}. 5.63;
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Dial}. 4.1; \textit{Mor}. 29.70.
\textsuperscript{31} The Holy Spirit functioned in a number of fashions within Gregory’s conception of salvation. Primarily, the Holy Spirit was the source of inspiration, bringing light to the human mind that it may perceive beyond the limitations of its earthly senses and abilities. See \textit{Mor}. 4.65; 5.50, 65; 11.15-16.
\textsuperscript{32} See \textit{HEz}. 1.2.4, 9; \textit{HEv}. 2.24.4; \textit{Ep}. 10.21; \textit{Mor}. 27.34; 29.1; 30.4, 17.
While pastoral concerns were the overriding consideration when Gregory spoke about God, he did not always employ the language of Scripture. There existed by Gregory’s time a rich tradition of Christian discourse speaking about God employing the language of Greek philosophy. Gregory utilized these concepts and categories in his own understanding and explanation of God. These categories, unlike those derived from Scripture, were philosophical in nature and spoke to God’s nature and ontological attributes.

**The Ontology of God**

The foundational intellectual distinction by which Gregory conceptualized God was that God was not creation. Gregory defined God by what he was not. He believed that the human mind could only approach God’s substance by means of a *via negativa*. He wrote: “The appearance of the invisible creator, apart from every image of bodily vision, is found in the chamber of the heart.” It was the heretics who attempted to picture God in a sensible form. God was ultimately immaterial and indescribable. Gregory did, nevertheless, endorse the use of analogy for speaking about God. Upon this basis, he distinguished God’s characteristics in reference to the characteristics of creation itself, which God was...

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33 Straw suggested that Gregory was very familiar with Stoic and Neo-Platonic ideas drawn from the Christian intellectual tradition that preceded him, drawing from such theologians as Augustine and Ambrose. See Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 13-16.

34 Carol Harisson has suggested that this distinction between God and creation, rooted in the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, defined Augustine’s cosmology and was the conceptual foundation for much of his theology. See Harisson, *Rethinking*, 77-78, 89. The same could be said of Gregory, who more than likely derived this notion, and its place within his own cosmology, from Augustine.

35 Mor. 5.62.

36 Mor. 8.41. “… inuisibilis conditoris species, repressa omni corporeae uisionis imagine, incubili cordis inuenitur.” Gregory believed that the interior contemplation of God was the only true access to him for human beings.

37 Mor. 5.49.

38 Mor. 26.17-18. Gregory employed various analogies in his explanation of God, particularly in terms of how God acted within creation. For example, Gregory spoke of the Son as God’s mouth and the Spirit as God’s voice, both uttering God’s Word in creation. See Mor. 27.34.
above and beyond. Paramount among such attributes was God’s stability and creation’s inherent instability.

God’s defining characteristic for Gregory was his stability (stabilitas). God, and God alone, had existence in himself. “To stand then, belongs to the Creator alone through whom all things pass away, himself not passing, and in whom some things, maintained, do not pass away.” Gregory derived this attribute of God from the name he gave Moses in the book of Exodus, “I Am who I Am” (Ex. 3:14). As the source of his own existence, and standing outside of creation, God was not susceptible to any change or mutation, even in his government of creation.

For that power which without compulsion created all things, and without oversight watches over all things, and without labor sustains all things, and without occupation rules, also corrects without emotion, and so by scourges forms the minds of men to that which he wills, while still not passing from his unchangeable light into the darkness of change.

Even in such things wherein it would seem God did change, as in response to prayer, God’s response was already a part of his eternity. Even where Scripture predicated change in God, such as in feelings or passions, these changes were the product of human discourse rather than true descriptions of God’s being. Every creative action and every manifestation in history represented no change in God. All such actions were already a part of God’s

39 Gregory stated that humans cannot know God as he is, but can only speak of him by virtue of reflections of him within creation. Here, Gregory is endorsing the principle of analogy in speaking of God. See Mor. 2.20; 26.17.
40 Mor. 5.63: “Stare ergo, solius creatoris est per quem cuncta non transeunt et in quo aliquia ne transeant, retinentur.”
41 Mor. 4.65; 16.45.
42 Mor. 3.4: “Illa enim uis quae absque necessitate omnia creauit et sine despectu omnibus praesidet, et sine labore cuncta sustentat, et sine occupatione regit, etiam sine commotione corrigit sicque humanas mentes ad ea quae vulturisset flagellis format, ut in diuerstitatis umbram a suae incommutabilitatis luce non transeat.”
43 Mor. 12.2; 16.14.
44 Evans, Thought of Gregory, 36-40.
45 This fact was evident for Gregory even in the case of the Incarnation, wherein God retained his eternal immutability even while entering into the mutability of time within his assumed flesh. See Mor. 29.1-2.
eternal being and the perception of change was rooted in the structure and mutability of creation, rather than in God.

Creation, on the other hand, was characterized by instability. Not having being in itself, creation always tended towards nothingness except that it was held in existence by God. This fact was a reflection of Gregory’s doctrine of God creating \textit{ex nihilo}.\textsuperscript{47} He stated: “Indeed every creature, which is made out of nothing, and through itself tends to nothing, has not the property to stand, but to flow away.”\textsuperscript{48} This instability, then, reflected the intermediary state of creation, standing between the stability of God and nothingness.

Creation only had existence to the degree that God kept it in being. Gregory stated:

\begin{quote}
Indeed all things have been made out of nothing and their being would return to nothing, unless retained by the powerful hand of the author of all things himself. Therefore, all these created things, through themselves, are not capable either to subsist or to move; but they subsist in the measure they are given to be; they move in the measure they are disposed by a secret impulse.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

Creation was therefore defined by a strict contingency on God, who at all times kept it in existence and ordered it.

The full significance of this distinction between God’s stability and creation’s instability can only be appreciated in light of Gregory’s notion of change. Change, for

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
    \item This fact of God’s unchanging stability, even in the course of his governance of creation, was a conceptual difficulty that Gregory’s conception of divine providence sought to overcome.\textsuperscript{46}
    \item \textit{Mor.} 14.22; 16.45; 27.10.\textsuperscript{47}
    \item \textit{Mor.} 6.18. The doctrine of \textit{creatio ex nihilo} had been firmly established within Christianity since the second century, wherein it was developed and used by the Christian apologists to assert God’s transcendence to creation against various Greek philosophical schools such as Platonism, Stoicism, and Gnosticism. See Harrison, \textit{Rethinking}, 79.\textsuperscript{48}
    \item \textit{Mor.} 5.63: “\textit{Omnis quippe creatura quia ex nihilo facta est, et per semetipsam ad nihilum tendit, non stare habet sed defluere.”\textsuperscript{49}
    \item \textit{Mor.} 16.45: “\textit{Cuncta quippe ex nihilo facta sunt corumque essentia rursum ad nihilum tenderet, nisi eam auctor omnium regiminis manu retineret. Omnia itaque quae creata sunt, per se nec subsistere praesalent nec moueri; sed intantum subsistunt, in quantum ut esse debeant acceperunt; in tantum mouentur, inquantam occulto instinctu disponuntur.”\textsuperscript{49}
\end{itemize}
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Gregory, represented a corruption, a lack of true being. In change, a thing ceased to be what it was while it became something new. Gregory wrote: “For what is mutability unless a kind of death?” Change always represented a lack of stability, a lack of genuine existence, in that a thing ceased to be in each new change that occurred. This fact explains why Gregory characterized God as stable and incapable of change, for any change attributed to God would represent a defect of being within God.

God’s stability was also reflected in Gregory’s affirmation of God as timeless. Time itself was a created reality and so one in which God did not partake. God, existing beyond creation and time, saw all of history in one instant. “Thus it comes to pass that in his eternity those things remain fixed which without flow unfixed in the revolutions of the world.” It is important to note that Gregory is not here supporting a doctrine of God’s foreknowledge, even though he used such terms frequently. God was not prescient of all things, for that would again suggest an aspect of time within God. Rather, Gregory was suggesting that God saw all history in one instance, inasmuch as God stood over and beyond all history, enabling him to see the beginning and end in his one eternal gaze. This supposition was the basis for Gregory’s belief in predestination; God at all times knew the

50 Mor. 4.68.
51 Mor. 12.38: “Quid enim mutabilitas nisi mors quaedam est?”
52 In this conception of change, Gregory manifested a lack of awareness of a genuine conception of nature, which would emerge later in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. While natures were recognized in distinct things and were responsible for their characteristics and form, such natures were not the basis for change. Change always represented a movement of one unique state into an entirely new and distinct state. This fact explains the reason why Gregory characterized change as a death. This view was characteristic of the era in which Gregory lived and was shared by others of time, such as Isidore of Seville. See William J. Brandt, The Shape of Medieval History: Studies in Modes of Perception (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 6-10.
53 Mor. 4.5.
54 Mor. 4.56; 9.72; 10.14
55 Mor. 2.34: “Unde fit ut in aeternitate eius fixa maneant ea quae non fixa exterius saeculorum volumna emanant.”
56 Mor. 2.40; 3.31; 10.52; Ep. 3.29; 9.153.
57 Mor. 2.36; 9.72.
Thus, Gregory’s conception of God was delineated by virtue of situating God beyond his creation, and so not participating in those defects of being found within creation, namely change and time.

Additionally, God was the supreme good in Gregory’s cosmology, and the good from which every other good was derived. This goodness of God was a reflection of his essence, inasmuch as Gregory equated goodness with being. The goodness of each created thing was linked to its relationship and proximity to God, the source of all goodness, stability, and being. Conversely, evil consisted in the absence of God and so being. Just as Augustine before him, Gregory conceived evil not as a subsistent reality, but as a privation of being. Consequently, the goodness or evilness of created reality, including humans, was ultimately linked to its relationship to God. This conception of good and evil had obvious moral ramifications. Moral goodness consisted in the ascent and union of each created thing with God, insofar as it was capable, while moral evil was the movement from God into greater instability and nothingness. Gregory’s morality was thus a function of his cosmology, and ultimately, his conception of God.

In Gregory’s intellectual schema, then, God was primarily distinguished by virtue of a comparison to creation. God was defined as being above and beyond all the limitations that

58 Mor. 2.40; 3.31; Ep. 3.29; 9.153.
59 Mor. 9.46.
60 This aspect of Gregory’s thought was decidedly Neo-platonic and more than likely derived from Augustine. It was based upon the Neo-platonic doctrine of emanation, whereby existence and goodness flowed from God into creation through a descending hierarchy, consisting first of all in intellectual being, then spiritual being, then bodily being, and lastly matter, which hovered just above nothingness. See Harrison, Rethinking, 39, 77.
61 Gregory defined evil as the privation of being and so a privation of God. Evil, not a subsistent part of creation, entered into it by means of free will, angelic and human, choosing lesser goods over God. Thus, evil consisted principally in the disruption of God’s good created order through sin. See Mor. 3.15.
62 In Augustine’s words: “malum est privatio boni.” Augustine, Mor. 2.5.7. This idea, a hallmark of Augustine’s cosmology, was expressed throughout his literary corpus, see Augustine, Sol. 1.2; civ. Dei. 12.6.
63 See Straw, Gregory, 32.
characterized creation, such as time, change, and a lack of being. Creation, on the other side, consisted in everything that was not God, all characterized by time, instability, and degrees of goodness and being. Within creation, Gregory distinguished a number of different aspects and constituents, some visible, others invisible, some spiritual and others corporeal, some animate and others not. These constituents were distinguished and ordered within creation according to a hierarchical structure, an essential aspect of Gregory’s cosmology. Now, after having examined Gregory’s conception of God, his understanding of creation will be examined, giving special emphasis to the hierarchical structure which distinguished and ordered every aspect of creation.

Creation: The Hierarchical Cosmos

While Gregory delineated a conception of creation that was marred by corruption and dissolution, he believed that this same cosmos was constituted by a distinct order and beauty. Surprisingly, given the chaos Gregory experienced daily in the world, he still saw creation as a highly structured and ordered universe, at all times unfolding in accord with God’s providential plan. The basis for his perception of order and beauty was his recognition of distinct hierarchies within every level of being and beings, which gave each thing its ontological place and function.64 Beauty was the function of order in the universe, while the

64 The concept of hierarchy had always been a part of Neo-Platonic cosmology, but it was Pseudo-Dionysius who actually coined the term hierarchy as an abstract noun in the early sixth century. See Sarah Klitenic Wear and John Dillon, Dionysius, 56, n.27. For Pseudo-Dionysius, hierarchy constituted the sacred order whereby God governed creation through a descending hierarchy of beings, wherein each level of being ordered the lower, producing an ordered whole. See Pseudo-Dionysius, CH 164D-165A; 260A. Gregory’s understanding of hierarchy was virtually identical to that of Pseudo-Dionysius. Gregory even proposed a celestial and ecclesial hierarchy similar to that proposed by Pseudo-Dionysius. See Ep. 5.59. These facts warrant the speculation that Gregory drew from Pseudo-Dionysius in the construction of his own conception of hierarchy, particularly as it pertained to God’s providence.
order was a function of its hierarchical structure. Good and evil were likewise characterized by means of this same hierarchical structure. Good was the product of God’s order in the cosmos, while evil was its absence. Thus, the hierarchical structure of the cosmos was the conceptual key by which Gregory interpreted and understood the world and its various constituents.

These hierarchies were also the very mechanism by which God governed his creation, orchestrating each successive level of being into one harmonious whole. Gregory wrote:

> Therefore, because as the conductor of all he holds all things by himself alone, and yet to distinguish an ordered universe of beauty, he rules one part by the governance of another.

Thus, while God was ultimately in control of all of creation, he did not order all events and things directly. Rather, he utilized one aspect of creation to order another. For this purpose he created things unequal in rank and being, such that creation could be ordered from the top downwards by means of successive ranks of beings, the higher governing the lower. The rank and position of each created thing was determined by its proximity to God and the degree to which it shared in God’s own attributes. Thus, invisible things were superior to

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65 Gregory saw the harmonious order within creation’s structure as the basis of its beauty. See *Mor.* 4.55. In this correlation between order and beauty, like Augustine before him, Gregory was drawing upon well-established philosophical traditions within Christianity such as Stoicism and Neo-Platonism, which identified the beauty and order of creation with God’s providential ordering. See Harrison, *Rethinking*, 103.

66 *Mor.* 9.5.

67 Straw suggested that it was the large role and concern of hierarchical order that separated Gregory’s cosmology from Augustine’s. See Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 29, n.7.

68 *Mor.* 4.55: “Quia igitur cunctorum conditor omnia per se metipsum tenet et tamen ad distinguendum pulchrae universitatis ordinem, alia alis dispensantibus regit.”

69 Gregory utilized the angels as the archetype for this hierarchical view of creation. Just as the higher choirs of angels ordered the function of the lower, so too the higher realms of being and beings within creation ordered the lower ones. On the same basis, Gregory believed that human institutions, such as the Church, should also bear such a hierarchical structure. See: *Ep.* 5.59.

70 Straw, commenting on this aspect of Gregory’s cosmology, stated: “Creation ranges along a hierarchical scale graded in degrees of being and value: the immutability or mutability that determines one’s level of existence carries a moral significance. The more reason and resistance to mutability one possesses, the
visible, spiritual to physical, stable to mutable, and so forth. In this way, God created the cosmos with a vast array of beings with disparate attributes and qualities, and yet by virtue of its hierarchical structure, this collage of beings formed a harmonious, ordered, and beautiful whole.

Gregory recognized such hierarchies in every aspect of creation. They occurred in living creatures, in angels, in the structure of the world, and even in human institutions such as the Church. While recognizing many such hierarchies, Gregory proposed two fundamental ones that structured all of creation. The first, comprised of heaven, aerial sky, earth, and hell, constituted God’s hierarchical ordering of inanimate creation. The second, concerned with animate beings, consisted of angels, demons, humans, animals, and plants. Each of these two hierarchies, along with each of their constituents, will be examined in detail, as they constitute the very structure of Gregory’s cosmology.

**Hierarchy of Being**

Between the eternity of God and the formless void of nothingness, Gregory’s cosmos was arranged according to a number of distinct levels of being. These levels of creation acted as the ontological stage for the various animated beings who were the actors in the drama of God’s providence. The highest level, heaven, was occupied by the angels and...
constituted the eternal reward for the elect. The next level, aerial sky, saw the energetic exchange of angels and demons alike, bringing aid or trouble to humans below. The earth was where living humans and animals dwelled. Last and lowest was hell, the eternal dwelling place of the damned, demons and humans alike. Within each of these successive levels of being, Gregory often recognized additional hierarchies structuring the form and order of their constitution. Each of these successive levels of being will be examined, as each played a vital role in Gregory’s cosmology, as well as in providence itself.

**Heaven**

Heaven existed as the pinnacle of creation, as it most closely resembled God in its invisible, incorporeal nature; it was a realm free of all corruption. While God still stood beyond heaven, heaven was the locus where creation was most fully united to God. Those that dwelled there, the angels and the saints, were united to God by means of an immoveable contemplation. In this contemplative vision of God, the angels and saints continually partook of God’s essence ever more fully, without that essence ever being exhausted.

There through the day, as in midday, the fire of the sun burns with radiant light, because the brightness of the Creator, now pressed by the darkness of our mortal state, is seen more manifestly. And just as the ray of the sphere elevates itself into higher expanses so the unadorned truth enlightens us of itself. There the light of interior contemplation is perceived without the intervening shadow of mutability; there is the heat of the supreme light without any dimness from the body; there the invisible choirs of angels in concealment throb like the stars, which now cannot be seen by men, in proportion as they are bathed deeper in the flame of true light.

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77 Gregory recognized additional hierarchies in both heaven and hell, which were the basis for the various degrees of punishment and reward found in each. See *Dial.* 4.36; *Mor.* 12.13.
78 *Mor.* 10.13.
79 *Mor.* 4.45.
80 *Mor.* 4.46; 10.13.
81 *Mor.* 9.17: “Ibi per diem quasi in meridiano tempore, ardentius solis ignis accenditur, quia conditoris claritas, mortalitatis nostrae iam pressa caligine, manifestius uidetur. Et uelut sphaerae radius ad spatia altiora se eleuat quia de semetipsa nos veritas subtilius illustrat. Ibi lumen intimae contemplationis sine interueniente cernitur umbra mutabilitatis; ibi calor summi luminis sine ulla obscuritate corporis; ibi
This conception of heaven is noticeably marked by Gregory’s monastic and ascetic ideals.\textsuperscript{82}

In heaven, souls were eternally freed from the corruptions and trials of the sensible world and eternally united to God through perfect contemplation.

While the angels had occupied heaven for all time, heaven was opened to humans only upon Jesus’ death and resurrection. Before that time the souls of the elect waited in the highest hell until Jesus came to gather them and bring them into heaven.\textsuperscript{83} Since that time, the souls of all the saints immediately entered into heaven to join the ranks of the angels.\textsuperscript{84}

The pasture of the elect is the countenance of the present God, and as he is seen without defect, the mind is satisfied with the food of life without end. In that pasture of eternal satiety they are happy, whoever now has evaded the snares of temporal pleasures. There are the hymns of the choirs of angels; there the companionship of celestial citizens; there the sweet solemnity of those returning from the sadness of their hard labor; there the far-seeing choirs of prophets; there the number of apostles, the judges; there the innumerable martyrs manifesting victory, happier there to the degree they experienced affliction here; there the confessors whose constancy is relieved by the reception of their reward; there the faithful men, whose manly strength was not able to be softened by the pleasures of the world; there the holy women, who conquered their sex with the world; there the children, who surpassed their years by their conduct; there the old, who were not made weak with age and did not relinquish the service of virtue.\textsuperscript{85}

\textit{Pascua namque electorum sunt uultus praesens Dei, qui dum sine defectu conspicitur, sine fine mens vitae cibo satiatur. In istis pasquis de aeternitatis satietae laetati sunt, quique iam laqueos uoluptuosae temporalitatis euaserunt. Ibi hymnidici angelorum chori, ibi societas supernorum ciuium; ibi dulcis sollemnis a peregrinationis huius tristi labore redentium; ibi prouidi prophetarum chori; ibi iudex apostolorum numerus; ibi innumabilium martyrwm uictor exercitus, tanto illic laetior, quanto hic durius afflictus; ibi confessorum constantia praemii sui perceptione consolata; ibi fideles uiri, quos a uirilitatis suae robore uoluptas saeculi emollire non potuit; ibi sanctae mulieres, quae cum saeculo et sexum uicerunt; ibi pueri, qui hic annos suos moribus transcenderunt; ibi senes, quos hic et aetas debiles reddidit, et uirtus operis non reliquit.”

\textsuperscript{82} This conception of heaven as contemplative union with God also drew heavily from Neo-Platonism and eastern spirituality, as was evidenced by Clement of Alexandria (d. c. 215), Origen (d. 253/54), Basil of Caesarea (c. 330-79), Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329-90), and Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-94). See Daley, \textit{The Hope}, 44-50, 81-88.

\textsuperscript{83} Gregory believed that prior to Jesus’ coming all the saints of old awaited his coming in the highest region of hell, where there was no punishment, but still the souls were deprived of the beatitude of heaven. See \textit{HEv}. 2.22.

\textsuperscript{84} Mor. 4.56.

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{HEv}. 1.14.5: “Pascua namque electorum sunt uultus praesens Dei, qui dum sine defectu conspicitur, sine fine mens vitae cibo satiatur. In istis pasquis de aeternitatis satietae laetati sunt, quique iam laqueos uoluptuosae temporalitatis euaserunt. Ibi hymnidici angelorum chori, ibi societas supernorum ciuium; ibi dulcis sollemnis a peregrinationis huius tristi labore redentium; ibi prouidi prophetarum chori; ibi iudex apostolorum numerus; ibi innumabilium martyrwm uictor exercitus, tanto illic laetior, quanto hic durius afflictus; ibi confessorum constantia praemii sui perceptione consolata; ibi fideles uiri, quos a uirilitatis suae robore uoluptas saeculi emollire non potuit; ibi sanctae mulieres, quae cum saeculo et sexum uicerunt; ibi pueri, qui hic annos suos moribus transcenderunt; ibi senes, quos hic et aetas debiles reddidit, et uirtus operis non reliquit.”
The bodies of these saints would rise at the end of the world and be united to their souls already in heaven. Gregory also speculated that there would be as many humans who entered heaven as there were angels there who did not fall. These humans, with the nine choirs of angels already there, formed a tenth choir giving heaven its fullness and completion.

Heaven was constituted by the same hierarchical structure that epitomized Gregory’s entire cosmology. In the first place, the angels were arranged hierarchically according to their nine choirs. Humans too, depending upon the merit they earned through their earthly life, enjoyed different levels of beatitude in heaven.

The words of truth would satisfy us even if examples were lacking. Certainly it was on account of the elect he said in the gospel: ‘There are many mansions in my Father’s house’ (John 14:2). For if there were no disparity in reward in that blessed eternity, there would be one mansion rather than many. As it is there are many mansions, in which the good in distinct order rejoice together with those similar on account of merits. And yet all those laboring received one denarius (Matt. 20:9-14), who in the many mansions were distinguished, and while one is the beatitude that they receive, they receive different kinds of rewards in accord to the different works.

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86 Mor. 9.17. In his *Moralia*, Gregory recounted the argument he had with Eutychius, the patriarch of Constantinople, wherein Gregory argued for the bodily resurrection of the dead at the end of the world. See Mor. 14.72-74. It is somewhat surprising that Gregory would argue for a bodily or fleshy resurrection given that he often purported the flesh to be the source of human sin and corruptibility. Gregory, in this same section of the *Moralia*, clarified this problem by stating that there are two meanings to the term “flesh.” In one sense it referred to human sinfulness, and in the other it referred to human nature. Flesh, in terms of sinfulness, never entered into heaven, but only in its second sense, that of human nature. When this flesh enters heaven to be united to the soul it will already have been freed from the bonds of corruptibility. The importance here for Gregory’s cosmology is that flesh itself is not inherently sinful or corruptible, it only becomes so through sin.

87 *HEv*. 2.34.

88 In Gregory’s numerology, the number ten was a symbol of fullness and completion. Consequently, by humans forming a tenth choir in heaven, in addition to the nine choirs of angels, they brought fullness and completion to heaven. See *HEv*. 2.34. Augustine had previously suggested a similar idea, stating that the saints in heaven would make up for the lost number of apostate angels, giving heaven its intended fullness. See Augustine, *cit. Dei*, 22.1.

89 Mor. 4.70. The notion of different rewards in heaven according to personal merit had been a long standing doctrine within Christianity going as far back as Irenaeus (c. 180). See Irenaeus, *AH* 5.36.1-2.

90 *Dial*. 4.36: “Veritatis nobis uerba satisfacerent, etiam si exempla deessent. Ipsa quippe propter electos in evangelio dicit: ‘In domo Patris mei mansiones multae sunt.’ Si enim dispar retributio in illa beatitudine aeterna non esset, una potius mansio quam multae essent. Multae ergo mansiones sunt, in quibus et
All the saints, just as the angels, equally share in the same joy of being united to God in contemplation, even while each occupies a different rank and reward in heaven according to each one’s unique merits.⁹¹

Heaven, while beyond the realm of the visible world, still retained connections to it. Heaven acted as the center of operations for God’s providential ordering of the physical, visible world. Angels, united to God in contemplation, were sent by him to accomplish his commands on earth.⁹² In this fashion, the invisible realm of heaven governed and ordered the lower realms of creation. The saints too, enjoying a similar relation to God and the visible world, continued to act within creation in accord with God’s providential ordering and human prayer.⁹³ This continued unity of the saints in heaven with the visible world was particularly experienced by means of their dead bodies, relics, which would one day be joined to the soul in heaven.⁹⁴ Thus heaven, by means of its invisible citizens, was the source of God’s providential concern and care for the lower levels of creation.

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distincte bonorum ordines et propter meritorum consortium communiter laetantur. Et tamen unum denarium omnes laborantes accipiunt, qui in multis mansionibus distinguuntur, quia et una est beatitudo quam illic perciunt, et dispar retributionis qualitas quam per opera diversa consequuntur.”

⁹¹ Mor. 4.70. Augustine had spoken of heaven in similar terms, wherein the saints all enjoyed different degrees of happiness in accord with their merits, but still all in harmonious accord with each other. See Augustine, civ. Del 22.30.
⁹² Mor. 2.3.
⁹³ Gregory never speculated in his writings as to how the saints in heaven continued to act in creation. He did speak of the human soul being more agile than the body and so capable of traveling great distances through God’s agency. See Dial. 2.22. Gregory conceived the souls of the saints in heaven in similar terms to the angels, and so, presumably, they could continue to act in creation in a similar manner to that of the angels. This fact is suggested by the continued efficacy of the saints’ prayers after death and the many visions of dead saints Gregory reported. See HEv. 2.32; Dial. 4.12-15.
⁹⁴ Gregory very often alluded to the power inherent in the bodies of dead saints. See Ep. 4.30.
Aerial Sky

Just below heaven, Gregory distinguished another realm of being he called “aerial heaven.” This realm had ambiguous qualities in Gregory’s thought, as it saw the interplay of a number of incongruous aspects of Gregory’s cosmology. Here, where the birds of the sky flew, the apostate angels, expelled from heaven above, also roamed. It was also the locus where the bodies of Elijah and Enoch, taken from earth by angels, now lay hidden from sight so as to return again in the final days. This mid-space between heaven and earth also saw the energetic traffic of angels, coming and going to in order to accomplish God’s commands on earth. The sky, then, saw a mixture of disparate elements of his cosmology intermixed. The sky was a visible and physical region, as depicted by the birds who flew there, and the bodies of Elijah and Enoch dwelling there. Yet, at the same time, invisible beings such as angels and demons dwelled and acted in this region. Thus, while a physical, visible reality, it was the medium of activity for spiritual, invisible agents as they carried out God’s providential designs on earth.

Earth

With the heavens above and hell below, the earth stood at the center of God’s creation. Like the sky above, the earth was characterized by a number of disparate elements, living and non-living, physical and spiritual, visible and invisible, all hierarchically arranged. Gregory explained: “Stones exist but are not alive; trees exist and are alive but have no feeling; brute animals exist, they are alive and have feeling, but they have no

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95 Mor. 2.74.
96 Mor. 2.74; 13.53.
97 Mor. 14.27.
understanding.”  This hierarchy, beginning with inanimate creation, ascended to plant life, then sensible life, and ultimately rational life, which was constituted by humans. Because of that rational life, humans, unlike the rest of the visible order, had the capacity for stability by means of contemplative union with God. The rest of the earth, however, was destined for dissipation and nothingness.

The source of the earth’s dissipation and corruption was its visible, physical composition. Gregory explained: “It cannot be otherwise then that what is touched is corruptible, and what is not corruptible cannot be touched.” Unlike the invisible, spiritual aspects of creation, which can be united to God in contemplation and therefore achieve stability, the visible, physical world was inherently tied to change and so corruption. One can only imagine how vividly this truth was imprinted in the mentality of Gregory as he witnessed the world around him, its building and cities, its crops and gardens, its people, all crumble under the weight of its own inherent mutability. On account of its visible, physical composition, the earth, in a distinctive way, was the locus of God’s providential government. It was here, within the changes and time of earth, that the eternal plans of God’s providence unfolded and were made manifest.

Particularly distinctive about Gregory’s conception of the earth was its radical contingency on God. Earth was completely dependent upon God for both its existence and

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98 HEv. 2.29.
99 Mor. 8.19, 47; 12.18.
100 Mor. 5.63.
101 HEv. 2.26.
102 Mor. 12.38. This fact was a reflection of creation being formed ex nihilo. Unless retained in being by God, each created thing invariably fell into dissipation and nothingness.
103 Mor. 2.34.
104 Boglioni, characterizing this aspect of Gregory’s thought, stated: “La mentalité de Grégoire nous apparaît comme intensément et très concrètement théocentrique, peu ou pas sensible à la nature considérée en soi, à ses dynamismes, à ses lois intrinsèques.” Boglioni, Miracle, 14.
operation. Gregory had no sense of nature as a principle of explanation for the earth’s operation. Each earthly thing had a distinctive nature, but it was not the physical characteristics of a thing that produced its activity. Rather, Gregory located the agency for each within the invisible realm. He stated: “From such consideration, it results that nothing in this visible world can be moved except through invisible creation.” In such fashion, then, the physical, visible world acted as a sacramental expression of the presence and activity of the invisible world that acted through these visible, physical entities. The visible world was in essence a theophany of the invisible world and, ultimately, God.

Gregory, in many instances and ways, bore witness to the invisible world acting through the visible, physical universe. Perhaps the most often cited example of this fact in Gregory’s writings was that nature itself, the earth, responded to humanity’s sins with chastisements. He wrote:

For anguish springs out of the ground just as when man, being formed in the image of God, is scourged by insensible things. But on account of the hidden merits of the mind, there comes forth the manifest scourges of punishment and not springing from the ground, because the defects of our sense requires that it should be stricken by insensible things. For here we distinguish that for our correction expected rain is withheld from the scorched earth, and the misty air enkindled by the sun is dried up; the sea rages with the swells of the tempest and intercepts those attempting to cross over, others courageously desiring to be on the way the water stops completely; the

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105 Both Boglioni and McCready agreed that Gregory had no conception of nature, as a universal principle of explanation for the events and things of the world. See Boglioni, *Miracle*, 28-37; McCready, *Signs of Sanctity*, 226.

106 *Dial.* 4.5: “Qua ex re pensandum est, quia in hunc quoque mundum visibilem nihil nisi per creaturam invisibilem disponi potest.”

107 This “sacramental vision” of reality was the paradigm of Gregory’s entire cosmology according to Straw. See Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 20. William McCready described Gregory’s view of the world in a similar fashion. See McCready, *Signs of Sanctity*, 258.


109 Gregory’s premise here was that God, in his providential wisdom, used the physical world, which was the source of humanity’s sin, as the mechanism for punishing humanity’s sin and correcting them. See *Mor.* 3.15.
earth from its fertility not only produces little fruit but also devours the received seeds.\textsuperscript{110}

On other occasions, the earth is seen responding in similar ways to the commands of holy men,\textsuperscript{111} and the activity of demons.\textsuperscript{112} The earth even recognized the appearance of its Creator on earth and responded with signs.\textsuperscript{113} The earth, then, bore witness to one of the central tenets of Gregory’s cosmology: the physical, visible universe is put into motion and ordered by the presence and activity of the spiritual, invisible world.\textsuperscript{114}

\textit{Hell}

The lowest realm of creation, hovering just above the abyss of nothingness, was hell. Within Gregory’s ontological hierarchy, hell was that aspect of creation that stood furthest away from God. Consequently, more than any other part of creation, it bore the effects of dissipation and corruption, as depicted by the fires that comprised it. Gregory spatially located hell just below earth, suggesting that the volcanoes in Sicily were open pits to it.\textsuperscript{115}

Essentially a physical realm, as it was composed of visible, physical flames, it was also the

\textsuperscript{110} Mor. 6.14: “Dolor namque quasi de humo egreditur cum homo ad Dei imaginem conditus de rebus insensibilibus flagellatur. Sed quia per occulta mentium merita, aperta prodeunt flagella poenarum et de humo dolor non egreditur, quoniam sensus nostri malitia exigit ut a rebus insensibilibus feriatur. Ecce enim cernimus quod ad correptionem nostram expectatus imber arente terra suspenditur, et caliginosus aer inardescente sole siccatur; mare procellis tumescentibus saeuit et alios ad transmeandum susceps susceptos intercipit, aliis desideratum iter erecta in cumulum unda contradicit; terra non solum germina fecunditatis imminuit sed etiam semina accepta consumit.”

\textsuperscript{111} Throughout his \textit{Dialogues}, Gregory very often referred to events where elements within the earth, in miraculous fashion, responded to the commands and actions of holy men. For a few examples, see \textit{Dial.} 2.6, 7; 3.9.

\textsuperscript{112} Satan, as all the demons, was presented often in the \textit{Dialogues} as effecting physical events through their actions. Some examples are \textit{Dial.} 2.9, 11; 3.20.

\textsuperscript{113} Gregory spoke of the earth sending forth a star announcing Jesus’ birth; the sea allowing its Creator to walk upon itself; the earth responding with an earthquake and the sun withholding its light at Jesus’ death. Although Gregory described his language as “human,” the point he was making was that the earth was animated such that it could recognize and respond to its Creator. See \textit{HEv.} 1.10.1.

\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Dial.} 4.5.

