

CURING THE BODY, CURING THE SOCIETY:
THE MIRACLE STORIES OF GREGORY OF TOURS IN THE SERVICE OF
ASCETICAL SOCIO-MORAL REFORM IN SIXTH-CENTURY GAUL

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ABSTRACT

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The saints in Gregory of Tours's miracle stories frequently transfer such values as peacefulness, charity and mercy from theory into public action by their miracles. This exemplary function of the miracles in the *Histories* has lately been acknowledged in the literature. However the stories in the miracle books, especially the healing miracles, have been neglected in this respect. The main question of the thesis is whether the *entire* corpus of the miracle stories can be fitted into the perspective of the socio-moral reform found in the sermons of Caesarius of Arles, in the canons of Merovingian Church councils, and in the works of Gregory of Tours himself.

The ideal society envisioned by Gregory of Tours and Caesarius of Arles, like the monastic community on which it was expected to model itself, was one that embraced ideal values such as charity, humility and obedience. Considering that the envisioned reform was of an ascetical character, the authors' ideal values and proposed methods for realizing them are investigated and brought into relation with the miracle stories within the framework of the ascetical stance and practice as found in Late Antique Gaul.

It is observed also in the miracle books that saints take an active part in the realization of the ideal values by exemplifying them and by punishing the transgressors. Moreover, they help the bishops in transferring these values into public action and in persuading their flock to preoccupy themselves with their future salvation instead of the present world. Another important result is that the healing miracles in which the patient undertakes some sort of ascetical practice before the cure or vows never to commit sins afterwards can be similarly considered in the context of socio-moral reform.

ÖZET

TOPLUMU İYİLEŞTİRMEK, BEDENİ İYİLEŞTİRMEK: TOURS'LU GREGORIUS'UN 6. YY. GALYA'SINDAKİ ASKETİK SOSYO- AHLAKİ REFORMA HİZMET EDEN MUCİZE HİKAYELERİ

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Tours'lu Gregorius'un mucize hikayelerindeki azizler, mucizeleri vasıtasıyla çoğun barışseverlik, yardımseverlik ve merhamet gibi değerleri teoriden toplumsal planda eyleme geçirmektedirler. Yazarın tarih eserinde bulunan mucizelerin bu örnek niteliğinin farkına, literatürde son zamanlarda varılmış bulunmaktadır. Ancak mucize kitaplarındaki mucizeler, özellikle de iyileşme mucizeleri, bu bakımdan ihmale uğramışlardır. Bu tezin ana sorusu, yazarın *tüm* mucize hikayelerinin, Arles'lı Caesarius'un vaazlarında, Merovenj dönemi kilise konsüllerinin kararlarında, ve de bizzat yazarın kendi eserlerinde bulunan asketik sosyo-ahlaki reform perspektifinin bağlamına yerleştirilip yerleştirilemeyeceğidir.

Tours'lu Gregorius'un ve Arles'lı Caesarius'un tasavvurundaki toplum, tıpkı kendisine model alması istenen manastırdaki keşiş topluluğu gibi, yardımseverlik, alçakgönüllülük ve itaat gibi değerleri benimsemiş bir toplumdur. Tasavvur edilen reformun asketik niteliği göz önüne alınarak, yazarların ideal değerleri ve onların gerçekleştirilmesi için önerdikleri metotlar, geç antik dönem Galya'sındaki asketik tutum ve uygulamanın çerçevesi içinde incelenmiş ve mucize hikayeleriyle ilişkilendirilmiştir.

Mucize kitaplarında da gözlenmiştir ki, azizler ideal değerlerin yaşama geçirilmesinde davranışlarıyla örnek olmak ve bu değerlerin tersine hareket edenleri cezalandırmak suretiyle etkin bir rol üstlenmektedirler. İlaveten, bu değerlerin toplumsal planda eyleme geçirilmesinde ve cemaatin fani dünyadan çok ahretle meşgul olmaya ikna edilmesinde de piskoposlara yardımcı olmaktadır. Bir diğer önemli sonuç ise hastanın derdine deva bulmadan önce herhangi bir asketik yükümlülük altına girdiği veya daha sonra bir daha asla günah işlememeye yemin ettiği iyileşme mucizelerinin de benzeri şekilde sosyo-ahlaki reform bağlamında ele alınabilir olmasıdır.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Serm. *Sermons au Peuple*, Caesarius of Arles, translated by Marie-José Delage.

The following abbreviations refer to the translations of Gregory of Tours's works:

Hist. *The History of the Franks*, translated by L. Thorpe.

GC *Glory of the Confessors*, translated by R. Van Dam.

GM *Glory of the Martyrs*, translated by R. Van Dam.

VJ *Suffering and Miracles of the Martyr St Julian*, translated by R. Van Dam.

VM *The Miracles of the Bishop St Martin*, translated by R. Van Dam.

VP *Life of the Fathers*, translated by E. James.

CHAPTER I

Introduction: the Miracle Stories and Socio-Moral reform?

I.1 Visions of ascetical socio-moral reform in sixth-century Gaul

In two bitter and passionate sermons delivered during the terrible ravages inflicted on the population by the Franks and Burgundians during the siege of Arles in 507-508, Caesarius of Arles expounded his views on the true cause of the current sufferings, and the ways to eliminate them. It was none other than love of this world, said Caesarius, that led to avarice, all the sins it engendered and to the problems that ensued. This was a paradoxical situation: the sins that stemmed from love of this world turned the world into a place of war, strife, ravages and pain. God, when he saw that none of his moral commandments to be charitable, chaste, merciful and just were being heeded, took revenge on this ravage of the human soul by allowing wars, pestilences and famines, which in turn made the world a “bitter drink” for those who loved it.¹ At the same time, the dilution of moral values and proliferation of iniquity also pointed out that the end of the world was nearing, a thought Caesarius supported by the words of St Paul. In the last days dangerous times would follow, the Apostle had said, and the people would be egoist, greedy, arrogant, proud, blasphemous, rebellious towards their parents, ungrateful, wicked, without affection and without peace. They would be criminals, debauched, hard, without goodwill, treacherous,

¹ *Serm.* 70.1,2.

brutal, irascible, and more in love with voluptuousness than with God.² The more one took note of the remark of the apostle that “in the last days the iniquity of many shall abound and charity shall grow cold,” concluded Caesarius, the more one ought to supplicate God to correct one’s habit of sinning.³ If the end of the world was indeed nearing, everyone had to make haste, while there was still time, to turn away from love of this world and to begin thinking about death and the Last Judgment, so that when the last day came, it would find one possessing all the virtues and occupied with good works.⁴ Since those who were occupied solely with their material existence were no better than animals, genuine Christians had to know that they were to think constantly about the coming world and the eternal recompense, and to work more for their eternal soul than their perishable body.⁵

In these sermons of Caesarius of Arles, but still more in the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours, it is clear that both bishops were intensely concerned about the state of affairs in Gaul: an unending series of wars, disasters, feuds, the spoiling of the poor and of the churches. They believed that this was due to the all-too-widespread habit of continuously craving after earthly riches and power, that is to say, to the people’s affliction with the “*amor mundi*.” Not content with the detection of this malaise, Caesarius and Gregory moved on to promote the treatment they thought proper for it. Common to their proposed remedies was a turning away from the world, the adoption of a *contemptus mundi* and an ascetical contemplation of the coming world and of God. In connection, however, with these two components of the ascetical stance, *contemptus mundi* and contemplation, there also went the duty to be virtuous and, no less important, the need to love and assist fellow human beings and

² *Serm.* 71.1-3.

³ *Serm.* 71.1.

⁴ *Serm.* 71.1.

those under one's supervision. Because, as set out in the three stages of ascetical progress formulated by Origen and Evagrius of Pontus, the first step was practice, being virtuous and helping others, and only after that came contemplation, of the physical and then of the spiritual worlds.⁶ Augustine himself had noted that one of the most important benefits of an ascetical practice such as fasting was to be able to give the poor more food. When, as an excessively busy bishop of Hippo, he discussed the need for an active life in addition to a contemplative one, he pointed out that, if in the contemplative life one directed one's care and love towards Christ, in the active life one directed them towards the body of believers; the second was an obligation imposed by the first.⁷

A similar strain of thought is observable in John Cassian's understanding of ascetical perfection, which became highly influential in the monastic tradition of Lérins.⁸ Cassian held that love of God was at once the goal, the way, and the measure of ascetical perfection, and this perfection was incumbent upon all Christians, not just monks. But love of God was in turn inseparable from the love of one's neighbor, not least because the perfection of the love of God could be reached only by way of a socially minded, charitable love of one's neighbor. Similarly, Caesarius, an alumnus of the monastery of Lérins himself, stressed that charity was to be filled with God, and from this he deduced, like Cassian, that one also had to be full of charity towards God's other creatures, one's fellow human beings, and to fulfill by good works the duties this charity implied. This emphasis on the active, charitable aspect of

⁵ *Serm.* 16.1.

⁶ B. McGinn, "Asceticism and Mysticism in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages," in *Asceticism*, edited by V. L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis, 58-74 (Oxford, 1995), 63-65.

⁷ H. von Campenhausen, *Lateinische Kirchenväter* (Stuttgart, 1960), 178-79.

⁸ John Cassian (360-435) was a monk and theologian who, after a lengthy stay in Egypt, Palestine and Constantinople, settled in Marseilles in the early fifth century and played an important role in the adaptation of the eastern desert traditions to western monasticism, as well as acting as a leading advocate of Semi-Pelagianism in its early phase.

asceticism is also evident in the canons of the Merovingian Church councils in the sixth century, where, as we shall see, a great many canons are specifically concerned with the duties of the bishops and their churches to alleviate the sufferings of the poor, the weak, the sick, captives etc. This is no wonder, when it is considered that numerous Gallic bishops at this time had undergone an ascetical training in Lérinese monasteries before becoming bishops. Hence asceticism could indeed form the basis of a fully-fledged socio-moral reform of the kind promoted by Gregory and Caesarius, since it was far from being simply a prescription for egoistic individual salvation.⁹

The ascetical stance and practice accordingly became the backbone of Caesarius's and Gregory's visions of socio-moral reform. Its inculcation in, and imposition on, society by bishops (and in Gregory's vision, also by kings) was their proposed manner of bringing about such a socio-moral reform. It was the foremost duty of the leaders of the society to make that society accept an ascetical discipline of the kind found in monasteries, which would in turn foster the spread of the wisdom of otherworldliness. It should be made clear at this point that under the direct or indirect influence of Augustine,¹⁰ both Gregory and Caesarius drew a sharp line between, on the one hand, those who turned towards God and fulfilled the obligations of the love of God by loving and helping their fellow human beings, and, on the other, those who remained turned towards themselves, greedily appropriating the riches of this world and priding themselves on their worldly gains and power

⁹ On this social dimension of ascetical spirituality and its role as the driving force behind the social activities of the church in late-antique Gaul see R. Nürnberg, *Askese als sozialer Impuls: Monastisch-asketische Spiritualität als Wurzel und Triebfeder sozialer Ideen und Aktivitäten der Kirche in Südgallien im 5. Jahrhundert* (Bonn, 1988), 73-85, 127-30, 136-39, 196-206, 211-22 and 306-21.

¹⁰ While Gregory mentions Augustine nowhere in his writings and very probably never came across any of his works, he may have been familiarized with his ideas through the works of his students Orosius and Prosper of Aquitaine.

without ever paying gratitude to God. The first group made up the “City of God,” and the second the “Earthly City.” What the authors hoped to achieve by pressing an ascetical stance and its accompanying altruistic values and practices on society was to recruit as many as possible to the Godly City, to the real Eschatological Church which included Christ and all who believed in him and served him,¹¹ so that the end of the world would find a society that was so holy and virtuous that in it individuals would have nothing to fear from the Last Judgment.

The purpose of the present study is to research what kind of a role the miracle stories of Gregory of Tours may have been intended to play in the realization of this vision of reform. Before coming to the full presentation of this question, however, the ascetical aspect of the two bishops’ thought needs to be considered more closely against its historical background. It is also necessary to investigate whether the status of the collection of miracle stories as a genre with other purposes would really allow us to place Gregory’s miracle stories in the context of such a reform vision.

I.2 The Asceticism of Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours in Historical Context

We have seen that the two bishops’ vision of reform can be related to the concept of asceticism in both its contemplative and active aspects. This is not surprising when considered in the light of the “ascetic invasion” that took place, according to Robert Markus, precisely during this period in the West. In “The End of Ancient Christianity” he tells us how the invasion of the secular world by the ideal of asceticism led to monastic life’s being held up as a model towards which the rest of society, clerical and lay alike, should aspire. Augustine himself would never have

¹¹ For Gregory’s conception of the Eschatological Church see M. Heinzemann, *Gregor von Tours (538-594), Zehn Bücher Geschichte. Historiographie und Gesellschaftskonzept im 6. Jahrhundert*

approved of reforms calculated to recruit people to the “Godly City” by promoting the adoption of the lifestyle and values of a monk; in his eyes the secular world had an autonomous existence, and no group of people, monks and other ascetics included, could claim that they were more perfect, more representative of the City of God than other members, lay or clerical, of the Church. When looked at from the “desert,” on the other hand, as Salvian and such alumni of Lérins as Caesarius of Arles did, the circles of the Church and the lay world, which surrounded the circle of the monks, the “ascetic perfects,” tended to collapse into the same imperfection, and one had no other option than to step into this inner, monastic circle (in lifestyle if not in habit) if one hoped to be saved.¹² There is enough evidence in Gregory of Tours’s works to believe that, although not originally a monk himself, he too was influenced by this “epistemological excision”¹³ of the secular element of culture, insofar as he similarly promoted a reform program that held up an ideal of society like that found in monasteries: renunciation of earthly wealth and spouses, entry to the Church, and membership of a community which lived in love, peace and concord.

In this last, communal ideal however, like Caesarius and others, Gregory was also influenced by Augustine's vision of a monastic society which was more concerned with realizing the ideal of a unified and harmonious communal life through the virtues of mutual love and humility than in striving for ascetic, individual perfection.¹⁴ But whereas Augustine intended this peaceful, loving monastic community to be only a reminder, not even an image, of the Godly City, and by no means intended it as a model to be imitated by the seculars, Gregory and Caesarius

(Darmstadt, 1994), 145-50.

¹² R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, (Cambridge, 1990), 199-211 and 174-77.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹⁴ B. Lohse, *Askese und Mönchtum in der Antike und in der alten Kirche* (München, 1969), 220; Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 77-81.

do seem to have held it up to society as an ideal, towards which it should strive while yet in this world, so that as many as possible, thanks to the fact that they lived in such a reformed, ideal society, would be sure of salvation when the end of the world arrived. This project was of course something Augustine could never approve of. For him, sure salvation was never to be had in this world by fallen human beings. The belief of Cassian, in contrast, was that the perfection of the Apostolic Age could be preserved, at least in a narrow ascetic circle of ascetics represented by monks. Striving towards this in the world was necessary to preserve “true Christianity”. In this the Semi-Pelagian orientation of the Gallic Church may also have played a role.¹⁵ Another difference between the social ideals of Augustine and Gregory is the very heavy emphasis laid by the latter on obedience to spiritual and secular leaders, whereas in Augustine's monastic model obedience was owed above all to the “common mind” of the community and not specifically to the superior, who acted more in the role of a regulator and distributor. The influence of the desert tradition is also visible here, since in Cassian's understanding of monastic life, also, obedience to the superior was extremely important.¹⁶

Another remarkable sign of this “ascetic invasion” was that ascetic perfection also came to be seen as the necessary hallmark of a bishop, although he was fully active in this world. This was a result of the “ascetical training” in the monastery of Lérins undergone by numerous aristocrats in Gaul before they ascended to their episcopacies. Behind Lérins, however, lay the successful response of the western aristocracy to the challenge of institutionalized asceticism by asserting their own claim on ascetical perfection, with the result that a rich and noble bishop in all his

¹⁵ H. Chadwick, “The Ascetic Ideal in the History of the Church,” in *Monks, Hermits and the Ascetic Tradition*, edited by W. J. Sheils, 1-23 (Oxford, 1985), 12, 21; Lohse, *Askese und Mönchtum*, 225-26; Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 165-68.

worldly activity could also be accepted as possessing the *perfectio* of the ascetic.¹⁷ This merger between the ideals of asceticism and episcopal duties was bound to have profound effects on the way at least some of these bishops viewed society and considered the methods to improve it.

We can observe this development in the modes of sanctity found in the hagiography of the fifth and sixth centuries, as Claudio Leonardi's study on the models of sanctity in these centuries has made clear.¹⁸ Leonardi uses the East to make an illuminating comparison. There, where the imperial structure was still standing, the Empire and the Church still constituted together a sacral whole in which peace was firm and secure. The monks were a part of this whole, and they had set upon the task of transforming the body in a mystical framework through fasts and celibacy on the road towards resurrection, when the transformation of the body towards the better would be taken to its conclusion. Here, contemplation was the road towards perfection. In the West, on the other hand, the political situation was different: the Empire, which had secured *pax*, had collapsed and the barbarian kingdoms that had taken its place were not up to the task of fulfilling the imperial role and forming a sacral whole with the Church in which peace would be guaranteed. In the insecurity and danger created by this situation, contemplative asceticism for individuals, although still of primary importance and necessary, was no longer sufficient; standing outside the flow of history and only transforming the body towards the better had to be accompanied by action in this world, to transform society and history towards the end of the world, towards the better. Accordingly, the

¹⁶ Lohse, *Askese und Mönchtum*, 226; Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 162-64.

¹⁷ M. Heinzelmann, *Bischofsherrschaft in Gallien; Zur Kontinuität römischer Führungsschichten vom 4. bis 7. Jahrhundert: Soziale, Prosopografische und Bildungsgeschichtliche Aspekte* (München, 1976), 234-45.

model of the saint here was that of the bishop-prophet, a follower of the martyr who, as the agent of God in history, did not merely possess the full perfection of the ascetic, but also performed the necessary actions: he read people's hearts, warned them about the rewards and punishments of God that awaited them, and told them to change their ways. He converted and preached, and guided the society along the right path from the Incarnation towards the Last Judgment. It was in this way that the two bishops, Gregory and Caesarius, presumably themselves enjoying ascetical perfection to the full, had taken over the task of transforming society towards the better, towards the ideal society of saints that would be established after the Resurrection. But how, and equipped with what?

The possibility that Gregory's miracle stories may have played a part in his vision of social reform has been pointed out by Martin Heinzelmann, who has suggested that the miracle stories in his historical works serve firstly to point to the existence of the Eschatological Church (i.e. the Godly City) made up of Christ and all who really believed in him, secondly to point encouragingly to the ideal society that would be established at the Resurrection, and finally to offer *exempla* showing how to progress towards such a society.¹⁹ But how exactly did the stories set an example? Before coming to that question, it may be useful to recall the main features and the usual purposes of the miracle story as a genre.

I.3 The miracle stories of Gregory of Tours: the genre and its purposes

Gregory of Tours wrote eight books of miracles, as he lists them in the preface to the *Glory of the Confessors* and in the final chapter of his *Histories*: one

¹⁸ C. Leonardi, "Modelli di santità tra secolo V e VII," in *Santi e demoni nell'alto medioevo occidentale (secoli V-XI)* (Spoleto, 1989), 261-83.

book on the miracles of St Julian, four books containing the miracles of St Martin, one book each on the miracles of various martyrs and confessors, and also a book on the lives and miracles of twenty saints, bishops, monks and abbots that lived in Gaul during the fifth and sixth centuries. When Gregory wrote his miracle collections, the genre was already a century old. Miracle stories had up to that time been included in works of historiography, not only by Christian authors such as Eusebius and Orosius, but also by pagan authors such as Ammianus Marcellinus. In these works they had an overtly political function, in that the miracle was brought into relation with the future of the reigning emperor. On the other hand, miracle stories were also contained in works of hagiography such as Athanasius' *Life of Antony* or Sulpicius Severus' *Life of St Martin*, but these stories were exclusively concerned with the miracles performed by the saint in his lifetime, and their purpose was to serve the modelling of the saint's life on that of Christ, whose miracles had included turning water into wine, healing the sick and raising people from the dead.

An important change came about in this situation with Augustine, who in the later books of his *City of God* pointed out that, with the coming of Christ, his thousand year reign, along with all his saints and martyrs, that had been pointed to in the *Apocalypse*, had already begun. From this eschatological perspective, the reality of miracles at the tombs of saints became justifiable from the point of view of the Church, since the dead saints were accepted as actually living and reigning with Christ. For the same reason, the miracles performed by the saint after his death by the tomb became not only justifiable, but also preferable to those performed when he was alive: posthumous miracles provided unmistakable proof that the saint had been

¹⁹ M. Heinzlmann, "Die Funktion des Wunders in der spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Historiographie," in *Mirakel im Mittelalter: Konzeptionen, Erscheinungsformen, Deutungen*, edited by M. Heinzlmann, K. Herbers and D. R. Bauer, 23-61 (Stuttgart, 2002), 46-57.

free from sin during all his life, and that now he was living side to side with Christ, for otherwise he would not be able to perform miracles by God's help after his death. The miracles performed during the lifetime of the saint, on the other hand, were always subject to the doubt that they were brought about by the help of demons, which were also thought capable of feats of wonder, and not of God. Besides, even if a living saint worked his miracles indeed by the help of God, there was always the danger that he could forget this fact and attribute all the power to himself, beginning to pride himself on his miracles—a sure way of falling prey to the Devil. It is because of these reasons that Gregory of Tours assumes a rather cautious attitude against the miracles performed by living saints, which are much fewer in number in his works than posthumous miracles.

In addition, although the creation and activity of nature were daily miracles themselves in the view of Augustine, they went largely unnoticed due to familiarity, and the “more unusual” kinds of miracles performed by dead saints and martyrs were necessary to draw attention to the all-embracing power of God and to foster and strengthen the faith. Nevertheless, even these miracles were faithlessly forgotten, so it was absolutely necessary to set them down in writing in order to save them from oblivion, to which task Augustine set himself in the last book of *City of God*.²⁰ Hence, the miracle story, up to this time, had hardly constituted a genre in itself, embedded as it had been in other genres like history and saints' lives. Now, however, it had acquired a degree of dignity that justified making collections out of the stories of miracles that occurred at saints' tombs.

The common procedure for this was to record the miracles that happened at the tomb of a saint, with additional information such as the age, sex and origins of

the beneficiary of the miracle, and then to use these notes when compiling the story collection. This was also the main procedure followed by Gregory of Tours in the last three of his books about the miracles of St Martin (the first book comprising past miracles compiled from earlier written sources), and in the book about St Julian, though he enriched the collections with miracles he had heard about through the report of his acquaintances. The books about the miracles of martyrs and confessors were mainly compiled through this latter procedure, although for events long past (as in the case of *VM I*) Gregory also used written records and books.