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Dial.} 4.36.
eternal dwelling place of invisible beings, both demons and damned human souls alike.\textsuperscript{116} God created hell at the start of creation as a place of punishment for wicked angels and humans.\textsuperscript{117} Gregory saw it as an aspect of divine justice, that just as reprobate humans and demons were united in sin, they should be united in their punishments.\textsuperscript{118} While the souls of reprobate humans went immediately to hell upon death, the body, implicit in their sins, would be joined to the soul to suffer eternally after the Last Judgment.\textsuperscript{119} Then, body and soul, the wicked would pay the penalty for their sins, whose debt they failed to pay in life.\textsuperscript{120}

Similar to the frescos that adorned the walls of Renaissance churches, whose depictions of hell were meant to frighten spectators to repentance, Gregory painted a picture of hell that was meant to bring souls to fear God’s justice.\textsuperscript{121} Described as a land and sea of fire, the flames of hell, while corporeal, burned body and soul alike.\textsuperscript{122} In hell the soul experienced an internal death, experienced as internal blindness and disorder without end, due to the soul’s separation from God.\textsuperscript{123} Gregory characterized this experience as an eternal dying, an “immortal death,” wherein one experienced all the disorder and destruction of death, but was eternally kept alive in it.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{116} Gregory explained that the physical fires of hell had the capacity to burn incorporeal souls. The analogy he used to explain this fact was the human body, which was physical, but had the capacity to produce suffering in the soul to which it was attached. See \textit{Dial}. 4.30.
\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Mor}. 15.35.
\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Mor}. 9.103.
\textsuperscript{119} Gregory stated that the resurrected body joined the soul of the damned in hell after the Last Judgment. See \textit{Mor}. 15.35-36.
\textsuperscript{120} \textit{Mor}. 9.95, 100-01.
\textsuperscript{121} Gregory, in some detail, described hell in his \textit{Moralia}. See \textit{Mor}. 9.95-103.
\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Mor}. 9.95; \textit{Dial}. 4.30.
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Mor}. 9.97-98.
\textsuperscript{124} Such a torment constituted the worst imaginable for Gregory due to his metaphysical notion of instability. In hell, the soul continually experienced the dissolution of its own being towards nothingness, yet continually was kept in existence in order to experience it forever. See \textit{Mor}. 4.5; 9.100; 15.21; \textit{Dial}. 4.3. Both
Therefore, there is done upon the wretches death without dying, end without ending, failure without failing, because death lives, and the end always begins, and the failing is unable to fail. Therefore because death both annihilates but does not destroy; anguish tortures but never banishes terror; the flame consumes but in no way dispels the darkness.\textsuperscript{125}

Further adding to the torment there, each soul saw the glory awarded to the righteous in heaven, as well as their loved ones with them in their tortments in hell.\textsuperscript{126} In this torment, not only did they experience their present pains, but also the pain of anticipating an eternity of such torment, with the loss of all hope of reprieve.\textsuperscript{127}

While hell was described as a place of dissolution and disorder without end, it was not devoid of God’s order. Just as in heaven there were many mansions to accommodate a hierarchy of rewards awaiting the just, so also in hell there was a multitude of dungeons so as to punish the wicked in accordance with the just penalty of their sins.\textsuperscript{128} In hell, then, there were many levels of punishment, and while there was one fire that burned all, each suffered from the flame differently in accord with their sins.\textsuperscript{129} Even within the individual person, different parts of the body experienced worse punishment to the degree it was complicit in sin.\textsuperscript{130} Thus even hell, the location furthest from God in creation, was not devoid of his order, and so, his providence.

\textsuperscript{125} Mor. 9.100: “\textit{Fit ergo miseris mors sine morte, finis sine fine, defectus sine defectu, quia et mors uiuit et finis semper incipiit, et deficere defectus nescit. Quia igitur et mors perimit et non extinguit; dolor cruciat, sed nullatenuus pauorem fugat; flamma comburit, sed nequaquam tenebras discutit ...}”

\textsuperscript{126} Mor. 9.101.

\textsuperscript{127} Mor. 8.29; 9.100.

\textsuperscript{128} Mor. 9.98. Augustine likewise suggested different degrees of punishment in hell. See Augustine, \textit{civ. Dei} 21.16.

\textsuperscript{129} Dial. 4.45.

\textsuperscript{130} Gregory used the example of \textit{Luke} 16:19-31, wherein the Rich Man’s tongue burned severely due to his sin of talkativeness. Thus, he was punished more excessively in those parts of the body where he sinned more often. See \textit{HEv.} 2.40.
**Purgatory**

Gregory has been depicted as inventing the medieval doctrine of purgatory. The basis for this supposition were statements Gregory made in his *Dialogues* about a period of purgation certain souls must go through before entering the eternal rewards of heaven. Gregory never gave a location for this realm or appropriated to it an ontological status, other than that it was transitory and occurred before one’s final judgment to remove venial sins. Consequently, for the purposes of this study, purgatory will not be considered as a distinct place or realm within Gregory’s ontological hierarchy, nor a distinctive factor in his cosmology.

**Analyses of Gregory’s Hierarchy of Being**

Gregory’s ontological hierarchy was the conceptual cornerstone of his cosmology. It functioned as the infrastructure of God’s entire creation, providing for the order, beauty, and goodness that characterized creation. Furthermore, it functioned as the mechanism of God’s providence whereby he ordered each successive level of creation by virtue of those above it. Consequently, recognizing and understanding these various levels of being and their function is essential to understanding Gregory’s world, as well as how he conceived providence acting within it. However, within Gregory’s description of these various levels of being there was a certain amount of ambiguity and lack of clarity. This ambiguity itself is important to

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132 *Dial.* 4.26, 41-42.
133 *Dial.* 4.41-42. Le Goff has argued that the non-existence of the noun *purgatorium* prior to the twelfth century shows that purgatory had not been afforded a temporal-spatial status prior to that time. See Jacques Le Goff, *La Naissance du Purgatoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), 10. Sarah Foot, responding to this claim, asserted that while there was no agreement on the location and contours of purgatory during the early Middle Ages, all still agreed upon its existence. See Foot, “Anglo-Saxon Purgatory,” 88-90.
recognize, for understanding its source and place in his thought is essential to fully comprehending his cosmology.

Typically, these ambiguities were the result of the antonyms he characteristically utilized to describe the various aspects of creation, such as visible and invisible, stable and instable, spiritual and corporeal. For example, heaven was a spiritual and invisible realm free of all corruption and change, and yet, it was also to be the place of human bodies that were the very source of corruption to humans on earth. Additionally, the aerial sky was a physical and visible realm, but it was the dwelling place of invisible beings such as demons. It was also the medium of angelic traffic going from heaven to earth. The visible, physical bodies of Elijah and Enoch were also mysteriously hidden somewhere there out of sight. Hell, likewise, was constituted of a mixture of visible and invisible, physical and spiritual elements. It was composed of a physical flame, but one that consumed invisible, spiritual entities, such as human souls and demons. As can be seen, the source of many of these ambiguities was the place that living beings functioned within Gregory’s cosmology. A thorough investigation of this other aspect of creation, living beings, and their hierarchical structure, is needed to complete the picture of Gregory’s cosmology.

Hierarchy of Personal Beings

The primary concern of Gregory’s theological efforts was the human person. As pope he was a curator of souls and so pastoral concerns gave shape and meaning to

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134 Gregory believed that after the Last Judgment, the physical bodies of the just would be resurrected and joined to their souls already in heaven. See Mor. 14.72.
135 Mor. 14.27
136 This conceptual difficulty was one that Gregory himself recognized, as he attempted to address it in his Dialogues. See Dial. 4.30.
everything he wrote. Consequently, while conceptually relying on a hierarchy of being to structure his thought, the value of that hierarchy was invariably linked to its effects on the human person and salvation. This pastoral concern is why his hierarchy of being can never be fully appreciated and understood outside the influence and activity of the other hierarchy that structured his universe, the hierarchy of living beings, in which human beings held a central place. This hierarchy, composed of angels, demons, humans, and even plants and animals, was the true object of concern for Gregory, both in terms of his cosmology as in his conception of providence.

Gregory distinguished a number of different kinds of living beings, each constituting a different level within his hierarchy of beings. Gregory explained:

And so stones exist but are not alive; trees exist and are alive but have no feeling; brute animals exist, they are alive and have feeling, but they have no understanding. Finally, angels exist. They are alive, possess feeling and understanding. Human beings have something in common with every creature.137

Here, Gregory is seen distinguishing four groups of living beings, plants, animals, humans, and angels, based upon the attributes of existence, life, feeling, and understanding. Gregory additionally distinguished these various orders of beings by means of ontological attributes, visible and invisible, stable and mutable, spiritual and physical. By virtue of these various attributes, then, these living beings formed a descending hierarchy of angels, humans, animals and plants. Two of these groups of beings were not just living, but also had understanding. Consequently, they were not static constituents of creation, but had the capacity to rise and fall within God’s ontological order. This fact explained the existence of two additional categories of living beings, namely, apostate angels and reprobate humans. These various living beings formed the heart of Gregory’s cosmology and constituted the

137 HEv. 2.29.
very actors of God’s providence. Consequently, each of these living beings, along with their place within the hierarchy of beings, will be examined to complete the picture of his cosmology.

Angels

Just as heaven existed as the pinnacle of God’s created order, angels, the citizens of heaven, were the highest order of created beings. Unlike every other created being, angels had an invisible nature consisting of pure spirit with no attending physicality.\textsuperscript{138} Despite this elevated nature, they were not omnipresent like God, but were still bound by space and locality.\textsuperscript{139} Moreover, as with every other created thing, their nature bore the inherent defect of mutability; they had the capacity for change.\textsuperscript{140} Angels overcame this inherent instability by means of an immovable contemplation of God, wherein their natures remained eternally fixed in union with God.\textsuperscript{141} Even in their exterior activity in creation, they remained ever present and united to God by means of this contemplation.\textsuperscript{142} In this contemplation, God’s essence and knowledge were communicated to angels such that they continually knew his will and commands, which they in turn executed in the rest of creation.\textsuperscript{143}

Angels played a vital role both in Gregory’s cosmology as well as in his theory of providence. United to God in contemplation, angels acted as the mediators of God’s will and

\textsuperscript{138} Mor. 2.8-9. Gregory distinguished angelic from divine nature by characterizing the nature of angels as invisible, whereas God was of an incomprehensible nature.

\textsuperscript{139} Mor. 2.3.

\textsuperscript{140} Angels had an invisible, spiritual nature. See Mor. 2.8. However, like all creatures, angels still had the capacity for change and were mutable by virtue of their created natures. See Mor. 4.12; 5.68. This fact is particularly evident in the fall of Satan and demons from the choirs of heavenly angels.

\textsuperscript{141} By an act of free will the angels joined themselves to God by an immoveable contemplation. See Mor. 25.11; 27.40.

\textsuperscript{142} Mor. 2.3.

\textsuperscript{143} Mor. 2.3, 8.
providence within the rest of creation. In this fashion, then, God ordered his entire creation through the agency of angels. “These [angels] bear the world, in that governing of the universe they manage its cares.” This role of angels exemplified Gregory’s cosmological premise that God ordered visible creation by means of the invisible. Comparable to the human person, wherein the invisible soul governed the physical body, invisible angels governed visible creation, ordering it in accord with God’s revealed will. In this sense, the universe for Gregory was not an inert mass, but was alive, at all times manifesting the judgments of God that he executed through his angels. Storms, earthquakes, plagues, wind, rain and droughts, all were the manifestation of God’s providence in creation executed through the agency of angels.

This cosmological and providential role of angels also extended to their relationship with humans. As the name “angel” implies, they acted as God’s messengers to humanity, carrying God’s revelations and executing his judgments on humans. Angels, in essence, were God’s mouthpiece within creation, announcing to humans God’s judgments and commands. They also carried out such functions as chastising people for their sins.

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144 In this function of angels, Gregory recognized the perfect union of the contemplative and active life, which humans were to emulate. See Chase, Angelic Spirituality, 27.
145 Augustine also spoke to the role angels played in effecting God’s commands in creation. See civ. Dei 9.15. Augustine, however, never developed this function of angels in his cosmology as fully as Gregory. This characteristic of Gregorian cosmology shows the influence of later Christian writers, particularly Pseudo-Dionysius.
146 Mor. 9.26: “Ipsae etenim orbem portant, quae regendi mundi curas admininant.”
147 Dial. 4.5. Augustine had suggested a similar role for angels within God’s providential government of creation. As with Gregory, Augustine conceived God to govern the physical world through the agency of invisible angels. See Augustine, Trin. 3.1.4-9.
148 As Gregory explained in a homily, all angels, as their name indicated, were messengers. This generic function of messenger applied to all angels as mediators of God to creation. Each choir of angel fulfilled that function in specific ways in accord to the specific name of each choir, whose function their name indicated. See HEv. 2.34.
149 Mor. Praef.3; 4.55.
150 Mor. 16.45.
escorting souls to heaven, and fulfilling the prayers of humans. Surprisingly, given the role and activity of demons, Gregory never ascribed a role to angels concerning the human heart and will. Whereas demons were the source of temptations, it was not angels, but the Holy Spirit, which was the remedy for those temptations by imparting interior light and grace. Humans could obtain virtue by meditating on the choirs of angels, but the angels themselves did not impart that virtue. Thus the providential role of angels in the lives of humans was primarily an exterior ministry, communicating God’s will and executing his judgments on humans.

This role of angels within creation was a function of their natures and hierarchical structure. Gregory conceived angels to be hierarchically arranged according to nine different choirs. Gregory derived these nine choirs from Scripture and Pseudo-Dionysius, whom Gregory cited in one of his homilies particularly devoted to angels. The name of each choir of angels was an indication of their nature and their particular function within creation. They were Angels, Archangels, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Dominations, Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim. These nine choirs were hierarchically arranged with

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151 HEv. 2.40.5.  
152 Mor. 8.82.  
153 As will be shown below, demons had the capacity to enter into the minds and hearts of humans in order to suggest and prompt various sins. See Mor. 14.45; 15.19; 27.50. Gregory never recognized a similar, but reverse, role for angels.  
154 The movement of grace, whether in the enlightenment of the intellect or the imparting of virtue, was always an activity of the Holy Spirit, rather than angels. See Mor. 4.62-63, 65; 5.50; 9.19; 11.15; 27.41; 29.40.  
155 HEv. 2.34.  
156 In a homily devoted to the explanation of angels, Gregory stated he derived their nine choirs from Scripture. In the same homily, he also cited Pseudo-Dionysius, who, at Gregory’s time, was thought to be Denys the Areopagite, the companion of Paul referred to in Acts 17:34. Both sources were influential in shaping Gregory’s list and function of the various angels. See HEv. 2.34; Chase, Angelic Spirituality, 91-95.  
157 Gregory explained each of these names and roles in HEv. 2.34; Mor. 17.12.  
158 Gregory gave two lists of the nine choirs of angels, in which their hierarchical order slightly differed. See HEv. 2.34 and Mor. 32.23.
the higher angels governing the lower. The higher angels never left heaven, instead orchestrating God’s commands to the lower angels who went forth to execute these commands in the lower aspects of creation. In this way, then, the angels harmoniously executed God’s will in creation from the highest to the lowest orders.

Gregory also recognized an additional function of angels within creation. Not only were they responsible for mediating God’s government over creation, but they served a pedagogical function for humanity. The name of each angel signified its particular virtue, and by meditating upon these names, one was led from the lower to higher virtues, and ultimately to God. Just as the angels descended downward according to their nine ranks from God to humanity, humanity could ascend upward to God by meditating on these choirs of angels. This pedagogical function of angels was reflected in the order Gregory listed the nine choirs. Whereas Pseudo-Dionysius ordered the angels descending from top downward so as to reflect their role in the government of creation, Gregory listed them from lowest to highest, such that, like a ladder, one could ascend through the choirs to God.

Within Gregory’s cosmological hierarchy, angels were the highest created beings inasmuch as their natures were purely spiritual and invisible. As the highest created beings, they had power over all the other ontological realms of being and beings. This power and agency, while a reflection of their elevated nature, was still completely contingent upon God.

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159 Pseudo-Dionysius, from whom Gregory derived his own understanding of angels, conceived hierarchy, whether celestial of ecclesiastical, not in terms of domination, but one of charity and service. The higher angels not only commanded the lower angels, but mediated to them God’s divine power. Thus, each successive rank of angels received its power by virtue of the higher ranks of angels who directed their ministry. See Pseudo-Dionysius, CH 260A. The example Pseudo-Dionysius gave was of the Seraphim, who sought to uplift the lower ranks of angels into the divine heat of love in which they participated. See Pseudo-Dionysius, CH 205C. See also Sarah Klitenic Wear and John Dillon, Dionysius, 59-60.

160 Mor. 4.55; HEv. 2.34.

161 Chase, Angelic Spirituality, 91.

162 See Chase, Angelic Spirituality, 26-27; HEv. 2.34.
They derived their power, stability, knowledge, and even will, from God by virtue of their immoveable contemplative union with him. Thus, the ontological status and role of angels within God’s universe and providence was ultimately a function of God, rather than an inherent quality of their angelic nature. Nothing manifested this fact more clearly to Gregory than the corruption of angels into demons when they separated themselves from God, particularly so in the case of Satan.

**Satan and Demons**

Sharing the same invisible, spiritual nature with angels was another class of beings called demons. Demons were in fact at one time angels, but due to their own free will, and ultimately pride, they separated themselves from God and so fell from contemplative union with him into the limitations and defective powers of their own created natures. Moreover, due to their ontological fall, they were expelled from heaven to roam the lower regions of creation, primarily aerial sky and the earth. Here, in the perversity of their corrupted wills and nature, they seek to disrupt God’s providential plans and to unite humans to themselves in their sin. In this activity they are led by Satan, once the highest of angels and now the most depraved of demons.

Satan was one of the few angels that Gregory identified by name. Satan, when created by God, was the most beautiful and highest of all the angels, outshining them all in

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163 Mor. 2.3-8; 5.68.
164 Mor. 4.6-10.
165 Mor. 13.38; HEv. 2.34.
166 Gregory utilized a great number of names when speaking of Satan: “Prowling Wolf” in Ep. 6.57, “Deceiver” in Ep. 7.33, “Cunning Trickster” in Ep. 9.157, “Tempter” in Mor. 2.19, “Cruel One” in Mor. 2.32, “Old Enemy” in Mor. 2.40, “Corruptor” in Mor. Praef.3, and “Exactor” in Mor. 4.69. These names depicted not only his identity, but also his role and function within the providential economy of God. Gregory did also speak of Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, the other angels identified by name in Scripture. See HEv. 2.34.
his created brilliance. Due his pride, he separated himself from God, which caused him
to fall beneath all the other angels that still stood united to God.¹⁶⁷

Thus that highest angelic spirit, who being subject to God might have stood at the
height, underwent repulsion into himself, such that he wanders abroad in the disquiet
of his own nature.¹⁶⁸

Gregory interpreted a passage of Isaiah as explaining this fact.¹⁶⁹ Now, Satan stood at the
head of all the demons he united to himself in sin and whom he directed in the attempt to
unite humans to himself through sin.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, even in their attempts to disrupt God’s
providential order within creation, and so introduce evil into it, Satan and demons never
acted outside the providential designs of God.

Satan and demons, even though guided by their own evil wills, ultimately acted as
agents of divine providence. The basis for this fact resided in Gregory’s conception of
created nature and its complete contingency upon God. Created beings, even of such an
exalted status as Satan, had no power in themselves to exist or to act except that God gave
it.¹⁷¹ Consequently, Satan and demons were completely ineffectual in carrying out their evil
designs unless God gave them the power and ability to accomplish it.¹⁷² In this fashion, then,
God ordered all the activity of Satan and demons by only giving them the power to

¹⁶⁷ Mor. 2.4; 4.16.
¹⁶⁸ Mor. 9.5: “Sic summus ille angelicus spiritus, qui subjectus Deo in culmine stare potuisset,
semetipsum repulsus patitur, quia per naturae suae inquietudinem foras uagatur.”
¹⁶⁹ Is. 14:13-14: “You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars
of God; I will sit on the mount of assembly on the heights of Zaphon; I will ascend to the tops of the clouds, I
will make myself like the Most High.’” While Isaiah was speaking of the King of Babylon, Gregory interpreted
this passage in light of Satan’s pride and his attempt to usurp God. See HEv. 34; Ep. 5.44.
¹⁷⁰ Gregory utilized Saint Paul’s analogy of the Body of Christ in reverse fashion, equating Satan as the
head of the wicked, who, in turn, formed his body. See Mor. 13.38.
¹⁷¹ Mor. 2.16-17.
¹⁷² Mor. Praef.7; 2.16-17.
accomplish that which God willed to be done.\textsuperscript{173} As Gregory explained: “Whence it is accomplished in a wonderful manner, such that what is done without the will of God is not contrary to the will of God.”\textsuperscript{174} God therefore used Satan and his demons, like the angels that they were, as agents of his providence within creation.\textsuperscript{175}

God providentially used demons in a number of diverse ways. First and foremost, demons were the instigators of sin. Unlike Augustine, who rooted the genesis of sin in the corruption of the human will, for Gregory the root of all sin was ultimately tied to demonic suggestion.\textsuperscript{176} Demons, as invisible beings, had the capacity to suggest thoughts and desires to the interior of the human mind and heart.\textsuperscript{177} In this way all sin had its beginnings in the suggestions of demons, who suited their temptations to the personality of each individual to make them more effective.\textsuperscript{178} Nevertheless, God controlled such temptations, never allowing a person to be tempted beyond their strength.\textsuperscript{179} By means of such temptations, reprobate humans were led into more and more sin, while the elect earned greater rewards by virtue of suffering such temptations.\textsuperscript{180} Thus, even in their attempt to lead souls from God, demons still fulfilled God’s providential designs.

The other providential role of demons was to send chastisements upon people.

Demons, as invisible beings, had power over the visible elements of creation and so, with

\textsuperscript{173} One example Gregory provided was of Jesus himself, whom Satan killed, but whose death served God’s providential plan for redemption. Another example was that of Joseph. The evil committed against him by his brothers was the very source of their salvation during a famine. See Mor. 6.28-33.

\textsuperscript{174} Mor. 6.33: “\textit{Vnde miro modo fit ut et quod sine uoluntate Dei agitur, uoluntati Dei contrarium non sit ....}” Mor. 14.46.

\textsuperscript{175} Augustine rooted human sinfulness in a fractured will, resulting from original sin. Gregory, bearing more resemblance to Cassian and Eastern Monasticism, saw the beginning of sin to be exterior to the human person. While flesh, with its appetites for pleasure, was the source of human consent to those sins, the suggestion still came from outside the human person. See Mor. 13.19; Ep. 8.37.

\textsuperscript{176} Mor. 14.45.

\textsuperscript{177} Mor. 3.14; 14.14.

\textsuperscript{178} Mor. 9.71.

\textsuperscript{179} Mor. 2.38.

\textsuperscript{180} Mor. 2.38.
God’s approval, had the ability to cause events in the physical realm.\textsuperscript{181} Gregory, particularly in his \textit{Dialogues}, gave a number of examples of this fact. Here, demons are seen harassing a monk in prayer,\textsuperscript{182} making a rock immoveable,\textsuperscript{183} causing an illusory fire,\textsuperscript{184} and even throwing a boy into a fire.\textsuperscript{185} These calamities and chastisements served God’s purposes by trying the elect and effecting punishment upon sinners. Consequently, even in their attempts to cause evil and disrupt God’s ordered creation, demons fulfilled that very order. Demons, just as fully as the angels, acted as agents of God’s providence.

\textit{Animals and Plants}

Skipping for the moment human beings, the lowest levels of created beings were composed of animals and plants. These beings represented the lowest and basest aspects of creation, being completely visible and physical beings. Animals and plants had life, but without the capacity for understanding, they had no capacity for stability. Their existence and function, therefore, was completely contingent upon God, who gave them existence and ordered their operation.\textsuperscript{186} Their function and role within creation, as well as within God’s providence, was completely determined by God who brought each thing into existence as needed. When their particular function or role ceased, they simply passed out of existence.

\textit{Human Beings}

At the very center of Gregory’s cosmology stood the place of human beings. In the first place, humans were a microcosm of the entire universe, having in their nature some

\textsuperscript{181} \textit{Mor.} 2.25.
\textsuperscript{182} \textit{Dial.} 2.4.
\textsuperscript{183} \textit{Dial.} 2.9.
\textsuperscript{184} \textit{Dial.} 2.10.
\textsuperscript{185} \textit{Dial.} 1.10.
\textsuperscript{186} \textit{Mor.} 5.63.
aspect of every other part of the cosmos. Thus, in some sense, Gregory’s entire cosmological perspective can be appreciated by reflecting on his conception of human beings. Additionally, all of Gregory’s theological effort was orientated towards human salvation, and consequently, human beings were central both to his cosmology as well as his understanding of divine providence. Therefore, in order to complete Gregory’s cosmology, as well as his hierarchy of created beings, some time will be spent here explaining his conception of human beings and their place within God’s creation and divine government. The goal here, in accord with the purposes of this chapter, will be to explain Gregory’s cosmological anthropology, leaving aside for the moment his conception of human salvation, the topic of the following chapter.

Constructing Gregory’s anthropology is no easy task. He recognized no distinct and stable human nature that could be explained outside of its relationship to God, and ultimately, to sin or grace. Human nature, like angelic nature, only functioned as it was designed by virtue of union with God, outside that relationship it deformed into something it was never created to be. This fact derived from the inherent mutability that characterized all created beings and their complete contingency on God. As Gregory explained: “For truly the
human creature, by the fact that it is a creature, has it in itself to sink down below itself.”  

This mutability in humans pertained not only to their existence, but even to the order and operation of their own created natures. While Gregory spoke about souls, bodies, wills, desires, senses, and so forth, these human attributes operated differently in accord with each person’s relationship with God. Thus, Gregory’s anthropological perspective allowed for no single and stable conception of human nature, but only humans in different states and relationships with God.

Gregory’s method of developing his anthropology, then, was not a philosophical or theoretical reflection on human nature. Rather, he sought to construct a paradigmatic picture of human beings in correct relationship with God, thereby manifesting the goal of human life, as well as the defects incurred in human beings outside that relationship. Gregory composed this image through a reflection on Adam in his initial pristine relationship with God, prior to the effects of sin. Consequently, the principal source for Gregory’s anthropology was Scripture, and particularly, the creation narrative found in the Book of Genesis. Gregory did, however, interpret this narrative through the lens of Stoic and Neo-Platonic influences he had inherited from the Christian tradition that preceded him.

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192 Mor. 12.19: “Humana namque creatura, eo ipso quod creatura est, in semetipsa habet sub se defluere.”
193 Mor. 11.8.
194 Gregory asserted that human nature was one way prior to original sin and another way after it. See HEv. 2.32. Augustine had also proposed a similar idea. He suggested that human nature was one way prior to sin and another way afterwards: mortal, ignorant, and entangled in the flesh. See lib. arb. 3.19.54.
195 Gregory did on occasion engage in philosophical reflection, such as on the immortality and origins of the human soul. See Ep. 9.148. These reflections, however, were a speculative endeavor and not central to his conception of human beings.
196 A good example occurred in Dial. 4.1.
197 Gregory composed no specific exegetical work on the creation narrative in Genesis. He did in many places throughout his corpus, however, speak on Adam and the initial anthropological conditions of his creation. See Ep. 6.14; 8.37; Dial. 4.1; Mor. 4.45, 54; 5.61; 8.19; 9.50; 11.68.
particularly Augustine. Thus, while Scripture was the source for his understanding of human beings, he did utilize philosophical categories to explain his thought.

In light of these considerations, the method for explicating Gregory’s anthropology will be the same he used in expounding it. The starting point, as was Gregory’s, will be a consideration of human beings in their initial state of creation, prior to the effects of sin. This initial constitution of human beings will be used as the model for distinguishing both, the ideal of human life, the saint, as well as the anthropological effects of sin, in the reprobate. Afterwards, the cosmological place and function of each, the saint and the sinner, will be considered so as to complete Gregory’s cosmology.

Gregory believed that God revealed the authentic image of humans, how they were designed to be, in his very creation of Adam in the Book of Genesis. Indicative of this image, Genesis described humans as having been created in the image and likeness of God. According to Gregory, human beings imaged God by virtue of their rational souls. The human soul, as the invisible and rational component of humans, resembled most closely God’s own invisible, incorporeal nature. Thus, it represented the highest

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198 Dagens has suggested that Gregory’s anthropology relied heavily upon Augustine. In support of this fact he suggested comparing Gregory’s Mor. 11.6 to Augustine’s Conf. 10.6. See Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 216.

199 Gen. 1:27.

200 Mor. 5.63; 29.21. Gregory, similar to Augustine, believed that humanity imaged God in its reason only insofar as the focus of reason was the contemplation of God, not the acquisition of sensible knowledge. Thus humans imaged God not in its mere capacity for reason, but in the proper functioning of reason, which was contemplation, by which soul was brought into union with God. See Augustine, Trin., 12.3.12-19.

201 While both God’s nature and the human soul were invisible and incorporeal, the two were not of the same nature. Gregory described God’s nature as incomprehensible, while that of the human soul, as the angels, was merely invisible. Thus, while bearing similarities, each existed on a different ontological level. See Mor. 2.9. Gregory also distinguished the human soul from angelic nature on the basis that, while both were invisible, immaterial, and bounded by space, human nature was bound by ignorance while angelic nature was not. See Mor. 2.3.
element of human nature and its governing agent. The soul, for Gregory, was the inner face of human beings, constituting their true self and identity. The soul, while immortal, was still a created entity and therefore mutable. Thus, it only had the capacity to serve the function for which it was designed by union with God. This union, born of the contemplation of God, was the hallmark of Adam’s initial creation.

The contemplation of God constituted the beatitude of humans, their one and true joy, and the end for which they were created. When God created Adam, he created him already in the state of this contemplative union, such that the perception of God, and union with him, was already a part of his created nature. This contemplative union with God elevated Adam above his own mutable state, conferring upon him God’s own stability. This stability was a function of Adam being united to God rather than to visible creation, which was inherently mutable and dissipating. Moreover, this union with God conferred stability within Adam’s own created nature, such that it operated in the way it was designed without any internal strife or disorder.

This contemplative union with God, defining Adam’s initial creation, conferred upon his initial nature two important effects. First, contemplation gave to the soul spiritual sight and understanding. Gregory distinguished two different modes of cognition in humans,

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202 The soul, besides being the source of human knowledge and action, was designed to govern every other aspect of the human person, including the desires, emotions, and appetites of the flesh. See Mor. 4.35-36; 9.106; 14.24; 15.52.

203 Mor. 10.27. This fact was evidenced within Gregory’s theology by the fact that the soul, and so the person, could exist in either heaven or hell devoid of the flesh.

204 Mor. 4.5, 68.

205 Gregory conceived heaven as the fulfillment of this contemplative union with God. In heaven, this contemplation of God, as with the angels, becomes fixed and eternal. See Mor. 4.45; 12.27.

206 Mor. 9.50; 11.59.

207 Mor. 11.68; 12.38.

208 Mor. 4.54.

209 Gregory had a very developed and coherent cognitional theory. See Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 31-54, 205-243.
and concomitantly, two different types of knowledge.\textsuperscript{210} The first consisted of the soul’s interior and spiritual perception, which, when united to God in contemplation, conferred upon the human person understanding and wisdom.\textsuperscript{211} The second type of cognition, resulting from the information gained through the five senses, provided sensible knowledge.\textsuperscript{212} While the soul was operative in both forms of knowledge, the first type, understanding and wisdom, was not a purely human endeavor, but resulted only from the soul’s contemplative union with God.

The foundational premise of Gregory’s entire epistemology, one resulting from his hierarchical conception of creation, was that one could only judge those things below oneself.\textsuperscript{213} Consequently, it was only upon the human soul being joined to God in contemplation, and so elevated above the world and its very own self, that the soul gained God’s perspective by which to properly perceive and understand created things.\textsuperscript{214} Describing this vision born on contemplation, Gregory stated:

In the advantage of their eyes whatsoever is exalted temporally is not high. For, as if set upon the high summit of a mountain, they look down upon the plains of the present life and so transcending themselves through spiritual loftiness, they see inside made subject that which swells without through carnal glory.\textsuperscript{215}

\textsuperscript{210} Mor. 4.45-46; 5.8; 11.9; 12.26. Augustine, likewise, distinguished the same two forms and modes of knowledge: wisdom born of contemplation (\textit{sapientia}) and sensible knowledge (\textit{scientia}). See Trin. 3.4; 12.22.  
\textsuperscript{211} Mor. 7.52-53. 
\textsuperscript{212} Mor. 5.61; 11.8-9. 
\textsuperscript{213} Mor. 8.28. 
\textsuperscript{214} Gregory gave a good description of this spiritual perception in a story he told of Benedict in his \textit{Dialogues}. Gregory explained that Benedict was caught up into the contemplation of God and, besides seeing the soul of Bishop Germanus ascend to heaven, he saw all of creation beneath himself in a single gaze. The idea that Gregory was suggesting in this story, as elsewhere, was that contemplation conferred upon the soul God’s own perspective. See Dial. 4.8.  
\textsuperscript{215} Mor. 7.53: “\textit{In horum profecto oculis quicquid temporaliter eminet altum non est. Nam, uelut in magni uertice montis siti, praesentis uitae plana despiciunt seques ipsos per spiritalem celsitudinem transcendentes, subiecta sibimet intus uident quaeque per carnalem gloriem foris tumet.”
Such perspective, or *discretio*, conveyed to the soul spiritual understanding, right
judgment, discernment, the ability to properly interpret Scripture, and even prophecy.\(^{216}\) It
also conferred upon the soul the ability to rightly judge the sensible knowledge gained
through the senses.\(^{217}\)

The second effect of contemplation in Adam, one derived from the first, was that his
soul was able to subject his flesh to its government without any intervening opposition.
Unlike angels who were pure spirit, or animals which were entirely physical, humans
occupied a middle state being composed of soul and body, spirit and flesh.\(^{218}\) The flesh,
constituting the visible and corporeal aspect of humans, was inherently weak and mutable,
being tied by its appetites and corporeality to the corruptions of the visible world.\(^{219}\) In
Adam’s initial integrity, the human soul, united to God in contemplation and so elevated
above the flesh, was able to govern the body and order its appetites.\(^{220}\) As such, Adam
experienced no strife or disorder in his flesh, such as heat or cold, hunger or thirst, or any
kind of disease.\(^{221}\) His flesh shared in the very stability of his soul, born of his innate
contemplation of God.\(^{222}\) Moreover, at the end of his life Adam would not have experienced
a physical death had he not sinned, but would have been assumed body and soul into

\(^{216}\) *Mor.* 3.24; 7.41, 52-53; 8.49; 9.29; 11.25.

\(^{217}\) Gregory asserted that truth was a function of the soul rightly interpreting and understanding the
knowledge gained through the senses. The soul obtained the ability to correctly judge this sensible knowledge,
not by its own inherent powers, but only by God’s light received through contemplation. See *Mor.* 4.45-46.

\(^{218}\) Gregory pointed out that each of these terms, spirit and flesh, had two different meanings. Spirit
could mean either the human soul or the capacity for spiritual understanding; see *Mor.* 11.7. Flesh could mean
either human nature or sinfulness; see *Mor.* 14.72.

\(^{219}\) The flesh, in Gregory’s anthropology, was the source of all discord and mutability within humans.
Due to its appetites and desires for pleasure, it was constantly at war with the soul, attempting to bend the soul
to its own inclinations. See *Mor.* 4.49; 6.52; 10.42; 11.66-68; 14.17, 77. In God’s creation of Adam, prior to
sin, the flesh was completely docile and subservient to the soul. See *Mor.* 4.23, 54.

\(^{220}\) *Mor.* 4.35-36; 5.83.

\(^{221}\) *Mor.* 4.68; Ep. 8.37.

\(^{222}\) *Mor.* 5.61.
Thus, Adam’s contemplation of God conferred upon his soul the ability to fulfill the very function for which it was designed.

This image of Adam in his initial created constitution, prior to the effects of sin, constituted for Gregory the ideal paradigm of human life. Here, Adam was construed as being innately united to God by an inward contemplation, which elevated his soul and conferred upon it the ability to govern and order his body and appetites. It further enlightened his soul with right perception, *discretio*, by which he could understand the world and order his life to its ultimate end in God. While in this initial, idyllic state Adam participated in God’s own stability through contemplation, even though as a created being he was still mutable. This initial state of humanity was not a function of nature, but of grace, and so could be lost. When sin entered into humanity’s relationship with God, the grace born of contemplation was lost, as well as the condition of human nature derived from it.

Having seen the state of human beings in grace, to complete Gregory’s anthropology, it is also necessary now to examine human nature in the state of sin. Gregory conceived sin, like Augustine before him, to be a perversion of God’s created order. In humans, sin was realized when they turned from their interior union with God in contemplation to the exterior world in pursuit of created goods and pleasures. Whereas Augustine located the source of sin in the concupiscence of the human will, Gregory located its genesis outside the human soul, in demonic suggestion and fleshly pleasure. As Gregory explained, there were three

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223 *Mor*. 4.54.

224 Both Augustine and Gregory agreed that sin resulted from choosing of a lesser, created good, over the supreme good, God. See Gregory’s *Mor*. 3.15 and Augustine’s *Simpl*. 2.18.13.

225 Both Dagens and Straw characterized Gregory’s conception of sin as an exterior movement, moving from the interior soul to the visible world, in pursuit of the appetites of the flesh. See Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 117, 168-69; Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 79-80. Dagens added that this view of sin was also shared by Gregory of Nyssa, Athanasius, Ambrose, and Augustine. See Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 170-71.
stages whereby humans were brought to sin: suggestion, pleasure, and consent.\footnote{226}

Suggestion, the starting point of all sin, came to humans by virtue of demons, who had the capacity to enter into the human mind and heart and implant ideas and suggestions for the purpose of eliciting sin.\footnote{227} The human flesh, taking pleasure in the suggestion, then led the soul to give consent and so to act in committing the sin.\footnote{228} Gregory expressed this idea using the example of Adam and Eve, wherein Eve represented human flesh and Adam the mind:

For the serpent suggested, Eve was delighted, Adam yielded consent, and even when being examined, he refused to acknowledge his sin through audacity. The serpent suggested in that the secret enemy silently suggests evil to man’s heart. Eve was delighted because the sense of the flesh, at the words of the serpent, immediately gives itself over to pleasure. Adam, set above the woman, truly consenting because while the flesh is seized in delight, so also the infirm spirit is bent from its uprightness\footnote{229}

In such fashion, sin consisted of a reversal of God’s established order, inasmuch as the flesh, through pleasure, now controlled the rational soul.\footnote{230} It was on this account that Gregory believed all pleasure to be sinful, particularly sexual pleasure.\footnote{231}

The resulting effect of sin in the human person was that it deprived the soul of contemplative union with God, thereby leaving it to operate in then deficiency and instability of its own created nature. Gregory explained:

\footnote{226} \textit{Ep. 8.37}. Gregory did at times add a fourth, which was the pride to defend the sin once committed. See \textit{Mor. 4.4}.

\footnote{227} \textit{Mor. 14.45; 15.19; 27.50}.

\footnote{228} \textit{Mor. 4.49}. Gregory believed that human flesh was the source of an inherent infirmity within humans. See \textit{Mor. 4.8}.

\footnote{229} \textit{Mor. 4.27.49}：“\textit{Nam serpens suasit, Eva delectata est, Adam consensit, qui etiam requisitus, confiteri culpam per audaciam noluit. Serpens suasit quia occultus hostis mala cordibus hominum latenter suggerit. Eva delectata est quia carnalis sensus, ad verba serpentes mos se delectationi substernit. Assensum vero Adam mulieri praepositus praebeuit quia dum caro in delectationem rapitur, etiam a sua rectitudine spiritus infirmatus inclinatur}.” The understanding of Eve as the sense perception of the body and Adam as the mind had a long tradition in Christianity prior to Gregory. See Hester, \textit{Eschatology}, 62, n.48.

\footnote{230} \textit{Mor. 4.49; 7.36; 10.42; 11.45}.

\footnote{231} \textit{Ep. 8.37; Mor. 7.30; 10.42; 12.70}. Gregory believed every act of sexual intercourse was inherently sinful on account of the presence of pleasure. It was on this basis that he believed original sin to be communicated to the child through the act of conception itself, due to its ties to sinful pleasure. See \textit{Mor. 11.70}. 
For the human soul by the sin of the first man was expelled from the joys of paradise, lost the light of the invisible and poured itself out entirely in the love of the visible; and so was made blind to the interior sight, deformed to the degree it was dissipated without. Whence it comes to pass that it knows nothing except that which it knows by bodily eyes, that is to say in the manner of touching. For man, if he had been willing to keep the commandment, would even in his flesh have been spiritual, yet sinning was made even in soul carnal, so that it only knows in the soul which it obtains through bodily images. The body is a quality of heaven, earth, water, animals and all visible things, which he unceasingly considers; and while the delighted mind throws itself entirely into these things, it wanders from the fineness of its interior intelligence; and whereas it is now no longer able to erect itself to things on high, in weakness it willingly lies prostrate in things below.\footnote{Mor. 5.61; “Humana quippe anima primorum hominum uitio a paradisi gaudiis expulsa, lucem invisibilium perdidit et totam se in amorem visibilium fudit; tantoque ab interna speculatione caecata est quanto foras deformiter sparsa; unde fit ut nulla nouerit nisi ea quae corporeis oculis, ut ita dixerim, palpando cognoscit. Homo enim, qui si praeceptum seruare voluisset, etiam carne spiritualis futurus erat, peccando factus est etiam mente carnalis ut sola cogitet quae ad animum per imagines corporum trahit. Corpus quippe est caeli, terrae, aquarum, animalium cunctarumque rerum usibilium, quas indesinenter intueter, in quibus dum totam se delectata mens proicit, ab internae intelligentiae subtilitate grossescit; et quia iam erigere ad summa se non uaelit in his infima libenter iacet.”}

Absent of contemplation, the human soul had no stability in itself. It was constantly being swayed and pulled by the impulses and desires of the flesh, which led the soul captive in its pursuit of transitory goods. The result of sin, then, is that it turned the rational person into an irrational beast, only seeking to fulfill its own disordered appetites.\footnote{Mor. 7.36.}

Additionally, with the loss of God’s interior light drawn from contemplation, humans were left in the blindness of their own created intellects. It was only God’s light that gave the soul spiritual perception and right judgment.\footnote{Mor. 8.49; 9.29; 11.8-9; 27.42-45.} Consequently, devoid of that light the soul could only receive knowledge through the senses, and even that knowledge, absent God’s light, was improperly understood.\footnote{Gregory explained that the human soul was the source of understanding for all the knowledge received through the senses. Without God’s light, the human soul had no ability to correctly understand or judge that sensible knowledge. See Mor. 4.6; 8.28; 11.9.} The soul in such a state was spiritually blind,
blind to God,\textsuperscript{236} blind to the invisible world,\textsuperscript{237} blind to the deeper meanings of Scripture,\textsuperscript{238} blind to God’s action in history,\textsuperscript{239} and even blind to its very self.\textsuperscript{240} “The human race, being driven by blame, lost the eyes of the mind so as to be shut out from interior joys, and is ignorant where it is going with the steps of its merits.”\textsuperscript{241} Gregory described such souls as living in a fantasy world, in a dream like state, believing all was well as they walked right into hell.\textsuperscript{242} Moreover, this blindness, coupled with the overpowering impulses and desires of the flesh, rendered the human soul ultimately enslaved to Satan.\textsuperscript{243}

Gregory believed that Satan ruled all the souls that had yielded to sin.\textsuperscript{244} Every sinful soul was controlled by the desires of the flesh, and insofar as Satan and his demons suggested sin to the flesh, they ultimately controlled the soul.\textsuperscript{245} “The skillful enemy certainly recommends every sin, but we accomplish it by consenting to his recommendations.”\textsuperscript{246}

Gregory believed the demons could enter into the mind and heart of the sinner, thereby

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\textsuperscript{236} The very first effect of sin was the loss of awareness of God and the invisible world. See \textit{Dial}. 4.1; \textit{Mor}. 5.3, 52, 61; 6.38; 7.2.
\textsuperscript{237} It was only God’s light that illumined the human mind to the perception and awareness of the invisible world. Without God’s illumination of the soul, humans were only aware of the visible, physical world. See \textit{Mor}. 5.52; 11.9; 15.20.
\textsuperscript{238} Without God’s interior light, one only had the capacity to see the historical meaning of Scripture. Lost to them were the deeper spiritual meanings made present by God’s Spirit. See \textit{Mor}. 3.49; 15.16
\textsuperscript{239} Like Scripture, Gregory believed God to be the author of history. Therefore, besides its physical and historical sense, history itself had deeper allegorical and moral meanings. Devoid of God’s light, the sinner had no awareness or ability to perceive and understand these deeper meanings of history. See \textit{Mor}. 5.1; 9.20; 14.36.
\textsuperscript{240} A central tenet of Gregory’s anthropology was that the human person was only known to themselves to the degree they were made visible to themselves through God’s illumination. Consequently, the sinner, devoid of God’s light, was completely blind to their own sinfulness. See \textit{Mor}. 5.12; 6.26; 7.37; 9.51; 11.58. In fact, Gregory believed souls in hell actually had more light and interior knowledge than sinners on earth, because the damned soul in hell at least recognized its own sins. See \textit{Mor}. 15.59.
\textsuperscript{241} \textit{Mor}. 9:13:20: “Seclusam quippe ab internis gaudiis genus humanum, exigente culpa, mentis oculos perdidit, et quo meritorum suorum passibus graditur nescit.”
\textsuperscript{242} \textit{Mor}. 15.7.
\textsuperscript{243} \textit{Mor}. 27.49-50.
\textsuperscript{244} \textit{Mor}. 4.42; 15.19.
\textsuperscript{245} Gregory explained that Satan led the wicked first to sinful thoughts, then sinful desires, resulting then in sinful acts. See \textit{Mor}. 27.50.
\textsuperscript{246} \textit{Mor}. 13.19: “Et quia omne peccatum hostis quidem callidus suadet, sed nos eius suasionibus consentiendo perpetramus ....”
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controlling all their actions.\textsuperscript{247} Consequently, the wicked functioned in a similar, but opposite, fashion as the saint. Saints, like Adam, were joined to God in contemplation, from which they drew the knowledge and power to perform God’s will.\textsuperscript{248} They functioned as agents of God in creation just like the angels. The wicked, conversely, were governed by the suggestions of Satan and so acted as his agents in creation, just like the demons.\textsuperscript{249} The wicked actually comprised the body of Satan (\textit{corpus diaboli}) no less than the saints formed the body of Christ (\textit{corpus Christi}).\textsuperscript{250} This fact led Gregory to distinguish two distinct groups of humans within the world, the saints and the reprobate.\textsuperscript{251} Each of these two groups of people served a particular function within Gregory’s cosmology, as well as in God’s divine providence.

\textbf{The Saints}

The saints, as attested by the numerous references to them throughout Gregory’s literary corpus, occupied a central role in his theology. In the first place, the saint, like Adam, constituted the ideal of human existence, the life for which all humans were

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\textsuperscript{247} Mor. 13.12; 14.45.\\
\textsuperscript{248} Mor. 2.11; 14.40.\\
\textsuperscript{249} Mor. 9.44; 13.12, 38.\\
\textsuperscript{250} Mor. 13.38; 26.21; 27.30; 29.15. Augustine likewise had distinguished these two groups of humans operating in the world, the \textit{corpus diaboli} and the \textit{corpus Christi}. See Augustine, \textit{De Gen. ad litt.} 11.24.31; \textit{En. in Ps.} 139.7.\\
\textsuperscript{251} Mor. 26.21. God ultimately distinguished these two groups of humans by virtue of his foreknowledge of the outcome of each person’s life and final judgment. See Mor. 2.36-40. While these two groups of people were distinct from God’s perspective, humans could never know to which group they belonged during life. See Mor. 15.4-23. Hester has suggested that Gregory, based upon Mor. 26.49-51, actually distinguished four different groups of humans. There were two groups that experienced judgment upon death and two that did not. Within the elect there were the true saints who had already judged themselves in life and made sufficient atonement and so were not judged upon death. There were also the elect whose full atonement for sin during life was ambiguous and so had to experience God’s just judgment, and possibly post-death purgation, before entering heaven. A similar, but reverse, situation occurred with the reprobate. There were those who clearly chose and deserved damnation during life and so there was no need for God’s judgment after death, they simply went straight to eternal punishment in hell. There were those reprobate, however, who may have attempted conversion and repentance, but still went to hell upon God’s judgment of them after death. Thus, there were two classes of people, the elect and reprobate, but four different groups. See Hester, \textit{Eschatology}, 46-47.
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created. Gregory’s description of the saint, certainly influenced by his monastic ideals, was one of detachment from the world, humility, mortification, a life of contemplation, studying Sacred Scripture, and of preaching. Above all, the saint was defined by his stability, his constantia mentis, which allowed the saint to govern the flesh and not to be moved by its appetites or desires. It was on the basis of these virtues and manner of life that Gregory offered the saints for imitation. Like Scripture itself, the lives of the saints served a pedagogical purpose, spiritually instructing the person who meditated upon them.

Besides virtue, the other hallmark of saints was their ability to perform miracles. Throughout his corpus, and particularly in his Dialogues, Gregory recounted many miracles performed by the saints, such as animals obeying a saint’s command, changing the physical properties of things, controlling nature, and even raising the dead to life. The ability to perform such miracles was undoubtedly derived from God, but as Gregory explained, this power of God became a part of the saint by virtue of their contemplative union with God.

Through that light of interior vision the bosom of the mind expands, and also enlarges in God, such that it stands above the world: the soul seeing it is made strong even above itself. And when it is raised in the light of God above itself, it is enlarged

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252 This ideal of sanctity was made manifest in Gregory’s description of Benedict’s life in the second book of his Dialogues.
253 Mor. 4.58-60.
254 Straw, Gregory the Great, 75, 236-39.
255 Ep. 1.24; Dial. 1.1-2; Mor. 9.89.
256 Dial. Praef.9; Mor. 27.16-17.
257 Dial. 1.3, 9.
258 Dial. 1.5.
259 Dial. 1.2. 2.33.
260 Dial. 1.10.
261 Gregory, in his Dialogues, explained that the power to perform miracles invariably came from God. See Dial. 2.8. Nevertheless, saints became temples of God by virtue of their union with him, and so, acted with his power in their very person. See Dial. 1.9; 2.30.
interiorly, and, then glancing beneath itself from above it understands how small were the things below that it could not understand before.  

Contemplation conferred upon the saint God’s own perspective and ability, allowing the saint to perceive and act in the world with God’s own power.  

The miracles of the saints, like their virtues, served a pedagogical function, recalling the minds of the spiritually blind from the visible world to the invisible world, and ultimately to God.  

Besides their pedagogical value, the saints served a vital cosmological purpose within Gregory’s schema of providence. Like the angels, the saints served as agents of God’s providence within creation.  

Receiving knowledge of God’s will and his power through their contemplative union with him, the saints acted as ministers of God’s will within creation, ordering the visible world and historical events to accord with his divine plan.  

As an example of this fact, Gregory explained that God moved the saint to pray only for that which God intended to give.  

Thus, the actions and life of the saint were always an expression of God’s will, and so constituted a principle of divine order within creation.  

This cosmological function of the saint was once again, as with the angels, an expression of God’s hierarchical ordering of creation. Here, God used the invisible souls of humans to order the visible world and history.  

The Reprobate

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262 Dial. 2.35: “quia ipsa luce uisionis intimae mentis laxatur sinus, tantumque expanditur in Deo, ut superior existat mundo: fit uiro ipsa uidentis anima etiam super semetipsam. Cumque in Dei lumine rapitur super se, in interioribus ampliatur, et, dum sub se conspicit, exaltata conpraehendit, quam breue sit, quod conpraehendere humiliata non poterat.”  
263 Straw, Gregory the Great, 99-100.  
264 Dial. 1.1; Mor. 4.59; 27.37.  
265 Mor. 27.56-57.  
266 Dial. 2.16; Mor. 4.56.  
267 Dial. 1.8.  
268 Gregory explained that God directed all the activity of the saint, see Mor. 2.11; 27.56-57.
The reprobate served a similar, but opposite, role within Gregory’s cosmology. While the saint, united to God, acted as his agent within creation, the reprobate, united to Satan, acted as his agent with creation. Gregory explained that, through sin, a person was divorced from God and united to Satan, the author of all sin. Spiritually blinded by sin, the flesh came to dominate the soul, which in turn was governed by the suggestions of Satan and his demons. In this way, while sinners believed themselves to be the authors of their actions, they were invariably controlled by Satan, who acted through them. The reprobate thus formed an extension of Satan in the visible world, parts of his body, through whom he attempted to accomplish his evil designs. “What else are all wicked men but members of the devil? Therefore he himself does through them whatever he puts into their hearts that they ought to do.” Nevertheless, whether an action was good or evil, all still fell within God’s one and overarching government of creation.

While the reprobate acted as agents of Satan, they still fulfilled a very important role within God’s providential government of creation. Satan, as a creature, only had that power to act as was granted to him by God. Consequently, Satan was only able to tempt and influence humans in accord with God’s allowance. “Evil spirits incessantly pant to do us mischief; but while they have a bad will derived from themselves, they have not the power of doing mischief, except the supreme will gives them permission.” In such fashion then,

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269 Mor. 18.2.3: “reprobus.”
270 Mor. 4.18.
271 Mor. 29.15.
272 Mor. 13.12, 38.
273 Mor. 13.12: “Quid aliud omnes iniqui quam membra sunt diaboli? Ipse itaque per eos agit quicquid in eorum cordibus ut agere debeant immittit.”
274 Mor. Praef.7; 2.16-17.
275 Mor. 14.59-60.
276 Mor. 14.46: “Maligni quippe spiritus ad nocendum nos incessabiliter anhelant; sed cum pravaam voluntatem ex semetipsis habeant, potestatem tamen nocendi non habent, nisi eos voluntas summa permittat.”
Satan was only able to lead humans to commit those sins that were in accord with God’s own providence. In fact, God actively used such evil actions, inspired by Satan, to accomplish his goals. Thus, like the saint, the reprobate, even in their evil, constituted agents of God’s providence within creation.

**Conclusion**

As witnessed by this overview of his cosmology, Gregory firmly believed that God was in complete control of the entire cosmos. This fact was first of all an expression of creation’s complete contingency on God; God at all times kept creation in existence and functioning. Additionally, God actively ordered each aspect of creation by means of a divinely established hierarchy. This hierarchy, comprised of a number of different levels of being and beings, was the divinely established structure of God’s government within creation. Here, God used the higher levels of beings, the invisible angels and invisible human souls, to govern the visible, corporeal aspects within creation. These rational beings, united to God in contemplation, acted as God’s hands in creation ordering everything to accord with his will. Even evil itself, constituted through the actions of Satan, demons, and reprobate humans, fell within God’s government. While each of these beings acted in accord with their own perverse wills, God only gave them the power and ability to accomplish that which accorded with his will. In this manner, then, all creation inexorably functioned, in harmonious order, in accord with God’s divine providence.

This cosmology of Gregory, while never explicitly or schematically elaborated by him, functioned as the intellectual bulwark of his entire theology. It functioned as the conceptual foundation for the entire system of his thought, unifying all his ideas and giving each their proper form and relationship. Furthermore, it constituted the ontological
foundation upon which his theory of providence was built. His conception of divine
government within creation, through the agency of created beings, was the basis for his belief
in God’s government of history. Just as God governed every aspect of creation, he
concomitantly controlled all of history. Gregory believed that every event within history,
even those conceived in opposition to his will by evil beings, still occurred in accord with his
divine plan. This control over history was not merely an act of God’s foreknowledge; in
accord with Gregory’s cosmology, God actively ordered every event and action by means of
his hierarchical government. It was upon this basis that Gregory believed God was the
author of history just as fully as he was the author of Scripture. Like Scripture, then, all of
history had not only a historical sense, but deeper allegorical and moral meanings, which the
spiritual mind was able to discern.

In order to complete Gregory’s formulation of divine providence this other side of
God’s government, his government of history, needs explication. Gregory’s historical
concern, as with all other aspects of his theology, had human salvation as its central focus.
Consequently, Gregory’s understanding of providence in history will be constructed using
traditional ideas and doctrines central to the Christian understanding of human salvation,
ideas Gregory himself employed. The ideas that will be utilized include Gregory’s
conception of original sin, the redemptive role of Christ, conversion, the role of the Church
and its sacraments, and the nature and function of grace. Utilizing these core Christian
concepts of salvation, the next chapter will complete Gregory’s picture of divine providence
by explaining God’s government of history.
CHAPTER 4

GOD’S PROVIDENCE WITHIN HISTORY

Gregory’s theory of divine providence, while conceptually relying upon a distinct cosmology, always had history as its ultimate focus and aim. History was the locus of human salvation, the drama between good and evil, angels and demons, sin and grace. History was the site of God’s incarnation, Jesus’ death and resurrection, the Church, the sacraments, and the saints. History was also where the Antichrist would appear, where the eschatological battle between the forces of good and evil would be determined, and where God’s ultimate victory would be established. As such, God’s providence was principally encountered and understood within the realm of history. In fact, divine providence was for Gregory the unfolding of God’s plan of salvation within history. Providence was history, and history, providence. Thus, while it was necessary to first explicate his cosmology, Gregory’s theory of divine providence can only be fully appreciated through an examination of his perception of God’s providence within history.

Gregory’s historical concern was never a matter of idle speculation or philosophical theory. His intention in considering divine providence within history was always to understand and explain God’s concrete judgments and actions for the purposes of human salvation.¹ His goal was to draw from the events of history spiritual lessons and moral pedagogy for the instruction of the souls for whom he had pastoral care. Thus, like Scripture, Gregory reflected upon the events of history not only to consider the historical narrative they comprised, but also to draw from them their deeper spiritual meanings, meanings imbued in

¹ Boglioni, Miracle, 59-60.
them by God. For Gregory, the real meaning of any historical event was its significance in light of human salvation, its spiritual significance, and to miss this meaning meant to not understand the event at all. Gregory utilized these historical reflections, just as he did in his commentaries on Scripture, to construct and explain the various concepts and themes of human salvation. Explaining human salvation, then, was the main concern for Gregory’s consideration of providence within history. Consequently, it is only by considering his understanding of salvation, its core ideas and doctrines, that Gregory’s conception of divine providence comes fully into view.

In this chapter, Gregory’s theory of divine providence within history will be developed and explained. The method for this explanation will be the same that Gregory utilized in expounding it, that is, a reflection upon God’s activities and judgments within history for the purpose of human salvation. Here, Gregory’s core ideas and doctrines of human salvation will be reflected upon so as to elicit how they manifest God’s governance and providence within history. The ideas that will be utilized in this examination will be his understanding of original sin and its effects, the role of Christ for salvation, the nature of conversion, the Church’s role in salvation, the nature and role of grace, and lastly, the relationship between grace and human effort. The goal of this chapter will be to complete the picture of Gregory’s conception of divine providence by considering its operation in history for the purposes of human salvation.

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2 Gregory viewed and interpreted history just as he did Scripture; every event constituted both a fact as well as a sign. Thus history, like Scripture, was imbued with deeper religious meaning. See Markus, The Jew as a Hermeneutic Device, 9.
3 Boglioni, Miracle, 56.
**Gregory’s Theology of History**

Upon an initial observation, Gregory’s historical perspective can seem rather disconcerting and confusing. Nearly every historical comment he made seemed to bypass historical causality and jump immediately to the spiritual or moral significance of an event. Moreover, he did not seem to differentiate the causality operating in natural as distinguished from miraculous events; each was a part of the one same collage of history. As such, it has been suggested that Gregory had no real theology of history. Such a conclusion might be warranted when considering Gregory’s views on the basis of a modern sense of history, but when interpreted in its proper context, that of Gregory’s own overarching cosmology, he did have a very coherent theology of history. In fact, it was this theology of history that explained his understanding of providence. Thus, in order to construct his theory of providence, his theology of history must first be explicated, and to do that, the relationship between his cosmology and his conception of history must be examined and explained.

An essential aspect of Gregory’s cosmology, and concomitantly history itself, was that God controlled every aspect of his creation. Every event and occurrence, even evil itself, fell within the all-encompassing umbrella of God’s providential ordering and government. Gregory wrote: “Nothing that happens in this world of men occurs without the secret counsel of almighty God.” While not every event issued directly from God’s will, such as evil, even

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4 Ibid., 64.
5 Boglioni has suggested that Gregory never really concerned himself with distinguishing a different causality operating in nature and in miracles; ultimately, God was the author of each. Ibid., 36-37.
7 *Mor.* 12.2: “Nulla quae in hoc mundo hominibus fiunt absque omnipotenti Dei occulto consilio ueniunt.”
those things done against his will were not contrary to his will. 8 Upon this basis, then, Gregory believed every historical event had the capacity to reveal God and his intentionality, on the condition it was rightly interpreted. 9 History, like Scripture, was revelation. 10 The significance of history for Gregory was therefore its revelatory character, its capacity to reveal God and his judgments within history for the purposes of salvation.

This understanding of history sprung out of Gregory’s cosmology. History, like creation itself, had the capacity to reveal God because of its essential structure. As previously described, the mechanism of God’s government was the divinely established hierarchies that characterized each aspect of creation. God governed creation through its hierarchical structure, utilizing the higher aspects of creation, united to himself in contemplation, to govern and order the lower aspects. The invisible realm, the realm of angels, demons, and human souls, governed the visible and physical aspects of creation. 11 The visible aspects of creation, in return, had the intrinsic capacity to reveal this activity of the invisible world, and therefore, God. 12 Miracles, Christ, saints, Scripture, and even history, all visible things, had the capacity to lead the human mind from the visible, to which it was attached though sin, back again to the invisible world and God. 13 “But because we have, by visible things fallen from invisible, it is right that we should again strive, by visible

8 Evil issued from the perverse and disordered wills of demons and sinners, not God. Evil was never something directly chosen or willed by God. God, however, used the evil will of demons and humans, only giving them the power to accomplish that which he willed done, such that they did nothing outside his will. In this way, even evil was providentially ordered by God. See Mor. 6.28-33.

9 Gregory repeatedly asserted that the events of history could only be rightly understood by the mind gifted with discretio, which was derived from the inward contemplation of God. See Mor. 3.24; 4.46; 7.52-53; 8.49; 11.9.

10 Evans suggested that, for Gregory, history had the same revelatory capacity as Scripture, and so he interpreted each similarly. See Evans, Thought of Gregory, 46.

11 This cosmological precept was foundational for Gregory’s entire perception of history. It functioned as the conceptual basis for history’s capacity to reveal God. See Dial. 4.5.

12 Mor. 11.8-9; 26.17-18.

13 Dial. 1.Praef; 4.1-5; Mor. 4.59; 5.61.
things, to reach invisible.” The significance of history for Gregory, then, issuing out of his cosmology, was its inherent capacity to reveal God and lead the soul back to him.

Insofar as history revealed God and his plan of salvation, Gregory very frequently reflected on the historical events of his day in order to draw out their religious significance. Such historical reflections can be found throughout Gregory’s corpus, particularly in his letters and homilies. Some of the events of his day were interpreted as chastisements for sin; others were interpreted, not as punishments for sin, but hardships to induce conversion; others indicated the imminent approach of the eschatological end, and still others were particular manifestations of some aspect of God’s providential plan. History was laden with meaning, so much so that the one same event might mean several different things. Such ambiguity led Gregory to repeatedly reaffirm that while it was proper and good to interpret history for its deeper meanings, one’s judgments must always be recognized

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14 Mor. 26.18: “Quia enim inuisibilitus per uisibilita cecidimus, dignum est ut ad inuisibilita ipsis rursum uisibilitibus innitamur ....”

15 Boglioni, reflecting on this aspect of Gregorian thought, stated: “Ainsi, même pour la question de l’attente eschatologique, Grégoire manifeste son inclination à voir toute la réalité créée comme un immense tissu de signes dont la portée principale est leur valeur pédagogique et leur capacité de révéler à l’homme les intentions divines.” Boglioni, Miracle, 66.

16 Gregory’s most common historical reflection was the interpretation of some disaster or hardship as God’s punishment (flagella) for sin. He used such reflections as an evangelical tool to instill fear of God’s just judgment. See Ep. 1.17; 2.2; 5.37; 10.21; Mor. 6.14.

17 While hardships could be for punishment the of sin, they were at times also interpreted as divine goads to conversion, or even as a trial for the just to garner greater merit. See Ep. 11.8; Mor. 6.42.

18 Gregory believed he lived in the age just preceding the coming of the Antichrist and so interpreted many of the events of his day as ominous precursors of his coming. See Ep. 5.39, 41; 7.28; 9.157; 13.1. In other cases, he interpreted the devastations of his day as signs of the approaching end. See Ep. 3.29; 5.44; 9.232; 10.21; HEv. 1.1.1; HEz. 2.6.

19 Ultimately, for Gregory, every event was an expression of God’s providence. However, he only chose to reflect on the specific providential character of certain events. For example, he reported that his own election to the papacy was an expression of God’s providential, but hidden, choice. See Ep. 1.41.

20 This principle was true of both history and Scripture. Gregory stated that, in regard to Scripture, all interpretations were legitimate as long as they were not contrary to Catholic faith. See Ep. 3.62. Likewise, God may manifest many different intentions within the one same historical event. See HEv. 2.40.7-8.
as tentative. While history revealed God, his judgments always remained frighteningly obscure. Only in one’s judgment upon death, or in God’s Final Judgment at the end of the world, would full understanding occur. Until then, all judgments were partial and incomplete.

Gregory believed that not only the individual events of history had meaning in light of God’s providence, but history itself, in its entirety, reflected God’s plan of salvation. Accordingly, just as he had with individual events, Gregory attempted to discern and explain this overarching plan of history. In one place, Gregory schematically organized history according to five ages, corresponding to twelve hours, wherein each age was defined by its mode of instruction, whether by patriarch, law, prophet, apostle, or preacher. Gregory’s own age, designated by him as the eleventh hour, was defined by the activity of preachers. While speaking here of five ages, Gregory spoke of the world consisting of six ages in another passage, wherein each age corresponded to different periods of human life from infancy to old age. In each of these schematizations of history, despite their differences,

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21 Gregory repeatedly warned that God’s judgments are ultimately inscrutable, and before them, the proper response was faith rather than understanding. See *Mor.* 4.29; 5.1; 9.20; 11.27; 15.49, 60; 29.33; *Ep.* 1.26, 31.
22 *Mor.* 27.6-7.
23 Gregory suggested often that one could never fully know that state of one’s soul, or that of others, until God’s judgment. As such, one could not know if hardships were the result of God’s punishment for sin, or merely a trial for the just. See *Mor.* 5.35-36; 11.3; 15.49. Likewise, a long life could be God’s mercy to a sinner allowing time for repentance, or the fruit of a righteous person’s life. See *Mor.* 6.14. Good things, too, may be given by God as a reward to the just, an attempt to convert the sinner, or even given to add to the punishment of the sinner who remains unconverted. See *Mor.* 16.18.
24 *HEv.* 1.19.1. Augustine gave a similar outline of world history, but differed with Gregory on some of the details. Augustine, comparing history to the seven days of the week, said the first day was from Adam to the flood, then the flood to Abraham, then Abraham to David, then David to Babylonian captivity, then Babylonian captivity to Jesus, with the sixth day being the present time of the Church. See Augustine, *civ. Dei* 22.30.
25 *Mor.* 19.19. In this passage, Gregory suggested that the world aged much like a human person, growing weak and unstable as it moved into its then current old age. See also *Mor.* 22.18.44. Gregory probably derived this schematization of history from Augustine, who had also explained history according to the six stages of human life: infancy (*infantia*), childhood (*pueritia*), youth (*adolescentia*), young adulthood (*juvenescintia*), mature adulthood (*gravitas*), and old age (*senectus*). Augustine, *Gen. c. Man.* 1.35-41.
Gregory was attempting to show that the world was near its end and judgment was soon to come. God’s final judgment then, salvation or damnation, was the capstone of all of history, the end towards which all of history flowed and the end that explained all of history. Thus history formed the narrative of God’s plan of salvation, and it was from this overarching plan that the meaning of each particular historical event was derived.

Besides this overriding providential plan of history, Gregory, on numerous occasions, attempted to synthetically explain history in light of various aspects of salvation. On one occasion, Gregory characterized history according to the relationship of the Law and grace: there was the age preceding the Law, the age under the Law, and then lastly, the age under grace.26 Gregory also categorized history in accord with humanity’s relationship to God in contemplation. Within this historical schema there were four distinct ages: full but not final contemplation in Adam, no contemplation after the Fall, a taste of final contemplation through grace, and in heaven, full and final contemplation.27 In a similar fashion, Gregory divided the history of the Church into distinct ages. There was the age of the apostles, the age of the martyrs, then the age of the teachers, in which Gregory believed he lived, followed by the end.28 In such fashion, Gregory attempted to explicate God’s providential plan of salvation within history by characterizing it in terms of aspects of salvation itself. Salvation, then, was the ultimate meaning of history and so providence itself.

As seen within this brief overview of Gregory’s thought, he did possess a distinct theology of history. While his theology of history might betray the sensibilities of the modern historian, Gregory’s sense of history was still entirely coherent with his own

26 Ep. 5.44.
28 Mor. 9.11.
cosmology. In fact, his theology of history was the natural consequence of his cosmology; each was a product of the other. History, in this light, was defined by God’s government within creation. Just as God providentially ordered creation, he concomitantly ordered history. In such fashion, then, the very meaning of history was likewise the very meaning of providence. Just as history was defined by God’s plan of salvation, so was God’s providence defined by that same plan of salvation. In this way, God’s plan of salvation constitutes the conceptual key for understanding Gregory’s theology of history, and likewise, his notion of divine providence.

_Providence within the History of Salvation_

Gregory’s theology of providence was conceptually linked to his theology of history. Just as God’s plan of salvation was the overriding theme of his conception of history, it likewise constituted the essence and purpose of God’s providential action with history. As such, Gregory’s conception of salvation provides a unique avenue of investigation into his understanding of providence within history. The ideas, doctrines, and themes that defined his perception of salvation have the capacity to reveal God’s providence in history. Here the various components of Gregory’s understanding of salvation will be examined for the purpose of showing how they manifest his theory of divine providence. This examination will begin with a look into Gregory’s doctrine of original sin, for it was original sin that constituted the need for salvation and therefore defined the entire history of salvation, and so providence itself.
Gregory’s Doctrine of Original Sin

Gregory’s understanding of salvation conceptually derived from his doctrine of original sin. Only on the condition of human sin, and so corruption and death, was salvation even needed. 29 If humanity had not sinned, human history, and the history of salvation, would have appeared quite differently. 30 Christ, the Church, conversion, grace, and even monasticism derive their ultimate meaning, and even their own historical occurrence, from the fact that sin was a part of human history. Gregory’s doctrines of salvation and original sin were therefore mutually interdependent; each only made sense in light of the other. Consequently, in order to explicate Gregory’s conception of salvation, it is incumbent to first explain his doctrine of original sin.