Nevertheless, it was above all his books on the miracles of St Martin that came to exercise a great influence on later hagiographers, and contributed to the establishment of the collection of miracle stories as a genre. It was not only the importance of St Martin as a saint that lay at the basis of this influence, suggests Martin Heinzlmann, but also Gregory's success in giving to the miracle collection a simple, yet clear and stable structure. After a brief introduction and a couple of miracles that Gregory had personally benefited from, the miracles that happened at the tomb followed in chronological order, their distance from one another denoted by such expressions as "a few days later," "not long after", etc. Among these were scattered several stories that recorded events that had happened earlier, but were included because of an association they recalled in Gregory's mind, or stories that he heard from his friends. The days of the saint's festivals (two per year, one for his translation and one for his death) functioned as foci in this chronological framework, since large numbers of miracles, amounting to almost one third of the total number, occurred on these days. When a specific number of miracles had been recorded (60 in the middle two of the four books, the last one being interrupted by Gregory's

²⁰ Heinzlmann, "Die Funktion des Wunders," 32-45.

death), some kind of a finale was added, not infrequently in the form of further miracles that Gregory had enjoyed. Then the collection was published.

Although the collection of miracle stories hence received a boost from Gregory's literary activity, and found an imitator in the historian's friend Venantius Fortunatus, it did not appear as a distinct form in the following three centuries. During this period it usually formed a part, often of considerable bulk, of the lives of saints. This situation changed in the ninth century with the appearance of Eginhard's four books of miracles on the translation of the relics of the saints Marcellin and Pierre. The change was due to some important political, literary and religious transformations that had taken place by Eginhard's time. Firstly, the life of saints in the Carolingian Renaissance had come to be written once again according to the model of classical biographies, and in this form there was much less place for episodic miracle stories. Secondly, as a result of the close relations between the Carolingians and Rome, and the loosening of the prohibitions against dividing the relics of martyrs, many relics had come to be translated from their original resting place to other churches, which in effect amounted to the canonization of the saint in question. This, along with other liturgical acts like elevations, was accompanied by many miracles that were increasingly frequently recorded and published in the form of a Translation Report, as in the case of Eginhard. Hence, the miracle story collection as a distinct form was truly launched on its way into the high and later Middle Ages.²¹

Returning to the miracle stories of Gregory of Tours, five purposes emerge from a broad classification of them: First, persuasion of the population of the validity

²¹ M. Heinzmann, "Une source de base de la littérature hagiographique Latine : le recueil de miracles," in *Hagiographie, Cultures et Sociétés; IVe – XIIIe Siècles*, edited by E. Patlegan and P. Riché, 235-259 (Paris, 1981), 239-46.

of Christian revelation; second, reminding them that through the cults of saints Christianity offered effective solutions for dealing with the problems of this world, to draw people away from pagan cults to the Church; third, providing an effective tool for the maintenance and reproduction of the necessary *reverentia* towards the saints; fourth, preserving the moral values and integrity of the community; and fifth, the consolidation of the power and position of the bishop and his family against the clergy, city community, dukes and kings.

1.3.1 Persuasion of the population of the validity of Christian revelation

Platonists had held that it was possible, by way of language, to reach from the shadows in the cave to the world of ideas. After the spread of Christianity this optimism fell out of favor. Adherents of the new religion questioned the ability of man to attain the truth by himself, and branded such aspirations as the mere philosophizing of the pagans; one could not hope to get beyond the world of appearances merely through the medium of language, without divine revelation. Yet there was a problem here. When the capacity of language to serve as a tool with which one could reach beyond the world of appearances and attain the truth was questioned, and the “philosophizing” of the pagans was discredited, the persuasive capacity of the scriptures was also undermined in turn, since these were written texts themselves. In this situation, collecting all the available evidence of divine intervention, effected through the saints, was necessary to persuade the flock of the reality of the biblical miracles, and by implication, of the biblical revelation as a whole: the miracles were the concrete and tangible proofs of the Christian revelation. Although miracle stories themselves were also texts, the simplicity of their language, stressed so much by Gregory himself, served to make them, as it were, “transparent” windows that allowed an immediate visual glimpse of the miraculous events that

were reported. By showing that the saints and God were ever shaping the workings of nature and human society, it was hoped that a still doubtful populace could be persuaded that events were part of an ongoing timeless dialogue between humans and God on the subject of sin and divine retribution.²²

The word “timeless” here is important, for the modern miracles did not only provide verification for the past miracles; rather, they represented a replication of the past in the present, or, in other words, a synchronization of the past and present events. It is even misleading to speak of a “past” and a “present” here, for in the case of miracles, the past and the present were no different from each other: time might pass, eternity stood still. The last miracle performed at St Martin’s shrine was only a re-enactment of the first miracle performed during his lifetime. Hence both the miracles from the past recorded by Sulpicius Severus and Bishop Perpetuus and the recent miracles recorded by Gregory occupied the same timeless zone. They could equally serve as inspiration and guidance for their audience, since they were all miracles that St. Martin performed in a continuum outside the flow of time.²³

A chief function of the stories in this context was to affirm the correctness of the Trinitarian doctrine of incarnation against the Arian heresy. Behind the healing stories lay the implicit assertion that, only if God had been fully incarnated in a human body, thus rendering it sinless and redeeming it from its fallen and corrupt condition, would it be possible for the saints, who were sinless followers of Christ, to cleanse from sin and bring back to life the limbs that had become “dead” and “withered” because of the sins committed with them. Hence the power of orthodox saints to perform miracles, as well as the presumed inability of Arians to do so,

²² W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (AD 550-800)* (Princeton, 1988), 127-53.

²³ R. Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, 1993), 144-49.

stemmed from the “correctness” of the Trinitarian doctrine. Every miracle of theirs was a proof of it.²⁴

The miracle stories were also an illustration of the doctrines of Fall and Resurrection — because the saints had returned to obedience and gratitude to God, they had attained man’s status before the Fall, or alternatively, had already gained the reintegration other mortals would achieve only at the point of resurrection. Hence, their abilities to distribute health and reintegration, to live without ever working, to preserve an uncorrupted state after death, to exert control over wild beasts and other elements of nature, etc, that pertained to these two states, could be brought forward by Gregory as proofs of the correctness of the Christian version of history.²⁵

1.3.2 Reminding the population that through the cults of saints Christianity offered effective solutions to deal with the problems of this world

Miracle stories reminded the populace that Christian saints offered them an alternative to the ritual protection they had used to expect from pagan cults for solving their problems, easing their burdens, and alleviating their afflictions in this world. Miracle stories facilitated the adoption of the new religion by showing to those who read or listened to them that Christianity was not only an “organized” religion that consisted of a highly regulated code of conduct and belief devised by outside religious specialists, a well-defined hierarchy, and strict criteria of inclusion and exclusion, it could also serve as a “community” and a “local” religion by conforming to the religious needs, traditions, and expectations of the local community. Miracle stories demonstrated that effective remedies for the problems

²⁴ R. Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley, 1985), 187-89; Van Dam, *Saints*, 105-108.

²⁵ P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981), 69-85; Van Dam, *Saints*, 108-114.

that arose, as communities went about the difficult task of living in late antique Gaul, could now be obtained by praying to saints, instead of having recourse to sacred trees, lakes, etc.²⁶

Moreover, the stories might attract much of the population into the sphere of influence of the Christian Church and its sacraments, into the orbit of Christian worship. By way of the stories of miraculous healings that were read out publicly in the churches and spread by word of mouth, more and more people could be attracted away from alternative recourses for healing to the churches in which relics were kept. Once they had come to these places primarily looking for a cure, they would also be able to attend masses and listen to sermons.²⁷

1.3.3 Providing an effective tool for the maintenance and reproduction of the necessary “reverentia” towards the saints

Christian churches, as hinted above, were by no means the only places where healing could be sought. In addition to pagan soothsayers, there were also Christian hermits who went about offering miraculous cures to people, although they were outside the control of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Many miracles recount the re-crippling, further crippling, or even death of people who were rustic enough to have recourse to these alternative forms. Then there were the difficulties involved in reconciling a religious time that flowed according to an abstract rhythm determined by saints’ feast days and holy Sundays, and the traditional agricultural time which adjusted itself according to the rhythms of nature. Sunday or not, hay had to be lifted if it seemed there was going to be rain. Nativity or not, the fence had to be mended;

²⁶ P. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 95-111; W. E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge, 1994), 1-2, 171.

²⁷ D. Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1989), 188.

otherwise an animal might ruin a considerable part of the whole year's produce. And one could not always restrain one's sexual instincts on a Saturday evening. Punishment however would of course rapidly follow: hands would wither or get stuck to the handles of utensils, offspring would be born crippled. Not everyone though was terribly concerned lest they should offend the saints. Although there are innumerable stories about the terrible punishments meted out to those who defied the saints' authority by harassing their churches and priests, for every such punishment, there was someone to do the defying. In order to combat such manifestations of *rusticitas*, i.e. "pagan" boorishness, miracle stories were thought to be an effective weapon: they continually warned their readers and listeners to show due *reverentia* to saints, by observing their feast days, eschewing any insults to their churches and priests, avoiding the consultation of any alternative forms of healing such as recourse to soothsayers.²⁸

As Peter Brown points out, the relics of saints also assumed a judicial function in the West, where they came to be involved in the daily exercise of law and justice, separating the sinful from the sinless. Thus in the miracle stories, those who had committed sins were compelled to confess them in order to obtain healing, and could not get well if they kept some sins secret; this process resembled remarkably the Roman judicial practice of inquisition by torture. Relics were also used for taking oaths, loyalty to which was assured by the threat of divine retribution for perjury.

²⁸ P. Brown, "Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours," in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, 222-50 (Berkeley, 1982), 230-36; I. N. Wood, *Gregory of Tours* (Bangor, 1994), 29-30; Brown, *Cult of Saints*, 119; Van Dam, *Leadership*, 283-94.

Miracle stories about the terrible punishments meted out to those who dared to take false oaths on relics warned the flock to remain faithful to their promises.²⁹

1.3.4 The preservation of the moral values and integrity of the community

In this respect, miracle stories also served to foster and reproduce Christian moral values within the community. Among the people who had read or listened to such stories that associated sin with disease and exclusion from the community, those who failed in their duty to show *reverentia* to the saints by working on Sundays or in other ways, or who committed other sins, would feel all the more guilty. By this internalization of the fear of sin and its accompanying feeling of guilt, they would eventually be compelled to confess whatever sins they had committed and return to conformance with the prevailing values. Hence they could regard themselves once more as respectable members of the community. To put it another way, all the stories of paralysis, blinding and so on, that associated sin with illness and exclusion from the community, showed also a return to *reverentia* as the sole method of healing and reintegration. This helped to assure moral and reverent behavior in most people without themselves having to undergo paralysis, blinding, etc.³⁰

The stories had an edificatory purpose as well. As Gregory asserts again and again in the forewords to the *vitae* contained in his *Life of the Fathers*, the ability to perform miracles, in the lifetime of the saint and especially after his death, proved that the saint was a dear servant of God, and pointed out the value of a sinless and humble life innocent of any struggle for earthly goods and well-being. Only those who tried to imitate the saints' moral attitudes, even if not their way of life, could, in

²⁹ P. Brown, "Eastern and Western Christendom in Late Antiquity: A Parting of the Ways," in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, 166-95 (Berkeley, 1982), 187-92; Brown, *Cult of Saints*, 108-9; Wood, *Gregory of Tours*, 26.

³⁰ Van Dam, *Leadership*, 256-76; Van Dam, *Saints*, 86-94.

the eyes of God, hope to reach a status similar to that of the saints whom He had deemed worthy enough to work miracles. In this respect miracle stories aimed to set *exempla* before the readers and listeners.

1.3.5 Consolidation of the power and position of the bishop and his family against the clergy, community, dukes and kings

The miracle stories did not only serve the interests of the populace, the saints, and the Church. By collecting the miracles of St Julian, the patron saint of his family, and of St Martin, the patron saint of his church, Gregory was also consolidating his position as a scion of a powerful family, and an “outsider” bishop who had to bolster his standing in Tours. Although he asserts in one place that only five of the bishops of Tours were not among the members of his family, the main strength of the family lay further to the south, in the region of the Auvergne. We know from a poem of Fortunatus that it was only by the support of King Sigibert and his wife Brunnhild that Gregory was elevated to the see of Tours, a situation likely to raise serious problems. How insecure his position was can be observed from the intrigue set up against him by his priest Riculf, who had expected to be raised to the see himself. It was of vital importance therefore to show that the patron saint of Tours had accepted this foreigner. The first sign came with a miracle that occurred when, shortly after his arrival, Gregory placed the relics of the patron saint of his family, St Julian, on the tomb of St Martin. A light was seen that night in the shrine, which was conveniently interpreted as the unmistakable message of St Martin that he had welcomed St Julian. Welcoming St Julian meant, of course, welcoming his client also. Gregory recorded several more miracle stories, significantly placed at the beginning and/or at the end

of his books on the miracles of St Martin, in which the saint made it clear that he accepted Gregory, by healing him again and again of his not infrequent ailments.³¹

Stories of the miracles that happened at the shrine Gregory watched over also bolstered his standing and power, with respect to the community on the one hand, and the dukes and the King on the other. In the eyes of the community, the position of the bishop and the religion he sustained won prestige as people found healing at his church. It was the Christian God and his saints who granted them their health, and the bishop with his shrine of relics who made the contact possible.³² As for the king and his dukes, they had to see their judicial power shared, as observed in the stories about the release of prisoners, but they could not perform miracles in turn — unless they strictly conformed to the bishops' demands, like King Guntram. In this context the miracles had a protective purpose as well, illustrating the punishments meted out by a vengeful God to those kings and dukes who had offended his priests, lands and churches. It was no doubt because of such factors that the kings tried to avoid Tours as much as possible, preferring to visit the shrines of royal saints instead.³³

I.4 Were the miracle stories, notwithstanding their place within a certain genre, also intended to serve socio-moral reform, and if so, how far?

It is apparent from this discussion that Gregory's miracle stories could serve many different ends, including theological, political and, most important from our point of view, edificatory functions. Starting from here, it would not be far-fetched to suggest that they could have been intended to serve the author's vision of socio-moral reform as well. Returning to the exemplary value of miracle stories pointed out by Heinzelmann, we see that many in the *Histories* show saints punishing perjury,

³¹ Van Dam, *Saints*, 50-81.

³² Klingshirn, *Caesarius*, 166-67; Brown, "Relics," 243-47.

freeing captives, punishing the “slayers of the poor” (i.e. church robbers) and so on, thus exemplifying such ideal values as the mercy and respect due to the weak, the poor and the clergy that Gregory would have expected society to adopt. This exemplary role of the saint and his miracles for society is also confirmed by several statements of Gregory of Tours himself. The saints set an example above all with their lives, as Gregory remarks in several of his introductions to the *Life of the Fathers*: “I did not want to postpone the relation of some of these things, because the life of the saints not only makes their aims clear, but also encourages the minds of listeners to follow their example.”³⁴ Again,

The human mind must carefully and constantly investigate the life of the saints, so that, incited by that study and inflamed by that example, it might always turn to what it knows to be pleasing to God and so that it might either merit to be delivered by Him or be able to be heard.³⁵

To set the lives of saints as an example before others is justified, because these are:

men of outstanding sanctity, raised on earth, whom the palm of a perfect beatitude has lifted straight up to heaven. They are men whom the fetters of true charity bind, or whom the fruits of alms enrich, or whom the flower of chastity adorns, or whom the certain agony of martyrdom crowns... They made themselves their own persecutors, destroying the vices in themselves, and they triumph like proven martyrs, having completed the course of their legitimate combat.³⁶

It is St Aredius, in the last but two chapter of the *Histories*, who most perfectly typifies the saint Gregory places before society as an ideal model, during a time when the approaching Last Judgment renders conversion to a spiritually oriented life all the more necessary. The saint renounces the king’s court, where a brilliant secular career awaited him, in order to give himself to religious studies which he receives from a holy bishop; he enters the Church; he gives himself wholly

³³ Van Dam, *Saints*, 94-105.

³⁴ *VP*, *praef.*

³⁵ *VP* XVI, *praef.*

³⁶ *VP* VII, *praef.*

to prayer and building churches; he founds a monastery and collects relics, and he wholly resigns from worldly affairs, including the keeping of a household. Moreover, his virtues and his sinless character allow him to perform many miracles. When dying, this exemplary saint leaves all his property to the churches of St Martin and St Hilary, and other saints come together for his funeral to confirm his sanctity.³⁷

But not only the lives (or rather in singular: the Life) of saints, but also their miracles and miracle stories could have an edificatory function. As Gregory says, “At least we can lay out... stories which make known the miracles of the saints and of the friends of God in the Holy Church, so that those who read may be fired by that enthusiasm by which the saints deservedly climbed to heaven.”³⁸ This is confirmed in a curious story about the saintly recluse Hospicius, who does not bother to tell the Lombards, who find him in his cell and wonder what crimes he has perpetrated to justify imprisonment, that he has resigned there voluntarily to dedicate himself to God and turn away from the world towards spiritual matters. This is because he knows that they will never be able to understand this by themselves. Instead he tells them what they can conceive of and confesses to every sort of crime, and later converts some of them by the manifestation of his miraculous powers.³⁹

I.5 The question of the thesis

The saints do not only set examples with their life, as is clear in this last case, but positively intervene through miracles to correct society and to put such values as peacefulness, charity and mercy into action through such deeds as forcing kings to put an end to civil war, protecting those who seek asylum, breaking the chains of prisoners, rescuing convicts from gallows, redeeming slaves and captives, protecting

³⁷ *Hist. X.29.*

³⁸ *VP IX, praef.*

city populations from heavy taxation or enemy attacks and so on. Kathleen Mitchell has already pointed out this exemplary aspect of the miracle stories found in the *Histories*. However, contrasting the role of the saint as an exemplar in the *Histories* to his predominant role as a healer in the miracle books, she dismisses the stories that are found in the miracle books, especially the healing miracles, as being irrelevant to Gregory's vision of socio-moral reform.⁴⁰ Although the author does not dwell further on this point, it is possible that she is acting under the influence of a sharp distinction drawn until lately by historians between the historiographical and hagiographical works of Gregory of Tours. This is a distinction, however, that has been lately questioned by scholars. Martin Heinzelmann, for example, has pointed to the existence of a hagiographical and a historiographical discourse in the historian's works, which are by no means confined to the miracle books and the *Histories* respectively, but are to be found equally in both. Giselle de Nie and Walter Goffart have gone further in denying altogether the existence of any significant difference between the hagiographical and historiographical elements in Gregory of Tours's works.⁴¹

All this tempts one to ask if it could be possible after all to establish some kind of connection between the author's vision of social reform and the stories found in the miracle collections, in addition to those found in the *Histories*. This is indeed the central question for which an answer will be sought in this study. Can the *entire corpus* of the miracle stories of Gregory of Tours be fitted into the perspective of the

³⁹ *Hist.* VI.6.

⁴⁰ K. Mitchell, "Saints and Public Christianity in the *Historiae* of Gregory of Tours," in *Religion, Culture and Society in the Early Middle Ages*, edited by T.F.X. Noble and J. J. Contreni, 7-26 (Kalamazoo, 1987), 78-81.

⁴¹ See M. Heinzelmann, "Hagiographischer und historischer Diskurs bei Gregor von Tours?" in *Aevum inter Utrumque*, edited by M. Van Uytfanghe and R. Demeulenaere (The Hague, 1991), 237-58; G. de Nie, *Views from a Many-Windowed Tower. Studies of Imagination in the Works of Gregory of Tours* (Amsterdam, 1987), *passim*; Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, 127 ff.

ascetical reform of morals and society that is evident in the sermons of Caesarius of Arles, in the canons of Merovingian Church councils, and in the historical works and biographies of Gregory of Tours himself?⁴² If the answer is in the affirmative, how far and in what manner can this be done?

I.6 The method

The ideal society envisioned by Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours was one that willingly embraced ideal values such as charity, humility and obedience, much like the monastic community on which it was expected to model itself. Progressing towards such a society made it necessary for the leaders of the society, as well as other individuals, to take steps towards the realization of these values and the elimination of their opposites, such as avarice and pride. Hence, in order to delineate the socio-moral reform envisioned by our authors, and to place the miracle stories in the context of this reform, it is necessary to investigate both the values our sources promote (or in reverse, the attitudes they censure), and the methods they suggest for realizing these values and the duties of the secular and ecclesiastical leaders they put forward for their realization. Considering that the envisioned reform was of a strongly ascetical character, it makes sense to perform this investigation within the general framework of the basic components and aims of the ascetical

⁴² Gregory of Tours mentions Caesarius of Arles only once, in the context of his rule for nunneries adapted by St Radegund's convent, and there does not exist sufficient evidence to conclude that Gregory had personal access to Caesarius's sermons. Nevertheless, it would still be reasonable to use the sermons as a source for reconstructing the general mentality of ecclesiastics during Gregory's time, which would in turn provide illuminating insights into the mentality of Gregory of Tours himself, without necessarily investigating whether Caesarius of Arles had any direct impact on Gregory of Tours' thinking. This is not only because the sermons were widely copied and would have been likely to exert a certain amount of influence, even over those who had not read them, but also because the very fact that they were being widely copied hints that they struck some common chords in at least some circles among the ecclesiastics of Gaul. This suggestion is further corroborated by the striking similarity between the social concerns found in Caesarius of Arles' sermons and in the canons of Merovingian Church councils, which has been discerningly pointed out by Kathleen Mitchell. On what she calls Caesarius's "dominating influence upon the ecclesiastical mentality of his century" as well as upon Gregory of Tours himself, see Mitchell, *History and Christian Society*, 206-15.

stance and practice as found in Late Antique Gaul. Within this same framework, the ideal values and the intended methods to realize them can then be brought into relation with the different kinds of miracle stories that both illustrate these moral values and exemplify the ways to realize them.

The advantage of using such a framework is that it provides us with a subtler method for bringing together the promoted values and the methods for realizing them than does the approach of considering the values and methods in two clearly divided compartments. Drawing so sharp a line between the “values” and the “methods to realize them” (a distinction not explicitly made in the sources and justifiable only as an analytical tool for the modern researcher), may not only prove too schematic, but it has the further disadvantage of presenting the visions of reform found in our sources in a rather anachronistic light, making them look like a modern reform program with a clear cut manifesto and proposed methods to realize the measures put forward in the program.