Gregory’s understanding of original sin resulted from his anthropology. In Gregory’s thought, original sin and its effects only made sense in light of God’s initial creation of humans. It was God’s creation of Adam that constituted the ideal paradigm of human life, the existence into which humans were created and the existence to which humans returned through God’s plan of salvation. Adam was thus paradigmatic both for human salvation as well as its need. Gregory therefore explained original sin by virtue of a reflection upon Adam, contrasting the effects of original sin to that of humanity’s pristine condition in its initial creation.

What defined this initial state of Adam was that he was created in the state of contemplative union with God. 31 As Gregory explained, at the moment of creation the

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29 Gregory believed that it was only on the condition of human sin that God became man in Christ and was crucified. If there was no sin, then, there would have been no crucifixion. See Mor. 3.26.
30 Gregory stated that why God allowed sin to take place in the first place was a hidden mystery of his providence, and as such, was beyond human understanding and questioning. See Mor. 15.60.
31 Mor. 9.50; 11.59.
perception of the Creator was already implanted in human nature.  

This contemplation conferred stability and order within Adam, such that his soul, united to God, governed the flesh and its appetites in accord with reason and God. In this state, he experienced no corruption or mutability, experiencing a peaceful stillness within his nature, as it functioned in accord with its inherent design. This contemplation also conferred upon Adam an experiential knowledge of the invisible world and God, thereby allowing him to perceive and operate within the invisible realm, rather than just the visible. Furthermore, had Adam continued in this state and not sinned, at the end of his life he would have been transported to heaven without experiencing death. If sin had not occurred, this same state of existence would have been passed on to all his posterity, thereby redefining all of history and so providence. This initial state, then, reflected how God created humans to exist, and additionally, manifested the devastating effects of original sin.

Original sin was consummated in the Garden of Eden when, betraying God’s command, Adam and Eve ate of the fruit they were forbidden to eat. Prior to sinning Adam and Eve experienced no internal disorder, and therefore no temptations within themselves; it was Satan who induced them to sin through deceit. Gregory related:

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32 Mor. 9.50; Dial. 4.1.
33 Mor. 4.35-36; 5.83; 11.68; 12.38.
34 Mor. 4.54; 8.19.
35 Dial. 4.1.
36 Mor. 4.54.
37 Mor. 4.62. This position of Gregory seems to contradict other statements he made concerning the inherent sinfulness of sexual intercourse and the means whereby original sin is passed on to offspring. He stated that insofar as all sexual intercourse was tied to pleasure, and all pleasure was sinful, sexual intercourse itself was inherently sinful. See Mor. 7.30; 10.42; 12.70; Ep. 8.37. Moreover, it was this very aspect of pleasure in sexual intercourse that passed original sin onto the progeny that resulted from it. See Mor. 11.70. Thus, it would seem contradictory that, insofar as intercourse was inherently tied to pleasure, this initial sinless state could be passed on to progeny without sin being involved.
For he [Satan] found them immortal in Paradise, but by promising divinity to immortal beings, he offered to add to them something beyond that which they were. But while he offered flatteringly to give something they did not have, he skillfully took what they did have.  

The essence of this sin, according to Gregory, consisted in Adam and Eve attempting to usurp God’s authority and rule themselves, thinking that their abilities and powers derived from themselves rather than God. Sin was the delusion of self-sufficiency. While evil had previously existed within creation due to the rebellion of the apostate angels, evil now entered the human person and human history.

The principal effect of original sin was that humans lost the blessedness of their initial, created constitution. Gregory explained:

For this end was man created, that with an erect mind, he might erect himself in the fold of contemplation, and that no corruption should cause him to move from the love of his Maker. But that he moved the foot of his will from the innate steadfastness of standing in himself toward sin, he immediately receded from the love of his Creator into himself. Forsaking that true love of God, the real source of standing, he could not stand fast in himself, because, by the impulse of a slippery mutability, falling beneath himself through corruption, he also came to be at strife with himself.

The result of this original sin was that humans lost their innate contemplative union with God, which was the essential source of their own created unity and order. Without this

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39 Mor. 4.15: “Eos namque in paradiso immortales repperit sed diuinitatem immortalibus promittendo, quasi eis aliquid ultra quam erant se addere spopondit. Sed dum blande non habita se daturum perhibuit, callide et habita subtraxit.”
40 Mor. 24.4.7; 26.17.28; 28.8.18.
41 Gregory conceived evil to be the perversion or privation of God’s created order. See Mor. 3.15.
42 Mor. 8.19: “Ad hoc namque homo conditus fuerat ut stante mente, in arcem se contemplationis erigeret, et nulla hunc corruptio a conditoris sui amore declinaret. Sed in eo quod ab ingenita standi soliditate uoluntatis pedem ad culpam mouit a dilectione conditoris in semetipsum protinus cecidit. Amorem uero Dei, ueram scilicet stationis arcem deserens, nec in se consistere potuit, quia, lubricae mutabilitatis impulsu, infra se per corruptionem proruens, etiam a semetipsa dissensit.”
43 Mor. 4.54; 5.12.
union with God, and his mediated stability, humans fell into the inherent mutability of their own created natures, with devastating results. 44

With the loss of contemplative union with God, humans lost all experiential knowledge of the invisible world. 45 They became devoid of God’s interior light, which gave them not only the perception of the invisible world, but was likewise the source of true wisdom and judgment. 46 Humans were left with only their own created intellects, which only had the power to perceive and know the visible world. 47 In essence, humans became blind, blind to God, blind to the invisible world, blind to themselves, blind to all things except that received through the physical senses. 48 Worse still, humans came to believe this visible world was their true home, loving it and rejoicing in its pleasures, and thereby being bound to its inherent corruptibility and dissipation. 49 This attachment to the visible world produced internal disorder within human nature itself, which was yet an additional effect of original sin.

Prior to sin, humans experienced no internal strife or conflict, in that the soul, united to God, perfectly ruled the flesh and its appetites. 50 After sin, however, humans lost this union with God and concomitantly the ability of the soul to rule the flesh.

44 Mor. 8.8.
45 Dial. 4.1.
46 Mor. 6.25; 9.50.
47 Mor. 5.61.
48 Ep. 12.7; Mor. 4.45; 6.25; 11.45.
49 Mor. 6.40; 7.2; 11.45. Gregory explained that humans could only love what they knew. With the loss of experiential knowledge of the invisible world, humans could not love it nor desire it. They were left with only the visible world, perceived through the senses, to know and love. See HEv. 2.36.1.
50 Mor. 4.8; 11.68.
Thus the first parent of the human race because he resisted the precept of his Creator, the flesh immediately experienced an affront, and because he would not be subject to the Maker in obedience, prostrated beneath himself, he lost the peace of the body.  

As such, the flesh, in its insatiable desire for pleasure, and in its newly realized lust and concupiscence, came to war against the sovereignty of the soul, subjecting the soul to its own inherent needs. Whereas prior to sin human beings experienced no need, they now experienced the needs and defects of the flesh, such as hunger and thirst, heat and cold, fatigue and disease. In other words, humans came to be defined by the inherent instability and corruptibility of their flesh, which became the dominant governing agent within the human person. Devoid of God, humans came to experience in full force the inherent mutability and dissipation that defined all created natures, particularly through death.

Perhaps the most decisive and devastating effect of original sin was that it introduced death into human existence. Whereas prior to sin, humans enjoyed an immortal existence, after sin, they became subject to the effects of dissipation and death. When Gregory spoke about death he did so in two different senses. Death could refer either to the death and dissipation of the body at the end of one’s life, or it could equally mean the death of the soul due to its loss of union with God. When Gregory spoke about the death resulting from original sin, he meant it in both senses of the term. Adam lost his contemplative union with

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51 Mor. 9.5: “Sic primus humani generis parens qui auctoris praecepto restitit, carnis protinus contumeliam sensit; et qui subesse conditori per oboedientiam noluit, sub semetipso prostratus et pacem corporis amisit.”
52 Mor. 4.47; 54; 6.52.
53 Mor. 4.68; 13.36; Ep. 8.37.
54 Mor. 8.8; 11.68.
56 Mor. 4.30-31; 9.97. The notion of two deaths, death due to sin and death of the flesh, was an ongoing theme in western Christianity, having been previously expressed by both Ambrose and Augustine. See Ambrose, De ex. Frat. 2.3-7; Augustine, civ. Dei 13.2-3.
God due to sin, and consequently, died in his soul. Likewise, at the end of his life, instead of being transported into heaven body and soul, his body experienced dissolution and his soul, devoid of God, went to hell. Thus the ultimate outcome of original sin was eternal damnation, which affected not only Adam and Eve, but equally all of their descendents.

Inasmuch as all humans derived their natures from their first parents, Adam and Eve, they equally shared in the defects of that nature resulting from original sin. According to Gregory, all humans were born into original sin with the inherent defects, and death, which it implied. “For that day the first man sinned, we say he died in the soul and that through him all humanity has been condemned with this penalty of death and corruption.” Gregory suggested that the mode of transmission for original sin was the very act of procreation itself. Insofar as pleasure always accompanied the act of procreation, and pleasure itself was inherently sinful, humans were conceived with effects of sin in them. This fact, for Gregory, explained why Jesus was born without original sin, because he was conceived miraculously rather than through procreation. All others, however, were born into the state of sin and its consequent defects. This sinful condition, then, characterized by dissipation,

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58 Ep. 8.37; 9.148; Mor. 11.62.
59 Gregory stated that original sin alone, even if no other sins were committed, was sufficient for God to condemn a soul to hell. See Mor. 9.31. Even unborn babies who died without baptism went to hell according to Gregory. See Mor. 4.Praef.
60 Ep. 7.31: “Nos enim primum hominem qua die peccavit, anima mortuum dicimus atque per hunc omne genus humanum in hac mortis et corruptionis poena damnatum.”
61 Augustine held two different theories on the mode of transmission of original sin. One, similar to that of Gregory, tied its transmission to the very act of procreation. The second, which Gregory did not hold, was that all humans were in Adam when he sinned and so experienced the effects of that sin within themselves. See Burns, The Development, 101-07.
62 It is at times difficult to distinguish where Gregory located the source of humanity’s sinful condition. At times the emphasis was on Adam and Eve’s original sin, and at other times, on the sinfulness of the act of procreation. Compare Ep. 9.148 and Mor. 11.70.
63 Mor. 11.70.
death, and ultimately damnation, was the context for Gregory’s explanation for the need of salvation.

Just as Adam’s initial state was used by Gregory to explain original sin, it likewise acted as the paradigm of salvation. All of salvation history was providentially ordered by God to return humanity to its initial state of creation, which would then be consummated in the eternal beatitude of heaven.\(^64\) In sin the contemplative union with God was lost; in salvation, the goal was to restore humanity to that same contemplative union with God.\(^65\) Adam was thus paradigmatic for both sin and salvation. In his creation the goal of salvation was revealed, while in his sin, the need for salvation was made manifest. This understanding of human sin and redemption functioned as the hermeneutical lens by which Gregory interpreted all of God’s actions within history. Now, God’s providential activity in history for the purpose of human salvation will be examined, beginning with the role of Christ.

**The Role of Christ for Salvation**

At the very center of God’s providential plan of salvation within history was the person of Jesus Christ. Just as God was the source of all creation, he likewise was the source of salvation. While God could have redeemed humanity in some other fashion, he chose to become human, to die and rise, so as to manifest his love for humanity and return them to himself.\(^66\) As such, the person of Jesus Christ, along with his life, his death, and his resurrection, formed the veritable foundation upon which Gregory’s entire theology of

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\(^{64}\) Gregory’s understanding of salvation was, in this sense, a matter of restoration. This conception of salvation as restoration derived from the doctrine of \(\alphaπ\)\(κατ\)\(στα\)\(σι\)\(ς\), which was developed in the third and fourth centuries by theologians in the East, such as Origen, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. See Daley, *The Hope*, 58-58, 81-89. The immediate source for Gregory’s own ideas was probably Augustine, who had similarly suggested that salvation was a restoration of humanity to its original state prior to the Fall. See Augustine, *Serm*. 259.2.

\(^{65}\) Gregory stated that human beings received more from Christ’s redemption than was lost through original sin. While by sin Paradise was lost, through grace heaven is attained. See *Mor*. 27.30.

\(^{66}\) *Mor*. 20.69.
salvation was built. Therefore, some time will be spent here exploring and explaining Gregory’s understanding of Christ and his particular place and role in God’s providential plan of salvation.

Gregory, in constructing his Christology, had the benefit of living in an age that followed upon the Christological councils of the fourth and fifth centuries. While Christological heresies remained, the contours of the Church’s Christology had largely been defined by Gregory’s day. Consequently, his focus in speaking about Christ was more to explain soteriology than Christology. His concern was how Christ provided for human salvation, rather than speculations about Christ’s nature. Nevertheless, Christ’s soteriological role was entirely dependent upon his Christological identity, and consequently, Gregory did spend time explaining the person and ontology of Christ.

Gregory’s explanation of the identity of Christ was primarily a recapitulation of the language of the Christological councils that preceded him. As Gregory explained, Christ was two things, one from his Father, and another from his mother, but he was still one person and not two. In his divine nature, Jesus, as the Son, was eternal, impassible, consubstantial, and coeternal with both the Father and the Holy Spirit, while in his human nature, he was temporal, passible, and mortal. He explained:

Truly to pass away is of humanity, to stand is of divinity. Through his humanity he was able to be born, to grow up, to die, to rise, to go from place to place. Because there is no change in divinity, and this changing is itself to pass away, this passing is

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67 Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 148, n.3.
68 Mor. 28.52.
69 Mor. 3.26; 27.34; 18.85: “Non purus homo conceptus atque editus, post per meritum ut Deus esset accept, sed nuntiante angelo, et aduemente Spiritu, mox Verbum in utero, mox intra uterum Verbum caro, et manente incommutabili essentia quae ei est cum Patre et cum sancto Spiritu coaeterna, assumpsit intra uirginea uiscera ubi et impassibilis pati, et immortalis mori, et aeternus ante saecula temporalis posset esse in fine saeculorum.”
actually from his humanity and not his divinity. It pertains to his divinity to stand always still, which is present everywhere, and neither comes nor goes by motion. Thus Christ shared fully in divine nature with the Father and Holy Spirit, and at the same time, shared fully in human nature possessing a human soul and flesh. Moreover, these two natures in Christ, as Gregory explained, being distinct and unconfused, were at the same time inseparably united and conjoined in the one person of Christ. While clear in explaining Christ’s two natures, Gregory at times struggled in his explanation of how these two natures were joined in the one person of Christ.

Gregory used a number of different images and allegories to explain the unity of Christ’s two natures. In one instance, reflecting on Luke’s parable of the lost drachma (Luke 15:8-9), Gregory suggested that Christ was the lamp used by the woman to search for her lost drachma, that is, her lost image of God. Christ’s divinity constituted the light of the lamp, while his humanity formed the clay urn. In another place, he described their union as a mixture like that of the alloy “electrum,” which was formed from the mixture of gold and silver. In a third analogy, Gregory compared Christ to a mounted horseman. The horse was Christ’s humanity, while the horseman was his human soul upon whom his divinity was

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70 HEv. 1.2.6: “Transire namque humanitatis est, stare diuinitatis. Per humanitatem quippe habuit nasci, crescere, mori, resurgere, de loco ad locum venire. Quia ergo in diuinitate mutabilitas non est, atque hoc ipsum mutare transire est, profecto iste transitus ex carne est, non ex diuinitate. Per diuinitatem uero ei semper stare est, quia ubique praesens, nec per motum uenit, nec per motum recedit.”
71 Mor. 2.24; 3.26; 27.34.
72 Mor. 29.23.
73 HEz. 1.8: “In Redemptore autem nostro utraque natura, id est divinitatis et humanitatis, inconfuse ac insepnrabiliter unita sitbxet atque coniuncta est, ut et per humanitatem diuinitatis eius claritas nostris posset occulis temperari, et per diuinitatem humana in eo natura claresceret, atque exaltata fulgorem ultra hoc quod creata fuerat haberet.”
74 Dudden imputed Docetism to Gregory in regards to his explanation of the union of Christ’s two natures. Dudden believed Gregory emphasized Christ’s divinity to the extent that Christ did not share fully in human nature, and in particular, in the effects of fallen human nature. See Dudden, Gregory the Great, 2:235.
75 HEv. 2.34.6.
76 Mor. 28.1.
mounted as upon the horseman’s shoulders. As seen through these various images, there was some confusion and lack of clarity in how Gregory conceived Jesus’ two natures being united. In the first image, his divinity seems to have only indwelled in his humanity; while in the second, the two formed a mixture, wherein each nature communicated its attributes to the other; and in the third, perhaps the most clear, the two were joined through the human soul of Christ.

The difficulty with these images, as well as with the rest of the language employed by Gregory to describe the union of Christ’s two natures, was how they presented Christ’s divinity and humanity operating in him. The issue centered upon Gregory’s conception of Christ’s exinanito, his self-emptying of his divinity. At times, Gregory seemed to suggest that due to his divinity, Christ did not fully share in human nature. For instance, Gregory believed Christ to be omniscient, only feigning ignorance on occasion to appear fully human. Moreover, Christ’s divine nature ordained all he was to suffer in his human nature, and as such, in his divinity he remained tranquil and undisturbed in all that he underwent. Gregory’s ultimate answer was that Christ did not forgo his divinity, but added humanity to his divinity. This fact of Christ’s identity, then, became the very basis for his role in

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77 Mor. 31.23. See also Straw’s analysis of this text: Straw, Gregory the Great, 165-66.
78 Mor. 2.23.
79 Gregory’s difficulty centered not so much on the degree to which Christ participated in human nature, but to the degree to which he participated in sinful human nature. Christ was conceived without original sin and therefore bore a human nature comparable to Adam’s prior to sin. See Mor. 2.22; 17.30. His flesh was completely subservient to his soul, which in turn, was completely subservient to his divinity through contemplative union. See Mor. 3.16. Consequently, Gregory struggled to explain how Christ could have experienced the effects of sin in his sinless human nature, such as fatigue, ignorance, hunger, thirst, temptation, and death, all of which Scripture revealed him experiencing.
80 Mor. 1.31; Ep. 10.21.
81 Mor. 3.16.
82 Mor. 2.42; Ep. 11.52.
salvation, wherein, through the Incarnation, God came to humanity to once again unite humanity to himself.

Gregory distinguished a number of different components of the redemption achieved through Christ, but all of them were ultimately derived from his Incarnation.\(^{83}\)

For [Christ] was made flesh to make us spiritual. He mercifully lowered himself to raise us; he departed [from heaven] to admit us; he appeared visible to show us the invisible; he suffered scourges to cleanse us; he bore rejection and derision to free us from eternal reproach; he died to vivify us.\(^{84}\)

Fundamentally, all of these various functions of Christ, his teaching, his miracles, his suffering, his death, and even his resurrection, all formed the one same redemptive action of Christ, which in turn was rooted in his Incarnation.\(^{85}\) Humans, due to sin, could not rise to God, so God came to them, becoming human so as to unite humanity to himself.\(^{86}\) Christ’s redemptive role, then, deriving from his Incarnation, was to act as the Mediator between God and man, which was Gregory’s most common way of describing Christ’s function in salvation.\(^{87}\) By means of the Incarnation, Christ served as this Mediator between God and man in a number of distinct ways.

In a first sense, the Incarnation provided for human redemption by effecting a recapitulation of the entire human race.\(^{88}\) Through the Incarnation a wonderful exchange

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\(^{83}\) Straw believed that the entire redemptive enterprise of Christ, according to Gregory, centered on the role of sacrifice. This sacrifice was preeminently rooted in Christ’s Incarnation, wherein God became human to redeem humanity. All Christ’s other sacrifices, including those of his life, crucifixion, and descent into hell, all derived from this initial sacrifice of the Incarnation. Straw, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 149-51, 172-74. Hester likewise suggested that Gregory’s soteriology centered on Christ’s Incarnation. See Hester, \textit{Eschatology}, 76.

\(^{84}\) HÉz. 2.4: “\textit{Caro enim factus est ut nos spiritales faceret, benigne inclinatus est ut levaret, exit ut introduceret, visibilis apparuit ut invisibilia monstraret, flagella pertulit ut sanaret, opprobria et irrisiones sustinuit ut ab opprobrio aeterno liberaret, mortuus est ut vivificaret.}”

\(^{85}\) Mor. 1.24; 21.11.

\(^{86}\) Mor. 2.23; 14.55; 17.30.

\(^{87}\) Gregory referred to Christ as \textit{Mediator Dei et hominum} over 50 times in his exegetical works. See Straw, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 150, n.11.

\(^{88}\) Gregory, utilizing Paul’s imagery of Christ as the New Adam, suggested that just as all were separated from God in the first Adam’s sin, all the elect were reunited to God in the person of the second Adam,
took place wherein God partook of human nature so that humans might partake of God’s nature.\(^8\)

We, being mortal and unrighteous, stood a great distance from righteousness and immortality. But between us, the mortal and unjust, and the immortal and righteous appeared the mortal and righteous Mediator of God and man, who shared mortality with humans, and righteousness with God; so that even through our lowliness we stood far away from the heights, he joined in himself together the lowliness and the height, and so he became for us a way of return, for he united our depths with his heights.\(^9\)

All the elect formed the body of Christ, and so in him, in his humanity, they were united to his divinity.\(^1\) In this union, the highest and lowest natures were eternally united.\(^2\) Humans, created lower than the angels, were now raised ontologically higher than them by virtue of humanity’s union to God in Christ.\(^3\) In this act, God not only restored humanity to the state of its original creation in Adam prior to sin, but actually effected a new creation.\(^4\) Humanity now bore a new relationship to God through Christ.

Another essential aspect of the redemption achieved through the Incarnation was that Christ revealed God, making him accessible again to a fallen humanity. Through sin, humans had lost all perception of the invisible world, and so concomitantly God.\(^5\) In their fallen state, humans could only perceive through their senses, and so only knew the visible

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\(^8\) Gregory, here, developed the common Christological theme of *communicatio idiomatum* in order to explain Christ’s soteriological function. See Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 152.

\(^9\) Mor. 22.42: “Longe quippe distabamus a justo et immortali, nos mortales et iniusti. Sed inter immortalem iustum et nos mortales iniustos apparuit Mediator Dei et hominum mortalis et iustus, qui et mortem haberet cum hominibus, et iustitiam cum Deo; ut quia per ima nostra longe distabamus a summis, in seipso uno iungeret ima cum summis, atque ex eo nobis via redeundi fieret, quo summis suis ima nostra copularet.”

\(^1\) Mor. 27.30.

\(^2\) Mor. 29.22. In Gregory’s cosmological schema, there were lower natures in creation than humans, such as animals, plants, and stones. Yet, none of these were rational and so could not be joined to God. Humans were the lowest order of rational beings that could participate in contemplative union with God.

\(^3\) Mor. 27.29. In Gregory’s cosmological hierarchy, humans were ontologically lower than the angels.

See *Dial. 4.3*.

\(^4\) *Cant.* 4.

\(^5\) *Dial. 4.1.*
world to which they had attached themselves through sin. In order to be reunited to God, the invisible God had to become visible.

For sinful man could not be corrected except through God. However, he who corrected had to be seen, to offer an example for imitation that past lives of evil might be changed. But God could not be seen by men. For this reason, God was made man, so that he could be seen. Therefore, the righteous and invisible God appeared as a visible man like us, so that while he would be seen from likeness, he could cure from righteousness; and while he agreed with us in the truth of his nature, he could cure our sickness from the power of his medicine.  

By means of the Incarnation, then, Christ returned humanity to the invisible by means of the visible, and recalled humans from the exterior world to the interiority of their own souls once again, and from there, to God. Christ, in this fashion, constituted an “exterior beatific vision” whereby souls were prepared for the interior beatific vision of God in contemplation.  

Besides revealing God, by means of his Incarnation, God gave humanity an example for imitation by which they might be led back to him. As Gregory explained, Christ came not only to die for sins, but to teach humanity by giving them an example to follow. Just like the saints, Christ was an exemplum, in fact the foundational one, whose life served a number of pedagogical functions. His life and miracles recalled humanity to the invisible world. His preaching, recorded in Scripture, was an instrument of conversion and

96 Mor. 24.2: “Uitiosus enim homo corrigi non poterat nisi per Deum. Uideri autem debuit qui corrigebat, ut praebendo imitationis formam, anteaactae malitiae mutarent uitam. Sed uideri ab homine non poterat Deus; ergo homo factus est, ut uideri potuisset. Iustus igitur atque invisibilis Deus, apparuit similis nobis homo visibilis, ut dum uidetur ex similis, curaret ex iusto; et dum ueritate generis concordat conditioni, uirtute artis obuiaret aegritudini.”

97 Mor. 7.2.2. See Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 166, 173.

98 Hester, Eschatology, 104.

99 Gregory suggested on numerous occassions that Christ’s life, his words and actions, were a model for humanity’s imitation. See Past. 1.3; Dial. 1.9; 3.21.

100 Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 222-27.

101 Mor. 29.22.
repentance. His death manifested the sacrifice that must characterize every person’s life. Lastly, his resurrection manifested the goal of human life, and the end towards which all salvation history flowed. “Accordingly, to this end the Lord appeared in the flesh, so that by admonishing arouse human life, by giving examples enflame, by dying redeem, by rising renew.” The Incarnation, therefore, provided for every aspect of salvation, including the expiation of human sin, which constituted another essential aspect of Christ’s redemptive role.

A central component of Christ’s redemptive mission was to remove the barrier of sin separating God and humanity. In the Incarnation, God became man to act as a substitute for humanity, to pay the debt of human sin that they themselves were incapable of paying. God, impassible and immortal, took on human nature in Christ so that he might become capable of suffering and dying, so as to pay the debt due for human sin. Christ took on himself human flesh, the very source of human sin, and used that sinful flesh as the very source of humanity’s salvation. In a first sense, Christ atoned for human sin in the Incarnation itself, which Christ continually offered to the Father through time as an expiation of sin.

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102 Mor. 4.59.
103 Mor. 9.38; 29.26.
104 HEz. 1.4; 2.34; Mor. 27.29; 29.25-26.
105 Mor. 21.11: “Ad hoc itaque Dominus apparuit in carne, ut humanam uitam admonendo excitaret, exempla praebendo accenderet, moriendo redimeret, resurgendo repararet.”
106 Mor. 17.30.
107 Mor. 18.52.
108 Mor. 3.33. Gregory conceived human flesh, with its appetites and desires, to be at the very core of human sinfulness. Gregory believed that Christ, by taking upon himself that very source of sin, the flesh, he transformed it into a vehicle for salvation. Through his suffering in the flesh, Christ utilized God’s punishment of sin, suffering and death, and made it into a means to expiate sin. As a result, human suffering became redemptive rather than merely punitive. See Hester, Eschatology, 2-3, 94-113; Straw, Gregory the Great, 153-56.
109 Gregory believed that Christ, even after his resurrection, continually offered to the Father the sacrifice of his Incarnation. See Mor. 1.24.32; 22.42. In such statements it is not entirely clear whether Christ
For his very incarnation is itself the offering for our purification, and while he shows himself as a man, he is the intercession that washes out man’s misdeeds, and in the mystery of his humanity he offers a perpetual sacrifice.\textsuperscript{110}

Christ then completed this sacrificial atonement for sin in his crucifixion, wherein he took upon himself the punishment due humanity for its sin, which was death, and used that very death to free humanity from the debt and punishment due its sins.\textsuperscript{111} Thus, for Gregory, Christ’s crucifixion acted as the natural culmination of the Incarnation, wherein he expiated human sin.\textsuperscript{112}

While sacrificial atonement was a central component of his understanding of Christ’s passion and death, Gregory also conceived Christ’s crucifixion in light of humanity’s battle with Satan. Gregory believed that Satan had legal rights over humans inasmuch as he had united them to himself through their sins.\textsuperscript{113} The debt of human sin was due to the devil, not to God, and the debt that was due was death.\textsuperscript{114} Through his crucifixion and death, Christ, the sinless one, paid the ransom due to Satan for sin.\textsuperscript{115}

When the Lord for our salvation gave himself up to the hands of Satan’s members, what else did he do, but let loose Satan’s hand to rage against himself, that by the very act whereby he himself outwardly fell low, he might set us free both outwardly and inwardly?\textsuperscript{116}

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is offering the Father his earthly body, perhaps in the Eucharist, or rather his body the Church in which he continued to suffer. Gregory repeatedly affirmed that Christ still suffered in the members of his body that constituted the Church, often times due to the sins of the members themselves. See Mor. 3.35-37; 6.1; 29.12-13.
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\textsuperscript{110} Mor. 1.32: “\textit{Ipsa quippe eius incarnatio nostrae emundationis oblatio est cumque se hominem ostendit delicta hominis interveniens diluit. Et humanitatis suae mysterio perenne sacrificium immolat}.”

\textsuperscript{111} Mor. 3.26-27; 24.6.

\textsuperscript{112} Mor. 3.26-27; 24.6.

\textsuperscript{113} Mor. 20.69.

\textsuperscript{114} Mor. 24.2.3.

\textsuperscript{115} Mor. 17.30. Augustine expounded a similar theology of the crucifixion, see Trin. 13.4.15-18.

\textsuperscript{116} Mor. 3.29: “\textit{Cum ergo se pro nostra redemptione Dominus membrorum satanae manibus tradidit, quid aliud quam eiusdem satanae manum in se saevire permisit; ut unde ipse exterius occumberet, inde nos exterius interiusque liberaret}.”
As Gregory explained, Satan, perceiving the weakness of Jesus’ humanity, thought him to be merely mortal and so could kill him, but in that very act, through killing the sinless one, Satan lost his rights over all sinners.\textsuperscript{117} Christ acted as God’s “fishhook.” His flesh was the bait and his divinity the hook by which God caught “Leviathan,” the devil.\textsuperscript{118} Thus, just as Satan had deceived humans into sin, and so death, God deceived Satan, and through Christ’s death, set humanity free of its sins.\textsuperscript{119} In such fashion, then, God used Satan, acting out of his own evil will, to accomplish his own providential plan of salvation.\textsuperscript{120}

In his crucifixion and death, Christ overcame not only the death of the body, but likewise, the second death, the death of the soul.\textsuperscript{121} Gregory believed that upon Christ’s death, he descended into hell so as to overcome the final and full penalty of sin, eternal damnation. As Gregory explained, Christ entered hell due to his death, but without sin, hell had no power over him.\textsuperscript{122} Rather, Christ entered hell and overpowered it, releasing from it all the just who had been detained there since the beginning of time.\textsuperscript{123} In this way, then, Christ overcame all the effects of sin, both the physical death of the body as well as the death

\textsuperscript{117} Mor. 3.28; 17.30.
\textsuperscript{118} HEz. 2.25. Straw explained that this fishhook imagery came to Gregory from Gregory of Nyssa by way of Rufinus. See Straw, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 155, n.35.
\textsuperscript{119} Mor. 3.29.
\textsuperscript{120} Mor. 3.29.
\textsuperscript{121} Gregory believed that humans experienced two deaths due to sin. The first death was the death of the body, wherein the soul departed the body at the end of one’s life. The other death was the death of the soul, which was experienced in the soul’s loss of God, and ultimately, in eternal damnation. See Mor. 4.30-31; 9.97. Christ, in taking upon himself the punishment due humanity’s sins, experienced and overcame both types of death.
\textsuperscript{122} Mor. 29.24-25.
\textsuperscript{123} Gregory believed that all the just who had died prior to the coming of Christ awaited him in hell. They all dwelled in the higher regions of hell experiencing no punishment, but merely awaited Christ’s coming for heaven to be opened to them. See Mor. 4.56; 12.13. Christ, upon his physical death, descended into hell to free these elect and bring them into heaven, which he opened through his sacrificial death and resurrection. See Ep. 7.15; Mor. 13.48; 29.23. Augustine had expressed a different role of Christ’s descent into hell, which was to release sinners there rather than the just patriarchs. See Augustine, \textit{De Gen. as litt.} 12.33.63; Ep. 164.7.
of the soul, eternal damnation. This victory over death was completed in Christ’s resurrection, wherein he manifested the goal and climax of God’s providential plan of salvation.

Within Gregory’s soteriology, Christ’s sacrificial death, descent into hell, and resurrection were all constituents of one and the same event wherein Christ overcame sin and its effects in humanity. The resurrection was the effective culmination of his death, whereby Christ irrevocably overcame death and manifested the providential end for which all the elect were destined. While all experienced bodily death, the body of each person was to rise at the end of the world to be reunited to their souls, which were already dwelling in either heaven or hell. The risen bodies of those in hell would join their soul in eternal torment, while the bodies of the elect would rise incorruptible to join the soul in heaven. Gregory forcibly argued the point that the risen body of the elect, like Jesus’ own resurrected body, was to rise incorruptible, yet be palpable. In other words, it was the physical body that would be resurrected, but it would rise incorruptible, being made hard and durable like “brass.” The human flesh itself, once the source of sin, would in the resurrection become spiritual, sharing in the soul’s own incorruptibility through its beatific union with God. The resurrection, then, was the culminating event of Christ’s soteriological role in history.

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124 Ep. 7.31.
125 Mor. 29.24-26.
126 Mor. 9.17; 15.36.
127 Mor. 14.70-77. The question of the nature of the resurrected body had a long history prior to Gregory, but it was generally agreed the body was to rise free of suffering and incorruptible. See Carole Straw, “Settling Scores: Eschatology in the Church of the Martyrs,” in Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages, eds. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 32-33. Frances Young has argued that the Christian notion of bodily resurrection was ultimately tied to the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo. The idea was that insofar as God could create everything out of nothing, he was equally able to reconstitute the resurrected body into a new and incorruptible form. See Frances Young, “Naked or Clothed? Eschatology and the Doctrine of Creation,” in The Church, the Afterlife, and the Fate of the Soul, eds. Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon (Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2009), 1-19.
128 HEz. 1.4; 2.34.
Gregory did recognize one additional role of Christ within God’s providential plan of salvation. This role, however, did not provide for salvation, but rather consummated salvation. Gregory believed that upon the eschatological end, when all experienced the resurrection of their bodies, Christ would return to judge all creation.\(^{129}\) In this context, Gregory spoke of the two comings of Christ, the first in humility to save, the second in power to judge.\(^{130}\) Gregory correlated these two comings using the imagery of dawn and day.\(^{131}\) The dawn was Christ’s initial coming wherein the light of truth began to shine in the darkness of the world, and ever since, there has been a mixture of light and darkness as at dawn. When Christ returns he will irradiate all creation and people in the fullness of light and truth, which is the day, the Day of Judgment. In this final judgment, divine light will be shed on every human so that each person will be able to see one’s sins, and therein experience God’s just judgment.\(^{132}\) Gregory often commented on the severity and strictness of this judgment so as to elicit fear and conversion in his audience.\(^{133}\) In Gregory’s mind, while Christ provided for salvation, humans must still respond, and fear was a strong motivating factor.\(^{134}\)

Christ was thus at the very center of God’s providential plan for salvation. Christ revealed God and made him accessible to humans once again, even in their fallen and sinful condition. He recalled humans from the visible world to the invisible world, and gave them an example for imitation. Furthermore, through his sacrificial death he paid the debt of human sin, liberating humans from the tyranny of Satan. In his resurrection, he overcame the

\(^{130}\) Mor. 17.53; 28.1. See also Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 376.  
\(^{131}\) Mor. 29.2-4; *Dial*. 4.43.  
\(^{132}\) Mor. 27.45.  
\(^{133}\) Ep. 1.33; 3.29; 11.18; Mor. 6.47-48; 8.41; 9.31; 10.54; 11.18; 13.33.  
\(^{134}\) Mor. 27.47.
power and effects of both death and hell, and revealed the authentic goal and end of human existence. In this way, then, Christ provided the historical foundation for salvation. Nevertheless, these actions of Christ only provided the ontological and historical foundation; salvation still required a human response.\footnote{Dudden, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 2:345.} For the salvation provided by Christ to be effective in any person’s life, they themselves must respond with conversion and repentance.\footnote{Dagens \textit{Saint Grégoire}, 174-75.}

**The Nature and Role of Conversion**

Conversion within Gregory’s thought could mean many different things. In a first sense, conversion meant the movement from unbelief to faith, the necessary starting point for salvation.\footnote{Ibid., 281.} Conversion could also mean the renunciation of the world so as to devote oneself entirely to God, which defined both the desire and goal of monasticism.\footnote{Ibid., 392-94.} Conversion also meant the recognition and turning away from one’s own sinfulness, which was characterized by compunction and repentance for one’s sins.\footnote{Conversion was one of the most common themes in Gregory’s writings, which were littered with references to it. See \textit{Ep.} 11.18; \textit{Mor.} 3.24; 4.35; 5.67; 8.38; 9.67, 94; 13.32-33; 15.58; 24.49; 27.33, 39.} It was this last sense of conversion, conversion as compunction for sin, which constituted the most common meaning of the term for Gregory, and the meaning he most frequently discussed.\footnote{Dagens has suggested that one of Gregory’s major contributions to the history of Christian spirituality was his psychological analysis of conversion. See Dagens, \textit{Saint Grégoire}, 251.} Gregory’s world was predominantly Christian, and while pagans still needed conversion and monasticism was the ideal, his goal was always to induce conversion among the Christians for whom he had pastoral care. In this context, Gregory explained conversion as the necessary process by which each person participated in the salvation of Christ.
The process of conversion explained by Gregory was in essence a reversal of the process of sin. Whereas sin invariably led the person from God into the attachments and pleasures of the visible world and flesh, conversion meant a return from the visible world to God. The ultimate end of sin was spiritual and personal blindness, wherein the soul was so blind to itself and God that it did not even see its own sinfulness. Conversion, therefore, could only begin by each person first recognizing their own sinfulness. Only by recognizing how far one truly was from God due to sin, the horror of their current state, and the terrible end that their sins deserved, could the sinner begin the process of conversion leading back to God. This recognition of sin in the soul, as Gregory explained, could occur from a number of different causes: meditation on Scripture, enlightenment by the Holy Spirit, the experience of God’s chastisement, an effective preacher, the experience of bodily pain or suffering, or even the reflection upon God’s severe judgment. The resulting effect from such recognition of sin, and the next step in conversion, was sorrow and compunction for one’s sins.

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141 Gregory explained that the process of sin entailed four steps: the suggestion of Satan, the flesh taking delight in the suggestion, the soul consenting to the act, and lastly, the boldness and pride to defend the act. See Mor. 4.49. The process of conversion consisted of the complete reversal of the process of sin. For a good account of this process of conversion, see Straw, Gregory the Great, 211-35.

142 Both Dagens and Straw characterized Gregory’s conception of sin as an exterior movement, moving from the interior soul to the visible world, in pursuit of the appetites of the flesh. Conversion, therefore, meant the opposite movement from the exterior world into the interiority of the soul, and from there to God. See Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 117, 168-69; Straw, Gregory the Great, 79-80.

143 Ep. 12.7; Mor. 4.25, 45; 6.25; 11.45, 58.

144 Gregory believed that the recognition of sin within oneself constituted true discretio, which imparted to the soul understanding and light so as to guide the soul back to God. See Mor. 3.24; 4.35.

145 Mor. 2.1; 6.23.

146 Mor. 5.65-67.

147 Mor. 6.42; 10.24.

148 Mor. 27.47-48.

149 Ep. 13.24. Just as the pleasures of the flesh led each person into sin, pains of the flesh had the reverse effect, liberating the soul from its attachments to the flesh. See Hester, Eschatology, 82-86.

150 Mor. 13.32-33.
Gregory believed that compunction and sorrow for sin was a necessary step in authentic conversion after the recognition of sin.\(^{151}\) Compunction served a salutary purpose in that it was both sanative to the soul and made atonement for sin. Compunction was healthy to the soul, for it displaced from the soul the pleasure that was the cause of sin.\(^{152}\) Additionally, such sorrow constituted the full acknowledgement of sins, which had the capacity to mitigate the punishment due for the sins committed.\(^{153}\)

Dearest brothers, we must recognize the evils that we have committed, and we must wear away ourselves with continual sorrow. Let us seize through penitence the inheritance of the righteous, which we do not hold by our way of life. Almighty God wants to undergo this kind of violence from us. For he desires us to seize the kingdom of heaven through our tears, which we are not owed by our merits.\(^ {154}\)

Like a second baptism, tears of sorrow washed from the soul the stains of its sin.\(^ {155}\)

Moreover, such sorrow moved the sinner to true repentance, which was characterized by both the firm ammendment not to return to sin and to make atonement for the sins committed.\(^ {156}\)

Whereas one was led into sin through pleasure, the route out of sin always entailed suffering. As Gregory explained, “all ascending is in labor, but descending is in pleasure.”\(^ {157}\)

Gregory believed that it was the desires of the flesh that led the soul to sin, and therefore,

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\(^{151}\) Gregory explained that there were two forms of compunction, compunction of fear and compunction of love, and the two were interrelated. Conversion began with compunction of fear, wherein a person was brought to sorrow and repentance due to fear of punishment, whether temporal or eternal. Eventually this fear was to turn into the compunction of love, which occurred when the sinner recognized with gratitude and love the great gift and mercy God had given them in redemption. See \textit{Dial.} 3.34.

\(^{152}\) \textit{Mor.} 4.35.

\(^{153}\) \textit{Mor.} 4.71-72; 9.67; 10.11. For a description of this process, see Straw, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 211-35.

\(^{154}\) \textit{HEv.} 1.20.15: “Recogitemus ergo, fratres charissimi, mala quae fecimus, et nosmetipsos assiduis lamentiis atteramus. Haereditatem justorum, quam non tenuimus per uitam, rapiamus per poenitentiam. Uult a nobis omnipotens Deus talem uiolentiam perpeti. Nam regnum coelorum rapi uult nostris fletibus, quod nostris meritis non debetur.”

\(^ {155}\) \textit{Mor.} 27.39.

\(^ {156}\) Gregory asserted that for repentance and compunction to be sincere and effective, one must not return to the same sin again. See \textit{HEv.} 2.34.

\(^{157}\) \textit{Mor.} 7.30: “Omnis namque ascensus in labore est, descensus in uoluptate.”
only by subduing the flesh, afflicting it, could those bonds to sin be truly broken. The flesh, in this manner, which was once the source of sin, now became a means of liberation from sin. Gregory explained:

And because we have followed the flesh through the sight of the eyes, we are tortured by flesh itself, which we preferred to the commands of God. Daily we suffer in it sorrow, torture, and death, so that by a wonderful dispensation the Lord turns into a punishment that through which we sinned; no other place can supply this censure except the place that was the cause of sin, so that man might be disciplined to life by the bitterness of his flesh, whose prideful delight drew man to death.

Just as flesh was used by Christ to liberate humanity from its sins, repentant sinners, in imitation of Christ, were to sacrifice their flesh as a means to atone for their own personal sins. Consequently, while beginning with tears, repentance was never fully complete without accompanying penance.

Penance, for Gregory, was a necessary step in conversion. As an indication of this fact, Gregory himself could often be seen assigning forced penances on clerics and monks for sins when he saw such signs of true repentance lacking. Gregory even interpreted many of God’s chastisements as forced penances he mercifully imposed on his elect to atone their sins. As Gregory explained: “Therefore all smiting is divine, either a purifying in our

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158 Ep. 11.18; 13.24; Mor. 32.2. This relationship between soul and body was again reflective of Gregory’s overriding cosmology and anthropology. The invisible and visible were ontologically connected with each other. Just as the visible body could lead the invisible soul into sin through pleasure, likewise, the body could lead the soul from sin through suffering. For a discussion of this characteristic of Gregory’s thought, see Straw, Gregory the Great, 142-43, 194-99.

159 Mor. 24.7: “Et quia per oculorum uisum carnem secuti sumus, de ipsa carne, quam praeceptis Dei praeposuimus, flagellamur. In ipsa quippe cotidie genitum, in ipsa cruciatum, in ipsa interitum patimur, ut hoc nobis mira dispositione Dominus in poenam uerteret, per quod fecimus culpam; nec altiunde esset interim censura supplicii, nisi unde fuerat causa peccati, ut eius carnis amaritudine homo erudiretur ad uitam, cuius oblecture operatione superbiae peruenit ad mortem.”

160 Mor. 17.9; 31.33. While discipline and mortification were a necessary part of conversion, Gregory recognized limits and was critical of those going too far in their mortifications. He criticized heretics who said people should not marry nor eat enough for proper nourishment of the body. See Mor. 16.10.

161 Ep. 1.66; 2.3; 4.24; 5.18; 11.53: Dial. 4.57.

162 Ep. 11.18; Mor. 6.42; 9.68.
present life, or a beginning of punishment that follows.” The goal of such penances was to completely subjugate the flesh to the control of the soul, so as to return the soul from the flesh and the world to its interior contemplation of God. The other necessary effect of such penances was that they made satisfaction and atonement for the sins that each person had committed.

While Christ’s propitiatory death provided for the forgiveness of sins, God’s justice still demanded payment for the sins that each person committed. As Gregory conceived it, for each sin committed a just penalty was due, and this payment was exacted either by oneself in the present life or by God in the next.

For either man doing penance punishes it [sin] in himself, or God strikes hard asserting vengeance with man for it. Therefore there is never a sparing from sin, because it is never released without vengeance.

Repentant sinners could make such payment for sin either by depriving themselves of some lawful good, performing a good work, prayer, or by giving alms. These penances were never conceived by Gregory as a meriting or earning salvation, but the full realization of the salvation of Christ within each person’s life. It was only Christ’s suffering and death that allowed human suffering to serve this expiatory function. “The New Dispensation, to extend Gregory’s legal metaphors, restores man’s solvency, allowing him to expunge or

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164 Mor. 18.35: “Omnis ergo diuina percussio, aut purgatio in nobis uitae praesentis est, aut initium poenae sequentis.”
165 Mor. 5.9; 7.53. Gregory explained that the flesh thrived in pleasure, while such pleasure was deadly to the soul. Bitterness, on the other hand, caused the soul to thrive while it killed the flesh. Thus, the perpetual goal of such mortification was to flee pleasure and induce bitterness. See Mor. 10.42.
166 Mor. 9.41; 13.23; 15.33. As Carole Straw explained, Gregory believed that while Christ redeemed humanity, that gift of salvation still had to be paid back. The debt of each sin had to be paid, and paid to the very “last penny.” See Straw, Gregory the Great, 175-77.
167 Ep. 11.18.
168 Mor. 9.54: “Aut enim ipse hoc homo in se paenitens punit, aut hoc Deus cum homine uindicans percusit. Nequaquam igitur peccato parcitur, quia nullatenus sine uindicata laxatur.”
169 Mor. 4.71-72; 12.57; 32.2.
170 Mor. 9.73; 13.26; 33.24.
repay his debts, even permitting him to earn credit.”

Thus while such penances alone would never suffice for salvation, they still constituted an essential aspect of salvation, for without them, Christ’s redemption was never fully effective in any person’s life.

The first step in sin was always the suggestions of the devil, and likewise, the last step of conversion always entailed the battle with demons. As Gregory explained, those seeking freedom from the tyranny of Satan must do battle with him. After conversion, God continued to allow Satan and his evil spirits to harass and tempt his elect, and so, if one was not to return to sin they must engage Satan in battle.

For he [Satan] sometimes enters even the mind of the good, he suggests unlawful thoughts, he wearies them with temptations, he endeavors to turn aside the uprightness of the spirit to the pleasures of the flesh; he also strives to carry out delight as far as to consent but he is kept from prevailing by the opposition of aid from above. Such battles with Satan characterized the life of the saint. The saint, and repentant sinner alike, engaged in such battle through self-discipline and mortification so as not to be enticed by the suggestions of the devil nor the pleasures of the flesh. They attempted to subdue their flesh and the world by renouncing them, living a life in imitation of death. Here, Christ’s sacrificial death served as the model of authentic Christian life.

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171 Straw, Gregory the Great, 175.
172 Gregory conceived Christian life, especially that of the monk and saint, to consist in a battle with evil spirits. This aspect of Gregorian spirituality was drawn from Evagrius through Cassian. See Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 189-91, 256-57.
173 Mor. 4.42.
174 Mor. 6.46; 7.20; 8.8; 27.50; Ep. 9.148.
175 Mor. 27.50: “Aliquando namque etiam bonorum mentes ingreditur, illicita suggerit, temptationibus fatigat, rectitudinem spiritus ad delectationem carnis deflectere conatur, delectationem quoque ad consensum perducere nittitur, sed tamen resistente superno adiutorio praevaleat prohibet.”
176 An excellent example of this fact occurred in Book II of Gregory’s Dialogues, wherein he recounted the ongoing battle between Benedict and Satan.
177 Mor. 4.68; 13.36; 27.50.
178 Mor. 13.33.
179 Mor. 34.23. Gregory believed that just as sacrifice defined Christ’s life, the life of Christians must likewise be conformed to sacrifice in imitation of him. See Mor. 20.68.
battles, allowed by God, served a number of divine purposes. They had the capacity to humble the afflicted soul, keep the soul vigilant in its defense against sin, and garner greater merit for the elect in heaven. Only through overcoming Satan by means of such struggles was conversion complete, and the process of sin completely reversed and overcome.

Conversion, therefore, represented the necessary human response to the salvation provided by God in Christ. Whereas sin had led each person from the interior contemplation of God outwards into the attachments and pleasures of the flesh, conversion returned the person from the world into the interiority of their own soul, and from there to a restored contemplative union with God. Moreover, conversion entailed the ongoing effort to make atonement for one’s sins through acts of self-mortification and penance, along with the continual battle with demons so as not to return to sin. While this human response of conversion was necessary, and one requiring effort, salvation was still something God accomplished and governed by his providence. God providentially extended and ordered such conversion within history, according to Gregory, by means of his Church.

**The Church’s Providential Role in Salvation**

Surprisingly, given the degree to which Gregory and his papacy shaped the Church of the Middle Ages, Gregory spent little time elaborating an explicit ecclesiology. While he did comment in passing on various aspects of the Church, and he certainly could be seen responding to the needs and various issues of the Church in his correspondence, Gregory was

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180 Mor. 4.43-44; 8.48; 9.85.  
181 Mor. 11.57.  
182 Mor. 6.28-33; 7.29; 9.44; 10.18-19; 14.46.  
183 For Gregory’s effects on the Church of the Middle Ages, see Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 13-17.
noticeably silent on the Church. The world and the Church were in great flux in Gregory’s day, and as such, the business of running the Church left little time for reflecting upon it. Despite his silence, Gregory did believe the Church provided an essential and pivotal role in God’s providential plan for salvation. The Church, through its mission, preaching, and sacraments, made the salvation provided by Christ effective in the world. Here, this providential role of the Church will be elaborated and explicated, particularly in terms of how Gregory realized it within his own activity as pope.

The role of the Church in salvation, for Gregory, was really an extension of his understanding of his own role as pope. Gregory, as pope, called himself the “servant of the servants of God.” In this title Gregory defined the mission of the pope, and likewise the Church, as one of service. The Church, like the pope, was a servant of God, and so its role was to act as God’s agent within the world, similar to that of the saints and angels. Gregory even compared the hierarchy of the Church to that of the angels, thereby indicating the similarity of their structure manifested a similarity in their roles. Just as angels acted as God’s agents within creation, serving as ministers of his providential government, the Church acted as God’s agent within history, and in a particular way, as an agent of God’s providential mission of salvation in Christ.

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184 The one exception was Gregory’s *Regula pastoralis*. This work, however, was directed more to the explanation of effective Church leadership, particularly the role of the bishop, rather than the Church itself.

185 One exception to this general rule occurred in the ninth year of his papacy, wherein Gregory was confined to bed due to illness. See *Ep.* 10.14. During this year, or two, he could be seen reflecting on a number of pressing issues of the Church and responding to them in his correspondence. He wrote over two hundred letters during this one year alone, which was two to four times more than in any other year of his pontificate.

186 Gregory believed the Church was essential for salvation, so much so, that he stated there was no salvation outside the Church. See *Mor.* 14.5.

187 *Ep.* 1.38: “servus servorum Dei.” Gregory was the first pope to apply this title to himself.

188 Gregory understood service in the sense that the master acted through the servant. See *HEv.* 2.36. In this sense of service, the angels were servants of God, inasmuch as he directed all their activity and they acted as his agents in creation. See *Mor.* 2.3, 6. In a similar way, the saints were servants of God, inasmuch as he directed all their activities and so acted through them. See *Mor.* 27.57.

189 *Ep.* 5.59.
The Church, as Gregory explained, was the body of Christ. The two were so intimately united that Christ still suffered in his body, the Church, while the Church, on its part, continued Christ’s mission in the world. The Church, as Christ’s body, functioned in a similar fashion to the human body. All that the human body did was an expression of the invisible soul acting through it, and likewise, everything that the Church did was to be an expression of the invisible Christ acting through it. Consequently, just as Christ’s life was defined by service and sacrifice, the Church too, particularly in its leaders, was to be defined by the same service and sacrifice. Similarly, just as Christ provided for salvation in his historical life, the life of the Church was to make that salvation effective in the world, particularly through conversion.

Gregory believed that the historical and providential mission of the Church was to procure Christ’s salvation in the world through conversion. How the Church fulfilled this providential role of conversion varied throughout its history to accord with the exigencies of the various historical ages in which it operated. In Gregory’s day, the Church was

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190 Mor. 3.35.
191 Gregory believed that there were two such bodies operative within the world, the body of Christ, the Church, and the body of Satan, the reprobate. The wicked formed the body of Satan and so Satan acted through them. See Mor. 13.12; 15.19; 27.49. Likewise, the elect formed the body of Christ, and so he acted through them. See Mor. 27.30. Gregory was careful to point out, however, that not everyone in the Church was a part of the elect and so true members of Christ. See Mor. 13.9-11. There were many sinners, heretics, and hypocrites within the Church, and it was through these people that Christ continued to suffer in his body, the Church. See Mor. 3.35-37; 29.12-13.
192 Gregory believed that the human body could accomplish nothing outside the activity of the soul. The body, worn like a garment by the soul, was merely an instrument of the soul. See Mor. 7.38; 15.52. Likewise, the Church, as Christ’s body, was the instrument of Christ who acted through it.
193 Gregory believed the life of every Christian, and therefore the Church, should be an imitation of Christ’s own life and mission. Just as Christ’s life was defined by sacrifice, so too should the life of the Church. See HEz. 2.8; Past. 1.3; Dial. 4.61. This fact was the foundation for Gregory’s abhorrence over the Patriarch of Constantinople’s use of “ecumenical patriarch,” for it was a title of pride and self-glory, rather than service, and so a betrayal of the mission of the Church of which he was a leader. See: Ep. 3.52; 6.15; 7.5, 24, 28; 9.157; 13.41. It was for the very same reason Gregory rejected the title of “universal pope” for himself. See Ep. 8.29. Sacrifice was the defining characteristic of Christ, and therefore, the defining characteristic of the Church and authentic Christians. See Ep. 7.27; Mor. 3.17; 31.16-17.
194 Mor. 9.10-16.
triumphant and secure, having established itself throughout the known world, a position it would occupy until the coming of the Antichrist and the final persecution of the Church.\textsuperscript{195} Therefore, the most pressing need of the Church was not the conversion of those outside, but the conversion of lax and sinful Christians within the Church.\textsuperscript{196} Official paganism had largely receded by Gregory’s time, with only small pockets and remnants of paganism remaining.\textsuperscript{197} Gregory believed that those in most need of conversion in his day were those who professed faith in Christ, but who had not completely converted their lives to accord with the faith.\textsuperscript{198} The Church was composed of heretics,\textsuperscript{199} schismatics,\textsuperscript{200} hypocrites,\textsuperscript{201} and sinful Christians,\textsuperscript{202} all of whom stood in need of conversion.

Gregory believed that one of the most effective ways the Church could induce conversion among Christians, and therefore make Christ’s salvation effective, was through proper preaching.\textsuperscript{203} Conversion always required the illumination and conviction of one’s own sinfulness. Only by becoming aware of one’s own sins could a person develop salutary sorrow for them, as well as repent and make atonement.\textsuperscript{204} Therefore, one of the essential roles of the Church was to effect conversion by convicting Christians of their own

\textsuperscript{195} Markus, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 56-57.

\textsuperscript{196} Gregory can be seen in many places criticizing lax and hypocritical Christians within the Church. See \textit{Mor.} 3.35-37, 42-48; 13.9-11; 28.12-13.

\textsuperscript{197} Brown, \textit{Rise of Western Christendom}, 146-52.

\textsuperscript{198} Salvation, for Gregory, was never constituted merely by the act of professing faith in Christ, but consisted in renouncing the attachments to the visible world in deference to the invisible so as to be reunited to God through contemplative union. Conversion, therefore, always entailed a change of life, a renunciation of the world and sin, rather than just a profession of faith. See \textit{Mor.} 28.12-13.

\textsuperscript{199} Many heresies remained in Gregory’s day to which he responded in his pontificate, including Monophysitism in the East (\textit{Ep.} 10.21), Arianism in the West (\textit{Ep.} 1.17), and even Manichaeism (\textit{Mor.} 9.74).

\textsuperscript{200} The most significant of these schisms in Gregory’s day was Donatism in North Africa (\textit{Ep.} 1.72, 75; 2.39; 4.32, 35; 5.3; 6.36, 64) and the “Three Chapters Schism” (\textit{Ep.} 1.24; 3.10; 4.2-3; 9.148).

\textsuperscript{201} Gregory was very critical of hypocrites within the Church, whom he accused of great blindness, condemning in others what they failed to perceive in themselves. See \textit{Mor.} 3.61; 15.4-23.

\textsuperscript{202} Gregory was also critical of the lax and sinful Christians in the Church who failed to live in accord with Gregory’s own monastic ideals and expectations. See \textit{Mor.} 3.35-37; 13.9-11.

\textsuperscript{203} Carole Straw provided a very good summary of the role of the preacher in Gregory’s thought. See \textit{Straw}, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 201-12.

\textsuperscript{204} \textit{Mor.} 4.35; 8.38.
sinfulness. Gregory himself could often be seen fulfilling this role of the Church, convicting others of their sin, and even assigning penances where needed. The failure to do so constituted the sin of silence. Gregory often recommended to preachers the use of fear, as the fear of judgment and eternal damnation was an excellent motivating force to induce conversion. Gregory also suggested the use of *exempla*, whether the lives of saints, miracle stories, or even pictures and statues, as useful tools for instruction, inasmuch as they had the capacity to convict the sinner as well as instruct by their example.

While preaching was always the most frequently mentioned means of conversion within the Church, Gregory did also recognize an essential role for the sacraments, particularly those of baptism, confession, and the Mass. The sacraments of the Church, like Christ, the saints, and even miracles, had the intrinsic capacity to draw the minds of carnal human beings from the visible to the invisible. In a unique way, the sacraments manifested within themselves the essential connection of the visible and invisible that defined Gregory’s entire cosmology. The sacraments made Christ present, along with all the effects of his

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205 *Mor.* 27.47-48.
206 *Ep.* 1.66; 2.3, 17, 39; 3.54, 61; 4.3, 24; 5.18, 44; 11.34, 53.
207 *Mor.* 15.41.
208 *Mor.* 27.47-48. Gregory himself could often be seen drawing the attention of his audience to the strict judgment of God that awaited them upon death, or in the impending end of the world, so as to elicit salutary fear. See *Ep.* 1.33, 75; 3.29; 11.18; 13.33; *Mor.* 4.26; 6.47-48; 8.30-32; 10.54.
209 *Past.* 2.3; 3.6. Gregory often employed the use of such *exempla* in his own preaching and teaching. See *Ep.* 4.30; 7.23; 11.26; *HEv.* 1.15; 1.19; 2.23; 2.37; 2.38. His entire *Dialogues* was a testimony to the effectiveness he attributed to such miracle stories and lives of the saints for instruction. Additionally, Gregory reprimanded a bishop for destroying statues and pictures, for Gregory believed such things were very helpful for instruction, particularly for the uneducated who could not read. See *Ep.* 2.209; 11.10.
210 *Dial.* 4.60. Pseudo-Dionysius had suggested that, while higher ranks of angels directly mediated divine power to lower ranks, within the Church, the bishop mediated divine power to the lower ranks of Christians through the sacraments. See Pseudo-Dionysius, *EH* 376D-377A. Gregory never explicitly stated this idea, but it certainly expresses his own understanding of divine causality within the sacraments.
life, death, and resurrection. As such, the sacraments functioned as a providential mechanism by which each person participated in the redemption of Christ, particularly in terms of the forgiveness of sins.

Baptism played a unique and central role within God’s plan of salvation and within the providential role of the Church. Baptism, according to Gregory, was the divinely established means for the forgiveness of sin, particularly that of original sin. Gregory called baptism the “waters of regeneration,” through which the guilt of sin, including original sin, was fully extinguished. As such, baptism was an essential requirement for salvation, for without it, one was still bound to the guilt and penalty of sin, and therefore eternal damnation. Supporting this fact, Gregory asserted that babies who had died without having committed any sin of their own, still went to hell if not baptized. While baptism provided for the forgiveness of the guilt of sin, those baptized still retained the effects of sin within their natures, particularly corruptibility and bodily death. Thus, while baptism was a necessary requirement for salvation, it alone did not suffice. Salvation, for Gregory, was a life-long affair, and it was in this context that he conceived the need and role of confession and the Mass.

The sacrament of confession was going through considerable change during Gregory’s time, particularly in response to the spread of monasticism and its spiritual ideals. Columbanus had entered Northern Gaul in 590 and was spreading the penitential system of

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211 Gregory never developed a theory of signs as had Augustine. Unlike Augustine, he did not carefully distinguish between the sacramentum and the res. Rather, more in accord with Ambrose, he identified the sacramentum with the res, equating the one with the other. See Straw, Gregory the Great, 180.
212 Ep. 11.27.
213 Ep. 8.37; Mor. 4.3.
215 Mor. 4.3.
216 Mor. 9.54.
Ireland throughout continental Europe. Gregory himself encouraged a movement towards private confession, modeling it after the relationship between abbot and monks. Drawing from Cassian and the tradition of monasticism, Gregory believed that the purpose of confession was the acknowledgement of one’s own sinfulness. The power of sin was in its hiddenness and the blindness to self it produced in the soul. Only by becoming aware of one’s sins, acknowledging and confessing them, did the person develop salutary compunction for them. Through sorrow and tears, then, the repentant sinner was liberated from one’s sins and likewise made atonement for them. The Mass, for Gregory, fulfilled an essential role within God’s economy of salvation; it constituted the historical continuation of Christ’s redemptive mediation between God and man. Within the Mass, Christ’s entire historical mission of redemption was reproduced and so made present and active for Christians in each age and time. As Gregory explained, at the very moment of consecration, Christ was made present on earth to once again act as the saving victim and make expiation for humanity’s sins.

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219 Cassian, in his *Conferences*, had suggested that the acknowledgement and confession of a sin alone was sufficient for liberating the person from its effects and demonic attachments. See *Coll*. 2.11.
220 *Ep*. 12.7; *Mor*. 4.45; 6.25; 11.45, 58.
221 *Mor*. 4.35; 8.38. Using the example of Lazarus (*Jn*. 11:43-44), Gregory suggested that the confession of sin brought the dead sinner back to life. See *HEv*. 2.26.
222 *Mor*. 9.67; 10.28; 27.39.
223 Gregory, in speaking about Christ’s historical role in salvation, had highlighted a number of important effects of His life, death, and resurrection. Christ, in His incarnation, visibly revealed the invisible God and united human nature to divine nature. In His crucifixion and death, Christ made atonement for sin, reconciled humans to God, and gave a model of sacrifice for imitation. In His resurrection, He overcame death and revealed the goal of human life and existence. These same effects, according to Gregory, were made present and available to all the faithful as they participated in the Mass. See *Dial*. 4.60-61.
224 Straw has suggested that Gregory’s conception of the Mass had two emphases, that of the consecration where Christ was made present, and its sacrificial character. See Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 180-81.
Truly only this sacrifice saves the soul from eternal death, for it mysteriously
renews for us the death of the Only-begotten, such that ‘rising from the dead
henceforth he dies no more and death has no power over him,’ living in himself
immortal and incorruptible, he is again immolated for us in the mystery of the holy
sacrifice. Truly there his body is eaten, his flesh is distributed among the people for
salvation, his blood flows not again on the hands of the godless, but into the mouths
of the faithful. Consequently from this we consider the quality of this sacrifice for us,
which is always reproducing the passion of the Only-begotten Son for our absolution.
For who of the faithful can have any doubt that at the moment of the immolation the
heavens open at the sound of the priest’s voice, and the choirs of angels are present in
that mystery of Jesus Christ, the lowest is united with the most sublime, the earth is
joined to heaven, the visible and invisible somehow are made into one.225

The Mass, therefore, functioned as a representation of Christ’s historical passion wherein he
made atonement for humanity’s sins and reconciled God and humanity.226 This sacrifice of
the Mass, as Gregory was careful to explain, did not constitute a new passion or crucifixion
of Christ, but was a reproduction of his historical sacrifice, wherein it was made “mysteriously”
present and offered once again to God.227

While Gregory’s description of the Mass and its efficacy focused on the consecration
and Christ’s redeeming sacrifice, the Mass was never something God did without human
participation. For the Mass to accomplish its intended effects, the faithful, and particularly
the priest, had to participate in the mystery they celebrated, and conform their lives in
imitation of what they partook.

225 Dial. 4.60.4-9: “Haec namque singulariter uictima ab aeterno interitu animam saluat, quae illam
nobis mortem Unigeniti per mysterium reparat, qui licet ‘surgens a mortuis iam non moritur et mors ei ultra
non dominabitur,’ tamen in se ipso immortaliter atque incorruptibiliter uiuens, pro nobis iterum in hoc mysterio
sacrae oblationis immolatur. Eius quippe ibi corpus sumitur, eius caro in populi salutem partitur, eius sanguis
non iam in manus infidelium, sed in ora fidelium funditur. Hinc ergo pensemus quale sit pro nobis hoc
sacrificium, quod pro absolutione nostra passionem Unigeniti Filii semper imitatur. Quis enim fidelium habere
dubium possit ipsa immolationis hora ad sacerdotis uocem caelos aperi, in illo lesu Christi mysterio
angelorum choros adesse, summis ima sociari, terram caelestibus iungi, unum quid ex uisibilibus atque
inuisibilibus fieri?”
226 Straw, Gregory the Great, 149-50, 173; Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 417-18.
227 Dial. 4.60.
We need to sacrifice ourselves to God in a sincere immolation of the heart whenever we offer Mass, because we who celebrate the mysteries of the Lord’s passion, ought to imitate what we are enacting. The sacrifice will truly be offered to God for us when we present ourselves as the victim.\(^{228}\)

Just as salvation required a human response, in a similar fashion, the Mass itself required a human response to be effective. In order to participate fully in the Mass and receive its benefits, humans must offer themselves as victims to God, uniting the sacrifice of their lives to the sacrifice of Christ.\(^{229}\) Moreover, in order to receive the forgiveness of their own sins through the sacrifice of the Mass, they themselves must forgive others their offenses.\(^{230}\) Thus, humans played a significant role in the efficacy of the Mass, and this efficacy extended not only to themselves, but equally to others.

One of Gregory’s most notable contributions to the understanding of the Mass in Christian tradition was his explanation of its intercessory role, particularly for the dead.\(^{231}\) Just as the sacrifice of the Mass had the capacity to expiate the sins of those who properly participated in it, when offered for the dead, it had the capacity to expiate their sins also.\(^{232}\) Gregory explained that, while fervent prayer provided a salutary effect for the dead, the Mass, in a unique way, had the intrinsic capacity to remedy the punishment due the dead for

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\(^{228}\) *Dial.* 4.61.1: “Sed necesse est ut, cum hoc agimus, nosmetipsos Deo in cordis contritione mactemus, quia qui passionis dominicae mysteria celebramus, debemus imitari quod agimus. Tunc ergo uere pro nobis Deo hostia erit, cum nos ipsos hostiam fecerit.”


\(^{230}\) *Dial.* 4.62. Gregory, citing both Matt. 5:23-24 and 18:24-35, forcefully stated that only on the condition that one forgave others their offenses, would one experience the forgiveness of one’s own sins through the Mass. Gregory explained that unforgiveness was like a sword in the heart, which can only be healed once the sword is removed. See *Mor.* 10.30.

\(^{231}\) In his explanation of the intercessory role of the Mass Gregory focused on its benefits for the dead, but did also assign benefits for the living when offered on their behalf. In his *Dialogues*, Gregory told of how the life of a shipwrecked man was saved through the Mass and how the chains of a captive were released whenever Masses were offered for him. See *Dial.* 4.59. Thus, the Mass provided not only the expiation of sin for those for whom it was offered, but temporal benefits as well.

\(^{232}\) *Dial.* 4.57.
However, for a soul to experience these benefits of the Mass in the afterlife, a couple of conditions were required. In the first instance, Gregory believed that Masses would only benefit those who had merited such benefit by the good conduct of their own lives while living. Secondly, for the Mass to be effective for the dead, the sins committed by the dead person during life must be the type that were pardonable, that is, not deserving eternal damnation. On these conditions, then, the benefits of the Mass extended not only to the living, but also to the dead.