Hence, whereas in a compartmental approach obedience would appear as an ideal value, and the discipline established by the bishop as the way to realize it, when placed in the context of asceticism, these two turn out to be only different components of ascetical practice. Or again, whereas in the compartmental approach otherworldliness would be placed among the ideal values, and reading the Scripture among the ways to reach this ideal, when looked from the perspective of asceticism they correspond to the negative (insofar as renunciation of this world is concerned) and positive facets of the ascetical stance respectively. In turn, another way to realize the ideal of otherworldliness could, in this ascetical framework, be found among the components of ascetical practice, namely the very same method as that for the attainment of obedience — the discipline established by a bishop in his role of

spiritual supervisor. Hence, by adopting a holistic approach, the case where a single measure could serve more than one purpose can also be considered.

In his article about the biblical and patristic controversy surrounding the miracle and its repercussions on the hagiography of Late Antiquity, Marc van Uytfanghe has claimed that Gregory overestimated the role and value of miracles for Christian sanctity, and that he departed seriously from the biblical and patristic tradition, if only because of the huge number of miracles he related.⁴³ The present study will have performed its function if it can suggest to some readers that Gregory of Tours's miracle stories might be fitted more satisfactorily within the context of "Christian sanctity," insofar as they were intended to contribute to the sanctification and hence to the salvation of sixth-century Gallic society as it proceeded slowly, yet inexorably, towards the Last Judgment.

⁴³ "De toute manière, il est incontestable que Grégoire de Tours surestime le rôle et la valeur du miracle pour la sainteté chrétienne et qu'il s'écarte sérieusement de la tradition biblique et patristique, ne fût-ce que par le nombre énorme de miracles qu'il relate": M. Van Uytfanghe, "La controverse biblique et patristique autour du miracle, et ses répercussions sur l'hagiographie dans l'antiquité tardive et le haut moyen âge latin," in *Hagiographie, cultures et sociétés IVe – VIIIe siècles. Actes du Colloque organisé à Nanterre et à Paris (2 – 5 mai 1979)*, 205-31 (Paris, 1981), 218.

CHAPTER II

The Main Components of Ascetical Stance

Bernhard Lohse has pointed out, in attempting to give a definition of asceticism, that it is not only to be understood as renouncing something, but also as setting oneself and reaching towards a goal. In this respect, renunciation of certain things can be considered as ascetic only when it is undertaken with the philosophical or religious purpose of emancipating man from a state of insufficiency, or impurity, so that he fulfils a higher purpose, or where a religion is concerned, so that he comes nearer to God.¹ The first of these components, renunciation, can be characterized as “negative”; and the second, reaching towards a goal, as “positive.” Where religion is concerned, this positive component is likely to take the form of contemplation, of a reaching towards God with prayer and meditation. So in this chapter we shall investigate the promotion of these negative and positive components of asceticism, of renunciation and contemplation, in the works of Gregory of Tours and the sermons of Caesarius of Arles.

II.1 The “negative” component: renunciation

We have already seen, at the beginning of the previous chapter, that Caesarius recommends to all his contemporaries, in view of the approaching end of the world, to turn away from the love of this world and to begin thinking about death

¹ Lohse, *Askese und Mönchtum*, 15.

and the Last Judgment.² Because those who are occupied solely with their material existence are no better than animals, genuine Christians are to think constantly about the coming world and the eternal recompense, and to work more for their eternal soul than for their perishable body.³ The promotion of an otherworldly stance is also observable where he recommends that his flock ponder, when passing near the graves of the rich, on the all-too-ephemeral quality of worldly riches:

Reflect and attentively examine where are their riches, ornaments, rings and earrings, the precious diadems, the vanity of honors, the voluptuousness of luxury, the violent, bloody and shameful spectacles. Certainly, all has passed away like a shadow, and if penitence has not followed only opprobrium and crimes remain for eternity.

He concludes that it would be better if his flock became preoccupied with their soul rather than with their body.⁴

A similar emphasis on turning away from the present world is evident in many passages of Gregory of Tours' works. In fact, valuing the material world at the expense of the spiritual amounts to nothing less than heresy in his eyes. In *Hist.* V.44, we learn without much surprise that the *bête noire* of the fifth book, King Chilperic, has lately published a heretical decree that interprets the Persons of the Holy Trinity physically instead of spiritually. No wonder: being a staunch "materialist," he, like the Arians and Jews, cannot understand the spiritual meaning of the Trinity. It is nevertheless the duty of Gregory as a bishop to warn him about his mistakes and to try to direct him back to the truth and spiritual understanding. Another bishop is ultimately successful in this, though not Gregory. As Kathleen

² *Serm.* 71.1.

³ *Serm.* 16.1.

⁴ *Serm.* 37.3.

Mitchell points out,⁵ understanding the Trinity in a correct way necessitated in Gregory's eyes a spiritual stance that considered the unity of will and purpose amongst the three persons of the Trinity, instead of scrutinizing in a rationalist and materialistic manner the exact nature of the relationship and gradations between them. A further proof of the materialism of the Arians is produced in *Hist.* VI.18, where they come to accept the divinity of the Son but insist on rejecting the full divinity of the Holy Ghost.

In Gregory's view, the Jews are also materialists like the Arians, because they refuse to see the spiritual meaning of the scriptures and cling only to their literal meaning. Hence, as we see in *Hist.* V.6, fools like Leunast who seek from Jews material remedies to their ailments, instead of trusting the spiritual power of St Martin and God, lose whatever healing they have gained from spiritual means, and find no good in material treatment either.

It is perhaps best to leave it to Gregory to explain his own views on the need to turn away from this world towards spiritual matters, since he expresses them in direct speech at various places in his work, especially in the *Life of the Fathers*, in a way that does not leave much to be added.

The vines that we see now extending their branches, with shoots sprouting, tendrils entwining and grapes hanging, have so many charms for the eye, not only because of the abundant fruits they carry but also for the shade which protects us when we are burnt by the rays of the sun. But we know that when the fruit has been picked, in due season, the leaves drop off, as if withered. We ought the more to desire those things which never come to an end and never wither in the heat of temptation, where, even after hope has been lost, the thing hoped for can be attained and enjoyed.⁶

⁵ K. Mitchell, *History and Christian Society in Sixth-Century Gaul: An Historiographical Analysis of Gregory of Tours' Decem libri historiarum*, Unpublished dissertation, Michigan State University (Lansing, 1983), 83-91.

⁶ *VP* XII, *praef.*

The speech Injurius's new bride makes to him about the need to turn away from this world, as she is trying to persuade him to renounce conjugal relations at the expense of heirs, expresses the same idea of *contemptus mundi* in a more direct manner:

This earthly existence of ours is of no value. Wealth is of no value, the pomp and circumstance of this world is of no value, the very life which we enjoy is of no value. We should look instead to the other life which is not ended when death finally comes, which is not dissolved by any illness, which is not closed by any accident, but where man lives for ever in eternal bliss, in a radiance which never fades, and what is more than all this, where he is translated to cohabit with the angels and enjoys a happiness which is eternal, rejoicing in a meditation which lasts for ever, in the presence of our Lord Himself.⁷

In fact, warns Gregory,

every man who knows that he possesses a body made of terrestrial matter must be careful that terrestrial and fleshly things do not become dear to him, because, as St Paul said, 'the works of the flesh are manifest' (Galat. 5:19), full of impurity, rendering men who indulge in them polluted and unclean, and dooming them at the last to eternal weeping.⁸

"He who is at the summit of worldly nobility," however,

always longs for what can satisfy his desires. He rejoices over honours, he is puffed up by attentions, he disturbs the forum with his law-cases, he feeds on plunder, he delights in calumnies, he desires rusty gold, and when he seems to possess a few things he is the more enflamed with a desire to amass many: the more he accumulates the more his thirst grows, for, as Prudentius said, 'with amassed gold the hunger for gold increases.' Thus it happens that, while he rejoices in the pomps of the world and in his honours, he does not stop to think about the dignities which endure; as long as he possesses things which he wrongly thinks can assuage his passion he does not look towards the things which are not seen.⁹

But there are also those who,

like birds fleeing from a snare and flying up to the skies, have escaped their bonds with the help of a lively spirit and, leaving the terrestrial possessions which they despise, they have turned all their attention towards celestial matters.¹⁰

⁷ *Hist.* 1.47.

⁸ *VP IV, praef.*

⁹ *VP VI, praef.*

¹⁰ *VP VI, praef.*

This contrast between materially and spiritually oriented people is thrown into relief in two contrasting chapters that come one after another,¹¹ which is a method much more commonly employed in the *Histories* than that of directly addressing the reader. Mark the Referendary, whom we meet first, is an avaricious grabber, who is found to have amassed a vast hoard of gold and silver after his death. If he had spent these for the care of the Church and the poor, he would have amassed wealth in the other world, unlike the earthly wealth he could not take with him on his death. Instead he took the damnation of his soul on his last journey. This is a prelude to the next chapter about two nuns who, for the sake of eternal life, bid farewell to this life, the first shining so white after her death that she can be understood to have gone to heaven, while the other has herself walled up in a cell after a vision of the spring of everlasting life, passing her days with reading and prayer. Similar to these two nuns is the nun Georgia in *GC* 33, who resigns from the city to the countryside, where she passes her days with fasts and prayers. At her funeral, as the bier is being carried on the road to the city church for burial, a flock of doves begins to accompany the procession, rests on the roof of the church during the ceremony, and flies off to heaven after she is buried. Because Georgia busied her mind with spiritual cultivation, concludes Gregory, she harvested the sixty-fold fruit of her virginity and was honored with a funeral in heaven. All these nuns lay their treasures in heaven, unlike Mark. They are like

the athletes of Christ and the conquerors of the world [who] have desired to lose this fleeting life and to proceed to that life of perpetual joy, where there is no pain, which has no end, whose light will never go out and whose serenity will never be obscured by any cloud.¹²

¹¹ *Hist.* VI.28, 29.

¹² *VP* XIII, *praef.*

Just as the martyrs resisted all the pain and tortures inflicted on them to embrace eternal life, such people resist their own vices, desires and “bodily agitations,” and by becoming dead to this world even before they are dead, by becoming their own persecutors, they deserve the name of martyrs.¹³

An important, if not indispensable, part of this necessary turning away from the concerns of the present world in Gregory’s view is the abandonment of one’s earthly spouse for the celestial one, i.e. the Church. As already quoted, conjugal life is drawn in dark colours by Injuriosus’s wife as she is lamenting her marriage, declaring that she wanted to marry Christ only. She is successful in her exhortations and the young couple renounce conjugal relations, earthly fortune and heirs on the very first night of their marriage. As a result, their tombs come together miraculously after their death, as “Heaven has united them” and not flesh. They do this even though they do not enter the Church, which is to be contrasted with the behaviour of Bishop Urbicus and his lustful wife, who cannot resist their passions or abstain from conjugal relations, even though they are in the Church, and who are embarrassingly buried with a daughter born after their entry to the Church, as a sign showing that not Heaven but their flesh joined them.¹⁴

There are many more examples in Gregory’s works of people escaping from conjugal life and the inevitable worldly cares and compromises that come with it. When Leobardus the recluse arrives at the age of legal majority, his parents, following the custom of the world, want him to give to a young girl a pledge that he will take her as his wife. When he shows himself unwilling to do this, his father exhorts him to marry and produce heirs, so that they can transmit the wealth of the family to future generations. He finally gets betrothed and then his parents die. After

¹³ *VP VII, praef.* and *VM 105-6.*

the end of the mourning period, when he goes to his brother's house with the wedding presents, the drunken brother does not recognize him and turns him out. In a barn filled with hay, where he lays down to sleep, God inspires Leobardus "to leave the world in order to serve the worship of God." Then, "as if now the priest of his own soul," he begins to preach to himself, saying, "What are you doing, my soul? Why do you still hesitate? The world is vain, its lusts are vain, its glory is vain; everything that is in it is vanity. It is better to leave it and to follow God than to compromise with its works." Subsequently he retires to a cell near Marmoutier where he dedicates himself to singing, reading, prayer and writing.¹⁵ Likewise, Arthemius converts to a religious life, renounces his prospective wife and private fortune when healed from his sickness by a holy bishop, and later becomes a saintly bishop himself.¹⁶ An ideal of clericalizing the whole of society is unmistakable in such passages. The most spiritual society, according to Gregory, would be one in which all renounced their properties and spouses and entered the Church. Of course the earlier one converted to a monastic life, preferably in childhood, the better.¹⁷

From this perspective, returning to the secular world from the Church can only bring trouble. The Breton chieftain Macliaw renounces his vows and grows his hair, returning to his secular career and habit. As a result he is excommunicated and

¹⁴ *Hist.* I.44, 47.

¹⁵ *VP* XX.1, 2.

¹⁶ *Hist.* I.46.

¹⁷ See Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, 153-54 and 166, where the author brings forward the argument, based on an analysis of *Vita Patrum*, that Gregory aimed at the "moralization" of the society through its "clericalization," i.e. through the entry of as many members of the society as possible to the Church, in whose favor they would also renounce their entire property. In this way the existing wealth could be used for the exercise of charitable works under bishops' supervision, in accordance with the model of "Bischofsherrschaft," and moreover the ideals of apostolic poverty and antimaterialism could triumph against the greed currently rampant in the society. In this connection Heinzelmann also notes Gregory's insistence on the privileging of spiritual concerns at the expense of material ones, and on the necessity of giving alms (*ibid.*, 155-56). Nevertheless, he does not perceive the relevance of these observations to the overall ascetical framework of Gregory's social conception as laid out in the present study.

later meets a violent end.¹⁸ Theudecild, one of the queens of Charibert, gets packed off to a monastery by Guntram. As she bears the fasts and vigils ill and prepares to escape with a Goth, she is caught by the abbess and spends the rest of her life in a cell. Relapse from a religious life, even if originally entered by compulsion, is thus punished.¹⁹ In some cases, even turning away from the decision to renounce conjugal life and enter the Church can be disastrous. Lupus wants to enter the Church, but then lets himself be persuaded to marry instead by his brother. They are both killed by the lover of Lupus's wife. Going back on the decision to renounce the ways of the world and enter the Church thus results in an ignoble death, both for the man himself and the brother who had dissuaded him because of his own avaricious eagerness to deny the Church the inheritance of his brother.²⁰ Conjugal life is drawn in very dark colours here. Marrying the Church is certainly better!

II.2 The “positive” component: contemplation

By the sixth century in Gaul, the conception of “contemplation” in ascetic life had undergone a remarkable transformation at the hands of John Cassian. While in the true desert tradition contemplation had meant attaining a vision of God himself, in the tradition of Gallic monasticism, as influenced by Cassian, this was held to be no longer possible for the overwhelming majority of monks; although still highly cherished, the ideal of seeing God was now placed beyond the reach of all except a few solitary hermits, if it was available to any mortal at all. Thus, in the new conception of contemplation, study and the understanding of the scriptures came to hold an increasingly dominating position. Ascetic renunciation of the riches and concerns of the present world was seen to be a necessary prelude to the time-

¹⁸ *Hist.* IV.4.

¹⁹ *Hist.* IV.26.

consuming occupation of scriptural study, which would in turn foster such a renunciation through its spiritual content. Thus, the monastic life, at least insofar as the tradition of Lérins was concerned, became a compound of renunciation and scriptural study, mutually fostering each other. However, this was also a time, as previously discussed, when the boundaries between the City and the Desert had become blurred, and the monastic lifestyle came to be held up to society as a model, not least because the ranks of the clergy were increasingly filled by monks.²¹

It is by no means a coincidence under these conditions that Caesarius of Arles, himself an alumnus of Lérins, did not content himself with promoting ascetic renunciation, but also exhorted his flock, whatever their chances of observing his recommendations, to read or at least hear the scriptures as much as possible. A further parallel with the conception of contemplation at Lérins is Caesarius's view that the study of scripture would in turn encourage renunciation of the present world, both because of the spiritual qualities of scriptural study that would chase away unholy thoughts from the mind of the hearer or reader, and because of the period away from worldly concerns that it necessitated.

Hence, when explaining the necessity of dedicating oneself to reading the holy scriptures, Caesarius likens the human soul to a mill. It is necessary, he says, to feed to this mill only the wheat of honest and holy thoughts, so that the resulting flour will be fit as a meal for Christ. If on the other hand one grinds the thorns of wicked thoughts filled with pride, avarice and luxury, the resulting bread will be fit only for the table of the devil.²² Holy scriptures offer a helpful remedy in this respect, since "if we willingly read or hear the passages in the Holy Scripture where the Lord

²⁰ *Hist.* VI.13.

²¹ Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 186-89.

²² *Serm.* 8.4.

announces to us the rewarding of saints and where he threatens sinners of punishment, encouraging the good and warning the bad, bad thoughts will never be able to take us by surprise.”²³

However, apart from the effect of what is written in the holy scriptures, even the sole act of saving a few hours from daily preoccupations to read them will be beneficial, remarks Caesarius.

It is certain that if one does not make an effort to detach the wings of his soul from the glue of sins, from the excessive impediments and from the traps of this world, he will never be able to reach true rest. Even if we cannot draw ourselves entirely from the impediments of this world, at least we should apply ourselves to mitigate them as far as our forces allow, so that there remains for us the space of a few hours, during which we could occupy ourselves with lecture or prayer. Because if earthly preoccupations totally absorb us, we ought to fear lest the words ‘the impediments of this world have rendered them misfortunate’ come true about us.²⁴

Moreover, says Caesarius, the less time one dedicates to reading the words of God, the less able one will become of receiving “the softness of Christ,” and one will be absorbed more and more by the concerns of this world. Those who read the holy scriptures, on the other hand, will grow more hungry and thirsty for the word of God, since reading the scriptures is “nothing less than conversing with God himself.”²⁵

Or, should we say, nothing less than reading “the letters of invitation from God,” in that they teach what is pleasing to God and what not, thus allowing one to enter Paradise when the Last Judgment arrives.²⁶ For although it is worth more to act than to know, warns Caesarius, knowledge precedes action, and one should get to know beforehand what one desires to accomplish.²⁷ For all these reasons, everybody who does not want to commit sins should dedicate some hours to the reading or

²³ *Serm.* 45.4.

²⁴ *Serm.* 34.6.

²⁵ *Serm.* 8.3.

²⁶ *Serm.* 7.2, 3.

²⁷ *Serm.* 4.1.

hearing of scriptures, implores the bishop.²⁸ Every believer is advised to feed his own and also others' souls with the nourishment of the holy scriptures by continual reading, or if he cannot read, by hiring a poor but literate man to do the reading, so that he can listen.²⁹ Nobody should claim he does not have time for this, warns Caesarius, but instead he should give up vain chatter, empty pleasantries, and long meals that extend long into the night with their obscenities and buffooneries, to gain time for it.³⁰ Indeed, even at the meal table one should have the sacred scriptures read to guests, instead of indulging in obscene songs and jests.³¹

But Caesarius knew only too well that listening was not sufficient, as long as one did not keep in mind what one had heard. Hence, in a sermon delivered on one of his parish tours, he urges his flock to recall what they have heard in his sermons when they are at their daily work, and to think upon them like ruminating animals that do not let their food go immediately down their digestive tract, and hence are called "pure" animals.³² Since his audience found it very difficult to memorize the entire sermon, he recommends each to try to keep at least three or four sentences from the sermon in his memory, so that the sermon, having taken root in their hearts, will produce its fruits at the time of retribution. They should also tell these memorized extracts to each other, in order that the whole of the sermon can be learnt by all.³³ Caesarius's belief in the transforming power of the word when it is learnt by heart can also be observed in his insistence that the peasants should memorize, instead of obscene songs, the creed, the Sunday sermons and the psalms 50 and 90

²⁸ *Serm.* 7.1.

²⁹ *Serm.* 8.1, 5.

³⁰ *Serm.* 6.1.

³¹ *Serm.* 1.17.

³² *Serm.* 69.5.

³³ *Serm.* 6.8.

“which would show them the light of Christ,”³⁴ and in his warning against phylacteries that “it is preferable to retain the words of God in one’s heart than to suspend his scriptures from the neck.”³⁵

Similar to his exhortations for the reading and hearing of the scriptures by everybody, Caesarius insisted on the participation of his congregation in all the liturgical services presented in the churches, exhorting them, among other things, to rise up for the Matins.³⁶ A further parallel is that he believed that the words of the prayers, just as the words of the scriptural texts, would foster a spiritual stance and encourage a renunciation of vices in those praying: “It is bad to pay attention, when singing the psalms, only to the music and not to let the meaning of the words soften the heart, while the music is charming the ears.”³⁷ So one should pay attention above all to the virtues contained in the psalms, and avoid the sins that are mentioned in the psalms, such as pride, fornication and hate, forcing oneself to embrace virtues like justice, mercy, sobriety, chastity and humility, wherever one hears those virtues being praised in the psalms.³⁸

If Caesarius’s understanding of prayer as a method of contemplation is rather analytical and didactic, Gregory’s conception of prayer is more mystical and concentrates on the close relation with God or his saints established through penitence and prayer. In *GC 37*, he tells the story of a certain monk who used to go into the thick forest after the usual prayer hours to pray kneeling for a long time to God. After this he used to stand up, lift his palms and eyes to heaven, and silently recite psalms, looking to heaven “with such remorse that tears gushed from his eyes.”

³⁴ *Serm.* 6.3.

³⁵ *Serm.* 50.2.

³⁶ Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 203-4.

³⁷ *Serm.* 75.2.

³⁸ *Serm.* 75.3.

One day a fellow monk notices him and reports what he sees to the abbot, who follows the monk to watch him praying. Then he sees a great miracle: a flame extends from the monk's lips and gradually rises to a great height, all the time giving off a bright light, without ever harming his head. Risking, so to say, a "miraculo-scientific" explanation, one could say that the monk's faith was so fervent as he prayed, repented and recited psalms, his dedication to God so strong, that his contact with God during prayer became visible through a chain of fire extending from his lips to heaven. We shall see below the importance Gregory attaches to prayer as a way of contact with the saint before healing at his tomb. In any case, praying is a form of contemplation promoted both by Caesarius and Gregory, although Gregory's understanding of it was rather different from Caesarius's.

It is not possible to find in Gregory's works a similar emphasis on the reading of or listening to scripture, however. When seeking to explain this lacuna, there is good reason to keep in mind the important differences of Gregory's cultural milieu from that of Caesarius. Caesarius had lived in the South of Gaul at a time when its educational institutions were largely intact, and the proportion of laity that could read was not insignificant. This was highly unlike the situation in the more northern Tours in Gregory's time. Then there is the fact that Caesarius came from the monastery of Lérins, with its learned traditions and emphasis on scriptural study, whereas Gregory (besides the fact that he was no monk) stood in the tradition of St Martin, whose monasteries had never been centres of learning and teaching like the monastic circles of Lérins.³⁹

³⁹ F. Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich, Kultur und Gesellschaft im Gallien, den Rheinlanden und Bayern am Beispiel der monastischen Entwicklung (4. bis 8. Jahrhundert)* (Munich and Vienna, 1965), 452-61.