The Church, then, in its historical mission, in its preaching and sacraments, functioned as an agent of God’s providence within history for the purpose of eliciting and aiding conversion and salvation. The Church, through its preaching effected conversion, through baptism and confession provided for the forgiveness of sins, and through the Mass made Christ and his redeeming sacrifice present and operative throughout time. This role of the Church for salvation was so important that Gregory believed there could be no salvation

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233 Gregory did tell the story of Paschasius who was delivered from the punishment of his sins after death due to the prayers of the bishop Germanus. See Dial. 4.42. However, when speaking about intercession for the dead, Gregory’s focus was clearly on the role of the Mass. He related a number of stories in the fourth book of his Dialogues wherein he told how Masses performed for the dead had the capacity to release them from the punishment they were undergoing for their sins. See Dial. 4.57. One of these very stories gave rise to the practice of Gregorian Masses, wherein, as Gregory himself had done, thirty masses were said on thirty consecutive days in order to release a soul from post-death purgation.

234 Dial. 4.59. This notion of Gregory relates to his understanding of Christ’s descent into hell. Gregory believed that Christ liberated from hell only those souls whose lives had merited such liberation. He explained that faith in Christ alone was not sufficient, but that Christ only freed those from the bonds of hell if the conduct of their lives merited such a grace. See Ep. 7.15. In a similar fashion, those in punishment after death only merited to be liberated from it, through Christ in the Mass, if the good conduct of their lives merited such a grace. This idea constituted a rare instance within Gregory’s theology wherein he supported the idea that grace was in some sense given in response to personal merit.

235 Here, Gregory related the efficacy of the Mass to his notion of a post-death purging of sin, which would later be defined as purgatory. Gregory believed that sins were of different gravity, some deserving eternal damnation and others not. However, every sin, no matter how venial, still required a just penalty and payment; it was a requirement due God’s justice. These venial sins, according to Gregory’s belief, were purged after death prior to one’s judgment, thereby allowing the soul to enter heaven. See Dial. 4.41. The Mass only benefited, and delivered from punishment, venial sins, not those deserving damnation. See Dial. 4.59.
outside the Church. Just as God provided for salvation historically through Christ, he made that salvation present and operative throughout time by means of his Church. In this way, then, Gregory suggested that while a human response was required, salvation was still an activity ordered and accomplished by God. This fact is seen even more clearly within Gregory’s theology of grace.

**The Nature and Role of Grace**

Gregory, in explaining his understanding of grace, never used the neatly defined categories that would come to characterize scholastic theology in the later Middle Ages. Nor did he develop a comprehensive theology of grace as had Augustine in his response to the theological controversies of his day. Gregory, rather, constructed his understanding of grace around his primary pastoral concern, which was the conversion of those souls for whom he had pastoral care. In fact, the most common way he referred to grace was as *conversionis gratia*, the grace of conversion. In speaking about the role of grace in conversion, Gregory did delineate a coherent, even if not comprehensive, theology of grace.

When Gregory spoke about grace he did so in two different but related contexts, external grace and internal grace. External grace consisted of the various ways whereby

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236 Mor. 14.5. At times he seemed to seriously doubt the salvation of many within the Church.
237 Gregory never carefully distinguished grace according to various types as would be done in later scholastic theology. For example, as Boglioni pointed out, Gregory never distinguished between the grace given to all Christians and the miraculous gifts of grace given to the saints. He never distinguished between *gratia gratum faciens* and *gratia gratis data*. See Boglioni, *Miracle*, 77. He did, however, distinguish such categories as prevenient and subsequent grace. See *HEz*. 1.10.
238 Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 413. For a thorough account of Augustine’s doctrine of grace, and how it developed over his career, see Burns, *Development*, 18-51. In his description of Augustine’s theology of grace, Burns distinguished a distinct dichotomy between Augustine’s early theology of grace, prior to 396, and that occurring after in his response to Pelagianism. Harrison has recently contested this approach to Augustine’s understanding of grace, suggesting an evolution of Augustine’s thought rather than a strict dichotomy. See Harrison, *Rethinking*, 273-78.
239 *Ep*. 5.53a; *Dial*. 2.1; *Mor*. 24.11, 49; 27.61.
God, through his providential government of history, called souls to conversion. Gregory named a number of ways by which God historically extended this external grace:

Behold how he himself calls, he calls by the angels, he calls by the patriarchs, he calls by the prophets, he calls by the apostles, he calls by the pastors, he calls even by me; often he calls by miracles, often he calls by calamities; sometimes he calls by prosperity in this world; sometimes he call by adversity.  

Such external calls, while important and essential for conversion, were nevertheless completely ineffectual except by the working of interior grace. As Gregory explained, only interior grace provided the soul the means to rightly interpret such exterior calls, like preaching or chastisements, so that they brought about the intended conversion. This internal grace, in Gregory’s thought, was the function of the Holy Spirit.

Grace, for Gregory, was preeminently the activity of the Holy Spirit within the human soul to restore it to the contemplative union with God that was lost through sin. In this context, Gregory did speak of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but his focus was primarily on how the Holy Spirit produced conversion in the soul and united it to God. As Gregory conceived it, the Holy Spirit was the source of two movements within conversion. The first movement consisted in the illumination of the soul to its sins, bringing forth compunction and repentance, and ending in the restored contemplation of God. Secondly, the Holy Spirit inflamed the heart with the love of God, thereby enabling it to resist the temptations of

\[240\] HEv. 2.36.10: “Ecce uocat per se, uocat per angelos, uocat per patres, uocat per prophetas, uocat per apostolos, uocat per pastores, uocat etiam per nos, uocat plerumque per miracula, uocat plerumque per flagella, uocat aliquando per mundi huius prosper, uocat aliquando per adversa.”

\[241\] Dial. 4.11; Mor. 27.41; 29.47.

\[242\] Gregory explained that the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit functioned like the rungs of a ladder, whereby one ascended up to God. See HEz. 2.7.

\[243\] Gregory did distinguish between the grace of conversion and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. See Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 247-48.

\[244\] Mor. 5.65; 8.49; 9.88.
both the flesh and the devil. Each of these two activities of the Holy Spirit will be explained here, as together they constituted the heart of Gregory’s theology of grace.

The first step in conversion was always the recognition of one’s own sinfulness. As Gregory explained, this recognition of sin was entirely an activity of the Holy Spirit, who overcame the inherent obstinacy and blindness of the soul by illuminating it to its own wretchedness and sinfulness.

O’ what a skillful craftman is the Spirit! There is no delay to learning in everyone he wants to act upon. As soon as he touches the mind, he teaches; his touch itself is teaching. For he changes the human mind suddenly by enlightening it; unexpectedly it negates what was, manifesting what was not.

The more the soul was illumined by this divine light of the Holy Spirit, the more acutely it experienced and recognized its own sin and distance from God. The Holy Spirit further made the soul aware of the severe judgment due its sins, thereby eliciting compunction and repentance for the sins committed.

Because, without any doubt, so long as the sinner thinks only of those things that are earthly, the heart bears oppression by degrading thoughts. If he is suddenly touched by the inspiration of divine grace, this he understands above all else, that all that he did will be punished by the severe reproach of the eternal judge.

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245 Mor. 5.50; 9.29.
246 Gregory actually compared this descent of the Holy Spirit into the hearts and minds of sinners to Christ’s descent into hell to liberate the elect. See Mor. 29.28-30. Gregory did on one occasion suggest that natural reason was sufficient to convict humans of their sins. See Mor. 27.48. While sufficient, natural reason really never produced such awareness of sin, or the consequent conversion, outside the influence of grace. As such, Gregory firmly believed that it was only God’s grace that elicited awareness of sins and conversion. See Mor. 9.94; 11.16.
247 HEv. 2.30.8: “O qualis est artifex iste Spiritus! Nulla ad discendum mora agitur in omne quod voluerit. Mox tetigerit mentem, docet, solumque tetigisse docuisset est. Nam humanum animum subito ut illustrat inmutat, abnegat hunc repente quod erat, exhibet repente quod non erat.”
248 Mor. 5.53, 67.
249 Mor. 27.33.
250 Mor. 27.33: “Quia nimirum peccator quisque dum sola quae terrena sunt cogitat, dum cor oppressum infinis cogitationibus gestat, si repente diuinæ gratiae aspiratione tangit; hoc ante omnia intellegit, quod cuncta quae agit disticta aeterni iudicis animaduersione puniantur.”
Such compunction, then, had a sanative effect on the soul, whereby through its tears it washed away the guilt and stain of sin.\textsuperscript{251} This repentance further allowed for the restored contemplative union with God, which again was an activity and grace of the Holy Spirit.

According to Gregory, after eliciting compunction and repentance in the soul, the Holy Spirit then illumined the soul, lifting it above itself and restoring it to contemplative union with God.\textsuperscript{252} In this illumination of the soul, the Holy Spirit lifted the soul above itself and the world, imparting to it an experiential knowledge of the invisible world and God, which conferred upon the soul true judgment and \textit{discretio}.\textsuperscript{253} United to God in the Holy Spirit, the soul then came to be guided and directed by God, just as God had directed and guided the thoughts and writing of the authors of Scripture.\textsuperscript{254} In this way, then, the soul became a vessel and agent of God’s providence in the world and history.

Besides this role of illuminating the soul and uniting it to God, Gregory recognized another distinct role of the Holy Spirit in terms of imparting to the human heart the love and desire for God. Just as the Holy Spirit united the mind to God in contemplation, he likewise united the heart to God in divine love.\textsuperscript{255} One of the principal effects of sin, besides blindness, was attachment to the pleasures of the flesh and visible world. The Holy Spirit overcame this effect of sin by inflaming the heart with divine love such that nothing of the world yielded to the soul any satisfaction.\textsuperscript{256} As Gregory explained, the Holy Spirit was love, and by indwelling in the soul, it naturally imparted to it the love of God and love of

\textsuperscript{251} \textit{Mor.} 9.56, 67; 10.28; 27.39.
\textsuperscript{252} \textit{Mor.} 4.19.
\textsuperscript{253} \textit{Dial.} 4.1; \textit{Mor.} 9.29. Dagens, \textit{Saint Grégoire}, 43, 49-50, 118-23.
\textsuperscript{254} \textit{Mor.} Praef.2; 4.56.
\textsuperscript{255} Gregory explained that in the Holy Spirit illuminating God to the soul, the soul could not fail to love God. See \textit{Mor.} 27.41.
\textsuperscript{256} \textit{Mor.} 5.50; 9.29; 27.32.
neighbor. The stronger the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the more the soul loved God and despised the world. This love conferred stability on the soul, such that it could no longer be swayed by the temptations of the flesh, or even the devil. Thus, this grace of the Holy Spirit was paramount to the saint’s ongoing battle with Satan and his deceits and temptations. By means of the grace of the Holy Spirit, then, the sinner was brought from sin to conversion and ultimately, salvation.

In light of the role Gregory attributed to the Holy Spirit, he conceived conversion and salvation to be the work of God’s grace. Even the smallest of faults, for Gregory, could not be overcome by humans outside the operation of grace. Nevertheless, Gregory did not believe that grace operated independently, or to the exclusion, of human freedom and effort. The grace of the Holy Spirit was efficacious, but its efficacy still utilized human freedom and cooperation. This fact invariably raises the question of how Gregory conceived the relationship between God’s grace and human freedom and effort. While the question of this relationship was not a pressing theological concern in his day, as it had been for Augustine, Gregory did provide an explanation.

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257 Gregory imputed John’s statement that God is Love (1 Jn. 4:16) to the Holy Spirit, such that love defined the very essence of the Holy Spirit as well as his primary effect within the soul. See HEv. 2.30.1.  
258 Mor. 27.42.  
259 HEv. 2.30.2. See also Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 186-87.  
260 Mor. 29.40.  
261 Dail. 3.20.  
262 Gregory believed that the grace imparted by the Holy Spirit was efficacious in illuminating the soul to truth and inducing conversion. As light entirely eradicates darkness where it shines, the Holy Spirit unfailingly illumines the darkness of any heart into which it shines. See Mor. 27.45. Gregory gave the example of Paul in order to illustrate this fact. See Mor. 11.15-16.  
263 Augustine developed and expressed his understanding of the relationship between grace and human freedom in response to a number of controversies that occurred during his tenure as bishop of Hippo. For an account of these controversies, and Augustine’s responses, see Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 1967), 340-407.
The Relationship of Grace and Human Effort

Gregory’s explanation of the relationship between grace and human effort was really an extension of his larger consideration of the relationship between God and creation. As with the rest of creation, human nature was entirely contingent and dependent upon God for its operation. Human nature only functioned as it was designed by means of God’s grace. In fact, humans were created already united to God in contemplation, and thus grace was an essential aspect of their creation. Grace, therefore, did not detract from human activity or effort, but actually contributed to its authentic operation. It was the loss of such grace, due to original sin, that had corrupted human existence, such that it lost its integral unity born of divine contemplation. Like the angels who became deformed into demons due to their separation from God, humans became deformed due to the loss of God through sin. This deformation of nature constituted the need for salvation. Having fallen from their contemplative union with God into the limitations and instability of their own created nature, humans did not have the power within themselves to rise again to God. Without God’s intervention and grace, all humanity was lost.

Due to original sin and its consequent effects, Gregory believed all humans deserved damnation. In the words of Augustine, humanity constituted a massa damnata. Whereas Augustine had located the cause of this human condition within the fracturing of the

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264 Contingency and mutability were the distinguishing characteristics of all created things, including humans. See Mor. 16.45.
265 Gregory explained that Adam was created with the innate contemplation of God already in him, thus defining the ideal of human existence, and ultimately, heaven. See Mor. 9.50; 11.59.
266 Mor. 5.61.
267 Mor. 4.6-10.
268 Mor. 8.31.51; 12.18-19.
269 Mor. 11.12. This fact was also seen in Gregory’s position that all souls, even those of the elect, went to hell prior to the coming of Christ. See Mor. 12.13.
270 Augustine, Simpl. 1.2.16.
human will, or concupiscence, Gregory located it within humanity’s internal blindness and the subsequent domination by Satan.\footnote{Augustine’s and Gregory’s understandings of the effects of original sin in the human person constituted a distinctive difference in their respective theologies. Augustine located the primary effect of original sin within the human will, which, infected with concupiscence, invariably desired and chose the lower goods of the visible world over God. See Augustine, \textit{Simpl.} 1.11.4-5; \textit{Conf.} 8.5.10-11. See also Burns, \textit{Development}, 101-04. While Gregory did speak of concupiscence, he located the primary effect of original sin within the intellect rather than the will. See \textit{Mor.} 4.45-47. Original sin caused a loss of contemplative union with God, which resulted in a darkening of the human intellect such that it could only know the visible world. See \textit{Mor.} 5.61; 8.49. Thus, humans had no choice but to choose the visible world, for that was the only world they knew. Moreover, in such a state, Satan invariably controlled the soul by suggesting sin that the person did not fail to choose. See Mor. 9.103; 15.19; 29.15.} Due to sin, humans had become completely blind to God and the invisible world, and therefore, humans could never seek God unless he first came to them.\footnote{\textit{Dial.} 4.1; \textit{Mor.} 5.3, 52, 61; 6.38; 7.2.} Additionally, sin had left humans completely under the control of the desires of their flesh, which in turn were manipulated and ordered by demons and Satan.\footnote{\textit{Mor.} 4.42; 15.19; 27.50.} Gregory even spoke of Satan adapting and modifying his temptations to suit the particular weaknesses of each individual, so that, without grace, every person irrevocably chose the sin that Satan suggested.\footnote{\textit{Mor.} 2.22, 26; 14.15.} In this condition, humans were slaves to Satan with no possibility of escape except by divine intervention.\footnote{\textit{Mor.} 28.18.} Salvation, therefore, was not something humans could accomplish under the exigencies of their own operation and power, but only by God’s grace.

In light of humanity’s condition resulting from original sin, salvation was entirely a matter of God’s choice.\footnote{\textit{Mor.} 28.18.} If God denied any soul his grace, such a person was still bound
by the effects and punishment of both original sin and personal sin, and thus inevitably ended in the eternal damnation their sins deserved. According to Gregory, God actively chose to allow certain individuals to go to hell by virtue of denying them his grace. On the other side, by giving his grace to a soul, God efficaciously redeemed that person by means of that grace. “Just as no man resists his bountiful gift in calling, so no one can stop his justice in deserting.” Using the example of Paul, Gregory believed that God’s grace efficaciously overcame the blindness and obduracy of any sinner to whom God chose to give his grace, thereby irrevocably leading the soul to conversion, repentance, and salvation. In such fashion, then, Gregory believed God’s grace could actually “compel” individuals to choose him. Thus, salvation was entirely God’s choice and an action of grace.

While God’s grace was efficacious, Gregory adamantly maintained that grace accomplished salvation through human effort. As Gregory related: “Even predestination itself to the eternal kingdom is so arranged by the omnipotent God, that the elect attain it from their own effort.” In speaking about the relationship between grace and human effort, Gregory always gave primacy to grace. “The deed depends on the gift and not the gift on the deed; otherwise, grace would no longer be grace.” God’s grace was always prevenient to any salutary human choice or action. Nevertheless, grace worked by

277 Mor. 11.12; 12.12.
278 By using such verbs as deserere, recedere, and relinquere, Gregory manifested his belief that God actively chose, rather than passively allowed, such souls to go to hell by withdrawing from them. See Straw, Gregory the Great, 138. The example Gregory used to manifest this fact was that of Pharaoh in Ex. 4:21, where God hardened Pharaoh’s heart by not giving him grace. See Mor. 11.13; 29.60; 31.26.
279 Mor. 11.13: “sicut nemo obsistit largitati uocantis, ita nullus obuiat iustitiae relinquentis.”
280 Mor. 11.15-16; 12.20.
281 Hev. 2.36. Gregory here used the word “compelluntur” to speak of this action of grace on the soul.
282 Dial. 1.8: “Nam ipsa quoque perennis regni praedestinatio ita est ab omnipotente Deo disposita, ut ad hoc electi ex labore perueniant....”
283 Dial. 1.4.
284 Hez. 1.9.2. See also Mor. 16.30; “Superna ergo pietas prius agit in nobis aliquid sine nobis ut, subsequente quoque nostro libero arbitrio, bonum quod iam appetimus agat nobiscum, quod tamen per
eliciting and producing a free human response. Grace produced such human cooperation by illumining the mind to the truth, awakening the blinded soul to the reality of the invisible world and God, which upon seeing the soul did not fail to choose. Gregory firmly believed that when sinners were awakened to the truth of their own sinfulness and the terrible judgment of God that awaited them, they would not fail to repent. Fear, in this sense, acted as a prevenient grace.

Even after conversion, grace was needed for each human to complete the good they intended. As Gregory explained, “from the grace of the omnipotent God we can indeed attempt good works, but we cannot complete them if he does not aid what he commands.” Grace was absolutely necessary for any person to choose and accomplish anything meritorious. Only grace freed the soul from the dominion of the flesh and Satan, along with the limitations of its own unaided nature, lifting it to God who supplied the soul with divine

impensam gratiam in extremo iudicio ita rumenerat in nobis, ac si solis processisset ex nobis. Quia enim diuina nos bonitas ut innocentes faciat, praeuenit, Paulus ait: ‘Gratia autem Dei sum id quod sum’ [1 Cor. 15:10]. Et quia eamdem gratiam nostrum liberum arbitrium sequitur, adiungit: ‘Et gratia eius in me uacua non fuit, sed abundantius illis omnibus laborauit.’ . . . Non enim diceret ‘mecum’ si cum praeueniente gratia subsequens liberum arbitrium non haberet. Vt ergo se sine gratia nihil esse ostenderet, ait: ‘Non ego.’ Vt uero se cum gratia operatum esse per liberum arbitrium demonstraret, adiunxit: ‘Sed gratia Dei mecum.’” See also Mor. 24.10.24: “Quia praeueniente diuina gratia in operatione bona, nostrum liberum arbitrium sequitur, nosmetipsi nos liberare dicimur, quia liberanti nos Domino consentimus.”

Here is another occasion where Augustine and Gregory differed in their respective theologies of grace. Augustine had postulated that grace efficaciously produced conversion, in a way not violating human freedom, by means of imparting “voluntary assent.” See Augustine, Simpl. 1.2.21. Grace imparted a desire for God, and insofar as humans always chose what they desired most, grace invariably elicited a free will choice for God. See Augustine, lib. arb. 15.31. Gregory, on the other hand, located the effects of grace primarily in the intellect. Grace illumined the soul to the invisible world and God. See Mor. 9.80; 10.13; 27.33. Such illumination, according to Gregory invariably produced conversion. See Mor. 11.15-16; 27.41. He suggested that grace functioned in a similar fashion to God’s judgment, wherein even the reprobate, when flooded with divine light at God’s judgment, cannot fail to recognize the truth of their own sinfulness. See Mor. 27.45. Moreover, he believed that once spiritual pleasures were experienced by the soul, a natural desire arises in the heart for them, thereby soliciting free choice. See HEv. 36.1.

See Hester, Eschatology, 35.

Mor. 14.40; HEz. 1.9.2: “Sed surgere omnino non posset, nisi in hunc omnipotentis Dei spiritus intrasset, quia ex omnipotentis Dei gratia ad bona opera conari quidem possimus, sed haec implere non possimus, si ipse non adiuuat qui lubet.” This statement, and others like it, were similar to those of Augustine. See Augustine, Conf. 10.29.40.
This infusion of divine grace was neither a violation of human nature or agency, for as displayed in Adam, humans were created to be united to God in contemplation. All created beings, whether angels, humans, or even demons, required divine power to function as they were designed. Nonetheless, this divine power did not act independently of human agency, but only through human freedom and effort.

A helpful illustration of Gregory’s understanding of the relationship between grace and human effort occurred in the second book of Gregory’s Dialogues. Here, Gregory recounted a story of Benedict, wherein he was tempted by Satan to lust by the recollection of a woman he had once seen. As Gregory reported in the story, Benedict was almost overcome by the temptation until grace recalled him to his senses, upon which he jumped into a briar patch dispelling all temptation and thoughts, except that of his immediate pain. As the story related, without grace Benedict was impotent in resisting the temptations of Satan and would have been overcome by evil. Nonetheless, it was his response, jumping into the briar patch, which made the grace completely effective. In this sense, his victory over Satan was attributable to both him and God. “The good that we do is both of God and us, of God

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288 Gregory, in one instance in his Dialogues, spoke of Benedict being drawn up into the contemplation of God, whereby “all the powers of his mind unfolded.” Dial. 4.8: “Qui eandem quoque ascendentem animam intuens, mentis laxato sinu, quasi sub uno solis radio cunctum in suis oculis mundum collectum uidit.” Grace, in this sense, like fuel in a fire, allowed human nature to function as it was designed.

289 Mor. 9.50; 11.59. Humans were created to be united to God in contemplation, according to Gregory, because that is how they were created in Adam. In this sense, divine grace and power were connatural to humans. It was the absence of divine grace, not its operation within humans, which constituted a violation of human nature and agency.

290 This fact resulted from the strict contingency of all created things upon God. Only God kept each thing in existence, and only by his power was created agency enabled to act. Gregory asserted this fact clearly in the case of demons, who by their own power had not the ability to carry out their own evil wills, but had to ask God for the power. See Mor. Praef.7; 2.16-17.

291 Dial. 2.2.

292 Gregory reported that by jumping into the briar patch Benedict’s victory over the temptation was so complete he was never again tempted in this fashion. See Dial. 2.2. Thus, Benedict’s response to the grace added to its effect.
through prevenient grace, of us through the compliance of free will.”293 Thus, as the story indicated, Gregory believed that grace and human effort worked together.

It was only on the condition of this role of human effort that Gregory could speak of human merit. Salutary actions, inasmuch as they derived from both grace and human effort, garnered merit for the human that performed them. As Gregory explained, “Therefore grace precedes and good will follows, that what is a gift of of the omnipotent God provides our merit.”294 It was in this context Gregory spoke about good works and penances, which, while inspired by grace, humans could perform in various degrees in response to the grace given and thus merit different rewards.295 Only on the condition that merit played a role in salvation could Gregory speak of the various levels of rewards and punishments in heaven and hell.296 In fact, given the role Gregory assigned to human merit, he has been mistakenly charged with “Semi-Pelagianism.”297 While effort was always needed, Gregory suggested that the holy man will always think only of his own wickedness and consider the salvation that required his effort a grace.298

**Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to complete the picture of Gregory’s theology of divine providence by explaining its operation in history for the purposes of human salvation. As hopefully demonstrated, Gregory’s understanding of providence in history really derived

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293 Mor. 33.40: “Bonum quippe quod agimus, et Dei est et nostrum; Dei per praeuenientem gratiam, nostrum per obsequentem liberam voluntatem.”
294 HEz. 1.9.2: “Praeueniente ergo gratia et bona voluntate sebsequent, hoc quod omnipotentis Dei donum est fit meritum nostrum.”
295 Citing Matt. 25:42-43, Gregory suggested that human merit and good works were an important part of salvation. See Mor. 15.23; 26.50. Nevertheless, Gregory was careful to indicate that it was only Christ’s crucifixion, and subsequent grace, that allowed human actions to have any merit. See Mor. 9.73.
296 Mor. 4.70; 9.98.
297 Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 272-73. Dagens has suggested that such an accusation misses the true character of Gregory’s understanding of grace and human effort.
298 Mor. 11.51.
from his understanding of God’s providential ordering of creation. Just as God ordered all creation through his created beings, angels, demons, and humans, he likewise ordered history itself by the very same means. As such, history inexorably unfolded in accord with God’s divine plan for salvation, and consequently, like Scripture itself, history had the capacity to reveal God and his providential plans. It was on this supposition that Gregory interpreted history so as to explicate and understand God’s plan of salvation, which he in turn sought to explain to others in his pastoral care.

Gregory explained God’s providential ordering of history in terms of salvation. He believed God ordered all of history for the purpose of human salvation, and as such, salvation was the proper context for interpreting history. Consequently, Gregory’s explanation of salvation was at the same time an explanation of divine providence. In this light, key doctrines of Gregory’s understanding of salvation have been examined so as to explicate, through them, his understanding not only of salvation, but likewise providence itself. In the context of these doctrines, it has been shown that Gregory conceived salvation to be an activity of God’s divine operation and providence, wherein, through Christ, his Church, the Holy Spirit, and grace, God actively ordered certain souls to salvation while relegating others to the damnation their sins deserved. Salvation was thus an activity of God’s choice and grace, but one still requiring human effort. As Gregory conceived it, God actively ordered salvation through human effort, whereby, through grace, he efficaciously accomplished salvation through human freedom.

Having thus far developed and examined Gregory’s theology of divine providence, the remaining chapter of this study will seek to evaluate this notion of divine providence. This evaluation will begin by seeking to manifest the internal coherency of Gregory’s
thought in light of his conception of providence, particularly in terms of his belief in the miraculous. The thesis will be that his understanding of providence functioned as a key notional foundation within his theology and thought, giving structure and system to the rest of his theology. Additionally, some time will be spent explicating and examining a number of ambiguities that can be found within Gregory’s notion of providence. These ambiguities were an important part of his thought on providence, for they manifest clearly the synthesis that Gregory sought to obtain, and at the same time, manifest where that synthesis was lacking. Lastly, Gregory’s understanding of divine providence will be evaluated in terms of its contribution to the ongoing development of the theology of divine providence within the Christian tradition. Here, both the insights and ambiguities of Gregory’s own thought will be shown to have played an important part in the development of Christianity’s conception of divine providence.
CHAPTER 5

AN ASSESMENT OF GREGORY’S THEOLOGY OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

This study began by addressing the question of the place and function of miracles within the thought of Gregory the Great. More than any other aspect of his thought, Gregory’s belief and reports of miracles have proven troublesome to modern historians and commentators. While other aspects of his thought have been highly appreciated, such as his contributions to Christian morality and spirituality, or even his own practical administration as pope, his belief in miracles has typically only garnered him criticism and condemnation.¹ This dissertation has intended address such an evaluation of Gregory’s belief in miracles by considering it within the larger spectrum of his thought. Gregory’s belief in miracles was not an intellectual anomaly or a mere flight into superstition, but an essential expression of his overarching theological perspective.² This dissertation has attempted to show that Gregory’s belief in miracles was an entirely coherent expression of his conception of God’s divine providence.

One of the difficulties encountered in the evaluation of Gregory’s theology, and the place of miracles within it, has been a lack of appreciation for the systematic nature of Gregory’s thought.³ Due to a lack of systematic structure within his theological writings,

¹ See Boglioni, Miracle, 11; Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 18-19; Clark, The ‘Gregorian’ Dialogues, 16-20.
² Carole Straw suggested that Gregory’s belief in miracles was “emblematic” of his larger vision of the world. See Straw, Gregory the Great, 8.
³ Dagens has correctly reported that Gregory is characteristically recognized as not being a systematic theologian, but to malign his theological contribution on this basis, improperly and anachronistically misses the true value of his work and contribution. See Dagens, Saint Grégoire, 21-22. Dagens suggested that, while Gregory might not have been a systematic theologian in the traditional sense, there was an essential unity and coherency to his theology. See Ibid., 25-27.
Gregory has often been inaccurately characterized as an unsystematic theologian. Upon this supposition Gregory’s theology has often been appropriated and evaluated in a fragmentary fashion, examining such things as his moral teaching, spirituality, monastic ideals, or individual theological doctrines, to the exclusion of other aspects of his thought, like miracles, demonic and angelic interventions, the role of the afterlife, or relics and saints. The fact of the matter is that Gregory was a systematic theologian; there was an integral structure and system within his theology that unified all the various ideas and thoughts he expressed. Each aspect of his theology can only be properly appreciated and understood in light of the rest of his thought, that is, the entire system of his theology.

One of the primary intellectual foundations for the entire system of Gregory’s thought and theology was his notion of divine providence. It was his perception and understanding of creation, as well as God’s governance of it, which functioned as the intellectual infrastructure for every aspect of Gregory’s theology. Upon this supposition the present study has sought to explicate and explain Gregory’s theology of providence, both as a vehicle for understanding his notion of miracles, as well as providing for a new appreciation, or rehabilitation, of his entire theology.

This study has sought to identify and explain Gregory’s theology of providence by examining its cosmological and historical features. In the course of this study, the various

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4 See Boglioni, *Miracle*, 11. Francis Clark went as far as to deny Gregory authorship of the *Dialogues*, thereby effectively eliminating many of his miracle stories from his corpus. See Clark, *The ‘Gregorian’ Dialogues*.
5 Evans, *Thought of Gregory*, 55. Gregory is being labeled a systematic theologian, here, not on the basis of the scholastic notion of “systematic,” but upon the idea that there was an integral system, structure, and coherency within Gregory’s thought and theology.
6 Straw has suggested that the only appropriate way to understand any one of Gregory’s ideas is within the context of the larger vision of his thought. See Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 17. Dagens recommended the same approach to Gregory. See Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 27-28.
ideas and themes of Gregory’s notion of providence have been explicated and explained, but to this point, they have not been evaluated in the context of their internal coherence and rationality. The final chapter of this study seeks to accomplish this goal. This evaluation will begin by first synthesizing the various themes and ideas that characterized Gregory’s theology of providence, so as to manifest their inherent order and rationality. Afterwards, attention will be given to places of ambiguity in Gregory’s thought on providence, not so as to diminish the value of his thought, but to manifest how these ambiguities demonstrate the systematic structure of Gregory’s theology. Lastly, Gregory’s theology of divine providence will be considered in terms of its contribution to the ongoing development of the notion of providence within the context of the Christian theological tradition.

A Synthesis of Gregory’s Theology of Providence

Gregory’s theology of divine providence, reflecting the systematic structure of his thought, was organized and structured around a few central ideas and themes. Here, these various themes and ideas will be explicated and explained so as to manifest the rationality and coherence of Gregory’s conception of divine providence. The ideas that will be considered are Gregory’s pastoral purposes in constructing his theology of providence, the mysterious character of God’s providence, the place evil, his recognition of beauty and order in creation, his understanding of the sacramentality of creation, his notion of mediated causality, and lastly, his doctrine of predestination. Afterwards, Gregory’s notion of miracles will be considered in the context of these ideas in order to show how his belief in miracles was a completely coherent manifestation of these central themes of God’s providence.
One of the central aspects of Gregory’s theology of providence, and one that can be easily overlooked, was the pastoral purposes for which it was constructed. While Gregory’s understanding of divine providence was drawn from Scripture and the tradition that preceded him, it was the pastoral needs of his day that gave his theology of providence its particular shape and focus. Gregory, above everything else, was a pastor of souls, and it was the care and salvation of souls that was his utmost priority. As such, all his theological effort, rather than being speculative in nature, was orientated towards the benefit of those souls in his care. His theology of providence was no different.

The world in which Gregory lived was one of great change and distress. Wars, earthquakes, plagues, floods, famine, even changes in government and the economy, were being experienced on a grand scale throughout the Empire, and particularly so within Italy and Rome. Even within the Church itself, heresy, schism, and human sin were all producing considerable discord and conflict. The world and its people were in distress. Gregory’s theology of providence, in a large measure, can be construed as his response to this pervasive experience. His theology of providence was his attempt to explain the events of his day in a way that made them intelligible in light of God’s presence and activity.

Gregory explained that the disasters and devastations of his day were not signs of God’s absence or abandonment, but were clear indications of his presence and concern.

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Gregory’s Dialogues was an excellent example of this fact. It was written in late 593 and early 594, just after the very time in which the Lombards had ransacked Italy and Rome itself was under siege. The miracle stories of the Dialogues showed that God was clearly present and active in Italy during that very time within the activity and miracles of his saints.
They all formed a part of the historical narrative of God’s plan of redemption. The hardships and destruction were *flagella Dei*, divinely appointed chastisements to punish sin and correct his elect. These events were all ordained by God to liberate humanity from a too close attachment to the visible world, which was always crumbling and dissipating. History was intelligible and had meaning in light of God’s presence and activity. Nothing happened, not even destruction and hardship, outside God’s providential will and care. Thus, one of the principal purposes of Gregory’s theology of providence was to give meaning and intelligibility to the difficulties that all were facing in his day. God, according to Gregory, had not abandoned the world, but was actively correcting his children to prepare them for salvation in heaven, their true home and happiness. Gregory’s theology of providence was ultimately a message of solace and hope.

Another pastoral concern for Gregory was to correct the human tendency, resulting from sin, to operate only within the physical and visible realm of creation. Gregory was very conscious of the human propensity to disregard everything except one’s immediate physical needs and desires. The invisible realm, as such, was often forgotten if not outright denied. One of Gregory’s overriding pastoral concerns was to correct such unbelief, or lack of concern, for the invisible realm. He told his miracle stories not to tell tantalizing tales, but to recall his audience to the truth of invisible world’s presence and operation. The invisible

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8 History, insofar as it was a function of God’s providence, constituted a second book of Scripture, having the capacity to reveal God and his plan of redemption no less than Scripture itself. See Evans, *Thought of Gregory*, 46.


10 Gregory, at the start of his fourth book of his *Dialogues*, had a discussion with Peter, Gregory’s interlocuter in the *Dialogues*, about the human propensity not to believe in things that cannot be seen. See *Dial. 4.1-5*. The entire fourth book of the *Dialogues* constituted Gregory’s attempt to prove the reality of the invisible soul in light of the fact that it cannot be visibly seen. In doing so, Gregory manifested the fact that disbelief in the invisible world was a real problem in his time and one that required a pastoral response.
realm constituted the true essence of creation and history, as well as the human person, and as such, the invisible realm was to be the true concern for human life. Gregory attempted to emphasize and extol this fact through his theology of providence, which attributed the ultimate meaning and operation of all things to the invisible realm, rather than the visible.\textsuperscript{11}

Gregory’s theology of providence, again reflecting his pastoral concern, was always orientated towards eliciting conversion in his audience. In his theology of grace, he always maintained the absolute need for human effort in one’s salvation.\textsuperscript{12} Grace always had primacy, but grace only accomplished its ends through human cooperation and effort.\textsuperscript{13} Predestination did not alleviate human responsibility, but rather demanded and accomplished it. It was to elicit such effort that Gregory so frequently recalled to his audiences the strict judgment of God that awaited them upon death.\textsuperscript{14} Fear of hell, particularly the picture of hell painted by Gregory, could be a strong motivation for change. By expounding God’s presence and operation in the world Gregory was not attempting to mitigate the need and role of human action and effort, but rather was providing for its basis. Humans could only fulfill God’s providence in their lives and in the world by turning to God, drawing grace from him, such that by his power they could accomplish his predestined plan in history.

Gregory’s theology of providence, therefore, was his attempt to address the pastoral needs of those in his care. He highlighted those aspects of God’s providential operation in the world that would be a source of solace and hope to those in his care, as well as act as an

\textsuperscript{11} The central tenet of Gregory’s theology of providence was that nothing happened in the visible world outside the influence and operation of the invisible. See \textit{Dial.} 4.5.

\textsuperscript{12} Dagens, \textit{Saint Grégoire}, 272-73.

\textsuperscript{13} Straw, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 140-42.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Mor.} 3.24; 4.26-27; \textit{Ep.} 1.33; 3.29; 13.33.
impetus for conversion. Despite the various meanings of God’s providence that Gregory perceived and described in his literary corpus, he was always aware of the limitations of human perception and understanding. The enlightened mind could certainly draw salutary lessons from God’s operation in history, no less than in Scripture, but God’s judgments and actions were always beyond the scope of humanity’s abilities to comprehend. This fact raises another important element of Gregory’s theology of providence, which is the mysterious and inscrutable character of God’s providence.

**The Mysterious Character of God’s Providence**

One of the central themes that pervaded Gregory’s description of God’s providence was its mysterious character. Due to humanity’s sins and limited perspective, one could never fully understand or judge God’s actions in history. “The abyss of the divine judgments is not at all penetrated by the eyes of the human mind.”¹⁵ This inability to correctly interpret God’s judgments resulted first of all from God’s transcendence, but also from the blindness within human perception resulting from sin.¹⁶ Only divine light and grace provided humans with the ability to perceive and judge correctly and without that light, which humans had lost through sin, they cannot judge anything correctly.

Sin, according to Gregory, had left humans with only their unaided intellect and limited experience by which to understand God, the world, others, and even themselves. As such, humanity was blind. In the first place, humans were blind to themselves, such that they were unable even to judge themselves correctly.¹⁷ In this life, humans never fully knew the judgment they would receive when they stand before God, whether one had sufficiently

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¹⁵ Mor. 29.33; “... quia diuinorum iudiciorum abyssus humanae mentis oculo nullatenus penetratur.”
¹⁶ Mor. 9.19-20.
¹⁷ Mor. 9.51.
atoned their sins, or even fully perceived and acknowledged all their sins.\textsuperscript{18} It was this ambiguity of the sinner before God that was the basis for Gregory’s seemingly endless admonishments to do more penance.

This same blindness pertained to the judgment of others. Just as one never knew one’s own judgment before God, so also one really never knew the status of another. As Gregory explained, who would have ever thought that one of the apostles would be lost, while the repentant thief would be saved.\textsuperscript{19} Likewise, one never knew whether the sufferings another endured in this life were God’s chastisements for their sins, or if God was merely adding to their glory in heaven by their innocent suffering.\textsuperscript{20} Gregory warned never to judge another, for that was the mistake Job’s friends made and they paid a heavy penalty.\textsuperscript{21}

Gregory attributed this same blindness to humans in their attempt to know God and understand his judgments within history.\textsuperscript{22} Just as sin blinded the sinner from the deeper meanings of Scripture, sin left humans unable to properly interpret the world and God’s actions in it.\textsuperscript{23} Such blindness was characterized by the attempt to interpret the world and God by own’s own experience, rather than by the truth that only God’s light could provide.\textsuperscript{24} It was not only sin that left humans blind before God’s judgments, as Gregory explained, but God so transcended his creation and humans that they could never fully comprehend his judgments and actions within history.\textsuperscript{25} The elect would spend an eternity in heaven

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{18} Mor. 5.12. \\
\textsuperscript{19} Mor. 29.33. \\
\textsuperscript{20} Mor. 11.27; 15.49. \\
\textsuperscript{21} Mor. 15.67. \\
\textsuperscript{22} Mor. 27.61. \\
\textsuperscript{23} Mor. 15.16. \\
\textsuperscript{24} Mor. 12.36. \\
\textsuperscript{25} Mor. 27.5-8.
\end{flushright}
contemplating God without ever exhausting him, and so in this life, one could never expect anything beyond a partial and tenative understanding.  

In light of humanity’s limitations and inherent blindness, Gregory recommended that the proper disposition before God and his providence was one of reverence and faith, rather than questions.  

The acts of our Maker ought always to be reverenced without examining, for they can never be unjust. For to seek a reason for his secret counsel is nothing else than to erect one’s self in pride against his counsel.  

Rather than subject the judgments of God to humanity’s own limited rationality and perception, which was an activity of human pride, Gregory advised humans to subject their own rationality to faith. One must accept by faith, according to Gregory, that all God did was just. Despite such admonitions, Gregory himself often attempted to make sense of God’s actions within history, particularly so in the case of perceived evils.

**The Place of Evil in God’s Providence**

One of the most salient and effective aspects of Gregory’s theology of providence was his explanation of evil. The existence of evil has always been a profound conceptual difficulty for any Christian theology of providence. If God truly is good and orders all things, the question naturally arises as to why he would allow evil to exist. Such questions would have naturally occurred in Gregory’s day, as a response to the many disasters and hardships experienced by so many during his tenure as pope. In fact, his explanation of evil,

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26 *Mor.* 9.17.  
27 *Dial.* 4.27.  
29 *Mor.* 6.19; *Ep.* 1.26.  
30 *Mor.* 15.61; 32.7.  
31 This question had been acutely experienced by Augustine in his intellectual journey to Christianity. See Augustine, *Conf.* 7.5.7.
rather than comprising a philosophical theodicy, should be interpreted as his pastoral response to these very questions.\(^\text{32}\)

Gregory’s explanation of evil, like Augustine before him, was to suggest that evil really had no existence in itself, but occurred due to a disruption of the good that God did create.\(^\text{33}\)

Not that evil, which does not subsist by its own nature, is created by the Lord, but the Lord shows himself as creating evil, when the good thing founded turns into an evil by stricking us in a scourge.\(^\text{34}\)

According to Gregory, God did not create evil inasmuch as evil had no real being. Evil only entered into God’s good creation through the action of created freedom, whether angelic or human, when they disrupted creation’s order by desiring and choosing lesser goods over God.\(^\text{35}\) Evil was thus construed by Gregory as a disruption or privation of God’s created order.\(^\text{36}\) Ironically, while evil constituted a privation of order, in Gregory’s schema of providence, evil was still ordered by God.

While God did not create evil, given its entry into creation, God still actively ordered it such that it always accorded with his will. He did this by ordering the agents of evil within creation, which were demons and humans. When Satan and his demons fell from their initial contemplative union with God, they still retained their angelic natures, which gave them power over all that was ontologically lower, including humans.\(^\text{37}\) By nature, they had the capacity to move and change the physical world, effect miracles, and even direct the

\(^{\text{32}}\) See Hester, *Eschatology*, 55.

\(^{\text{33}}\) Augustine had previously explained evil in the very same way. See Augustine, *civ. Del*. 12.6.

\(^{\text{34}}\) Mor. 3.15: “*Neque enim mala quae nulla sua natura subsistunt, a Domino creantur; sed creare se mala Dominus indicat, cum res bene conditas nobis male agentibus in flagellum format.*”

\(^{\text{35}}\) Gregory provided a very good description of this process of sin in humans, see *Ep*. 8.37.

\(^{\text{36}}\) Mor. 3.15-16.

\(^{\text{37}}\) Mor. 2.4.
thoughts, desires, and activities of humans. Nevertheless, while they had these powers by nature, their own natures were entirely contingent upon God such that they could only do, by nature, that which God gave them to do. Satan and his demons actually had to ask God for the power to inflict any evils on humans. In such fashion, then, they could only accomplish the evil they desired insofar as it was allowed by God. Therefore, while evil was never directly willed by God, it still always accorded with his will, such that the evil done accorded with God’s justice and his providential plans. “Hence it comes to pass in a marvellous fashion, that even that, which is done without the will of God, is not contrary to the will of God.” Satan, in his prideful rebellion against God, served God no less than the other angels who did not rebel.

By virtue of God’s ordering of the actions of Satan and demons, he likewise ordered the actions of wicked and sinful humans. Sinful humans, by giving themselves over to sin and the desires of the flesh, were completely controlled by Satan, who directed all their actions by suggesting those sins he wanted accomplished. In essence, there existed an evil providence within creation, wherein Satan guided and ordered all the evil that was done by humans. Humans, in their own blindness and self-delusion, thought themselves to be acting independently and freely, but invariably did that which Satan directed them to do.

Nevertheless, insofar as Satan was controlled and ordered by God, being only able to do what

38 Mor. 2.25; 27.50.
39 Gregory recorded in his commentary on Job that Satan actually had to ask for the power to tempt and afflict Job. While God gave Satan this power, he set limits to it, only allowing Satan to do that which God himself willed to be done. See Mor. 2.16-22.
40 Mor. 8.43; 14.46; 16.47.
41 Mor. 6.33: “Vnde miro modo fit ut et quod sine ulontate Dei agitur, ulontati Dei contrarium non sit....”
42 The ultimate example of this fact occurred when Satan tried to destroy God’s plans by killing Christ, which in turn, fulfilled God’s very plan for salvation. See Mor. 17.30; HEv. 1.5.2.
43 Mor. 9.44; 13.12; 15.19.
44 Mor. 29.15.
God provided for, God himself was ultimately the one who ordered and directed the evil done. Even humans, in their attempts to do evil, still invariably fulfilled God’s providential plans.  

In light of God’s ultimate control over evil, Gregory believed that the evils experienced within the world served very important purposes within God’s providential plan. In the first place, evils were the natural consequence of sin, by which God manifested the natural consequences of evil. Gregory believed all the various evils that humans experienced, whether hunger or thirst, heat or cold, sickness or death, were all the natural consequence of sin. It was fitting and just, according to Gregory, that God would use the very consequences of sin as a means of punishment for sin. While the experience of evil was a natural result and punishment of sin, Gregory also recognized many other purposes for evil within God’s providential ordering of creation.

Gregory believed that the experience of evils was not only God’s just punishment of sin, but also an expression of his mercy. God used such evils to correct the elect and purge them of their sins.

But that every elect soul may escape eternal woe, and the poor mount up to everlasting glory, he ought to wear himself away by continual scourges inasmuch as he wants to be found purified at judgment. For we are daily led downwards by the weight of our infirmity, but that by the wonderful hand of our maker we are relieved through succoring stripes.

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45 Gregory gave many examples from Scripture to substantiate this fact, such as Joseph being sold into slavery in Egypt, Jonah being swallowed by the fish, and even Jesus’ own death. See Mor. 6.28-32.
46 HEv. 2.36: “”
47 Mor. 4.68; 13.36; Ep. 8.37.
48 Gregory believed that God allowed evils to occur not only to justly punish sin, but also to mercifully correct those whom he wanted to redeem. See Mor. 10.24.
49 Mor. 6.39: “Sed ut electus quisque aeterna supplicia euadat et ad perennem gloriam pauper ascendat, debet his assiduis flagellis utteri quatenus in iudicio ualeat purgatus inueniri. Ipso namque infirmitatis nostrae pondere deorsum cotidie ducimur, nisi mira manu artificis per subuenientia flagella releuemur.”
Like the purification of gold, God mercifully bestowed hardships and suffering on his elect so that, by such chastisements, they made atonement for their sins and were made ready for heaven. “For his elect he is studious to wipe off by temporal afflictions those spots of wickedness, which he would not behold in them forever.” Such afflictions, as Gregory explained, were that of a loving father scourging and correcting the sons that he loved. Suffering and hardships, therefore, were not merely punitive, but pedagogical and purgative as well.

Besides purging souls of their sins, the evils humans experienced had a number of other beneficial effects. First of all, pain and suffering produced a salutary fear of God and his just punishments, thereby preventing future sins. Additionally, by experiencing evils in the visible, physical world, particularly within one’s own body, humans were turned inwards to their souls, and from there to the invisible world and God. As Gregory noted of the “prodigal son” in Luke 15:11-32, “because only after he lost the earthly things he desired, he then began to think of spiritual things.” Thus, whereas sin rendered the soul captive to the flesh, suffering in the flesh liberated the soul. Another notable effect of the experience of evil, as outlined by Gregory, was that when such evils were experienced by the innocent they gained heavenly merit as a result. Gregory suggested that at times God withdrew himself from his elect, thereby rendering them vulnerable to the attacks and temptations of the

50 Mor. 16.32.39.
51 Mor. 9.54: “Ab electis enim suis iniquitatum maculas studet temporali afflictione tergere, quas in eis in perpetuum non uult uidere.”
52 Gregory, here, was interpreting the experience of evils in light of Heb. 12:6, wherein God was said to scourge the sons he loved. See Mor. 9.45.68; 14.30.35; 15.33.39.
53 Mor. 6.42; 29.28. See also Hester, Eschatology, 81.
54 Ep. 11.18.
55 HEv. 2.36.7: “… quia postquam terrenis rebus indiguit, tunc cogitate coepit quid de spiritibus amisit.”
56 Ep. 13.24. Hester has suggested that Gregory drew this idea from the Neo-Platonic tradition within Christianity. See Hester, Eschatology, 105-6.
God did this to his elect so that, through such trials and temptation, they would gain greater merit in heaven. In light of these goods that God brought about through the experience of evil, Gregory suggested that the proper disposition towards the evils all encountered was one of patience.  

In Gregory’s explanation of God’s providential ordering of evil, he not only explained why bad things happen to good people, but perhaps even more puzzling, he explained why good things happen to the evil. Giving voice to this quandry, Gregory stated:

> 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?

Gregory suggested that there were two reasons why God gave good things to the evil. First, God gave them good things in the attempt to convert them to himself, and if that failed, these good things served to justify his condemnation of them. In fact, the more goods he gave to a soul in this life, if they were rejected, the more he would punish that soul in the life to come. Thus, Gregory advised viewing such perceived goods and evils in a different light. Earthly goods are denied to the elect in this life because the physician never allows sick people for whom there is hope of recovery all the things they desire. To the reprobate, however, are granted all the good things which they seek in this life, because nothing which they desire is denied to the sick whose recovery is despaired. Let the just consider well the evils that await the wicked and let them never envy a happiness that comes to an end. Why should their joys be desired, for while the just are journeying to the fatherland of salvation along a rough path, the wicked are, as it were, traveling to the pit through pleasant meadows?

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57 The classic example Gregory utilized to manifest this fact of God’s providence was Job. See Mor. 23.1; 24.45.
58 Mor. 32.5.
59 Mor. 29.77: “Quis intellegat quae esse ratio secretorum potest, quod saepe vir iustus a iudicio non solum non vindicatus, sed etiam punitus redeat; et iniquus eius adversarius non solum non punitus, sed etiam victor abscedat?”
60 Mor. 10.54; 24.5-6.
61 Mor. 16.18.
62 Mor. 21.8: “Negantur electis in hac uita bona terrena, quia et aegris, quibus spei uiuendi est, nequaquam a medico cuncta quae appetunt conceduntur. Dantur autem reprobis bona quae in hac uita
Thus, to truly understand God’s providential judgments within creation, according to Gregory, they must be viewed from the perspective of eternity. Supposed goods may really result in eternal evils, while supposed evils might result in eternal goods.\(^6\) From such an eternal perspective, then, a distinct order and even beauty could be discerned within God’s providential government of his creation. This beauty and order in God’s providence constituted yet another central theme of Gregory’s theology of providence.

**The Beauty and Order of God’s Providence**

Characteristic of Gregory’s perception of creation, and God’s divine government within it, was his recognition of a distinct order and rationality, a beauty, which defined each aspect of creation and its operation. Despite the chaos and devastations that Gregory daily experienced in the world around him, he retained a certain optimism and hopefulness in his perception of the world. God ruled the universe, and despite the malicious activity of evil spirits, human weakness and pride, wars, plagues, heresy, and schism, creation and history retained a certain order and beauty that reflected God’s government.

Gregory recognized this beauty and order of God’s providence both on the cosmological level as well as historically. Cosmologically, this order and beauty in creation was a function of its hierarchical structure. God created a universe of beings diverse in rank, dignity, and function, so that by means of this diversity, the universe might function as a harmonious whole.\(^6\) Gregory did not conceive the hierarchies defining God’s creation as

\(^6\) *Mor.* 14.7.

\(^6\) *Mor.* 4.55.
comprised of rigid authoritarianism, wherein the higher ranks of beings dominated the lower. Rather, just as he conceived the Church, and even his own role as pope, hierarchy was ordered to service. Beings of different ranks and qualities were created by God such that each could serve the other, thereby producing a universe that functioned harmoniously in its very diversity. In this way the universe manifested a richly ordered and complex beauty, reflecting God’s own innate depth and beauty. Humans would spend all eternity contemplating God without ever exhausting him, and therefore, it was fitting that he should create a world that reflected his own inexhaustible beauty, order, and rationality.

Historically, the beauty and order of God’s providential care were manifested in a delicate balance struck between his justice and mercy, wherein he was mercifully just and justly merciful. This balance was made operative in history through Christ, who subjected himself to the just punishment of sin so as to mercifully redeem the elect. Penance, in a similar fashion, fulfilled these two precepts in the lives of the elect. By justly punishing their sins in this life, they experienced God’s mercy in the next. Gregory believed God’s justice and mercy functioned as the very laws of history, giving shape and meaning to each event. Each and every historical event manifested these two aspects of God, his mercy redounding in his elect and his justice fulfilled in the reprobate. Disease, hardships, and calamities were all merciful condescensions to his elect to free them from sin and gain them merit, while the same difficulties were inflicted on the reprobate as the just punishment due their sins. Even

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65 As previously explained, Gregory conceived his role as pope to be the “servant of the servants of God.” See Ep. 1.38. He believed authority and power were to be principally ordered to service, a service characterized by self-sacrifice and humility. This fact was eminently manifested by Christ himself, whom, as God, became human to serve and redeem humanity.

66 Gregory believed that creation itself spoke to its Creator, manifesting in its own structure and design something of God’s own being. See Mor. 26.17-18.

67 Dial. 4.11.

68 Mor. 32.9. See also Hester, Eschatology, 87-94.

69 Mor. 6.43; 6.48; 10.12.
heaven and hell reflected this delicate balance of justice and mercy. Heaven was the gift God mercifully bestowed upon his elect redeemed by his grace, while hell was the just condemnation of those God left in their sins. Thus, all of history was harmoniously structured and ordered by God to accord with his mercy and justice.

In such fashion then, the beauty, order, and harmony that characterized creation manifested its Creator. Creation, according to Gregory, revealed its Creator. This fact constituted another distinctive element of Gregory’s perception of divine providence. He believed all creation, inasmuch as it was governed and ordered by God, intrinsically revealed God in its very structure and operation. As such, creation and history were sacraments of God, at all times revealing his presence and operation.

**The Sacramentality of Creation and History**

For Gregory, that which was really real within creation, that which had ontological weight, was the invisible world. The visible world, on the other hand, was unstable and continually dissipating into nothingness, a fact Gregory keenly experienced in the world around him. Despite its inherent weakness and dissipation, the visible world retained a certain order and beauty by means of the presence and operation of the invisible world. Rationally united to God, the invisible world stood at the apex of creation and gave shape and meaning to all beneath it, and in a particular way, to the visible world. All that took place within the physical, visible realm was a manifestation of this underlying activity of the invisible, and as such, the visible world functioned as a sacramental manifestation of the

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70 In his *Dialogues*, Gregory responded to the often asked question of how eternal punishment in hell could accord with God’s justice. Gregory’s answered that if a sinner lived eternally they would eternally choose sin, and therefore, it was fitting and just that they should be eternally punished for sin they would eternally chose if allowed. See *Dial.* 4.45.

71 *Mor.* 11.46.
activity of the invisible.\textsuperscript{72} The visible world was a sacramental allegory, which at all times manifested the invisible world, no less than the human body manifested the invisible soul.\textsuperscript{73}

Gregory’s explanation of this sacramental character of creation was not a theoretical enterprise, but relied upon a number of analogies and allegories. Gregory allegorically compared creation to the sun, which, while it cannot be looked at directly, was still known by how it illuminated the world.\textsuperscript{74} In a similar fashion Gregory used the analogy of the human soul and body, wherein the soul could not be seen directly, but was still perceived through its effects and operation within the body.\textsuperscript{75} Likewise, while God and the invisible world could not be seen directly, they were known by their effects within the world. As Gregory explained:

\begin{quote}
Therefore from these corporeal and external things, interior and spiritual ones are gathered, so that by that which is public to us we ought to pass over to the secret thing that is in us and hides within us.\textsuperscript{76}
\end{quote}

The visible world then, while being a source of temptation and so separation from God, sacramentally revealed God and the invisible world, and as such, could be a vehicle of return to God.\textsuperscript{77}

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\textsuperscript{72} Dagens, \textit{Saint Grégoire}, 223; McCready, \textit{Signs of Sanctity}, 258; Boglioni, \textit{Miracle}, 66. It is important to note that, for Gregory, creation did not just symbolically represent God’s presence and activity, but creation acted as an ontological manifestation of God’s activity. Creation’s manifestation of God was not merely an act of symbolism or human intellection, but was grounded in the very structure of creation itself. See \textit{Mor}. 26.17-18.
\textsuperscript{73} This idea constituted the thesis of Carole Straw’s book. See Straw, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 47-48.
\textsuperscript{74} HEv. 2.30.
\textsuperscript{75} Gregory, in essence, spent the entirety of Book IV of his \textit{Dialogues} explaining this fact, attempting to give proof that while the soul is not seen, it is not for that reason any less real. Visions, excursions into the afterlife, and even the post-death dissipation of the body, were all used to prove the existence of the soul. See particularly \textit{Dial}. 4.1-5.
\textsuperscript{76} Mor. 11.8: “\textit{Ex istis ergo corporalibus et exterioribus, interiora et spiritalia colligenda sunt, ut per id quod in nobis publicum est transire debeamus ad secretum quod in nobis est et nosmetipsos latet}.”
\textsuperscript{77} Mor. 26.18.
\end{flushright}
Inasmuch as creation revealed God, Gregory at times compared it to Scripture itself. Just as Scripture was written by God, and so had deeper spiritual meanings beyond the literal and historical, creation and history had the same deeper spiritual meanings. God was the author of history no less than that of Scripture, and therefore, like Scripture, history could be read so as to perceive this spiritual operation of God. The ultimate meaning of creation and history, then, was its spiritual significance, the meanings imbued in it by God. This same sacramental view of creation and history was the intellectual foundation for Gregory’s understanding of the pedagogical value of the saints, miracles, the Mass, and even Christ.

One of the great difficulties for perceiving the presence of the invisible world, and its operation in the world, was human sin. Sin invariably blinded and corrupted human perception so that it only perceived the visible. Consequently, for the invisible to be perceived once again, this human blindness had to be broken through and overcome. It was in this context that Gregory spoke of the role of the saints, miracles, Christ, Mass, and even such things as statues and art works. Besides acting as models for imitation, the saints had the capacity to manifest the invisible world through their virtues and miracles. Their lives reflected the abiding presence of the invisible world and God, and so by reflecting on their lives one was invariably led to the invisible world they manifested. Christ, in the same way, manifested God and the invisible in all he said and did, and most powerfully, in his

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78 Dial. 1.9.
80 Evans, *Thought of Gregory*, 46.
82 *Mor*. 27.16-17.
resurrection. In the Mass also, in a particularly exemplary fashion, the invisible and visible merged, such that the invisible Christ was once again made visible and corporeally present. Gregory even attributed a similar function to art work, which, particularly to the uneducated, had the capacity to reveal the very invisible world it depicted. Thus, while the visible and corporeal world was the source of sin, it at the same time could be a way of return to God.

**Gregory’s Conception of Mediated Causality**

The reason that creation and history could serve as a sacrament of God, according to Gregory, was that visible creation at all times manifested the activity invisible creation. This fact resulted from the way that God governed and providentially ordered creation and history. Within Gregory’s cosmological schema, God, utilizing a hierarchy of beings, ordered visible creation by means of the invisible, and as such, the visible was a continuous manifestation, a sacrament, of the invisible and God. This mode of government by God resulted from Gregory’s belief in the strict contingency of all creation upon God for its being and operation.

In Gregory’s mind, there were only two existing things: God and creation. Each was distinguished from the other on the basis of ontological stability. God, being the source of his own being and subsistence, was defined by his own inherent eternity and immutability. Creation was entirely dependent upon God for its existence and operation, and consequently,

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84 *Dial.* 4.60.
85 *Ep.* 9.209; 11.10.
86 *Mor.* 5.63.
was defined by its own intrinsic instability and contingency upon God. While distinct from and beyond creation, God still ordered every aspect of its operation.

For that power by which he created all things without compulsion, and without oversight presides over all things, and without labor sustains all things, and governs without being busied, he also corrects without emotion and so forms human minds to that which he wants, so that he does not move into the darkness of diversity from his unchangeable light.

How God accomplished this providential ordering, while still retaining his impassible and eternal nature as God, constituted the crux of Gregory’s theology of providence.

God, in a first instance, ordered creation by virtue of its complete contingency. Each created thing had existence and operation only to the degree it was granted and ordered by God. Gregory recognized no independent and subsistent natures in creatures; the operation of each thing was immediately dependent upon God. While each thing that God created had distinct qualities and capabilities, that is, distinct natures, these created natures had no stable existence and operation outside their relationship to God. This fact was clearly witnessed in the example of demons and sinful humans. In the case of demons, they were created angels, but due to separating themselves from God, they became corrupted into demons, having an existence and function completely different than their original constitution. Likewise, when humans sinned and divorced themselves from their contemplative union with God, they came to exist and function in a completely different manner than in their original creation. Demons and sinful humans still retained the capacities and abilities with which they were created, but the actual function of these abilities was completely different. In each case,

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87 Mor. 16.45.
88 Mor. 3.4: “Illa enim uis quae absque necessitate omnia creauit et sine despectu omnibus praesidet, et sine labore cuncta sustentat, et sine occupatione regit, etiam sine commotione corrigit sicque humanas mentes ad ea quae voluerit flagellis format, ut in diuerstitatis umbram a suae incommutabilitatis luce non transeat.
89 Mor. 4.6-10.
90 Mor. 5.61; 12.19.
whether angels or demons, sinners or saints, God only gave each thing existence and the power to operate in such a way that each fulfilled his providential plans. The consequence of this fact was that each thing invariably fulfilled God’s providence in its very being and operation.

Another eminently important ramification of Gregory’s distinction between God and creation, and creation’s complete contingency upon God, was that Gregory did not conceptually distinguish between primary and secondary causality. While Gregory recognized God as the first cause, the cause of all causes, he did not allow for a distinct secondary causality in creation. Each created thing’s existence and function was completely dependent upon God, and therefore, had no distinct operation outside God. This fact was witnessed to by Gregory time and again as he interpreted each event in history, and each thing in creation, in light of its meaning in God rather than in itself. Rather than distinguishing between primary and secondary causality, Gregory operated from a perspective that will be called “mediated causality,” which constituted Gregory’s explanation of how God ordered change without himself being changed.

While God existed beyond creation, he still actively ordered creation, such that everything that occurred in creation accorded to his will. God accomplished this divine government of creation, not directly, as that would invariably connect him to the mutability inherent in creation, but indirectly. As Gregory explained, God governed creation by creation itself. Utilizing its hierarchical structure, he ordered one part by the other. Creation was composed of different ranks and levels of beings, each having distinct

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93 Mor. 6.33.
94 Mor. 4.55.
characteristics and abilities, such that God ordered creation from the top downwards, using the higher aspects of creation, the rational and visible, to govern and order the lower, the visible and corporeal. Rational beings, in this way, were used by God as the very agents of his providence within creation.

Spiritual beings, namely angels and human souls, were inherently rational, and by virtue of their rational minds, had the capacity to be joined to God in contemplation. In such contemplation God revealed to them his divine will, which he then empowered these rational spirits to fulfill in creation. As Gregory explained:

From such observations we begin to realize that in this visible world, too, nothing can be achieved except through invisible forces. Almighty God, then, with his breath and immanent power imparts life and movement to invisible, rational beings, which in their turn give movement and sensation to visible bodies of flesh and blood.95

In such fashion, then, God governed and ordered creation through the invisible and rational aspects of creation itself. Such ordering was not a function of either primary or secondary causality, but a type of mediated causality wherein rational, spiritual beings drew from God all they needed to order the world on his behalf.96 In other words, God ordered creation through his angels and saints.

95 Dial. 4.5: “Qua ex re pensandum est, quia in hunc quoque mundum uisibilem nihil nisi per creaturam invisibilem disponi potest. Nam sicut omnipotens Deus, aspirando uel inplendo, ea quae ratione subsistunt et uiiificat et mouet invisibilia, ita ipsa quoque invisibilia inplendo mouent atque sensificant carnalia corpora quae uidentur.”

96 This notion of mediated causality was not unique to Gregory, but was a consistent part of patristic theology, which shared with Gregory the basic distinction between creator and creation rather than natural and supernatural. What was different about Gregory was the degree he utilized this principle to explain every aspect of God’s government of creation. A good comparison is between Gregory and Augustine. Augustine had suggested a similar type of mediated causality, but in doing so, he gave greater weight to secondary causality. For example, in De Trinitate, he suggested that God illumined the minds of human and angels, which they then used to order creation, which was a type of mediated causality. Nevertheless, humans and angels, acting upon that illumination, utilized their own secondary causality. See Augustine, Trin. 3.1.7-11. Gregory maintained that God not only illumined the minds of humans and angels, but even gave them the ability to act upon such illuminations. Their power and agency was attributed, by Gregory, more to God than to their own distinct, created natures. Thus, for Gregory, there was no real distinction between primary and secondary causality, but only mediated causality.
Angels and saints functioned as the agents of God’s providence, mediating and effecting his order and divine plan within the rest of creation. Angels, in a particular way, were responsible for governing the visible, physical universe on God’s behalf, ordering the rest of creation to accord with his divine will. Using a modern analogy, angels functioned similarly to the very laws of nature, governing and guiding each aspect of creation and giving it its own proper structure and order. The saints served a similar function within God’s providence, mediating his order and government within history. United to God in interior contemplation, the saints received both knowledge of God’s will and power to accomplish his will in the world and history. God, therefore, without change, communicated to the angels and saints both his will and power, by which they, through change, then effected his providential government within creation. Angelic and human natures were created for this purpose, and as such, acting as God’s mediators within creation never violated their natural constitution or freedom, but constituted its fulfillment.

This same understanding of mediated causality was the basis for Gregory’s description of salvation. Gregory believed salvation was predestined by God, such that he chose to save certain humans while allowing others to experience the damnation their sins deserved. While such salvation was predestined by God, it still ultimately accorded with human freedom. Due to sin, human nature had been deformed in its separation from God so

97 Mor. 2.3, 9, 38; 9.26.
98 Mor. 2.11; 27.56-57. In this contemplative union, God communicated his own divine power to the saints so that they could then accomplish his commands within creation, such as having power over visible creation (Dial. 1.2), ordering non-rational creatures (Dial. 1.9), and even changing the natures and properties of physical elements (Dial. 1.5).
99 Grace and nature were never opposed within Gregory’s theological perspective. Rather, nature only functioned as it was designed by grace, as witnessed in God’s initial creation of Adam. See Mor. 9.50; 11.59. As such, angelic and human natures were designed to act with God’s grace and power. This fact explains why Gregory spoke of the saint’s ability to perform miracles as both coming from God as well as from their own power. See Dial. 1.9; 2.8.
100 Mor. 11.13.
that it only had the capacity to sin. When God left such souls in their corrupted state, their inherent freedom invariably chose sin and so damnation.\textsuperscript{101} God effectively predestined their damnation by not redeeming them. On the other hand, God communicated his grace to those souls he chose to save, such that being reunited to God by means of grace they invariably chose God in their freedom.\textsuperscript{102} In either case the person freely chose their end, but in the case of salvation, God’s grace empowered human freedom to choose salvation. Grace, in essence, empowered nature such that it could choose the very end for which it was made. Here, again, God mediated his power to created beings, or denied it, such that that his will was invariably accomplished.

This mode of ordering the world safeguarded two essential aspects of Gregory’s theology of providence: God did not change and rational spirits were free. By virtue of mediated causality, God never directly acted in creation, except in the case of his Incarnation in Christ.\textsuperscript{103} Rather, created beings drew from God, in their contemplation of him, all they were to do and accomplish on his behalf within creation. All change, therefore, occurred on the side of creation rather than in God. Moreover, all that these created spirits did in creation they did freely. They chose freely to do all that God commanded them to do within creation, and thus, providence was achieved through the free actions of created beings.\textsuperscript{104} This fact of God’s government constituted the basis for another central element of Gregory’s theology of providence, which was his doctrine of predestination.

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{101} \textit{Mor.} 11.12.
\item \textsuperscript{102} \textit{Mor.} 8.51; 12.18-19.
\item \textsuperscript{103} Even in the Incarnation, however, Gregory did not impute change to God. Rather, Gregory seemed to suggest that in his divinity, Christ experienced no real change or suffering. Such change and suffering pertained to his humanity rather than his divinity. See \textit{Mor.} 3.16; \textit{Ep.} 10.21.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Straw, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 140.
\end{enumerate}
Gregory’s Doctrine of Predestination

At the very heart and center of Gregory’s entire perception of divine providence was his belief that God controlled and ordered all things. Everything that happened in creation and history, according to Gregory, was a function of God’s providence. This fact was reflected in his doctrine of predestination. He stated:

Of the things that occur to men in this world, none come to pass without the secret counsel of almighty God. For God, foreseeing all things that follow, before the ages decreed how they would be ordered in the ages.105

Even within the cosmological operation of creation itself, as Gregory explained, nothing happened outside God’s sovereign dictate.106 As such, all that occurred was predestined by God. Who would be saved and who damned,107 the length of life of each person,108 even Christ’s Incarnation and death,109 all were written by God in his eternal and predestined plan. The fact of God’s predestination was certainly not unique to Gregory, but had been a consistent characteristic of Christian providential theory, resulting from the Christian notion of God.110 Christianity, as Gregory himself witnessed, held God to be eternal and impassible, existing beyond the circuit of creation.111 Consequently, standing outside of time, God saw all of history in his one eternal gaze.112 All of history, the beginning and the end, were eternally known to God. He saw the elect already with him in eternity and the

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105 Mor. 12.2: “Nulla quae in hoc mundo hominibus fiunt absque omnipotentis Dei occulto consilio ueniunt. Nam cuncta Deus secutura praeciens, ante saecula decreuit qualiter per saecula disponantur.”
106 Mor. 2.25.
107 Mor. 11.13-16.
108 Mor. 12.58.
109 Mor. 3.14-16.
110 Augustine himself, from whom Gregory drew much of his theology, also supported a doctrine of predestination very similar to that of gregory. See civ. Dei. 4.9.
111 Mor. 10.14-15.
112 Mor. 9.72.
reprobate already in hell. Even God’s response to such things as prayer was already a predetermined part of history. From God’s perspective, all the exigencies of history were a completed story.