In these conditions, it is clear that scriptural meditation is highly unlikely to have been the kind of contemplation Gregory could have recommended to his uncultivated audience. There is good reason, on the other hand, to consider the possibility that he intended the miracle stories themselves as food for contemplation.⁴⁰ In the prologue of *VP IX*, as we have seen in the first chapter, he expressly stated that his miracle stories were laid out to fire their readers with an enthusiasm that would grant them access to Paradise. The stories had the indispensable advantage that, through their simple, “transparent” language, vivid style and lively images they worked visually, and unlike the scriptures, they maintained a degree of accessibility they could have hardly enjoyed as simple texts in this early medieval “television” age. Caesarius’s audience had found it hard to memorize sermons and biblical texts, as he advised them; Gregory’s would have found no difficulty in remembering and telling others the interesting and astonishing anecdotes about miracles that their bishop related to them.

This emphasis on miracle stories had had also much to do with the mode of piety prevalent in the age. Giselle de Nie has indeed pointed out that in Late Antiquity people tended to experience religious truth largely through a sort of dream-consciousness working through figural images, instead of the textually-based, verbalizable logic of the classical and modern ages. This she attributes not so much to the decline of literacy as to the continuance of an older meditative tradition that

⁴⁰ For the following discussion on the contemplation of miracle stories see G. de Nie, “Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours: two sixth-century Gallic bishops and ‘Christian magic’,” in *Cultural Identity and Cultural Integration: Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, edited by D. Edel (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995), 170-96; “History and Miracle: Gregory’s Use of Metaphor,” in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, edited by K. Mitchell and I. Wood (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne, 2002), 261-79; “Iconic Alchemy: Imaging Miracles in Late Sixth Century Gaul,” *Studia Patristica* 30, 1997: 158-66; “Word, Image and Experience in the Early Medieval Miracle Story,” in *Language and Beyond*, edited by P. Joret and A. Remael (Amsterdam, 1998), 97-122; “Eine Poetik des Wunders: bildhaftes Bewusstsein und Verwandlungsdynamik in den Wundererzählungen des späten sechsten

valued figural images as being able to express the otherwise inexpressible. Caesarius of Arles had already interpreted the events of the Old Testament as pointing figuratively to the spiritual truths contained in the New. His approach, however, was firmly bound to the biblical texts, as Augustine had recommended, and he eyed the application of a similar method to dreams and miracles with suspicion. Contemplation through figural-spiritual interpretation could not be kept limited to biblical texts however in a milieu when most of the populace was illiterate; and Gregory took a necessary step in presenting miracle stories as food for meditation to his uncultivated audience.

In this context, de Nie has also investigated in depth the psychological processes involved in the contemplation of miracle stories, suggesting that the metaphorical images found in the miracle stories, such as the candle, the broken and re-integrated lamp, the gold that mysteriously appears in a locked church building etc., corresponded to iconic images that were the expressions of invisible, spiritual realities. Moreover, as she points out, the images did not only stand as symbols of these invisible realities; they also partook of their powers, and by virtue of these shared powers they were able to let loose certain latent forces within the individual who absorbingly read the miracle story and re-visualised its images. The triggering of these transformative dynamics, which went along with an involuntary inner “imitation” of the images (such as the blooming of a flower, piercing of the darkness by light etc.) led in turn to both spiritual and physical healing.

Jahrhunderts,” in *Mirakel im Mittelalter*, edited by M. Heinzlmann, K. Herbers and D. R. Bauer (Stuttgart, 2002), 135-50.

CHAPTER III

The Main Components of Ascetical Practice: Virtuousness and the Ideal Values

The ascetic stance does not only consist in renouncing the world and practicing contemplation in isolation, but makes necessary an active life beside the contemplative one, which is indispensable for achieving the aims discussed above. Hence, as a corollary to his renouncement of the craving after power and riches, the ascetic should also strive to be virtuous (not least because he can afford it now), and as a corollary of opening himself to God and being filled with his love, he should also love and care for his own fellow human beings, especially helping the poor and the infirm, acting as the protector of the weak, and even loving his enemy. Of course all this is closely interrelated, since giving up the blind struggle for worldly riches implies that other people cease to be competitors and become loveable human beings, and from love follows the willingness to do good.¹ The ideal of the ascetic active in the world is represented by a type we frequently find in the literature about the aristocratic bishops in Gaul at this time, the origins of which go back to the incorporation of asceticism into the canon of traditional virtues of the Gallo-Roman ruling classes, which monopolized the bishoprics after the fourth century.²

¹ For John Cassian's views on the inseparability of an active and contemplative life see Nürnberg, *Askese als sozialer Impuls*, 73-85.

² Heinzelmann, *Bischofherrschaft*, 234-45.

Nevertheless, the ascetic bishop who humbly uses his power for helping and protecting the weak in his society is also a type we meet in Basileus the Great.³ Gregory extends this type, as we shall see later, to the ideal king, who is praised not for his success in war, but for his asceticism, piety and charity.

In this and the subsequent chapter, therefore, we shall be concerned with the themes of virtuousness and good works respectively, as found in our sources. In the present chapter, the ideal values promoted by Gregory and Caesarius, such as charity, humility, mercy and peacefulness are analyzed. It should be pointed out before starting that the nature of the passages in which the two authors promote these ideal values differs considerably from one to the other. Caesarius's sermons, as expected from the form, involve direct moral exhortations, whereas it is a remarkable characteristic of Gregory's works that he illustrates ideal values mostly through showing their opposites. Hence, a gallery of vividly portrayed avaricious, cruel, aggressive, perjurous, and vain characters as well as the divine punishment they inevitably receive in the end serves to hold up generosity, mercy, peacefulness etc. Moreover, the social upstart who, coming from a humble background, has attained great wealth and power is a type used by Gregory as an embodiment of all possible vices, and hence as a kind of "anti-saint." The most notorious example of such an upstart is of course Fredegund, Chilperic's queen.

III.1 Charity versus avarice

Charity and humility, together with their opposites avarice and pride, occupy a central place in Caesarius's stock of ideal values. Hence he strongly urges every individual to seek into his own heart — if he sees that avarice is planted there, he should root it out straightaway and plant the opposing value of charity, for avarice is

³ H. von Campenhausen, *Griechische Kirchenväter* (Stuttgart, 1955), 86-101.

the mother of all evil. If we can tear away this root, he says, all the branches will be reduced to naught, and we will be able to reject the concupiscences of this world, to preserve a perfect charity towards all men, and to love not only our friends but also our enemies. In contrasting avarice with charity Caesarius remarks that the root of the latter is planted in the Heavens, whereas the root of the former is in Hell, since the avaricious “always covet the earth, savour the earth, love the earth, and place all their hopes in the earth.”⁴

The value of charity that Caesarius stresses so much can be briefly defined as the principle of love for God and for other human beings, and involves not only caring about the needs of others, but also about their souls. Possessing charity is in fact no less than possessing God, for according to John the Evangelist, “God is charity.” “What would a poor man lack if he merited by virtue of charity to possess God? And on the contrary, of what benefit would his treasures be to a rich man if he did not merit to possess God?”⁵ But true charity is at the same time one “that is capable of making us love all men with all our heart.” It is so important that, as Caesarius quotes from St Paul, “You fulfill all the Law in fulfilling a single command: you shall love your neighbor like yourself.” All the other good works without charity are completely useless.⁶ But charity is as much a benefit as it is a commandment, for “if you love all humankind like yourself,” stresses Caesarius,

there will not be left any door by which sins could enter you, and you will close all the entries by which the Devil penetrates your soul. And indeed, how can it happen that a man do a bad thing to another, if he loves him as he does himself?⁷

⁴ *Serm.* 22.4.

⁵ *Serm.* 23.4.

⁶ *Serm.* 23.4.

⁷ *Serm.* 29.4.

Charity is also the ideal value, according to Caesarius, that acts as the cement of a perfectly healthy Christian society, whose members work in a harmonious collaboration based on mutual love:

If we love each other as the limbs of a body love each other, we can preserve the perfect charity in us. For see what happens to our body: how, when the head is in good health all limbs rejoice, and how each limb is happy on account of the others. On the contrary, when a limb suffers from some malady, how other limbs suffer together with it.⁸

This ideal necessitates of course the eradication of hatred from one's heart, and "he who realizes himself to bear hatred, even against a single man, should make haste to vomit this bitter poison in order to merit receiving the softness of charity." For fasts, vigils, prayers, alms, virginity or even faith cannot bring this harmony and unity amongst the limbs in the absence of charity.⁹ Those who cannot bring themselves to root out hatred from their hearts, even against their bitter enemies, and who gloat over their misfortunes instead of pitying and helping them cannot be a member of this society, Caesarius warns. For "they are like putrefied limbs, cut away and dead, and therefore deprived of their sensibility." Although different limbs have different functions, therefore "they should hold together in the unity of charity, and all should merit to follow the Christ."¹⁰

Such a direct emphasis on the necessity of loving one's fellow human beings is less apparent in Gregory's work than its corollary, the necessity of helping and supporting them. The reason for this may be the fact that unlike Caesarius he was not directly influenced by the mystical rhetoric of the traditions of Lérins and Marseilles that considered the love of neighbor, together with the love of God, as no less than

⁸ *Serm.* 24.1.

⁹ *Serm.* 23.4.

¹⁰ *Serm.* 24.4.

the target, the way and the measure of ascetical perfection.¹¹ Insofar as avarice is concerned, however, he completely agrees with Caesarius's statement that the avaricious place all their hopes in the earth. "The order of evangelical discipline," he writes in the introduction to VP I,

tells us that the money of Our Lord's largesse, when placed with the money-changers, will, with God's favour, obtain a just and fruitful multiplication, and that it must not remain hidden to corrode and rot away in deep pits, but should be put to a rational use and grow into profit in the winning of eternal life.

Otherwise, it will severely endanger eternal life, as Gregory warns in *GM 57*: "Why, o mankind, do you accumulate talents of rusty gold with which you will burn in hell? What is the use to you of money that will perish and poses a threat to eternal life?" Being burnt with gold in hell is no vain threat, as we learn in *GM 105*: a certain woman hoards a great treasure of gold in the ground of her cell by feigning a pious comportment all her life, and thereby collecting many alms for the poor, without giving one penny to anybody. After her death the treasure is revealed by her servant, but the bishop orders the gold to be thrown on top of her body in the tomb. Following this event, people hear chilling cries and shouts from the tomb, declaring that she is a miserable wretch who is being consumed by molten gold. When they open the tomb, they see indeed that the gold thrown on the woman's body has melted and trickled into her mouth along with its sulphurous flame.

Despite such fearsome examples, the avaricious in the *Histories* do not heed eternal life, however; they prefer to hoard up vast treasures in "deep pits" instead. Thus a huge treasure is found in Mummolus's possession after his death, as in the case of other avaricious grabbers.¹² The cruel duke Rauching is also found to have hoarded a vast treasure on this earth, which does him no good as he departs from this

¹¹ Nürnberg, *Askese als sozialer Impuls*, 73-85, 127-30, 136-39.

life. His wife, similarly, has to fling all her precious gems on the ground as soon as she hears of his death and sees herself deprived of earthly power in a sudden turn of vicissitude. The same fate awaits Guntram Boso, another avaricious grabber, who has chosen to hoard a treasure in this world by the things he has stolen and extorted from others, instead of hoarding treasure in Heaven by a virtuous life on earth. We are told however that he had a slightly different, quite curious reason for burying treasure: he did it when “his conscience pricked him.” When his conscience pricked him, certainly, it would have been far better for him to distribute his wealth to the poor and the Church, and hence transfer it to Heaven, instead of burying it.¹³

Paulinus of Nola did so, for example, as Gregory recounts with enthusiasm in *Glory of the Confessors*.¹⁴ When Paulinus read Christ’s commandment to the rich man to sell all his possessions and give to the poor, he indeed sold all that he had, distributed the money to the poor, and continued to give away whatever was at hand as alms. He was sure in the confidence that God would not leave him destitute as long as he gave alms, and he was not mistaken. Once, he told his wife to give the one remaining loaf of bread to a poorman, but his wife kept it back for fear of starvation. Not long after this, several ships carrying wine and grain arrived, but one of them had been lost in a storm — no doubt due to the loaf of bread that had been kept back, as Paulinus pointed out. Similarly, because of his chosen poverty Paulinus eventually ascended to the extremely prosperous bishopric of Nola, where he used this wealth to help the poor. Gregory contrasts his behavior with the merchant in the next chapter, who refuses to give alms to a poorman, stating falsely that his ship carried only stone, and has to see all the food in his cargo turn to stone as a punishment. A further

¹² *Hist.* VII.40.

¹³ *Hist.* IX.9.

¹⁴ *GC*, 108.

contrast is provided by the swindler in the last chapter, who makes a hundred large gold coins from a single small coin through the swindlery of diluting his wine with water. When he goes to the market with his sack of coins, a hawk snatches the sack from his hand and drops it into the river, to leave him back with a single small coin, which he was holding in his hand as the event happened. At the end of the book Gregory exhorts everyone to swell the purses of the poor by charity, and not their own purse through greed, so that they may win the favor of divine majesty as a profit.

Avarice is especially harmful in Gregory's eyes, as it is in his view the main cause of the numerous civil wars that devastate the country. A striking prodigy that happens in the midst of a civil war clearly illustrates that it is the avarice of the people and their kings, who pillage and destroy everything they come upon on their way, that lies behind these wars: a swarm of locusts, which are so greedy creatures that they eat up everything, form up two armies and fight each other in a "civil war."¹⁵ Many other landslides, floods, inauspicious prodigies and epidemics occur as a warning and punishment for the people's avarice. In a particular instance, after a very loud bellowing that sounds for weeks in the environs of Rhone, there occurs a huge landslide and the river floods a great extent of land. When thirty monks try to gain from this disaster with an avarice that does not heed even the warning of God, which makes itself heard again with the same bellowing sound, they are buried under the collapsing hillside.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Hist.* IV.20

¹⁶ *Hist.* IV.31.

III.2 Humility versus pride

Caesarius couples the values of charity and avarice with humility and pride respectively, which he defines as “daughters” and inseparable companions of the former two:

Because pride is born of avarice and humility from charity, these things are so tightly wound up with each other that each mother could not exist without its daughter. Therefore whosoever desires to be set free from the evil of pride should force himself at first to extinguish in himself avarice that engenders it, just as he who ardently desires to obtain true humility must strive to preserve faithfully her mother charity.¹⁷

In fact charity and humility are like

two wings on which humble souls are raised to the heavens, and if one of them is lacking the other cannot be of any benefit; similarly, avarice and pride appear as two hurdles by which the unhappy souls of the proud, while they stand up against the sky with arrogance, descend into the depths of Hell by the rightful judgment of God.¹⁸

Caesarius points out that it is indeed charity and humility that distinguish the Godly city against the earthly one, which is marked by avarice and pride:

The humble and the proud constitute two cities from the beginning of the world. One is Jerusalem, which is interpreted as ‘the Vision of Peace’, the other is Babylon, which is interpreted as ‘confusion’. Christ constructs the one, the Devil the other; all those who will persevere in pride belong to Babylon, but those who will remain in humility are of Jerusalem.¹⁹

Gregory does not lag behind Caesarius in denouncing pride — even when one takes pride in nothing other than one’s religious zeal, the severity of one’s ascetic practices, or even the amount of one’s alms. Gregory dwells on this subject at length when recounting the life of St Sennoch, an abbot, in the *Life of Fathers*:

It happens that the saints of God, who are burned by no ardor of passions, who are pricked by no goad of concupiscence, who are not polluted by the filth of lust, and who are not even brought down, so to speak, in their thoughts, are nevertheless carried away by the wiles of the Tempter, regarding themselves as perfectly just and in consequence being swollen by

¹⁷ *Serm.* 48.7.

¹⁸ *Serm.* 48.7.

¹⁹ *Serm.* 48.5.

the pride of an arrogant presumption. Thus those whom the sword of great crimes has not been able to slay have been ruined by the light smoke of vanity...²⁰ St Senoch... had great abstinence and he cured the sick. But just as his sanctity came from his abstinence, so vanity began to emerge slowly from his sanctity. For he left his cell and went with arrogant pride to visit his family... And on his return he was swollen with pride and sought only to please himself.²¹

Nevertheless, the warnings of his bishop, Gregory himself, are successful in reminding him of the value of humility and obedience.²²

In the *Histories*, the priest Cato is shown to be taking too much pride in his ascetical practices, almsgiving and Church service, counting these as sufficient to justify his claim to the bishopric of Clermont. Pride, even in religious zeal and service, is of course condemnable, and in this case it is punished by Cato's loss of the bishopric to another priest. Because of his pride in his holiness as well as obstinacy in claiming the seat of Clermont, which leads him to reject even the see of St Martin, he remains without a bishopric until the end, later asking for the see of Tours in vain.²³

Whereas Cato in his pride fails to be grateful even for St Martin's throne, a crippled woman in *VM* II.56 pays humble gratitude to God and Martin even when she cannot get the simple healing she seeks. She comes to the saint's festival in Tours for her crippled hand, but he does not restore her health. She humbly attributes this to the heaviness of her sins and leaves Tours worriedly, though still hopeful that the saint will someday grant her health, in spite of her sins. In the lodging where she stays for the night she wakes up about midnight and gives thanks to God "because she still survived, because she was alive, because she was flourishing, and because she had touched the tomb of the blessed bishop." Weeping loudly, she offers her

²⁰ *VP* XV, *praef.*

²¹ *VP* XV.2.

²² *VP* XV.2.

gratitude and then falls asleep again. Immediately the bishop appears to her in a dream and heals her. Her proof of her humility thus brings the healing at the hands of the saint, whereas she had not found it at his tomb.

III.3 Mercy

The basic moral principle “Do not do to the other what you do not want to be done to yourself,” finds its expression in several chapters of the *Histories*. In *Hist.* III.6, King Chlodomer is warned by St Avitus the abbot, a powerful churchman of the period, as he is preparing to attack the Burgundians, not to kill King Sigismund and his family whom he has taken captive. If he saves their lives he shall win victory; if not, the same thing he does to the man and his family will happen to himself. He disobeys the advice and gets killed in the battle. Gregory’s comment is that “he who digs a pit for his brother falls therein.” In another case King Sigibert, planning sinfully to kill his brother Chilperic despite the warnings of his bishop, gets killed himself instead.²⁴ In *Hist.* V.16, what the Breton chieftain Macliaw intends for another chieftain Bodic and his son, namely that both should be dead and their properties his own, happens to himself and his son, since both are in the end murdered in vengeance by Bodic’s son. In the next chapter, King Guntram kills the two sons of Magnachar, and loses his two sons in turn from a sudden disease.

Some saints exemplify the virtue of mercy by the mildness they show towards those who try to rob their possessions, or if they are dead, their grave. In *VP* XIV.2, a thief enters the garden kept by the monks of the monastery of which St Martius was the abbot. After picking up some vegetables, garlic, onions and fruit, as Gregory informs us, he fails to find the opening he had made to enter, and keeps

²³ *Hist.* IV.6, 7, 11, 15.

²⁴ *Hist.* IV.51.

touring the garden. In the meanwhile St Martius senses what has happened and sends a monk with the command to give the thief whatever he had stolen, and then peacefully to show him the way out. In *GC* 81, a man who comes to the cell of the recluse Eusicius to be healed from his quartan fever sees, on his way back, two beehives belonging to Eusicius' fellow monks, and at the night comes with a companion to steal them from the tree they are located on. He passes the first hive down to Eusicius, instead of his companion, who had in the meantime speedily made off after seeing the holy man approach. When the man reaches to steal the other hive also, Eusicius only says: "Son, let this one be sufficient for now; leave the other for the man who has worked on it." He catches and takes the man to his cell and admonishes him for having tried to steal the honey instead of asking for it, after which he allows him to leave unharmed with a honeycomb as a present.

The most charming — if that is the right word — story is however found in *GC* 61. After bishop St Helius of Lyon is buried, a thief comes on the following night to rob the grave, lifting the lid of the sarcophagus and propping up the saint's body against himself in order to steal the costly trappings. However, the saint tightly embraces the man and does not let him go until the morning, when the judge of the region orders him to be taken away and condemned. When they try to take the man away from the saint's arms, however, he does not release the thief until the judge gives a guarantee of the man's life. Hence, as Gregory enthusiastically comments, the saint does not permit the man whom he had already restored and corrected to be handed over for punishment.

III.4 Peacefulness and forgiveness of one's enemies as an antidote to war and civil strife.

Caesarius distinguishes what he calls “the alms of charity” from the alms of a material nature, such as providing for the poor and the weak, redeeming captives etc. The alms of charity, he says, consist of forgiving one's enemies with sincerity, and not preserving in one's consciousness the wounds of any sin delivered by another. So he who is not in a position to redeem captives, feed the poor or to clothe them should not bear hatred in his heart against any man, and not contenting himself with avoiding the countering of evil by evil, should love them and not cease to pray for them.²⁵ He should hate not the person of those who have harmed him, but their sins instead, and to try to dissuade them from their sinful ways, praying fervently to God to rescue them.²⁶ Nobody can excuse himself from this sort of alms, insists Caesarius, for it does not require any material surplus.

This sort of alms is indeed superior to the material sort according to Caesarius, since

the alms of charity are enough by themselves even without material offering, while the alms made materially are of no use, if they are not offered with a good heart. The charity and love of enemies suffices largely and abundantly in the absence of terrestrial fortunes for the remission of all sins.²⁷

It is of no use to offer a sacrifice or to give alms therefore, if one does not begin at first by coming to reconciliation with one's enemy.²⁸ The duty to love one's enemies is not a recommendation but a command that the Lord gives us in the Gospel, insists

²⁵ *Serm.* 30.3, 4.

²⁶ *Serm.* 23.2.

²⁷ *Serm.* 38.5.

²⁸ *Serm.* 39.4.

Caesarius. “Beware that if we do not love our enemies, we cannot be the sons of God.”²⁹ For

those who love only those who love them are no better in this respect than publicans, gentiles or even savage beasts, and in order to be superior to these, we should also love our enemies and adversaries. True brotherly charity is that which extends not only to our friends, but also to our enemies, as the charity of the Lord towards mankind was of such an extent that he cried for and made the sun rise over not only the good, but also over the bad.³⁰

Although Gregory does not insist as much as Caesarius on the need to love one’s enemies, he still praises the readiness of St Martius the abbot to forgive his enemies:

Divine goodness grants us a great benefit when it orders a refuge to be made for us for the remission of our sins, if we forgive the trespasses of others, if we are indulgent towards those who offend us, if we answer hatred with a blessing... Behold the great treasure that you lay up if you despise anger, reconcile yourself to him who has condemned you, absolve him who has judged you. This treasure makes you the son of God the Father, coheir with Christ, and has established you as an inhabitant of the celestial kingdoms. It is thus clear that sins are forgotten in heaven for those who in this world forgive those who have offended them.³¹

St Nicetius of Lyons, in Gregory’s account, shows himself always a friend of concord and peace, and when offended by someone he immediately pardons the offence, or lets it be known by someone else that a pardon should be sought. When he once sends a messenger to the count of the city, instructing him to close a law case he has reopened, the count retorts that he will arrive at whatever judgment he wants, and that the bishop has no option other than putting up with it. The messenger returns to report these words to Nicetius, but the bishop is annoyed to hear the words spoken in anger by the count, and forgives the messenger only after Gregory of Tours intervenes on the man’s behalf upon his own command. Then he makes clear that he has no wish to hear “such irrational words.” Gregory exclaims:

²⁹ *Serm.* 37.4.

³⁰ *Serm.* 37.5.

May those people hear these things who, if they are offended, do not wish to pardon, but rather call upon the whole town to share their vengeance, and do not even fear to have witnesses who by wicked reports say ‘We have heard so-and-so saying such-and-such about you.’ And thus it happens that the poor of Christ are oppressed by such accusations, and pity is laid to one side.³²

The causes of strife in the *Histories* are not only desire for vengeance, but also avarice and arrogance. The Saxons, for example, find Swabians in their old lands when they return from Italy. Their rejection through avarice and arrogance of coming to terms when the Swabians offer to give them as much as two thirds of the land is punished by defeat in two subsequent wars.³³ It is thwarting God’s will not to accept peace offers, and hence one is certain to be punished by defeat in war: King Lothar proves unsuccessful in persuading his men to accept the humble peace offer of their enemy, this time the Saxons, and has to see his army suffer great loss.³⁴

Kings do not always try to restrain their men, of course; most of the time they are as avaricious as their armies. Guntram orders the men of Orleans and Bourges to attack Poitiers, which does not want to submit to him, since it is in Childebert II’s share. The ravages perpetrated by the army, even in the lands of the loyal Tourangeux, are terrible, and the bishop of Poitiers is compelled at the end to ransom his city.³⁵ Similarly, King Sigibert wants to take over Arles and orders the men of Clermont-Ferrand to attack that city. They are defeated and thoroughly ashamed of themselves. An act of aggression motivated purely by avarice is thus punished once more.³⁶ Guntram and Sigibert convene a council of bishops in Paris to settle the matters between them, only to ignore their counsels for peace. The civil war resulting from their sinful behaviour leads to so much ravage, murder and devastation, not

³¹ *VP* XIV, *praef.*

³² *VP*, VIII.3.

³³ *Hist.* V.15.

³⁴ *Hist.* IV.14.

³⁵ *Hist.* VII.24.

excluding the Church, that it resembles Diocletian's persecution. "Whereas the early generations had turned from pagan temples towards churches," laments Gregory,

they are now busy plundering these churches; whereas the older folk listened with all their hearts to the Lord's bishops and had great reverence for them, nowadays they persecute them instead of listening. Whereas their forefathers built and endowed churches, they now demolish and destroy them.³⁷

In *Hist.* VIII.30, he details out with great skill and clarity the true face of war and warriors, who indulge more in devastating and plundering the churches and other places they pass through than in coming to grips with the real enemy. When they do face the enemy, they show themselves to be pitiful cowards, and Gregory ruthlessly ridicules this war against Spain as a preposterous failure.

It should be pointed out here that Gregory seems to assume a critical attitude not only against civil war, but also against unnecessary military aggression against foreign powers. He details out the terrible defeat suffered by Childebert's army in an unnecessary campaign against the Lombards.³⁸ In *Hist.* X.3, he recounts another campaign to Italy as a rather ridiculous failure, although the army was not entirely unsuccessful. During the campaign, as usual, the mobilization of armies proves to be destructive as much of internal peace and welfare as of the enemy. Peace is sealed at the end under Gregory's approving eyes. In yet another disastrous military aggression, the overweening pride of the attacking Franks is punished by a crushing defeat at the hands of the Goths.³⁹ According to Gregory, making peace with the enemy, even by bribery at the end of a defeat, is not at all shameful for a king, but

³⁶ *Hist.* IV.30.

³⁷ *Hist.* IV.47, 48.

³⁸ *Hist.* IX.25.

³⁹ *Hist.* IX.31.

indeed to his credit. Thus Sigibert is defeated by the Huns, but he buys peace with the historian's strong approval.⁴⁰

III.5 Perjury

It becomes easier in this light to understand why Gregory dwells so insistently on denouncing perjury: by undermining the trustworthiness of oaths, it severely endangers peace. The importance of the reliability of oaths taken in sacred places is shown by an incident in *Hist.* V.32. When a woman who has left her husband is accused of living with another man by the husband's relatives, the father swears by the altar of St Denis that his daughter is innocent. However his adversaries do not believe his oath and in the fight that ensues much blood is spilled. The woman commits suicide when summoned to trial. If perjury proliferates and the respect for oaths is undermined, Gregory seems to suggest, it will be no longer possible to secure civil peace, holy places will be desecrated, and innocents will come to harm.

Perjury endangers not only innocents, however, but also the perjurers themselves. Duke Mummolus receives an oath of self-conduct from Guntram's party in return for delivering the rebel Gundovald to their hands. By swearing a false oath, he overcomes Gundovald's suspicions about going out of the besieged town. But he cannot escape death himself, since the oath of self-conduct sworn to him also proves to be a perjury. He does not fail to complain of this treachery, of course.⁴¹ In a similar incident, the proud rebel Munderic is tricked by perjury into leaving the fortress he has taken refuge in, but Aregisel, who has not flinched from swearing an

⁴⁰ *Hist.* IV.29. See also W. Goffart, "Conspicuously Absent: Martial Heroism in the Histories of Gregory of Tours and its Likes," in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, edited by K. Mitchell and I. Wood, 365-93 (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne, 2002.), 370-74.

⁴¹ *Hist.* VII.39.

oath of safe-conduct to him on the altar, is killed by his victim as a divine punishment.⁴²

There are many miracles to this effect in the miracle books, in which saints show that they will not tolerate perjury by punishing those who swear false oaths, or by striking people dumb and motionless even before they can commit perjury. Hence in *VJ* 19 a man demands a coin he had lent another man, though the latter had repaid him the coin a year before. When the argument is prolonged, the creditor is invited to prove the rightfulness of his claim by an oath at the martyr's tomb. He is petrified and made dumb before he can commit perjury, and later confesses his deceit before he can leave with his health. In *VP* VIII.9, a man, who extorts from a beggar the alms he had collected by showing a letter that had been signed by Nicetius of Lyons when he was still alive, is called to prove his innocence by an oath he swears over this letter. Of course he suffers an epileptic fit before he can swear the false oath, and then confesses his crime. In *GM* 57, during St Eugenius's festival at Albi, a girl asks a merchant who was selling ornaments in the market at the church's courtyard for permission to look at a certain piece, and then passes it quickly to her accomplice, denying later that she had received such a thing from the merchant. The merchant in turn declares that he is only too willing to let her get away with the ornament, should the saint let her get away with a false oath — which offer she happily accepts.⁴³ The saint does not let her get away with perjury; in fact, he does not even let her commit the perjury, since she is petrified and struck dumb until she confesses to her crime.

Saints are not always so kind, though. In *GC* 91, a priest unjustly accuses a Frank in the presence of the king, who invites him to prove the truth of his

⁴² *Hist.* III.14, 15.

accusations by swearing an oath on the tomb of St Maximinus of Trier. St Maximinus is not as merciful as the saints in other stories, however, and the priest successfully completes his perjury to the intense displeasure of the Frank. Then, on the road, he simply “stumbles, falls to the ground, and dies.” The Frank is of course reconciled with the saint. In another case, an archdeacon accused of adultery enters the saint’s crypt to swear a false oath, but does not dare go beyond the third door, being struck with a fever. He confesses his sin and immediately recovers from the fever.⁴⁴

Apart from such specific miracle stories, we also learn from Gregory that certain relics are particularly dreaded for punishing perjury. The relics of Julian found in a village near Tours are such, he informs us. For whenever someone commits perjury there, his perjury is rendered manifest by divine vengeance in such a way that he suffers immediately a misfortune, a wasting disease, or the loss of an acquaintance.⁴⁵ Similarly, we learn in *GC* 92 that nobody with a guilty conscience dares to perjure himself by St Nicetuis of Trier’s tomb, since he is sure to be immediately corrected by divine retribution if he does so.

III.6 Fredegund and other notorious upstarts as the embodiment of materialism and all the other sins associated with it

In a speech that leads directly to his death, Bishop Praetextatus points out to Fredegund that any power and influence as well as pride derived from earthly status and riches are extremely transitive, and one who invests all his energy in building up his abode on earth will be plunged into the abyss, having nothing left but damnation

⁴³ Especially as the martyr was at that time not particularly famous for his miracles, still less for his punishments of perjurers. See G. Scheibelreiter, “Das Wunder als Konfliktbereinigung,” *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 74, 1992: 257-76.

⁴⁴ *GC* 92.

when he loses them either on death or after a vicissitude of fortune. It is much more advisable therefore to turn one's mind to higher things and to build up a treasure in Heaven. He accuses her of being the primary mover in the crimes, as Gregory himself does in several cases through his own or others' mouths, because Fredegund is in fact a kind of "anti-saint" in the *Histories*.⁴⁶ She represents all that is the cause of civil strife and suffering, as well as of God's wrath in this world: she is materialistic and disregards the spiritual sphere; she is avaricious, lustful, proud and vain, a slave that has killed her mistress, the queen Galswinth, to rise; she is cruel, much given to anger and superstitious beliefs, and closely associated with heretics and external enemies. And she is also disrespectful to the agents of the Church, even to the point of having them murdered in their churches when advised to be better.⁴⁷

From what she says about the source of the vast dowry she gives to Rigunth, for example, we understand that Fredegund is a hoarder of earthly treasure, just like Mummolus, Rauching and Boso.⁴⁸ She is probably not more chaste than these either. In *Hist.* VII.21, Fredegund wants to commit adultery with Eberulf, and when rejected denounces him to Guntram. In *Hist.* VIII.9, Fredegund's virtue is again called into

⁴⁵ *VJ*40

⁴⁶ In the literature Fredegund has usually been considered in connection with the other strong-willed queen of the *Histories*, Sigibert's consort Brunhild, with whom she entered a furious blood feud because of her role in the death of Brunhild's sister Galswinth, who had been married to Chilperic. It should be admitted that when looked at closely, Brunhild seems hardly better than Fredegund: among other things, she incites Count Injuriousus to kill an innocent bishop and then helps him to become a bishop himself (*Hist.* VI.37, 38); marries with the rebel Merovech (*Hist.* V.2); communicates with the pretender Gundovald (*Hist.* VII.34). Such an evaluation of the two queens fails to consider, however, the significant difference in the treatment they find at Gregory's hands: indeed he never directly condemns Brunhild, even when relating such deeds of hers that were highly detrimental to the dignity of the episcopacy as well as to the peace of the kingdom, and insistently singles out Fredegund as the source of all evil. Apart from the immediately apparent reason that Brunhild was Childebert's mother, and opposing both strong-willed women could have had fatal consequences for Gregory, the real cause of this difference should be sought, in my view, in the paradigmatic function of "anti-saint" in which Gregory had placed Fredegund.

⁴⁷ *Hist.* VIII.31.

⁴⁸ *Hist.* VI.45.

question, this time by Guntram; she can clear herself only by the oath of three bishops and three hundred leaders.

Fredegund also appears as the instigator of many civil disturbances. In *Hist.* VII.15, we are told by Gregory that Fredegund is the prime mover in many outrages, even though at the time she is residing in a church. In *Hist.* VII.20, Fredegund sends an assassin to kill Brunhild. In *Hist.* VII.39, she wants to prolong the rebellion by enticing Gundovald to her side. In *Hist.* VIII.44, she sends assassins upon Guntram, and in *Hist.* X.18, upon Childebert. In the war against the Bretons, Fredegund plays a principal role in the defeat of the Franks, as expected only too well, and goes so far as to instruct a Saxon leader and his men to dress up as Bretons and fight against her own people.⁴⁹ Her role in the defeat is confirmed in *Hist.* X.11.

The sworn materialist Fredegund is of course also associated with heresy and other unorthodox beliefs. She does not flinch from collaborating with the Arian enemies as in *Hist.* VIII.28, where she is discovered to be in a plot with King Leuvigild to kill Chilperic and to prevent Guntram from attacking Spain. Fredegund shows that she also believes in black magic and tortures people for it, as when the prefect Mummolus is denounced to her for having brought about the death of her baby.⁵⁰ In *Hist.* VII.44 she is shown associated with an avaricious soothsayer possessed by a devil.

Fredegund's paradigmatic role as an anti-saint becomes all the more clear with chilling irony in two anecdotes. The first is found in *Hist.* VIII.29: whereas the churchmen, after pointing out that human beings in this world are only mortal, counsel men to be virtuous, so that they may embrace eternal life in the other world, here Fredegund, after pointing out the same thing to two clerics, counsels them to

perpetrate an atrocious assassination, so that they can embrace eternal life in this world through the riches and high position that their relatives would achieve through this crime!

The second instance of irony is found in *Hist. X.27*: while Gregory had tried to bring an end to the civil strife in Tours between the families of Sicharius and Chramnesind by peaceful negotiation and by spending his financial resources much needed for other expenses, so that no more blood should be spilled on the two sides, Fredegund the “peace-maker” brings peace simply by treacherously murdering the remaining members of two feuding families, so that even in peace making she foments strife. She is doing much the same thing in the next chapter, where she invites Guntram to Paris to baptize her son. On the surface, this is an act intended to establish warmer and more peaceful relations between Guntram and his nephew, but in fact it constitutes a dangerous step that may upset the peace between Gregory and Childebert, which is why, by God’s intervention, a severe case of gout appears in Guntram’s foot as soon as he decides to grant Fredegund’s wish. Whatever he says, Guntram is breaking the terms of the Treaty of Andelot by accepting Fredegund’s offer.

The upstart, who has risen from very humble beginnings to acquire great wealth and power in the end, is a type especially disliked by Gregory, and Fredegund is only an extreme example. It is not too difficult to guess why Gregory shows such aversion towards successful upstarts. They could not have been successful had they not seen the power and riches of this world as the only things worth having in life, which implies that they are extremely avaricious to begin with. In the process of social rise, according to the aristocratic mindset of the bishop, they also show

⁴⁹ *Hist. X.9.*

themselves to be unmindful of their place and rebellious against their “betters.” Moreover, since they have acquired their social position by the help of their own skills alone, which are by no means unsullied, they tend to value their intelligence and hard-found status too highly, which makes them proud and arrogant. The way in life they have chosen for themselves is the exact opposite of what Gregory wishes everybody to choose, namely to renounce the secular world and enter the Church. The upstarts he depicts in the *Histories* are thus personifications of every vice and sin. Andarchius in *Hist.* IV.46 is a typical upstart: he is rebellious against his masters, proud of his own achievements, avaricious, deceitful, and arrogant. He finds his just punishment before long. Count Leudast is another upstart whom Gregory dislikes for the typical vices of this sort of person: he is proud, arrogant, avaricious, promiscuous, unjust, cruel, hateful. It is no coincidence that he shows himself to be a rebel against his own bishop!⁵¹ Priest Riculf is just another upstart, raised by Bishop Eufronius, Gregory cares to emphasize, “from very humble beginnings.” He is proud, avaricious, cruel, arrogant, given to perjury and deceit, and naturally, a rebel against his superiors, ultimately his bishop.⁵²

⁵⁰ *Hist.* VI.35.

⁵¹ *Hist.* V.48.

⁵² *Hist.* V.49.

CHAPTER IV

The Main Components of Ascetical Practice: Good Works

As we have seen in the last chapter, Gregory and Caesarius regard love of God to be inseparable from love of one's neighbor, which in turn shows itself in support for the poor and the weak. In the first section of this chapter we shall examine the general ideas of our authors about the necessity of good works and the ways to perform them. This shall be followed by an examination of the actions undertaken by the bishops and their churches to promote and implement this duty of charity, as evident in the Church canons of the sixth century Gaul, and of the actions of bishops and saints in this direction as found in Gregory's works. The last section is concerned with the duties incumbent on kings, in Gregory's eyes, to ensure the well-being and peace of their subjects and churches.

IV.1 Good works as an indispensable condition of faith and charity

Throughout his sermons, Caesarius insistently points out that charity and faith cannot be said to exist, unless they are transmuted into unceasing action in this world. He attempts to ground this claim in etymology. Since in Latin "fides" (faith) comes from "fit" (it happens), he says, it is not sufficient to confess the faith in words alone, but one should also confirm this confession and fulfill the promise one has made to God in his baptism by his good works, for faith without good works, as

the apostle says, is simply dead.¹ It does not suffice either, warns Caesarius, to reach the day of the Last Judgment in the state immediately after baptism, without any sins but also without good works, when one has enjoyed a long life in which one has had plenty of time to do good works. Just as one does not wish the crops one sows or the child one brings into the world to remain in that same state after years, he explains, God wishes us to grow and be fruitful with good works.²

In the prologue to *GM* 40, Gregory, in a similar manner to that of Caesarius, emphasizes the importance of good works:

There is great value in the name of Christian, if you perform in deeds what you confess in faith. For as the apostle says: 'Faith without works is dead by itself.' Just as it is not birth in the flesh but rather faith that makes sons of Abraham, so also not only the grace of the name but works distinguish true Christians.

In the context of the miracle story, good works constitute the illumination of unbelievers and the defense of the faith against idolatry. When, in the presence of the emperor, the divinations of a pagan priest are confused, a Christian soldier comes forward and confesses that with his prayers he has set the pagan gods to flight, upon which the emperor departs in fear and the others present in the temple are immediately converted.

By good works, mainly the giving of alms is to be understood however. Apart from the aforementioned spiritual sort of alms, consisting of loving one's enemy, this involves providing for the material well-being of others, i.e. giving alms to the poor as well as financial support to clerics and monks, caring for travellers and pilgrims, and redeeming slaves and prisoners. This sort of mercy is necessary for the rich, if they want forgiveness for their sins in the Heavens, stresses Caesarius.³ He further

¹ *Serm.* 12.1, 5.

² *Serm.* 15.3.

³ *Serm.* 25.1.

argues that if God has allowed some men to be poor in this world, this is only so that the rich may redeem their sins by way of distributing alms.⁴ For

there is a human and a divine sort of mercy; the former consists in paying attention to the misery of the poor, and the latter in granting pardon for sins. All the largess made by human mercy will be returned back by divine mercy.

When giving alms to the poor, the rich man should know that he is in fact feeding Christ, for he “deigns to be hungry and thirsty in all the poor, and what he receives in this world as alms, he will give back in the Heavens as pardon for our sins.” Therefore those who want their sins to be pardoned should not despise the poor, and coming to the church, they should offer, according to their means, alms of whatever sort for the poor, be it money, wine, or any other thing.⁵

Caesarius is indeed against what we would call today capital accumulation. He criticizes the rich who buy new possessions with the money that they have gained at the expense of another’s labour, while the Lord has ordained them to sell their belongings and to distribute their money to the needy.⁶ In his opinion a rich man should avoid hoarding treasures, and after saving the portion of his income necessary for paying the taxes and meeting the basic needs of his household, he should distribute all the rest to help others, even after he has given the tithe, since his surplus does not belong to him personally, but it has been only temporarily transmitted to him for distribution to the poor. If someone dies of hunger in the neighborhood of a rich man who avoids distributing his surplus in this manner, warns Caesarius, he will be personally responsible for his soul before God.⁷

All such views of Caesarius find their echoes in the miracles performed by saints in Gregory’s stories. In *GC* 5, we meet one such saint, the virgin Vitalina, who

⁴ *Serm.* 25.2.

⁵ *Serm.* 25.1.

⁶ *Serm.* 71.2.

is buried at Artonne, a village of Clermont. Once, after the celebration of vigils in her honor, a priest named Eudatius prepares food for widows and other people, but neither the fish nor the wine is sufficient for all. Subsequently, the virgin appears to a fisherman in a dream and commands him to take a supply of fish to the church, after which she appears to Eudatius in a vision and tells him to buy wine with the small gold coin he will find beneath a tree in the courtyard. In this way all the poor are provided for in the feast celebrated at her honor. Senoch, a saintly abbot whose *vita* is found in *VP XV*, puts the money brought to him by the pious into the purses of the poor, instead of hiding it in the ground, remembering the warning of the Lord not to lay up treasures upon the earth. He gives away whatever he receives to relieve the various necessities of the poor, and as a result rescues more than two hundred people during his life from the bonds of servitude and burden of debts. In addition to healing people, he also provides them with food and clothing if they are in need. In order to prevent anyone from being drowned in the flood season, he even builds bridges over rivers with his own hands. People at his funeral, whom he had saved from debts or slavery, mourn bitterly, saying: “To whom do you leave us, holy father?”

Senoch is not alone in giving whatever he receives to the poor, even though the sum received may be enough to make the beneficiary a millionaire. In *GC 62*, the emperor Leo’s daughter is possessed by an evil spirit, which declares that only the archdeacon of Lyon can drive him out. When the archdeacon expels the spirit at the end of four days with fasts and praying, Leo offers him no less than three hundred pounds of gold. The archdeacon is however of too high a spirit to value fleeting riches, and advises the emperor to enrich the whole city instead, through remitting the taxes as far as the third milestone around the walls of the city. In Gregory’s day,

⁷ *Serm.* 30.2, 6; 34.2.

the tax exemption was still valid in this region. Similarly, in *GC* 81, King Childebert, on an expedition to Spain, comes to the recluse Eusicius who is living in the territory of Bourges and offers him fifty gold pieces for success in the war. The old man advises the king to give the money to those who might distribute it to the poor instead, which Childebert indeed does.

Hospitality to travelers is another important part of good works. In *VM* IV.31, St Martin is traveling through the territory of Saintes on his donkey. When he comes to a village which draws its water from a well quite far away, he asks a man carrying water to give some to his donkey. The man objects: he has laboriously carried that water, and Martin should get it himself if he is willing to satisfy his donkey's thirst. Then a woman comes, and "like Rebecca" she willingly offers a drink to the donkey, after which she goes to draw water again. As a repayment, Martin prays God to expose a spring at that spot, which offers refreshment to the people in the region thereafter.