This understanding of God’s predestination was the conceptual and interpretive basis for Gregory’s entire historical perspective. Inasmuch as all of history was foreordained by God, history itself constituted a written book. Only on this condition could the figures of the Old Testament serve as types for future ones. Prophesy itself, with its ability to predict the future, was likewise based upon the same understanding of history. The prophet, imbued with God’s own perception, could see the future already written in God’s eternity. Gregory’s eschatological perspective, which distinctively colored his entire theology, was also grounded in the same perspective of history. Gregory could interpret the events of his day as signs of the impending eschatological end only because the story was already scripted. God’s predestination, then, was a one of the distinguishing characteristics of Gregory’s entire theology of providence.

An important aspect of Gregory’s notion of predestination was that it was not merely a function of God’s foreknowledge, but resulted from God’s active ordering of creation and history. God’s providence was not so much the result of his omniscience as it resulted from his omnipotence. As Gregory explained, while God existed outside time and the changes of

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113 Mor. 2.40; 3.31.
114 Mor. 12.2.
115 Straw, Gregory the Great, 137. See Mor. 28.14.
116 Gregory gave expression to this notion of prophesy in an account he gave of Saint Benedict, wherein Benedict was elevated above creation to perceive history from God’s perspective and thereby know the future. See Dial. 2.14; 4.8.
117 Gregory, in many places throughout his corpus, interpreted the events of his day as the fulfillment of the predicted signs of the eschatological end of the world. See Ep. 5.93; 7.28; 9.232; 10.21; HEv. 1.1.1; HEz. 2.6; Dial. 4.43.
history, he actively ordered all the changes of history in time.\textsuperscript{118} God, according to
Gregory, did not merely observe all creation from the pristine tower of his impassible
eternity, but actually ordered all things. Gregory believed that God was intimately involved
with his creation, such that he ordered every last detail of its operation. While God existed
outside time, he ordered every aspect of creation in time by means of his created agents,
angels, demons, and humans.\textsuperscript{119} Predestination and providence were therefore synonymous
for Gregory.

\textit{The Place of Miracles in Gregory’s Thought}

In light of these considerations of Gregory’s theology of providence it is now possible
to evaluate the place and role of miracles within his thought and theology. Gregory’s belief
in miracles, as this study has attempted to show, was not an anomaly within his thought, but a
central expression of his entire theology of providence. The central distinction of Gregory’s
cosmology was still that of the patristic era, between God and creation, rather than the
distinction between natural and supernatural that would define the later Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{120} As
a result of this fundamental distinction everything other than God constituted creation, and
therefore, the invisible world of angels and demons was just as natural and real as the visible
world of humans, animals, and earth. The agency of angels and demons, even the human
soul, were conceptually associated with visible creation rather than God, and so their activity
in creation was no more supernatural than visible agency. In fact, the invisible world
actually had more ontological weight than the visible, for it governed and defined all that was

\textsuperscript{118} Mor. 2.34-35.
\textsuperscript{119} This fact constitutes one of the primary theses this study intended to demonstrate.
\textsuperscript{120} Gregory operated with no clear conception of nature; see McCready, \textit{Signs of Sanctity}, 227. The
distinction between natural and supernatural occurred during the 12\textsuperscript{th} and 13\textsuperscript{th}
perceived in the visible world.\textsuperscript{121} In this context, miracles had a very different sense and meaning to Gregory than they would in the later Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{122}

Inasmuch as the invisible and visible were both essential constituents of creation, in Gregory’s mind, they constituted a single causal order. God’s government and operation in miracles was no different than his operation in normal everyday creation.\textsuperscript{123} As Gregory explained, God was just as present and operative in the growing of an acorn into a tree as he was in the resurrection of the body.\textsuperscript{124} All of creation was in this sense miraculous.\textsuperscript{125} The difference between miracles and normal events, for Gregory, was not their ontological distinction, but a pedagogical one. Miracles, by virtue of their inherent unfamiliarity and spectacular nature, had the capacity to induce conversion whereas the everyday occurrence of God’s providence normally did not.\textsuperscript{126} It was not that miracles ontologically differed from normal events, but miracles had the ability to overcome the inherent blindness of humans.

   Indeed visible miracles shine for this purpose, so as to conduct the hearts of those seeing to faith in invisible things, such that through the wonder done externally, that which is interior and far more wonderful may be perceived.\textsuperscript{127}

Thus, the purpose of miracles was conversion, to return sinful humans to an awareness of the invisible realm and God.\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{121} Dial. 4.5.
\textsuperscript{122} Miracles, since the Middle Ages, have been traditionally defined in light of this distinction between natural and supernatural, such that a miracle was constituted by supernatural causality rather than deriving from the natural. See McCready, \textit{Signs of Sanctity}, 211-214.
\textsuperscript{123} Mor. 6.18.
\textsuperscript{124} HEv. 2.26.
\textsuperscript{125} Mor. 14.70. Augustine had described all creation as miraculous in almost exactly the same way as Gregory. He suggested that the only difference between natural events and those labeled miraculous was the speed by which they occurred, and so one evoked marvel and not the other. See Augustine, \textit{Trin.} 3.1.
\textsuperscript{126} Dagens, \textit{Saint Grégoire}, 227-34.
\textsuperscript{127} HEv. 1.4.3: \textit{Ad hoc quippe visibilia miracula coruscant, ut corda uidentium ad fidem invisibilium pertrahant, ut per hoc quod mirum foras agitur, hoc quod intus est longe mirabilius esse sentiatur.}
\textsuperscript{128} Mor. 26.32; 30.6.
All of Gregory’s theology was orientated towards pastoral care, and therefore even his conception of miracles was orientated towards this end. He believed that the purpose of miracles, like Scripture itself, was to act as a pedagogical tool to bring about conversion. This fact explains why Gregory stressed spiritual miracles over physical ones, because the point of any miracle was to produce conversion rather than amazing visible phenomena. Gregory told the many miracle stories he did for this very purpose, to bring about conversion in his audience. While miracles were needed in the Apostolic Age to produce conversion to Christianity, even in Gregory’s own day similar conversion was needed. While outright paganism was rare, people still had a difficult time believing in anything they could not see. Miracles had the innate capacity to lead people from the visible, to which they were attached through sin, back again to the invisible. Thus, miracle stories were an essential pedagogical tool for Gregory, which he used and used quite often, to bring about conversion in the Christians of his day. Miracles also served the additional purpose of highlighting God’s presence and government in creation, which would have been reassuring to both Gregory and his audience amidst the turmoil they were experiencing in the world, and particularly in Italy. Thus, miracles defined not only Gregory’s theology of providence, but every aspect of his theological and pastoral effort.

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129 Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 233-34.
130 *Dial*. 3.17.
131 Gregory stated on occasion that physical miracles were more necessary in the Apostolic Age in order to bring about conversion of the gentiles to Christianity. See *Mor*. 27.36-37. In suggesting this fact, he was not denying the existence or need of miracles in his own day, but only that they were more necessary in the Apostolic Age.
132 At the start of the fourth book of Gregory’s *Dialogues*, his interlocutor, Peter, expressed the fact that he had a difficult time believing in anything he could not see. The particular topic under discussion was the reality of the human soul, whether it existed in light of the fact that it could not be seen. By including this exchange in his *Dialogues*, Gregory manifested, through Peter, that unbelief in the visible world was an issue in Gregory’s day. See *Dial*. 4.1-5.
Ambiguities in Gregory’s Theology of Providence

One of the purposes of this dissertation, besides explaining Gregory’s theology of providence, has been to suggest that there was in fact a system and coherency within Gregory’s theology. Despite the fact that he wrote no specifically systematic treatise, and morality always seemed to be his pervading goal, there was a definite system to Gregory’s theology. Nevertheless, there were a number of aspects within his thought, and his theology of providence, which were ambiguous and contradictory. The existence of these ambiguities does not thereby contradict the fact his theology was systematic, but actually prove it. It is only in the light of Gregory’s theological system that ambiguities and contradictions can be detected within his thought, and therefore, they attest to the system rather than detract from it. Here, the various ambiguities contained within Gregory’s theology of providence will be explicated. The purpose will be to manifest how these ambiguities actually reveal the systematic structure of Gregory’s theology. The ambiguities that will be considered are the relationship between the visible and invisible elements of Gregory’s cosmology, his conception of nature, and lastly, his notion of change.

Relationship of the Invisible and Visible Elements of Creation

One of the defining characteristics of Gregory’s thought, particularly his cosmology, was his use of complementary opposites to structure and explain his ideas. These polarities, such as invisible and visible, spiritual and corporeal, stable and mutable, can be found in nearly every aspect of his theology. While he used these distinctions to structure and give order to his thought, there were, nevertheless, a number of notable ambiguities. Such ambiguities typically occurred in Gregory’s attempt to maintain the tenets of Christianity

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133 Straw, Gregory the Great, 18-22.
even when individual doctrines did not fit nicely into his overriding theology or cosmology. Gregory always gave precedence to faith over reason, and where such contradictions occurred, he retained them to uphold the faith rather than abandon them for the sake of consistency or clarity. Here, a number of his most notable ambiguities will be highlighted, not so as to diminish the value of his thought, but to better manifest the very system they in fact betrayed.

While the interrelationship between the invisible and visible aspects of creation was a hallmark of Gregory’s cosmology, and one which defined the very order of the cosmos, there was a degree of discordance in his conception of these two components of creation. Perhaps the most obvious occurred within his vision of the afterlife. Gregory conceived heaven to be an entirely invisible realm composed of invisible beings; at the same time, all the bodies of the elect, visible bodies, would rise and be joined to the soul in heaven at the end of the world. Likewise, the invisible demons somehow dwelled in the visible expanses of aerial sky and earth, and would eternally dwell in the visible fires of hell. A related incongruity occurred in Gregory’s idea that the visible bodies of Elijah and Enoch were somehow invisibly hidden within the far reaches of the visible sky. Thus, while visibility and invisibility were distinct aspects of creation, there was some overlapping between the two.

A similar degree of confusion can be witnessed in the relationship Gregory expressed between the spiritual and corporeal aspects of creation. Physical bodies, corruptible due to their corporeal stature, would enter heaven incorruptible. Physical creatures, by virtue of

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134 *Mor.* 9.20-22.
135 *Ep.* 7.31; *Mor.* 14.70-77.
136 *Mor.* 2.74; 13.53.
137 *Mor.* 14.27.
138 *HEv.* 2.26.2; *HEz.* 1.4; 2.34.
their corporeality, were inherently corruptible, and therefore, it would seem
cosmologically contradictory that they could enjoy an incorruptible existence.\textsuperscript{139} A similar,
but reverse, issue occurred within his vision of hell. Hell was a physical reality, yet the souls
of the damned dwelled and burned there along with spiritual demons.\textsuperscript{140} Thus, spiritual
realities experienced eternal dissolution, which was a characteristic of corporeal realities
rather than spiritual ones. Thus, as with the relationship between visible and invisible, there
existed certain incongruities in Gregory’s correlation between the physical and spiritual
components of creation.

These ambiguities within Gregory’s thought can perhaps be explained, if at all, by
examining them in the context of sin. God originally created the human person such that the
invisible, spiritual soul was to rule and govern the visible, corporeal body.\textsuperscript{141} Sin, in essence,
contravened and reversed this process such that the physical body could affect and control
the invisible and spiritual soul. Appetites, pain, pleasure, and even dissolution and disease,
all aspects of the body, had profound effects on the soul.\textsuperscript{142} The invisible soul was rendered
almost corporeal by sin.\textsuperscript{143} This effect of sin explains how the invisible soul and demons
could thus be affected and burned by a visible, corporeal fire; the effect of sin was eternally
experienced within their very beings.\textsuperscript{144} On the other hand, the visible bodies of the elect
were freed from the burden of sin in the resurrection, and therein made spiritual and
invisible, and so suited to exist eternally in heaven with the soul.\textsuperscript{145} The ambiguities, then,
found in Gregory’s cosmological perception were not so much the result of conceptual

\textsuperscript{139} *HEv*. 2.26.2.
\textsuperscript{140} *Dial*. 4.30.
\textsuperscript{141} *Mor*. 4.35-36; 9.50; 11.59.
\textsuperscript{142} *Mor*. 4.68; 6.52; 11.66-68; 14.17.
\textsuperscript{143} *Mor*. 5.61.
\textsuperscript{144} *Dial*. 4.30.
\textsuperscript{145} *Ep*. 7.31; *Mor*. 14.70-77.
ambiguity on his part, as they represent the confusion sin introduced into God’s ordered and structured creation.

**Gregory’s Conception of Nature**

Some of the ambiguity experienced within Gregory’s cosmology can be attributed to his lack of awareness of the concept of nature. Gregory’s worldview was entirely theocentric, giving little or no consideration to nature as an independent or self-explanatory entity. He recognized no *ordo naturae* or *lex naturalis*. Individual things did have distinct natures, but it was not their natures that explained their operation, but God. Created nature could only do what God gave it the power to accomplish. Moreover, created natures were not static and stable in their respective constitutions, but changed in accord with each thing’s relationship with God. This fact was eminently witnessed in the case of angels and humans.

Angels, spiritual and invisible beings by nature, were created as the ontologically highest of all created beings, and so had power over the rest of creation beneath them. By nature, they should have had the power to do anything they wanted within creation, but in fact, they could only accomplish that which God gave them the power to do. This fact was made evident when the apostate angels separated themselves from God, and so were left with

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148 Ibid., 31-32.
149 Gregory did on occasion speak to discrete natures in individual things, see Mor. 3.15-16. Boglioni has suggested that Gregory, like Augustine, perceived intrinsic structures (*rationes seminales*) in things that defined and explained their structure and operation. See Boglioni, *Miracle*, 16.
150 This fact was the central thesis of Gregory’s entire theology of providence. A case in point was that of Satan, who, retaining an angelic nature, could only do by nature what God empowered him to do. See Mor. 2.16. Likewise, humans could only accomplish the good that God both willed and gave them the ability to perform. See *HEz*. 1.8-10. Thus, it was not nature but God that explained the operation of each created thing.
151 Mor. 2.16-17.
only their own unaided natures by which to operate. Satan and his demons could only
tempt and afflict humans to the degree it was ordered and allowed by God. Their function
and operation was more dependent upon God than upon their own created natures. The same
fact, even more apparently, occurred in the case of human nature.

Human nature, perhaps more than any other aspect of Gregory’s thought, displayed
the ambiguities characteristic of his theology of providence. Within Gregory’s
anthropological perception, there was no stable human nature that could be understood or
explained outside its relationship to God. This fact was clearly evidenced in the Fall.
Prior to sin, human nature experienced no need or disorder, standing stable and erect, united
to God in contemplation. After the Fall, however, humans came to experience such things
as hunger, thirst, pain, fleshly appetites, and even death. These seemingly natural human
characteristics, then, were attributed to sin rather than human nature itself. A good example
is the case of pleasure. Pleasure was inherently sinful for Gregory, and therefore, could not
have been a part of human existence or nature prior to sin. Another good example was the
case of human cognition. Humans, by their own unaided nature, had no capacity for truth.

Thus, it is nearly impossible to distinguish in Gregory’s thought what human attributes were
due to human nature and what resulted from humanity’s relationship, or lack thereof, to God.

This same ambiguity can be found in human operation and action. Humans, in any
action they performed, were controlled either by God or Satan. Gregory recognized no

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\text{References:}
\begin{align*}
152 & \text{ Mor. 4.6-10.} \\
153 & \text{ Mor. 2.21; 8.43; 14.46; 27.49; 33.34.} \\
154 & \text{ Gregory suggested that humans were one way by nature and another by grace. See Dial. 2.21.} \\
155 & \text{ Mor. 4.54; 9.50; 11.68; 12.39.} \\
156 & \text{ Ep. 8.37; Mor. 4.68; 8.8, 13, 19; 11.62; 13.36.} \\
157 & \text{ Ep. 8.37; Mor. 7.30; 10.42; 11.70.} \\
158 & \text{ Gregory believed humans had no capacity for truth outside the influence of divine illumination and} \\
\end{align*}
\]
autonomous human action. In good actions, as performed by the saints, God completely directed each of them in the action they performed and supplied them with the ability to accomplish it.\textsuperscript{159} Likewise, in evil actions, Satan and his demons entered the human mind and heart such that they acted through each human under their sway.\textsuperscript{160} Reprobate humans were, in this manner, the agents of Satan within creation doing all that he suggested.\textsuperscript{161} Thus, it would seem that Gregory recognized no independent and autonomous human action resulting distinctly from human nature. These same ambiguities of human nature were likewise witnessed in Christ’s assumed human nature.

Gregory’s Christology bore the same ambiguity that characterized his anthropology. Jesus, inasmuch as he was conceived miraculously rather than through procreation, bore none of the effects of original sin.\textsuperscript{162} Consequently, he should have experienced none of the effects of original sin within his human nature, such as ignorance, pain, hunger, thirst, cold, heat, or death. Rather, his human nature, perfectly united to his divine nature, should have been entirely incorruptible, much as Adam’s was prior to sin.\textsuperscript{163} Nonetheless, Gregory did attribute all these effects of sin to Christ’s human nature.\textsuperscript{164} There is some doubt as to whether Gregory allowed Christ’s divinity to participate in any real way in these defects of human nature.\textsuperscript{165} There is no doubt, however, that Christ’s human nature, particularly in death, experienced all the effects of fallen human nature. Inasmuch as Christ experienced all

\textsuperscript{159} Mor. 2.11; 27.19, 30, 57.
\textsuperscript{160} Mor. 13.12; 15.19.
\textsuperscript{161} Mor. 9.44; 29.15.
\textsuperscript{162} Mor. 11.70.
\textsuperscript{163} Mor. 3.16. See also Straw, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 165.
\textsuperscript{164} Mor. 2.41; 3.16.
\textsuperscript{165} HEv. 2.25; Mor. 5.63; 3.30. Dudden has suggested that Gregory really did not allow for Christ’s divinity to fully participate in the inherent defects and limitations of human nature. For example, Christ, in his divinity, really had full knowledge of everything but only feigned ignorance to manifest the appearance of fully participating in humanity’s created condition. See Dudden, \textit{Gregory the Great}, 2:328-29.
these things, and his human nature was sinless, it raises the question again as to the origin of these human properties, whether they were proper to nature or effects of sin.

As seen, Gregory recognized no stable and autonomous nature within creation. Each created thing’s existence and operation was entirely dependent upon God rather than upon its own intrinsic structure and capacities.\(^{166}\) There was no independent secondary causality in creation, only a mediated causality by which God operated through his creation.\(^{167}\) This fact, as pointed out, caused a certain amount of ambiguity in Gregory’s conception and description of created beings, particularly angels and humans. It is nearly impossible to describe a nature that has no stable existence. The basis for Gregory’s perception of nature, and its inherent lack of stability, was his notion of change. More than any other aspect of his thought, it was his notion of change that was the source of ambiguity within Gregory’s theology of providence.

**Gregory’s Conception of Change**

Gregory’s perception of change, while central to his theology of providence, was conceptually quite ambiguous within his thought and theology. In the first place, change represented the notional key by which Gregory distinguished between God and creation; God was beyond change while creation was defined by it.\(^{168}\) Change was an aspect of creation itself, rooted in creation’s inherent instability and lack of being.\(^{169}\) Change, for Gregory, constituted a lack of real existence, for in each change a kind of death occurred, wherein a

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\(^{166}\) This fact explains, to a large degree, Gregory’s theory of knowledge. He believed there was no real value to secular knowledge, that is, knowledge pursued to the exclusion of God. Each thing only made sense, or had meaning, in respect to its relationship to God. Thus, there could be no purely scientific or neutral investigation of creation. True knowledge could only be arrived at by considering each thing in respect to its relationship with God and its place within his creation and providence. See Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 31-54.

\(^{167}\) Boglioni, *Miracle*, 36-37.

\(^{168}\) Mor. 5.63; 14.22.

\(^{169}\) Mor. 16.45.
thing ceased to be what it was each time a change occurred.\textsuperscript{170} Change, in this fashion, actually constituted an evil within Gregory’s thought, for it represented a privation of being, which was his very definition of evil.\textsuperscript{171} The ultimate good and goal of creation, at least for rational creatures, was to rise above its inherent changeableness and attach itself to God.\textsuperscript{172} Change, therefore, while representing an essential aspect of creation, also characterized evil, and here is where the ambiguity in Gregory’s notion of change occurred.

Due to his lack of awareness of nature and secondary causality, Gregory had a difficult time with the concept of change. Particularly difficult for Gregory was distinguishing between change that was proper and essential to the nature of a created thing and change which represented an ontological defect of being. In other words, Gregory did not conceptually distinguish between change and mutation. While Gregory attempted to clarify these two different notions of change, conceptually he could not.\textsuperscript{173} Whether change occurred through action or on the level of being itself, it invariably constituted a lack of stability and therefore a defect of being.\textsuperscript{174} While change was an essential and necessary aspect of creation, at the same time it represented an inherent defect and lack of true existence. This fact was clearly evidenced within Gregory’s theology of providence.

According to Gregory, God ordered creation through his created rational beings. For created, rational beings to serve this providential function, two essential aspects were required. First, created beings must be able to be united to God through contemplation, and

\textsuperscript{170} \textit{Mor.} 12.38.  \\
\textsuperscript{171} \textit{Mor.} 3.15.  \\
\textsuperscript{172} Within creation, only rational creatures, angels and saints, had the capacity to rise above their inherent changeableness by attaching themselves to God, and his immutability, through contemplation. This contemplation, then, constituted the ultimate good for both angels and humans. Heaven was defined by this very contemplative union with God. See \textit{Mor.} 4.45; 12.27; 25.11; 27.65.  \\
\textsuperscript{173} Gregory attempted to distinguish between mutability and changeability, but conceptually, the distinction was not completely clear. See \textit{Mor.} 10.21.  \\
\textsuperscript{174} \textit{Mor.} 5.68.
thereby draw from him both the knowledge and power by which to accomplish his will in creation. Secondly, such created beings must be capable of change, such that they can produce change within creation. Rational creatures, then, as agents of God’s providence within creation, must be capable of both stability and mutability at the very same time, stable in their union with God and mutable in their activity within creation.\textsuperscript{175} The ambiguity that occurs here is that inasmuch as angels and humans change in their providential activity within creation, and change inherently constitutes a privation of being, an evil, humans and angels experienced an evil in their very activity to accomplish good. Insofar as change always entailed a privation of full existence, creation, even in heaven, always seemed to retain an element of evil.

There were a couple of ways Gregory attempted to overcome this seemingly inescapable defect of his cosmology. One way was to characterize change in accord with the effect it produced. Sin, for Gregory, always consisted in choosing a lesser good over God. Change could be characterized as an evil, then, inasmuch as the end achieved by it produced a greater distance from God, and so less being and stability. On the other hand, changes that brought one closer to God, and therefore greater stability and existence, could be characterized as a good. Conversion, for example, inasmuch as it united the human soul more closely to God, could still be considered a good rather than an evil even though a change occurred. Likewise, in heaven the angels and saints continually changed, ever drawing more fully from God in their contemplative union with him. Such change, rather than representing an ontological evil, actually constituted the highest good of rational beings. Change, in such fashion, rather than always constituting an ontological mutation, a

\textsuperscript{175} Angels and humans, being both eternal and yet capable of change, were described by Gregory as both “immortally mortal” and “mortally immortal.” See Mor. 4.5.
corruption of stable existence, could actually be just the opposite, a movement towards greater stability and being.

Another way that Gregory seemed to account for this ambiguity in his notion of change was by locating the change, the mutation, of any action in the effect rather than the cause. An analogy that could be used to explain this notion of change is that of fire, which loses nothing of what it is even as it causes another thing to burn. Fire never ceases to be what it is even as it produces a change in something else. In a similar fashion God remained always what he was even as he produced changes within creation. Angels and humans too, in the changes they produced within creation, never ceased to be what they were even as they effected God’s providential changes within creation. Only such a notion of change could explain how Gregory could propose change as an essential aspect of God’s governance of creation without thereby making evil a necessary aspect of creation itself.

These ambiguities within Gregory’s theology of providence do not necessarily constitute defects, but rather, manifest the very degree to which Gregory’s theology of providence was systematic. Only in the context of a fully established system of thought can ambiguities, of the type indicated here, exist and be recognized. Moreover, such ambiguities constitute the very place where development is needed within a system of thought. The ambiguities in Gregory’s theology of providence, then, provided an invaluable service to the development of the Christian notion of providence inasmuch as they indicated where such development was needed. Thus, whether through its rational structure or in its ambiguities, Gregory’s conception of divine providence constituted an essential expression of the ongoing development of the Christian notion of divine providence.
Gregory’s Contribution to the Christian Theology of Providence

The value or effect of anyone’s thought is never easy to assess. Often, the contribution one makes to a field of study, or on a particular topic, is subtle and operates on a level below the conscious or explicit. Later traditions might pick up and incorporate the ideas of earlier thinkers without ever fully recognizing or acknowledging the influence they had. Moreover, most thinkers and theologians never revolutionize thought on any topic, but merely add another brick to the ongoing edifice of existing knowledge and opinion. Thus, while they may win no historical acclaim for their contribution, they still provide an essential and valuable contribution to the ongoing development of the topic. Gregory’s theology of providence was no different. What effect it had, and the contribution it made, to the ongoing development of the Christian notion of providence is difficult to discern and distinguish, yet present nonetheless.

There are many ways in which Gregory has been acknowledged as contributing to Christianity in terms of its ongoing development in thought and practice. His highly individualized notion of the soul, along with his notions of sin and atonement, were hallmarks of medieval Christian spirituality.\(^{176}\) His *Dialogues*, which were widely disseminated and read in the Middle Ages, were extremely influential in terms of the ongoing tradition of Christian hagiography,\(^ {177}\) along with promoting and defending the intercessory role of the saints.\(^ {178}\) Moreover, his focus on moral exposition rather than theological speculation, his subjugation of profane knowledge to religious, as well as the supreme

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\(^{177}\) Alexander O’Hara, “Death and the Afterlife in Jonas of Bobbio’s *Vita Columbani,*” in *The Church, the Afterlife, and the Fate of the Soul*, eds. Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon (Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2009), 72.

\(^{178}\) Dal Santo, “Philosophy,” 44.
authority he attributed to Scripture, all defined the theology of the Middle Ages.\footnote{Dagens, \textit{Saint Grégoire}, 14-17, 50-54.}

Medieval eschatology also looked to Gregory as a source for much of its own thought on the last things.\footnote{McClain, \textit{Doctrine of Heaven}, 8.} His influence on medieval spirituality and theology was so profound, in fact, that at the end of the twelfth century Pope Boniface VIII gave Gregory equal status to that of Augustine, Jerome, and Ambrose.\footnote{Ibid., 14.}

Among the various ways that Gregory impacted Christianity, perhaps his most pervasive and lasting effect was the focus he gave to the afterlife. As noted by Peter Brown, Gregory, particularly in Book IV of his \textit{Dialogues}, “… sketched out, almost for the first time, the twilight outlines of the world beyond the grave.”\footnote{Brown, “The Decline,” 57.} There were many questions being debated in Gregory’s day about the afterlife, such as when the soul entered into life after death, when judgment took place, the possibility of post-death purgation of sin, and even the intercessory role of the saints.\footnote{Dal Santo has suggested that these questions about the afterlife were the context for Gregory’s \textit{Dialogues}, in which he sought to answer them. See Dal Santo, “Philosophy,” 41-51.} In his various explanations and descriptions of the afterlife, often using vivid imagery, Gregory sought to address and answer these questions. In doing so, Gregory provided a lasting contribution to Christianity in a number of important ways.

In the first place, by virtue of his focus on the afterlife, Gregory has been credited with founding the medieval doctrine of purgatory.\footnote{According to Brown, Christians in the Middle Ages looked to Book IV of Gregory’s \textit{Dialogues} as foundational for their own belief in purgatory. See Brown, \textit{Rise of Western Christendom}, 259.} While never specifying a particular location for purgatory in the afterlife, Gregory’s stories about post-death purgations left little doubt that such a purgation took place. His stories and descriptions about souls in the afterlife certainly contributed to the development of thought within Christianity that, nearly
six centuries later, resulted in the defining of the doctrine of purgatory.\footnote{The doctrine of purgatory was defined at the second Council of Lyons in 1274. For a good discussion on the emergence of the concept of purgatory in the early Middles Ages, see Foot, “Anglo-Saxon,” 87-96.} Moreover, Gregory’s stories about the benefit of Masses for the dead contributed to the vast multiplication of private Masses in the Middle ages, along with monk-priests to say them.\footnote{Hillgarth, “Eschatological,” 227.}

Moreover, Gregory’s focus on the afterlife also fostered a new consciousness of sin and atonement within Christian spirituality. Gregory’s insistence on the immediate post-death judgment of all souls, his continual preaching on the severity and strictness of that judgment, along with often graphic descriptions of heaven and hell, helped initiate a new awareness of sin, even small ones, within the Christian imagination of his day and afterwards. In fact, sin and atonement were so adamantly stressed by Gregory that Peter Brown has suggested Gregory contributed to a “peccatization” of Christianity. This peccatization consisted in “…the definitive reduction of all experience, of history, politics, and the social order quite as much as the destiny of individual souls, to two universal explanatory principles, sin and repentance.”\footnote{Brown, “The Decline,” 58.} This awareness of personal sin and atonement was the context for the development and spread of private confession, which became common practice in western Europe over the seventh century.\footnote{Mortimer has suggested that Gregory was the first prelate to advocate a form of private penitence in the West, one which definitely aided the growth of private confession after him. See Mortimer, The Origins, 170-87. Brown has suggested that, alongside Gregory, Columbanus was very influential in spreading private confession in the West, which he did by founding monasteries and advocating the Celtic penitential system. See Brown, Rise of Western Christendom, 249-59.} Moreover, these same ideas of sin and atonement were responsible for aiding the spread of monasticism.\footnote{Brown, Rise of Western Christendom, 264-65.}

Alongside his focus on the afterlife, and one related to it, was the importance of Gregory for spreading the ideals and practice of monasticism. As the first monk-pope,

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\item \footnote{Hillgarth, “Eschatological,” 227.}
\item \footnote{Brown, “The Decline,” 58.}
\item \footnote{Mortimer has suggested that Gregory was the first prelate to advocate a form of private penitence in the West, one which definitely aided the growth of private confession after him. See Mortimer, The Origins, 170-87. Brown has suggested that, alongside Gregory, Columbanus was very influential in spreading private confession in the West, which he did by founding monasteries and advocating the Celtic penitential system. See Brown, Rise of Western Christendom, 249-59.}
\item \footnote{Brown, Rise of Western Christendom, 264-65.}
Gregory championed the ideals of monasticism, and whenever he could he aided the erection of new convents and monasteries throughout the West, particularly in the emerging barbarian kingdoms. Along with Columbanus, Gregory was influential in spreading the spirituality of monasticism, particularly the penitential system that characterized monastic life. Moreover, his tales of the virtues and miracles of monks in his *Dialogues*, particularly that of St. Benedict, would inspire and capture the imagination of many after him, moving them to renounce the world and join the ranks of the blossoming monasteries. Thus, in many ways, Gregory’s theology gave form and shape to medieval Christianity.

While Gregory has contributed to the ongoing development of Christianity in all these varied and lasting ways, his contribution to the Christian understanding of divine providence was more subtle, but still important. First of all, Gregory’s theology of providence extolled a truth of Christian belief that can easily be overlooked and forgotten, which was the reality and presence of the invisible world. Ever since the medieval distinction of natural and supernatural became a stable part of Christian theology and experience, there has been a tendency within the Christian imagination to associate angels, demons, saints, and even the invisible world.

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190 *Ep. 1.50; 3.17, 58; 4.8, 10, 18, 44; 9.165*. There was a general reaction against Gregory’s monastic ideals among the regular clergy in Rome after Gregory. This fact was witnessed in the election of primarily only non-monk popes, with a few exceptions, after Gregory’s death. Gregory’s influence was more immediately experienced in the northern barbarian kingdoms of the West, particular so in England, which, in later tradition, referred to Gregory as its own apostle. See Llewellyn, *The Roman Church*, 363-67.


192 Gregory’s *Dialogues* was the primary source for knowledge on the life of Benedict in later traditions and so was very influential in shaping and spreading monasticism, particularly Benedictine monasticism. See Llewellyn, *The Roman Church*, 363.

193 Gregory wrote his *Dialogues* specifically as a response to doubts in his own day about the presence and operation of the invisible world, particularly that of the saints. See Dal Santo, “Philosophy,” 44. Gregory noted a current disbelief in the invisible world at the start of Book IV of his *Dialogues*, which he then sought to correct in the remainder of the book. See *Dial. 4.2-5*. 
miraculous with God rather than with humans and earthly life. One of the lasting contributions of Gregory’s theology of providence was its insistence of the presence and operation of the invisible world in the visible. He adamantly maintained that God, the world, and particularly human life, could only be understood in light of the abiding presence of the invisible world of angels, demons, and human souls. Blindness to this fact was a characteristic of sin, for Gregory, rather than rationality.

Another important and lasting contribution of Gregory’s theology of providence was its explanation of human suffering. Every age of human history, and even every human life, has been characterized by trials and sufferings of various kinds. Gregory sought to show that suffering had real value. Just as Christ’s suffering became an avenue of salvation for humanity, each person was required to walk that same path through their own sufferings and trials. Suffering purged sins, formed virtue, and provided lasting happiness and merit in the life to come. In order to understand this value of suffering one must perceive it through the principle of eternity. Gregory only attributed value to those things that were stable and eternal, and so there was no value in passing happiness or rewards, if they ended in eternal pain and suffering. Gregory’s entire moral enterprise was built upon the premise that it was better to suffer in this life, which would end, so as to endlessly enjoy happiness and reward in the afterlife. In this way, then, Gregory’s theology of providence spoke not only to the Christians of his own day, but to Christians of every day.

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194 The distinction between natural and supernatural occurred during the 12th and 13th centuries. See Chenu, Nature, Man, and Society, 10-15; Brandt, Shape of Medieval History, 6-10.
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