In Caesarius's view a hoarder of treasure on earth is also responsible for reducing the treasure that could be hoarded up in the Heavens by the society through religious service, since by "the poor" one should also understand the monks, clerks and all others who dedicate themselves to serving God with prayers, fasts and vigils in contempt of this world. These are, says Caesarius, like the vine that bears plenty of fruit, but which is close to the earth and unless lifted up will see its fruits petrify and perish. The rich therefore, like the fruitless elm tree that extends its branches to the vine and lifts it up, thus saving the grapes from rotting, and also becoming fruitful itself, should offer their earthly riches to the servants of God in alms, so that they may deal less with earning their living and dedicate themselves more to fasts, vigils, and prayers. Hence all the rest, including the rich, may partake of the treasure the

monks and clerks hoard up in the Heavens in exchange for their own earthly treasure.⁸ The delivery of the entire surplus to the Church and to the poor would of course have the effect of cutting the ground from under insatiable avarice, which would find it impossible to “join field to field” and thus wither away. At the same time, it would secure the well-being of even the poorest member of the society, enable the cleansing of sins through alms and unceasing prayer, and of course increase the earthly power and authority of the Church, which would thus find it easier to function as an active promoter and implementer of Christian moral ideals in the world.

In this context it is not surprising to find a miracle story that promotes donation of wealth to the Church.⁹ Blederic and his wife have no sons after thirty years. At the end of this period he loses hope and leaves all his property to the church of St Martin, with the proviso to be fed until the end of his life. On the night of the same day his wife conceives a son, who is followed by other sons. He does not revoke the testament he has originally made nevertheless, and leaves the children other lands. But where have these “other lands” come from, considering that he donated all his property to the Church? The moral of the story is perhaps that if you make donations to the Church in your testament, neither will you lack heirs, nor will the heirs lack property to inherit, in line with the claim that God will not leave destitute those who give away all they have as alms.

⁸ *Serm.* 27.1, 2.

⁹ *VM* IV.11.

IV.2 The bishop and his church as the principal promoter and implementer of good works

IV.2.1 “Slayers of the poor”?

The Merovingian kings frequently indulged in civil wars, in the course of which many took advantage of the disturbances to appropriate the properties of the Church. The bishops who convened in the second council of Tours complain bitterly about this state of affairs in canon 25:

While our lords attack each other and make war, pushed by evil counselors, and while one invades the domain of the other with a rapacious greed, they should not allow themselves, in the course of the destructive operation they carry out against each other, to touch ecclesiastical domains or to damage them.

If therefore someone recklessly allows himself to invade, claim or confiscate the properties of the Church or those of the bishop, he is to be called upon three times to make a restitution, and if he does not listen, all the abbots, priests and clerks are to come together at the church and to sing psalm 108 at the “slayer of the poor” who usurps the properties of the Church, and upon him is to come “the same malediction as upon Judas, who, holding the purse, spirited away the resources of the poor.”

This is not the only canon where the appropriators of Church property are defined as “slayers of the poor.” In the same council, in canon 26, it is asserted in connection with heirs who object to the donation of their inheritances to the Church that “it is necessary to take as slayers of the poor those who take away their nourishment from them in this way.” In Orléans V, 13, it is decreed that he who has retained, alienated and reduced the properties and resources granted as alms to the churches is condemned by the sentences of older canons as a slayer of the poor. The older clerics who reduce the properties entrusted to them by the bishop are also to be considered as slayers of the poor according to Arles V, 6.

IV.2.2 Bishops and charity

If there is anything that compels us to discern something more than hollow propaganda in this branding of those who were in disagreement with the Church over their rights of property as “slayers of the poor”, it is the function of the bishop and his church as the patron and protector of the poor, which had been originally a sphere of activity for the ruler stemming from the virtue of *pietas*, and delegated later to the Church.¹⁰ It is also in this connection that we should consider the insistence in many canons on the proper payment of tithes. By the means of the income provided by these tithes the bishop and his church would care for the sick and the poor, receive strangers, redeem slaves, build charitable institutions like hospices and hospitals, not only in cities, but also in parishes, as part of the role of the fatherly pious patron which the bishop had taken over from the late antique patrons who had offered support to those who fled to them.¹¹

Hence the Mâcon II, 5 distinguishes the giving of tithe as a matter of ancient custom. It is held to be necessary not only for the support of the clergy, but also for the relief of the poor and the redeeming of slaves:

Now the divine laws have prescribed to all the people to turn a tenth part of their harvests to holy places, so that, not being prevented by any work, priests and ministers can see to the spiritual services at regular hours... All the people should turn over their tithes to those who are responsible for the service of the Church: the priests, in spending them for the needs of the poor or for the ransom of captives, will obtain peace and salvation for the people by their prayers.

Indeed, tithes played their part in the relief of distress, and not in the enrichment of bishops. The weaker members of the society, such as the captives, pilgrims and the poor remained a dominant concern of the Frankish bishops, who acknowledged their duty to assist the huge population of the wretched, and a large part of their resources

¹⁰ Heinzelmann, *Bischofherrschaft*, 157-67.

was allotted for this purpose.¹² Acts of councils, as well as tradition required that one quarter of episcopal revenues should be allocated to the relief of poverty, and official beneficence was generously supported by private charity through bequests and donations.¹³ Indeed, the bishops did not need to be compelled by Church canons and by the law codes of the fifth and sixth centuries to see to the care of the poor. There was scarcely any bishop who did not try of his own accord to mitigate the poverty of the populace entrusted to him. The ascetical ideals of *abstinentia* and *caritas* were thereby definitive: while personally he despised worldly riches, the bishop endeavored to give these to the poor.¹⁴

A confirmation of the fact that the properties of the Church were regarded by the Gallic bishops as belonging above all to the poor is supplied not only by the systematic deployment of Church property in benefit of the poor, but also by the regulations to this effect found in the Church canons. In Orléans I, 16, it is demanded that the bishop, in the measure of his possibilities, should give food and clothes to the poor and to the infirm who cannot work with their hands because of their infirmity. Similarly, in the fifth canon of the same council, it is declared to be “very just that all that God will deign to grant as revenues should be spent for the reparation of Churches, the livelihood of bishops and the poor and for the ransom of captives.” If one of the bishops shows himself to be less careful and zealous than he should be in this matter, he will be publicly reprimanded by his colleagues.

It is understandable in this context that the willingness of a bishop to support and protect the poor and the weak with the wealth under his control is a crucial

¹¹ Heinzelmann, *Bischofherrschaft*, 123, 127-29, 157.

¹² J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford, 1983), 103.

¹³ S. Dill, *Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age* (London, 1926), 451-52.

¹⁴ G. Scheibelreiter, “Der frühfränkische Episkopat –Bild und Wirklichkeit,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 17, 1983: 143-44.

criterion in determining Gregory's view of him. As so often in his works, the behavior of an ideal bishop is mostly prescribed through showing the reverse; namely, the wicked deeds of materialistic, avaricious bishops. Salonius and Sagittarius are especially virulent specimens of such. They indulge in every kind of crime including murder, beat up their own congregations, completely neglect Church services and never mention God in their conversations, pass their time in gluttony, and do not flinch from having intercourse with women.¹⁵ Cautinus is another appalling example of an avaricious bishop: he goes so far as to bury a priest alive for not giving him the title deeds of his lands. His materialistic tendencies are also observable in his gluttony.¹⁶ Badegisil is not much better: he plunders and quarrels with his own citizens; he is ever involved in petty litigation over his own worldly possessions; he lets his wife, who is even more terrible than himself, goad him into various wicked actions; he maltreats his family members; and of course he is extremely avaricious.¹⁷

The most prominent example of such unholy bishops, who use their position to further their own material interests with avarice, instead of working for support of the poor and the weak, is Egidius of Rheims. At the end he is deposed by his colleagues in accordance with canon law. Like other avaricious grabbers and trouble-stirrers such as Rauching and Boso, he is found to have hoarded a vast treasure. He has thus preferred to build up his own treasure by evil conspiracies, whereas he ought to have seen the Church properties entrusted to him as the property of the poor and to have used them to support the poor, to ransom convicts and captives, and to mediate

¹⁵ *Hist.* V.20.

¹⁶ *Hist.* IV.12.

¹⁷ *Hist.* VIII.39.

conflicts.¹⁸ In *Hist.* IV.35, a bad candidate for a bishopric, who wishes more to gain “influence amongst men than a place honorable before God by refreshment for the poor,” is implicitly contrasted with the exemplary bishop Avitus. He is just, a patron of the poor, a protector of widows and orphans, hospitable towards strangers. St Nicetius is another exemplary bishop. He is saintly and chaste, full of loving kindness and charity, merciful, a giver of alms, and full of religious zeal.¹⁹

Given that Gregory sees the property of the Church as the property of the poor, to be deployed by the bishop for their benefit, it is not surprising that the idea expressed in the Church canons, that those who rob the Church rob the poor, appears in several miracle stories, together with the dire punishment only too expected for such a crime as “slaying the poor.” In *GM* 60, Britto, an important retainer of Count Waroch of Brittany, greedily seizes a belt of pure gold and its fittings donated by a pious man to St Nazarius’s church. A priest of the church resists this appropriation and says: “These things belong to God and were presented to the holy martyr to assist the poor, so that those who serve with faithful devotion at this church do not suffer terrible hunger. Rather than removing them, you ought to present something else.” Britto does not only scorn his words and threaten him with death, but also has his horse saddled before the porch of the church. As all too expected, he cannot go past the gate, hitting his head on the lintel and falling to the ground (from his horse) “with a fractured skull.” Count Waracho does heed the advice of the priest upon his retainer’s death and restores the belt with many other donations.

Similarly, in *GM* 78 Count Gomarchius seizes a field belonging to the cathedral at Agde, which housed relics of the apostle St Andrew. Leo, the bishop of the cathedral, rushes to the count to warn him, exclaiming “O son, depart from the

¹⁸ *Hist.* X.19.

possessions of the poor that the Lord has entrusted to my rule, lest it be harmful to you and you die from the tears of the needy who are accustomed to eat the produce of this field.” Again, the advice not to slay the poor goes unheeded, the count gets sick as a result, begs forgiveness from the bishop, forgets his promise to restore the field once he gets well, and threatens the bishop with public mockery. Understandably, the bishop is rather reluctant to pray for him a second time when he inevitably falls sick again, all the more so as he knows that the field will in any case return to the church after his death.

VM I.31, otherwise a perjury-punishment miracle, can also be considered in this context. A custodian entrusted with collecting the alms brought by the pious to help the feeding of the poor registered in the church embezzles a small gold coin brought by a man, and then perjures himself to deny that any such coin had been brought. He is immediately struck down, and even the returning of the gold coin does not save him from death. As Gregory comments, one small gold coin stolen from the poor with greed is hence more than sufficient to drag this man to the lower regions.²⁰

IV.2.3 Churches working as almshouses

The consequence of such a charitable stance on the part of bishops was that the churches functioned as almshouses on a great scale, feeding the registered poor on a regular basis. Among such poor dependants on a church, there were two classes, the *matricularii* and the *pauperes*. The former were an organized body, who were registered, supported by regular rations, and lived in a hospice attached to the church,

¹⁹ *Hist.* IV.36.

²⁰ Some other miracle stories that concern the punishment of church robbers without, however, representing them as “slayers of the poor,” and stressing instead the involved insult to the saint, are as follows: *VJ* 13, 14 and 20; *VM* I.30 and IV.7; *GC* 70 and 78; *GM* 58, 65, 71 and 104. Nevertheless, as Gregory affirms at the beginning of *VJ* 13, the purpose of such stories was also to defend the ability of the Church to protect the poor by frightening people with an eye on Church property.

being, so it was said, fed by the patron saint. The unenrolled beggars, on the other hand, were allowed to beg alms in the porticos of the church. The countryside was also full of mendicants who were occasionally armed with a letter from a bishop or other holy man, entrusting them to the charity of good Christians.²¹

The travelers and the leprous made up another important part of the weak that came under the Church's protection. The virtue of hospitality, so often stressed by Caesarius of Arles in his sermons, here found its application. The importance of hospitality is expounded at length in Mâcon II, 11: the zeal for hospitality has been recommended to all not only by Christ, but also by the apostle in all his directives. Therefore the bishops should not only apply themselves to performing this work, but also encourage all the faithful to do it, so that the guests may intercede for their sins before God in return for the hospitality they have received. Those who do not recommend this virtue, or do not exercise it themselves, are to be struck by the anger of God. In canon 13 of the same council it is forbidden to keep dogs at a church so that those who come there to seek shelter should not suffer physical harm. The leprous are similarly to be cared for. In Lyons III, 6 and Orléans V, 21, the bishops are instructed to provide adequate food and clothing to those afflicted with this disease who live in their city: "thus mercy will not be lacking for those whom their cruel infirmity has reduced to an intolerable destitution."

As in the case of preaching in the parishes, Caesarius had also pressed for the extension of the right to help and protect the poor to parish churches. Although the bishops resisted this measure for fear that it would reduce their control over Church property as well as their prestige coming from patronage, they finally gave in and the right was granted in Carpentras in 527. In the single canon of this council, it is

²¹ Dill, *Roman Society*, 452.

pointed out that some bishops claim so great a proportion of the tithes collected in the parishes that hardly anything falls to the share of parish churches; accordingly, it is decreed that if the church of the city over which the bishop presides is well-provided for and does not lack anything, then all the surplus should be equitably distributed to the clerics who run the parish churches and for the reparation of the buildings. This measure would no doubt considerably extend the activity of the Church in providing support to the poor. At the same time, Christian values such as charity and mercy would be exemplified and validated, and the receivers of these favors would become more prepared and willing to respect the clergy as a setter of moral norms.²²

IV.2.4 The advocacy of the people against the mighty

The patronal activities of the bishop were not exhausted by mediation or the support of food, clothing and shelter to the weaker members of his people, however. He also had to act as the advocate of the people in face of the mighty, the king, and even God himself. Where necessary, he had to appear as the representative of his people to resist the unjust demands of kings and other mighty men, putting forward the *terror verbis* against the *iura potestatum* as Nicetius's epitaph put it.²³ Or again, he had to organize Rogations to mitigate the divine justice and to beg mercy for the sins of all. This specific sphere of the bishop's activity as patron came also from his position as the heir of the *defensor civitatis* in the late Roman Empire. In 409, the right to be chosen *defensor* was granted to bishops and other members of the clergy. After the collapse of the western half of the Empire the office of *defensor* disappeared, but its jurisdictional and social-political function went over to the

²² W. E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge, 1994), 235-6.

bishop's office and through the spirit of Christianity found there a new, effective legitimization.²⁴

It is in this connection that we should understand the interventions of the bishops in favor of the poor against the mighty and against corrupt judges as documented in the Church councils. In Mâcon II, 14, the bishops have learned that the *familiares* of the king, and others enjoying power, are appropriating the properties of others and without any legal procedure or justification expelling the poor, not only from their lands but even from their houses. The bishops now decree unanimously that henceforth nobody shall have the liberty to commit such a wrongdoing, but one shall put forward his claims before the justice, so that no poor may be despoiled of his possessions by violence or by trickery. Those who ignore this decision will be struck by anathema. More specifically, the bishop acted as the protector of the widows and orphans, as evident in Macôn II, 12. Here the bishops have been notified that widows and orphans are being maltreated by judges for the slightest causes with great cruelty and without any recourse, deprived as they are of a *defensor*. Therefore the judges are implored, under pain of excommunication, to notify the bishop or a priest or deacon of his before calling such people before justice, where they will deliberate the case together in order to prevent the accused from being harassed again. Significantly, the bishops remark at the end of the canon that it is not proper for those who are answerable for great issues to make light of the affairs of little people, since the scorn of even the smallest leads little by little to a great, general evil.

In this connection it is not surprising to encounter, in Gregory's works, holy bishops conscious of their role as the *defensor* of the poor and the weak before the

²³ Heinzelmann, *Bischofherrschaft*, 171, 241.

mighty. Maurillo, the bishop of Cahors, was one of these. Besides being a man of great charity and biblical learning, we are told in praise, he was just in his decisions and protected the poor from the hand of unfair judges and the mighty.²⁵ St Quintianus was another such bishop who acted as a fatherly patron of the poor:

He never lost his regard for the poor; he never feared the person of the powerful man; but he always had in everything a holy liberty, and received in his house the mantle of a poor man with as much respect as the toga of an illustrious senator.²⁶

The bishops also appeared as a representative of the interests of their people before the kings. With the conversion of Clovis, the Frankish king had stepped into the post of the far-away Emperor for the Catholic clergy. Thereby, the bishop had become an important mediator: he functioned as the advocate of the city folk against the king, and was at the same time his agent in the affairs of the *civitas*.²⁷ It was in this role that the bishops who had convened for the council of Clermont penned a letter to king Theodebert. While the bishops were residing together in Auvergne a great crowd of people imploring a remedy for their hopelessness has flowed towards them. They have demanded the bishops to ask the king not to let anyone be excluded from his own possessions, and if anyone should find himself under the rule of a king, not to let him lose a property situated in the area of another king through the claim of some other person. Trusting the justice and the piety of the king, the bishops see it impossible to discard such a demand, for they are seeing to the necessities of a great number of people by such a suggestion, just and agreeable to God. The King will lose nothing from such a concession, for he will both increase his revenues and resemble the Lord of the Heavens with the grace of a merciful grant.

²⁴ F. Prinz, "Stadtherrschaft," 4-5.

²⁵ *Hist.* V.42.

²⁶ *VP* IV.5.

²⁷ Scheibelreiter, "Bild und Wirklichkeit," 145.

Gregory's saints, even when they are dead, show themselves active in the protection of the poor and the weak against rapacious kings, not least by the fear they inspire in such. Hence in *GM* 102, the martyr Polyeuctus prevents the wealth dedicated to his church and to the poor from falling into the hands of the greedy emperor. The emperor approaches Anicia Juliana, a rich woman from Constantinople, to give him a great sum in loan, obviously without any intention of paying it back. Juliana offers to present her wealth to him on a certain day and then has all her gold melted down and remolded to make beautiful decorations for the columns and dome of the martyr's church. The emperor can do nothing at all when he sees the coveted gold in the form of church decorations instead of the golden coins and jewelry he was expecting.

The Lord of the Heavens himself was however another powerful Lord who had to be appeased by the intermediation of bishops. In *Hist.* II.34, Bishop Mamertus prays to God to save his citizens from the fire that has broken out in the palace and threatens to spread to the whole city, and his "floods of tears" indeed put out the fire. He also institutes a special form of prayer, a religious service and a grant of alms to the poor in thanksgiving, later called Rogations and which spread everywhere in Gaul,²⁸ which brings the horrors to an end. Similarly, Bishop Victorius of Le Mans saves his city from destruction by a fire when he makes the sign of the cross against the whirlwind.²⁹ Remigius of Rheims, in turn, saves his city from the plague. Carrying the shroud from his tomb in the shape of a funeral bier in a procession, the citizens circuit the city and the nearby villages. The plague cannot advance beyond

²⁸ Hence Orléans I, 27 ordains that during the three days preceding the Ascension, all people should give up all kind of work, and pass these days with abstinence.

²⁹ *GC* 55.

this line.³⁰ Further examples are St Gall who intercedes successfully by his prayers for the protection of his people from the plague,³¹ and Bishop Theodore who intervenes successfully on behalf of his people before God, imploring Him to end the pestilence.³²

IV.2.5 Mercy and mildness to prisoners and those seeking asylum

Closely related with the role of the bishop as the protector of the poor and the weak were his judicial competences, as we have already seen in the canons that ordered the judges to deliberate in common with bishops in cases involving widows and orphans. Similarly, the bishops are expected in the canons to see to the practice of mercy in the field of justice by mitigating the harsh penalties of secular justice as much as they can, visiting prisoners and providing asylum to convicts and slaves, as well as avoiding any kind of participation in the harsh processes of the secular courts. Jurisdiction lost much of its harshness in the hands of a bishop, since the sacral legitimization of his position and the characteristic features of the exercise of a spiritual office with its idealistic requirements was bound to influence his secular activity. The eternal contrasting partners of the *vitae*, the mild, saintly bishop and the over strict, unmerciful judge, shows in exaggerated form the power of Christian legal thought, which often contradicted the Germanic ideas. The secular judge was restrained by many considerations, like the anger of the populace, possible acts of violence in face of unpunished guilt, and even the wrath of the unsatisfied Godhead,

³⁰ *GC* 78.

³¹ *Hist.* IV.5.

³² *Hist.* IX.22.

now in Christian form. The *virtus* and *auctoritas* of the bishops, nevertheless, had always to triumph over all the worldly claims.³³

Characteristically, the justification for the punishment was never questioned, and even wholly undeserving subjects were allowed to evade justice. It is necessary to consider in this regard that many of the freed prisoners remained as the bishop's *pueri* and increased his power and following. The episcopal power of protection founded for them a material as well as jurisdictional relation of dependence in the episcopal *familia*. One can deduce from this fact that such measures that were charitable in the essence did not remain without results for the actual building up of the power of bishops. It was above all the care for the dependents and the seekers of protection that laid out the essential foundation of a bishop's power.³⁴

A canon where the concern for the mitigation of the harsh punishments of secular justice can be seen together with that for the proper observance of the right of asylum is Orléans I, 1. If homicides, adulterers or thieves take refuge in a church, it is not to be permitted in any way to take them away by force from the church or the house of the bishop. They are to be given back only provided that they are given guarantee, by an oath taken on the Bible, against death, mutilation and all kinds of punishments, with the intent that the criminal come to terms with the one towards whom he is culpable. According to Orléans IV, 21, those who infringe the right of asylum by trying to remove the culprit from his refuge in the church through violence or trickery are to be suspended from communion until they have made reparation by the penitence assigned by the bishop. After similarly forbidding the

³³ Scheibelreiter, "Bild und Wirklichkeit," 142-3. See also E. James, "*Beati Pacifici*: Bishops and the Law in Sixth-Century Gaul," in *Disputes and Settlements: Law and Human Relations in the West*, edited by J. Bossy (Cambridge, 1983), 25-46.

³⁴ F. Prinz, "Die bischöfliche Stadtherrschaft im Frankenreich vom 5. bis zum 7. Jahrhundert," *Historische Zeitschrift* 217, 1973: 30.

forcible removal of those who had found asylum in the church, the eighth canon of Mâcon II also explains why:

If indeed secular princes have decided by their laws that whoever takes refuge at the feet of their statues remain unharmed, how much more should those who are placed under the protection of the immortal kingdom of the Heavens remain sheltered from all harm!

In accordance with the Church canons, such good bishops as Avitus and Nicetius also intervene frequently for the mitigation of secular justice in the *Histories*, and in this connection act as the guarantors of the right of asylum. Failing to protect those who have sought his assistance is indeed a source of much sorrow to a good bishop such as Ageric, who is highly grieved for not having been able to prevent the asylum seeker Berthefried and then Guntram Boso from being killed.³⁵ In *Hist.* VIII.6, Gregory appears before King Guntram to ask for the pardon of two asylum seekers in his church. What will he tell “his master” who has sent him if the king does not grant his wish? Being stupefied, Guntram asks who this master is. “It was St Martin who told me to come,” answers Gregory with a smile, and gets what he wants. It is the wish of saints to treat convicts and asylum seekers with mildness, it is the duty of bishops to act as their representative, and of the secular power to grant it. Not every king is of the same opinion, however. Thus Chilperic sends messengers to Gregory, commanding him to expel his rebellious son Clovis from his church and threatening to burn all the countryside if he does not so, but he receives the answer from the faithful disciple of St Martin that “it is impossible to do in Christian times what has not been done even in the days of the heretics,”³⁶ which is precisely the same reason given in the Church canon just mentioned!

³⁵ *Hist.* IX.12, 23.

³⁶ *Hist.* V.14.

St Martin himself instantly punishes a judge who refuses to allow Duke Austrapius, who had sought asylum in his church, to receive a cup of water offered to him. Many people hasten to provide the duke with necessities after this.³⁷ Julian is no less an avenger of those who try to harm asylum seekers. In *VJ* 5, a young man tries to break down the door of the saint's church in order to kill another man who seeks refuge there, and gets punished with a great pain, while the man inside goes away freely. In *VJ* 10, a man tries to drag from the saint's church another man who had struck him, and gets punished by blindness, although he receives his sight back when he apologizes to the other man. St Venantius is no more tolerant: he punishes with death a man called Fretrus for having killed his slave, who had sought asylum at Venantius's church when he was away.³⁸

Even when a culprit could not escape imprisonment by the intervention of the Church, he still enjoyed its protection in the prison. Hence it is decreed in Orléans V, 20 that prisoners are to be visited every Sunday by the archdeacon or other responsible person of the local church, so that they may be assisted with mercy in their needs; the provisions necessary for the task will be provided by the bishop. This concern of the Church for the lot of prisoners is evident in many miracle stories in which saints release prisoners by breaking their chains or directly rescue them from the prison. Significantly, they are often assisted in this by the bishop, who intervenes to secure their freedom after their chains are broken. In *VJ* 4, Julian causes a man sentenced to death by the emperor to be released upon the prayers of his wife. In *VM* I.11, prisoners in Galicia are released by Martin and by the bishop's intervention. In *VM* I.23, Wiliachar's chains are broken again and again by Martin and Chlothar has to set him free despite his involvement in Chramn's rebellion. In *VM* III.47, a man

³⁷ *Hist.* IV.18.

imprisoned for his debts and condemned to starvation by his creditor gets released as he hears a procession carrying Martin's relics and prays to the saint. In *VM* IV.16, a man being transferred from one prison to another gets released from his chains and his guards are struck down upon his prayer to Martin. In *VM* IV.26, Martin rescues prisoners from a prison in Rheims by breaking their chains and then lifting them through the open roof. In *VM* IV.35, an innocent man bound by ropes by evil men is released again and again from his bounds, and at last released on Gregory's intercession. In *VM* IV.39 and *VM* IV.41, prisoners are similarly released by Martin.

Martin is not the only saint concerned with the lot of prisoners, of course. In *Hist.* V.19, St Medard bursts the chains of prisoners asunder, and in *Hist.* V.8, St Germanus compels the prisoners who call upon him to be released by increasing the weight of his corpse as he is being transferred to the church. In *VP* VII.4, a prisoner being led to Dijon by soldiers along the same road by which the body of Gregory of Langres had been carried gets released from his bonds at a certain place where the saint's remains had rested. In *VP* VIII.10, we learn that Nicetius of Lyons has appeared one night to prisoners in seven different cities to deliver them from prison, and the judges have not dared to do anything more against them. Moreover, a mass of iron chains has been gathered in his church from such occasions. In *GC* 86, Abbot Sequanus from Langres breaks the chains of three men bound unjustly by Guntram for having stolen his horn, and the king, who becomes terrified when he learns this, promptly sets them free.

The concern of the Church to keep clear of the harsher ways of the secular world is apparent in several canons which forbid the members of the Church to become sullied by participation in secular kinds of punishments such as

³⁸ *VP* XVI.3

imprisonment, torture, execution etc. Hence in Orléans IV, 23, the servants of the Church are forbidden to arrest or imprison people, for “the discipline of the Church should not be dishonored by people whose masters have the duty of assisting the ransom of people.” In Orléans III, 35, clerks are forbidden to deliver anyone to secular justice without authorization, and in Mâcon II, 19, they are forbidden to bear witness in public judgments or to be present at interrogations and executions. In Auxerre, 33, and 34, similarly, the clerks are forbidden to attend tortures and executions.

In accordance with the aversion towards capital punishment observed in these Church canons, saints also save convicts from the death penalty. In *Hist.* VI.8, Abbot Eparchius of Angoulême intervenes before the count unsuccessfully for the pardon of a thief who is being taken to the gibbet, and his wish is accomplished in the end, upon his prayers, by the miraculous collapse of the gibbet.³⁹ In *VM* I.21, St Martin rescues from death a man who is already hung at the gallows on his insistent begging of the saint’s assistance, and in *VM* III.53, he similarly rescues two men from the gallows. In *GM* 72, a priest brings a man before the judge for a horse theft, but when the judge insists on the death penalty, he repents and begs to the martyr Quintinus to save the convict, which he promptly does.⁴⁰ In *GM* 68, St Genesius saves a woman from drowning when she is submerged on the order of the harsh judge because of a false charge of adultery, and another woman in the same condition is miraculously saved in the next chapter.

³⁹ A different version of the same story is found in *GC* 99, where he rescues a man from the gallows upon the prayers of monks.

⁴⁰ The influence of the canons forbidding members of the clergy from taking a man before the secular court without permission, and to be involved in capital punishments, is also evident here.

IV.2.6 The protection of slaves and captives

The lot of captives and slaves interested the Church as much as that of prisoners. We have seen in Macôn II, 2, that one of the uses of the tithe is indicated as the redeeming of captives. This use of tithes to provide the means to ransom the greater number of captives expected in the wars had first emerged in the letter to the people in Tours II. The tithe, which had long ago appeared in southern Gaul and elsewhere as a gift to the Church for distribution in alms to the poor, would now apply by extension to captives.⁴¹ There are also several canons concerned with the protection of slaves. The slaves who seek refuge in the Church are to be given back to their masters only on the oath of pardon (Orléans V, 22); slaves that have already been set free in a church are not to be enslaved again by their masters (Orléans V, 7), nor are the free-born to be reduced to slavery (Lyon II, 3).

Saints' protection of slaves and captives against their harsh masters can be considered in the context of such Church canons. In *VM* I.22, the cripple Leomeris is healed by Martin, but again made sick when his master reassigns him to his old work, so that the master has to set him free. In *VM* II.30, a mute slave woman is healed of her infirmity and redeemed with the assistance of the blessed confessor. In *VM* III.41, the daughter of already freed slaves is unjustly enslaved and chained by her patron's sons, but set free by Martin who on his feast day first breaks her stocks, and when she arrives at his church, her chains. In *VM* III.46, a woman from Poitiers with a crippled hand is healed, but gets crippled again when subjected to slavery by her masters, who finally accept a payment from the saint's wealth to give up their claims. In *GC* 66, St Lupus of Troyes brings about the insanity and then the death of a man called Maurus when he tries to drag away his slave who had sought refuge in

the saint's church, cursing the dead saint for trying to steal his slave — who remains a free man after his master's death. In the next chapter some captives flee to the monk Aventius, who used to assist Lupus when he was alive. When their master first swears an oath to accept a ransom but then forgets his oath, his right hand and arm become gangrenous and have to be amputated, but the man dies nevertheless, being followed by his wife when she tries to re-enslave the captives. In *GM* 44, Victor of Milan, honored for his frequent release of prisoners and captives, helps Apollinaris to escape without being asked anything all the way from Italy to Clermont.

IV.2.7 The protection of the city against enemies

Bishops are also seen as active in protecting their cities from the attacks and sieges of the enemy in Gregory's works. In *Hist.* II.5, Bishop Aravatius journeys as far as Rome to pray for the sparing of Gaul from the Hunnic invasion, considering the greatness of the people's sins, but his wish is still not granted. When he returns and tells his citizens that they will never see his face again, since he has been told that he will be spared from witnessing the coming disasters, they weep and groan, walking after him, and beg him not to leave, not to forget them. Likewise, Bishop Anianus of Orleans prays for the protection of his city from Atilla's army, and exhorts his people, who look up to him to learn what they should do, to implore God's help with prayer and tears. Eventually not only Orleans but the whole Gaul is saved by the prayers of the holy bishop, for Gregory has no doubt that the Hunnic army was defeated not really by Aetius, but by the prayers of Anianus.⁴² Similarly, Bishop Quintianus protects his city Rodez against Theuderic's besieging army by fasts, vigils and by touring the walls singing psalms. Theuderic is thereupon struck

⁴¹ Wallace-Hadrill, *Frankish Church*, 102-3.

⁴² *Hist.* II.7.

by a temporary madness, after which he listens at last to the advices of his duke to soften down against the city.⁴³

In this form of patronage bishops follow the saints, who show themselves to be indefatigable defenders of city populations. Thus in *Hist.* III.29, St Vincent intervenes on behalf of the people of Saragossa, who place their hopes in the mercy of God with great humility and abstinence. When they march behind the tunic of the saint on the walls, and implore God to take pity on them, the scared Frankish troops withdraw from the city. In *VJ* 7, Hillidius is guided by a white dove when he is traveling to rescue Saint Julian's city Brioude from the besieging Burgundians. Fortunatus tells Gregory that every time the enemy treacherously attacked one of the towers of the castle of Tertium in Italy, at whose summit an oratory for St Martin had been built, a bright light was reflected from the sword or knife of the guard on the tower, so that the enemy could be met at the proper time and routed by stones.⁴⁴ In *VM* II.25, Saint Martin comforts his flock with a healing miracle that he is still their patron and has not abandoned them at the critical period of Christmas 575, when Sigibert had been assassinated and it was not certain whether his under-age son could assert his authority. We learn in *GC* 44 that whenever the city of Bordeaux is invaded by an illness or besieged by some enemy or disrupted by some vendetta, the people gather to the church of St Severinus, and as soon as they observe fasts, celebrate vigils and offer prayers, the impending disaster is avoided.

IV.2.8 The protection and promotion of peace

Redeeming captives or protecting city populations against attacks from their enemy were only partial remedies, however. A real and complete remedy to these

⁴³ *VP* IV.2.

⁴⁴ *VM* I.14.

sufferings could only be brought about by the establishment and preservation of peace in the whole kingdom, a task on which the bishops did not fail to spend their energies. The fact that they indeed regarded themselves to be responsible for the maintenance of peace can be observed in the already mentioned letter to the people in Tours II, where everyone is exhorted to put an end to mutual hatred by coming to terms with those who have done him wrong:

For how vain is it to desire pardon for one's sins if one does not have any wish to forgive the wrongs of an enemy? For the first form of mercy is not to take revenge on someone who has sinned against us, but on the contrary, to return good for evil.

The duty of the bishops to work for peace constitutes a major theme in Gregory's *Histories*. In *Hist.* VII.1, St Salvius, after dying and going to the other world, is sent back to life on earth by God, despite his violent protestations, and later becomes a bishop. The reason for this decision, he is told, is that the churches still have need of such a man as him who is as far as one can be from striving after worldly power and riches, who is full of charity, who serves God in humility and poverty, and who directs his mind only towards spiritual matters. Not only the churches need him, indeed, but also the people, whom in the role of an ideal bishop he exhorts to do only good and prepare for the Last Judgment, and whom he also looks after in times of calamity, rescuing from captivity and illness alike. There is still one more reason for the need for him, however. The spiritual bishop is also needed for reconciling those in discord, thus re-establishing and maintaining peace in his city and in the whole kingdom when necessary. This is because only a bishop fully indifferent to the lure of worldly riches can pacify the civil disturbances that stem from the striving after worldly riches, acting in the role of a mediator in his society, as we have seen him doing in the Church council canons.

We see Gregory precisely in this role in the last chapter of the same book (*Hist.* VII),⁴⁵ where he settles the civil disturbance between the families of Sicharius and Chramnesind in Tours.⁴⁶ After all the civil strife we have read about in the intervening chapters, resulting in the despoiling of the poor, the ravage of Church property and wide scale massacres and devastation, which indeed make up one of the darkest books of the *Histories*, Gregory makes explicit through his personal mediation why a saintly bishop is necessary in the midst of strife: because a holy bishop is far from the earthly cravings that lay at the basis of such sufferings, he is the only person capable of pacifying civil disturbances by the deployment of the power and riches of the Church that have been entrusted to him — instead of using them to appease his avarice, like Egidius and other greedy bishops.

As Gregory wants to make clear his point about the mediating function of a holy bishop, he contents himself with telling only the first half the story in this chapter. The rest of the story, where Chramnesind kills Sicharius after a long period of reconciliation, is not found before *Hist.* IX.19, as it is used there to show how necessary is the existence of a bishop for peace making: in the very next chapter, *Hist.* IX.20, Guntram is roused to a fury against his nephew Childebert, bringing up old accounts and preparing to break the Treaty of Andelot he had made with him. Thanks to the intervention of the bishop (Gregory) in this case, peace is reaffirmed and does not lead to renewed conflict as in the case of Sicharius and Chramnesind, where he was no longer present to re-establish peace. Parallel to his role here,

⁴⁵ For the crucial role played by the first and last (as well as the middle) chapters in each book for delivering Gregory's messages, and for the relation of this three-tiered framework with his figurative interpretation of history from Adam to Christ and then to St Martin (the first and last being the "antitypes" of Christ) see Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, 131-35. When discussing the opening and closing chapters of Book VII, however, Heinzelmann makes no comments on their interconnection or on the message they convey concerning the function of spiritual bishops as peace-bringers (see *ibid.*, 50-51, 56-57).

⁴⁶ *Hist.* VII.47.

Gregory stresses the need for love and support between Guntram and Childebert in *Hist.* VIII.13. Gregory is of course not the only bishop to work for peace, but only represents the whole episcopate in such passages. As civil strife still threatens at the beginning of Book VI, the bishops assemble in council and show that they are up to the business of taking measures against the prevailing disturbances and to work for peace in collaboration with the king.⁴⁷

In his mediating activity Gregory is of course acting also as the client of St Martin, who personally intervenes to re-establish the peace in *Hist.* III.28, where Childebert and Theudebert attack their brother Lothar. Upon the prayers of their mother Clotild, St Martin compels the two brothers to make peace with Lothar by a hailstorm that hits only the aggressors. Just as the three kings give up their ambitions to wage war against each other and agree to make peace, thus cleansing themselves of their sins, three paralytics are similarly cleansed of their sins and brought back to wholeness and full life by St Martin,⁴⁸ who moreover assists the establishment of peace further by restraining the unruly tribes the kings had conscripted.⁴⁹

IV.3 The king as a promoter and implementer of good works

IV.3.1 Charitable support of the poor and the Church

If Egidius is the *bête noire* among the bishops, used by Gregory to illustrate what a bishop should not do, this function is taken over to a great part by Chilperic amongst the kings in the Histories. The most typical example of this negative prescription comes in his obituary, where Gregory denounces him as the “Nero and Herod of our time,” and in a downpour of denunciations uses him to illustrate all that

⁴⁷ *Hist.* VI.1.

⁴⁸ Also in *VM* II.5-7

⁴⁹ *Hist.* IV.49.

is unwanted in a king: Instead of ensuring the peace and welfare of his kingdom, he has destroyed and ravaged many districts. He has brought unjust charges against his subjects to confiscate their properties. He was gluttonous, proud and ignorant. He was an enemy of the poor. Whereas he ought to have supported churches, he was jealous and covetous of Church property and donations. And as a judge he was cruel and loved meting out brutal punishments.⁵⁰

In the first book of the Chilperic diptych,⁵¹ in turn, we meet an ideal ruler, Emperor Tiberius II. He is not only a capable man, but also full of charity and dedicated to the cause of the needy. He spends all his treasure on ransoming captives and giving alms to the poor, but never falls into want, because God, seeing his human charity, goes on providing him with more and more to give.⁵² The Merovingian Theudebert is another exemplary king: even before he has gained the throne, he shows his mercifulness by protecting the son of Sigivald when commanded by his father Lothar to do away with him. After gaining the throne he rules his kingdom justly, respects his bishops, shows himself liberal to the churches,

⁵⁰ *Hist.* VI.46.

⁵¹ According Heinzelmann, this diptych comprises Books V and VI, which are connected by the central theme of “the Godless King Chilperic” and should be seen as a counterpart of the following “Good King Guntram Trilogy” that comprises the Books VII-IX (see *Gregor von Tours*, 42 ff.). Lately Guy Halsall has drawn attention to the fact that there are many chapters that show Chilperic in a very favorable light in this “diptych,” especially in Book VI, and correspondingly, many chapters that reveal Guntram’s darker sides in the following “trilogy.” Although Halsall thus points out an important detail that is lost in Heinzelmann’s somewhat schematic analysis, he goes to the other extreme however, arguing that Gregory’s evil king was in fact Guntram. The denunciation of Chilperic at the end of Book VI, he claims, was only a means by which Gregory wanted to eliminate any doubts concerning himself in Guntram’s court, so that he could securely go on to write whatever he wanted (see “Nero and Herod? The Death of Chilperic and Gregory’s Writings of History,” in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, edited by K. Mitchell and I. Wood (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne, 2002), 337-50). This argument is not supported by the fact that Gregory shows Guntram performing miracles like a bishop or a saint — which goes far beyond what was necessary to reconcile himself to Guntram, since it was quite an unaccustomed thing at the time for kings to perform miracles, and nobody would have taken him to account for not attributing miracles to the king. The most plausible interpretation of Guntram’s moral failures remains that of Mitchell, who attributes them to the extremely insecure and plot-ridden atmosphere of the time, in which it would be vain to expect a better comportment from even the best of kings — a fact which underlines the importance of the bishops’ role as royal counselors (see *History and Christian Society*, 161-68).

⁵² *Hist.* V.19.

relieves the wants of the poor and distributes many benefits with piety and friendly goodwill. Moreover, he remits the royal taxes paid by the churches in Clermont with great generosity.⁵³ The message that comes out from these portraits is clear — just as in the case with bishops, it is a primary duty of the good king to act as a loving, merciful patron and protector of his subjects and churches.

Hence it is no coincidence that Chilperic levies crushing taxes, inflicts torture and punishment on those who resist, and does not flinch from torturing abbots and priests either.⁵⁴ Instead of relieving the distress of his subjects, the bad king is robbing them of their existing wealth. The punishment is not late in coming. Only five chapters later⁵⁵ God sends warnings in the form of natural disasters and epidemics because of the sins of the people and the resulting civil wars. Chilperic and Fredegund, among the chief instigators of these civil disturbances and mischiefs, finally take heed of these warnings when their little children are killed too. They quit, at least temporarily, laying up treasures through rapine and mulcting their people greedily with taxes though they are already rich enough, and begin to give lavish alms to the Church and to the poor.

Another bad king Charibert, who according to Gregory “hated clerics, neglected the churches of God, and despised bishops,” seizes the villa of Nazelles belonging to Saint Martin in *VM* I.29, and does not heed the divine warning given to him by the madness of horses that are fed with the hay from the estate, stating that the villa will not belong to the saint’s church, justly or unjustly, as long as he lives. Of course he promptly dies upon these words and provides Gregory with a nice example to warn all who exercise power: “Clothe some people in such a way that

⁵³ *Hist.* III.23, 25.

⁵⁴ *Hist.* V.28.

⁵⁵ *Hist.* V.33, 34.

you do not steal from others; and add to your wealth in such a way that you do no harm to the churches! For God swiftly avenges his servants.”⁵⁶

Lothar, who is trying to tax St Martin’s Church, is taught through less drastic means that a good king should support his poor subjects and churches instead of robbing them of their existing wealth through taxes and other unjust extortions. St Injuriosus of Tours confronts the king, declaring that it is “criminal for him, who should be feeding the poor from his own granary, to fill his coffers with the alms that others give to them.”⁵⁷ Church property is the property of the poor, and any king who tries to tax it deserves to be called a “slayer of the poor” as in the canons of Church councils. The same view is expressed by Gregory as he defends the tax immunity of his city, threatened this time by the officers of Childebert. Past kings have never taxed it for fear of and out of respect for St Martin, he says, because the money has to be used for supporting the poor and St Martin’s churches and clergy, instead of swelling the royal coffers, which ought to be emptied in favour of the poor instead. That St Martin is of the same opinion is confirmed by the miraculous punishment of the man who had produced the old tax registers.⁵⁸ Childebert does not only step back, but in a later chapter remits arrears from ecclesiastics with “open handed charity.”⁵⁹

Remitting taxes and arrears is little more than adequate, however: a good king should also help his subjects when they are in financial difficulties, like Theudebert. Desideratus of Verdun, seeing that his citizens are poor and destitute after the ravages of Theuderic’s army, asks Theudebert for credit on their behalf. The king duly gives 7000 gold pieces, and later refuses to receive any payment back — he has no need of the money, he says, and is indeed glad that those in dire distress are now

⁵⁶ *VM* I.29.

⁵⁷ *Hist.* IV.2.

⁵⁸ *Hist.* IX.30.

returned to prosperity. By his generous act, he restores the citizens of Verdun to affluence.⁶⁰ Only compare this behavior with that of Chilperic, who mulcted his people and impoverished them with crushing taxes. Not only kings, but also other officials who hold secular power are responsible for the welfare of those under their rule. Duke Chrodin, as an example, spends his wealth for the relief of the needs of the Church and the poor.⁶¹

IV.3.2 The protection of the peace

In the lengthy introduction to the fifth book, Gregory complains that instead of bringing peace to other people like the Roman Empire, the new Merovingian kings carry discord and strife into their own country and thereby destroy themselves and their people. Kings should spend their energies, he remarks, in being virtuous and not for civil strife, in which they indulge because of avarice, though they are already rich enough. In an interesting episode, Chilperic is used to exemplify how a king should take care to avoid civil strife. Although he has been severely provoked by a gratuitous attack on his troops that protected a bridge on the border area, Chilperic lets himself be persuaded by those who counsel peace. He opts to avoid war and embarks on peace negotiations with King Guntram, whose man the provoker was. The peace is consequently re-established between the two brothers without any further bloodshed.⁶²

Besides avoiding civil strife, however, it is also necessary for kings to accept offers of peace that come from foreign enemies, since it is thwarting God's will not to accept them, and certain to be punished by defeat. In the already mentioned

⁵⁹ *Hist.* X.7.

⁶⁰ *Hist.* III.34.

⁶¹ *Hist.* VI.20.

⁶² *Hist.* VI.19.

incident in *Hist.* IV.14 Lothar is unsuccessful in persuading his men to accept the peace offer of the Saxons, and has to see his army suffer great loss. It is therefore the duty of a king to make his subjects accept a peaceful settlement; if not, he will suffer defeat. It is still worse if the king himself should reject such offers. Guntram repeatedly rejects offers of peace from Spain, as a result of which the rift becomes deeper and deeper. In a subsequent attack on the Goths, Duke Desiderius gets killed with all his men near Carcassone.⁶³ Even when the Goths have been converted to Catholicism Guntram refuses to accept their peace offers, bringing up old accounts, and still seeking revenge. Childebert, on the other hand, accepts the offer and readily makes peace.⁶⁴

⁶³ *Hist.* VIII.35, 38, 45.

⁶⁴ *Hist.* IX.16.

CHAPTER V

The Main Components of Ascetical Practice: Obedience and Discipline

V.1 Obedience

Another important component of ascetical practice is showing obedience and humility towards one's superior, and fulfilling all his commands, exhortations and advice. In the context of our sources, by the superior is to be understood not only one's abbot or bishop, but also one's parents and king. In this section we shall examine the passages in Gregory, Caesarius and the Church canons about the need to obey one's parents and kings, as well as the passages that insist on the unfailing observance of obedience and respect towards the bishops and their churches, and stress the greatness of the guilt of any lay or clerical rebel who should dare to call the authority and dignity of his bishop into question. Many miracle stories showing the punishment of such people fall herein.

V.1.1 Obedience toward the bishop and the king

The clergy drew their orders and sacramental powers, as well as their financial support, from the absolute power of the bishop over them. Their whole life

and conduct were subject to episcopal discipline, with only a certain right of appeal to the episcopal synod.¹ Despite this, warns Michael Wallace-Hadrill,

it would be wrong to assume that bishops and their clergy always formed a happy brotherhood. The clergy could easily identify their interests with those of the townsmen, rustics or patrons they served and come to regard their bishops as *potentes* to be kept at arm's length.²

This mistrust of the clergy and the determination to control them are especially evident in the councils Orléans III and Tours II. According to Orléans III, 22, if a cleric, pushed by pride, refuses with disdain to exercise his office properly, he is to be reduced to the communion of laymen and deposed from his rank. In Tours II, 12, the metropolitan and his suffragans are exhorted to stand together if one of them should be resisted or despised by his clergy. Lyon I, 3 threatens those who call a living bishop's dignity in question with perpetual excommunication.

It is not surprising in this context that the disobedience of a cleric towards his bishop is a particularly obnoxious crime in Gregory's eyes. In *Hist.* III.13, he tells with satisfaction how Proculus, who had once done wrong to St Quintianus his bishop, was cut down at his altar by King Theuderic's troops as a divine punishment. The sin of Proculus is so serious in Gregory's eyes that he attributes the fall of the impregnable fortress of Vollore to the enemy and the captivity of the inhabitants to the same crime. Proculus is not the first cleric we meet in the *Histories* who has dared to insult or otherwise harm his bishop. In *Hist.* II.1, firstly the Bishop Bricius, who mocked his bishop St Martin, and then the other two bishops who let themselves be raised to Bricius's place while he was still a bishop and had been unjustly removed by the populace, are punished: Bricius through ill treatment by his congregation and the others through death, the first when traveling to Rome after

¹ Dill, *Roman Society*, 482.

Bricius to meet the pope, and the other just before Bricius entered Tours, being carried out by another gate while Bricius was entering the city.

In an even more revolting case two priests of Bishop Sidonius Apollinaris rebel against him, removing from him all control over the property of his church, reducing him to a straitened way of life and submitting him to every kind of contumely. One of them gives up the ghost through his back passage just as he is contemplating to drag the bishop out from his church, just like the heretic Arius. For, comments Gregory, it smacks of heresy that

one of God's bishops should not be obeyed in his own church, the man to whom had been entrusted the task of feeding God's flock, and that someone else to whom nothing at all had been entrusted either by God or by man, should have dared to usurp his authority.³

After the death of Sidonius, the other priest lays hands on the properties of the church as if already a bishop, and rides proudly in the city, later taking the first place at the table without regard for the senior citizens. Of course he is "dashed before long from the summit of his pride like Simon Magus," and goes to "accompany his accomplice in the nethermost hell."⁴

There are many other stories about the punishment of rebellious clerics in the *Histories*, the most important being the plot prepared against Gregory by his subdeacon and priest, both named Riculf, in collaboration with Count Leudast. In *Hist.* VI.36, jealousy, greed and ingratitude seduce two clerics, who try to kill and when they cannot do it, to depose their bishop Aetherius of Lisieux through calumnies. By the support of his flock and colleagues, the two kings Guntram and Chilperic, and of course God, Aetherius is restored to his post and the plotters are

² Wallace-Hadrill, *Frankish Church*, 97.

³ *Hist.* II.23.

⁴ *Hist.* II.23.

punished. In *Hist.* V.46, we are told about the punishment of a priest who sullies the dignity of his late bishop Dalmatius, and of the priest Transobadus who covets the bishop's place and lets him be insulted by this priest at his own table. This chapter forms a prelude to the coming chapters where Leudast and the two Riculfs who insult and try to supplant their bishop Gregory with pride, accusations, conspiracies and plots, are punished.⁵

If rebellion against one's bishop is associated with heresy by Gregory, he regards rebelling against one's king as no less of a heresy. In *Hist.* III.30, he makes the comment that the (Arian) Goths have adopted "the reprehensible habit of killing out of hand any king who displeased them and replacing him on the throne by someone whom they preferred." We have already mentioned the end of the rebel Munderic, in whose person rebellion against the lawful king by overweening pride was punished.⁶ Another such rebel is Gundovald, whose rebellion against Guntram occupies a great part of the seventh book. In the very beginning of this story we are informed of two prodigies showing that Gundovald's claim to the throne is doomed, and he himself is condemned to death.⁷ Gregory's aversion to Gundovald's rebellion does not stem from his disbelief in Gundovald's claim that he is a son of Lothar's. He probably thinks that Gundovald is indeed Lothar's son, considering that Gundovald's mention of St Radegund among his witnesses is reported in the *Histories*.⁸ But still he does not approve of his rebellion, both because rebellion against the lawful king is a sin, and also because Gundovald is being used by such

⁵ *Hist.* V.47-49.

⁶ *Hist.* III.14.

⁷ *Hist.* VII.10, 11.

⁸ *Hist.* VII.36.

avaricious grabbers as Egidius, Mummolus and Sagittarius to stir up trouble for their own profit.

In the penultimate chapter of the seventh book, Gregory tells with a certain amount of satisfaction how two Saxon servants kill their master and how the younger one, after being captured, is subjected to a brutal punishment. But why has he placed this chapter here? Perhaps to make a fitting epilogue to a book concerned with the rebellion of Gundovald and his accomplices, and their punishment.

V.1.2 Respect toward churches, saints and the clergy

Proculus in the last section was not the only person to get punished for insulting St Quintianus. The local official Lytigijs, who had likewise insulted and mocked the same bishop, even though the bishop had humbled himself before him, was bound and dragged away upon an order from the court.⁹ Thus disrespect towards a bishop is no less dangerous for a layman than for a cleric, as the case of Count Leudast's intrigue against Gregory also makes clear. There are many other cases in the *Histories* with the same moral, moreover. In *Hist.* V.35, Count Nantius harasses bishop Heraclius whom he holds responsible for his predecessor's death, who was his uncle. By his example we are shown that those who offend their bishop in this way are certain to be punished, and literally become roasted by the fires of hell until they are black even before they are dead! In *Hist.* IV.39, Palladius the count insults and attacks Bishop Parthenius, and meets his punishment when he has to commit suicide for fear of King Sigibert. In another case Guntram persecutes bishop Theodore. The overzealous officer whom he sends is struck by a terrible epidemic in

⁹ *Hist.* III.13.

his household.¹⁰ One who insults the memory of a bishop is not safe even when he is a bishop himself: Bishop Priscus and his household insult the memory of his predecessor St Nicetius severely, as a result of which they are struck with madness and other illnesses.¹¹

Gregory finds himself a victim of aggressive laymen in several cases besides the affair with Leudast. In *Hist.* V.4, Roccolen surrounds Tours and threatens Gregory if he does not give up Guntram Boso who has sought asylum from Gregory. His overweening arrogance and disrespect toward St Martin and his bishop are punished with death before long. In *Hist.* VII.22, Gregory offers sanctuary to Eberulf in St Martin's church, only to bear his insults directed at the saint and himself. Eberulf has never respected St Martin's church and its properties, as we are told, and he continues his disrespectful behaviour even after he has sought sanctuary in his church. Eberulf indeed deserves his death for not respecting the saint, but his murderer Claudius is also punished for infringing the right of asylum, for the false oath of safe-conduct he swears, and for insulting the saint by desecrating his church.¹²

It is interesting that this same Claudius fears St Martin and inquires about the recent punishments he has distributed, especially those concerning perjury, and yet does not flinch from offending him at the end. Like him, Bishop Bertram and Mummolus believe in a saint and want to benefit from his protection, and yet show disrespect for his relics, scattering his bones when trying to cut out a piece from his finger bone. It is only natural that they should be punished in the end like Claudius.¹³

¹⁰ *Hist.* VIII.12.

¹¹ *Hist.* IV.36.

¹² *Hist.* VII.28.

¹³ *Hist.* VII.31.

There are of course also many who do not even believe in saints and perpetrate any crime against their churches without fear. In *Hist.* VII.42, the outrageous contempt towards St Martin displayed by men sent to fine his churchmen is promptly punished. In *Hist.* VIII.40, Pelagius, a robber and a criminal who insults Gregory, does all the harm to St Martin's church he can, and moreover perjures himself in the church of Blessed Mary, finds his just punishment (i.e. death) when he is busy robbing the church.

We learn more about the fate of such fools in the miracle books. In *GM* 13, an archdeacon, who is impudent enough to attempt to carry away the relics of St John to his church without the saint's permission, goes mad, burns with fever, and expires on the third day. In *GM* 24, an Arian servant of King Theudigisel stalls his horses in the Catholic church covering the Spanish springs in Lusitania, and struck with a fever, dies in the hands of his servants. In *GM* 43, an audacious scoundrel, who lifts the lid of a martyr's tomb and puts his head inside with the hope of stealing something, gets crushed by the lid and leaves "in a state of confusion."

Mocking the saint is not a crime one can get easily away with. In *VJ* 17, a certain former deacon in the service of the public treasury forcibly seizes the sheep under the protection of St Julian's name. When the shepherds resist him, pointing out that Julian is protecting the sheep, he mockingly answers: "Do you think that Julian eats mutton?" Like Count Nantius, he is roasted by the fires of hell (through a fever, that is) even before he is dead. In *GC* 80, the recluse Marianus is found dead under an apple tree, upon which it is rumored widely that he had slipped from the tree while trying to pick apples. On Marianus's feast day a man prepares to brew beer instead of going to the church, and to those who warn him he asks angrily what kind of a saint should this be, who has slipped from a tree while satisfying his appetite. As

the inevitable result of his insult, the fire he has lit for brewing beer spreads in the wind and all his property is speedily reduced to ashes.

Disrespect toward a saint can have dire consequences, even when it is passive and involuntary as in *GM* 47. After a poor man lets the monks transferring the relics of the martyr St Saturninus sleep in his house for one night, he is warned repeatedly to convert his house to an oratory for the saint, since it has been sanctified by the relics. Upon resisting the command he is reduced to penury, but regains more than he had lost when he does move his house and builds an oratory on the location, praying every day for the martyr's assistance. Another man who threatens to turn a monastery, in which the same martyr's relics were kept, into the king's stable on the grounds that he did not receive a gift from the abbot, does not survive the third day.

Respect for the clergy is also indispensable for one's safety. In *VJ* 15, a wicked man called Pastor is literally burnt to ashes by a lightning strike when, having seized a field belonging to the saint, he attacks with weapons the clerics who are sent to him as envoys, as if they were enemies. Similarly, Saint Julian punishes Count Becco by death for imprisoning a young cleric on the false charge of having stolen his hawk.¹⁴ In *GC* 30, in turn, a man carrying breadcrumbs blessed by a bishop is saved from drowning in the river as he is crossing over a floating bridge, because as the demons confess, the holy object is preventing them. Gregory dwells at length on the moral of the story:

There is great favor if the priesthood is properly respected in behavior. For if the priesthood was so beneficial to priest Caiphas, an unjust persecutor, that he could prophecy the sacrifice of Christ, how much more can divine majesty attribute to those who fear God and solemnly and scrupulously respect the priesthood? So even the appearance of a priest together with a prayer is beneficial to the ill, according to James.

¹⁴ *VJ* 16.

This emphasis of Gregory on respect for the priesthood is in accordance with Mâcon II, 15, according to which a layman should respectfully salute a cleric he meets on his way, and even get off his horse if the cleric is traveling on foot.

Not only bishops, saints and the clergy are to be respected, but also Church rites. In *Hist.* IV.43, the governor Albinus rudely arrests an archdeacon, whom he accuses of having stolen his wine jars, during the rites on Christmas day. His disrespect for the rites of the Church is punished by having to pay four times the money he gets from the archdeacon. In *VM* II.1, a priest pronounces the words in a rustic fashion as he is delivering the mass in Gregory's presence, upon which some people in the audience mock him and remark that he had better remain silent than speak in such a fashion. On that night a man (St Martin?) who appears to Gregory in his dream warns him never to allow the ceremonies to be criticized in his presence, even when they are recited in an uncouth fashion.

Respect for the bishops, clergy and rites should also be understood to include respect for the moral exhortations delivered by bishops and priests in the church. All the efforts of bishops and priests will be in vain, insists Caesarius, if the public fails to attend the church, to behave there properly, and to stay to hear the sermon at the end. Attendance is of course not enough — they should also be eager and respectful in the church, listening attentively to the sermon and urging the preacher to explain more if they do not feel satisfied:

Since, just as the flesh is restored by daily nourishment, the soul on its part feeds on the word of God, whenever we are late in offering it to you, shake our laziness by your holy importunity and demand what is your rightful claim.¹⁵

¹⁵ *Serm.* 4.3.

With an analogy that might appear odd to modern tastes, Caesarius likens the priests and the flock to cows and calves:

Just as the calves are in the habit of harassing the breasts of their mother with a great impetuosity, in order to be able to extract from inside her body the nourishment that is necessary for them, the Christian people should similarly provoke its priests without rest, who are like the breasts of the Holy Church, by very pious questions, in order to procure for itself salvation and to provide its body with necessary nourishment.¹⁶

Similarly, the letter to the people in Tours II points out that the congregation should listen willingly and try to retain what they hear as the bishops speak, so that they are not condemned for showing themselves to be a sterile land full of thorns, where the seeds of bishops' words fall in vain. The same theme appears in Macôn II, 1 where the public is warned to respect the Sunday observance. Each bishop is to warn his flock about this subject; if the people consent to this warning, they will act in their own favor; but if they do not, they will suffer the punishments defined by the bishops. The Christians who do not possess this name in vain are therefore implored to lend an ear to their bishops' warning, knowing that it is the responsibility of these to watch over their good and to prevent them from doing evil.

V.1.3 Obedience toward one's parents

Upon the birth of Childebert's son Theudebert, Guntram sends envoys bearing presents and a message that goes: "through this child, God, by the loving kindness of His divine majesty, will exalt the kingdom of the Franks, if only his father will live for him and he will live for his father."¹⁷ The reverse may spell disaster for all. In *Hist.* V.25, the sons of Severus, who accuse their father and cause

¹⁶ *Serm.* 4.4.

¹⁷ *Hist.* VIII.37.

his banishment and miserable end, meet a just death after being accused of *lèse-majesté*, but the family and its wealth are also destroyed in the process.

Strife between father and son is undesirable, not only because it may spell disaster for their family or even for the kingdom, but above all because it is a sin that amounts to heresy. In *Hist.* V.38, Leuwigild, the heretic king of Visigoths, traps his Catholic son Hermangild by breaking his promise of self-conduct. Hermangild points out that his father is doing wrong to attack him because of his religion, since “it is a sin for a father to be killed by a son, or a son to be killed by a father.” Since in the next chapter we read about the war between Clovis and his father Chilperic, we are compelled to ask by this prelude whether they are any better than the heretics in this matter. In *Hist.* V.39, Chilperic kills his son Clovis, as Leuwigild had thought to destroy his son, and as Gregory remarks, does not even shed a tear. Clovis on his part shows himself to be guilty of extreme arrogance and of disrespect against his mother.

Gregory insists moreover that rebellion against one’s parents is a sin independent of their faith and morals. Thus when Hermangild is thinking of killing his father if necessary, he shows himself unaware of the fact that “God’s Judgment hangs over anyone who makes such plans against his own father, even if that father be a heretic.”¹⁸ In *Hist.* V.14, Merovech directs grave accusations against his parents, Chilperic and Fredegeund, which are not totally unjustified, but in any case it is not acceptable, believes Gregory, that one should make such revelations, and he is confirmed in this by a biblical sort (i.e. opening the bible at a random page and reading the first passage that comes to the eye in order to learn the possible outcome of a planned action). Rebelling against and accusing one’s parents can never be

¹⁸ *Hist.* VI.43.

excused and will inevitably be punished by God, even when those parents are monsters themselves. Clothar is no doubt another such monster, as he has slaughtered his two nephews without a blink.¹⁹ Yet this man is portrayed as a new David as we are told about his war against his rebellious son Chramn, who does not flinch from fighting against his own father like Absalom despite the warnings from his ally Count Chanao, and meets his deserved end.²⁰

V.2 Discipline

Another component of ascetical practice is the meticulous preservation of discipline, both over one's own body and over the community for whose spiritual well being one is responsible. Insofar as it awakens the fear of God, we read in Gregory of Tours, this latter kind of discipline causes the members of the community to give up groping after worldly riches and power through whatever means at their disposal, to become virtuous, and hence to embrace the true wisdom that only the treasures hoarded up in Heaven are really valuable.

In this section passages found in Caesarius's sermons and in Church council canons that stress the responsibility of priests and bishops to instruct their flocks in moral and spiritual matters, and in Gregory's works, passages that pertain not only to bishops and abbots, but also to kings will be analyzed. We shall also consider the two authors' common vision of the approaching end of the world and the Last Judgment, which was in their view an indispensable prerequisite for moral exhortation.

¹⁹ *Hist.* III.18.

²⁰ *Hist.* IV.20.

V.2.1 Bishops as the pastors of souls and correctors of the society

In *Hist.* VI.6, the sorry state of the morals in Gaul is revealed to St Hospicius in a dream by the Holy Ghost. “The Lombards,” says the Holy Ghost,

will invade Gaul and they will destroy seven cities, because the wickedness of those cities has grown great in the eyes of the lord. No one in them understands God, no one seeks Him, no one does good in order to appease the wrath of God. The entire populace is without faith, given to perjury, prone to theft, quick to commit murder: and no justice can be seen to flourish among them. They do not pay their tithes, they do not feed the poor, they do not clothe the naked: no hospitality is offered there to strangers, and they are not even given enough to eat.

It is the duty of the bishops to work for the reform of the morals. How will they accomplish this?

In *Hist.* II.23, as Sidonius Apollinaris falls sick with a very high temperature and is carried into the church, his citizens gather around him in a huge crowd and exclaim

Good shepherd, why are you deserting us? To whom will you abandon us, your orphan children? If you die, what can we expect? Will there be anyone left *to season our lives with the salt of wisdom and to inspire in us the fear of the Lord's name* with the same insight which you have shown?

This fear of God and wisdom are to be engendered through the imposition of heavenly discipline. According to Gregory,

The Holy Spirit teaches us by the mouth of the psalmist how much heavenly discipline grants to those who keep it, and how it has to be imposed upon those who do not observe it... *This discipline establishes fear of the Lord; fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: wisdom teaches the love of God; love of God raises man above the things of the earth;* it summons him and places him in paradise, where the souls of the blessed take new wine from the vine of life and feast in the kingdom of God.²¹

It is the duty of the bishop then, or indeed any other pastor of souls, to impose heavenly discipline and the fear of God, which will in turn enable him to inculcate in

²¹ *VP XII, praef.* The italics in this and the preceding quotation are mine.

his people the wisdom that consists in turning one's mind away from worldly power and riches towards the spiritual spheres. Let us examine these topics in turn.

V.2.1.1 The imposition of discipline

In *Hist.* IV.33, we are told about a vision of abbot Sunniulf, who had up to that time tried to rule his monks by entreaty rather than commands. In the vision, only those who keep good discipline over the people committed to their care are able to pass the bridge spanning a river of fire, and the others are thrown headlong into the river. Not surprisingly, Sunniulf becomes more severe with the monks after this. The moral is obvious — a religious leader should not only be humble and virtuous, which would suffice in the case of a solitary hermit (like Julian in the previous chapter) who does not hold responsibility for others, but he should also exert proper authority and keep good discipline over those entrusted to his care, being severe if the need arises. In the same context, we read in the next chapter that the abbot of a monastery punishes a youth who has performed a remarkable miracle to prevent him from becoming too pleased with himself.²² Discipline and chastisement are a must if those under one's care are to be protected from corruption.

It is no wonder that saints establish this discipline that leads to wisdom through censuring and frightening the unbelievers, which enlightens and saves them from condemnation at the Last Judgment, as Gregory expounds in the prologue to *VJ* 13:

It seems to me that just as illnesses are reversed and healed by the saint's powers, so also the depravities of unbelievers are restrained and exposed by his prayer for the correction of other people, lest they seek similar [follies]. For the glory of the saint is apparent in both situations: he restores ill people to health so that they may suffer no longer, and he censures unbelievers so that they may avoid condemnation in a future court.

²² *Hist.* IV.34.

A nice example of such kind of “enlightening chastisement” is found in *VJ* 6, where the protagonist, a priest, is called to a place where there still existed a large pagan population to heal a young man who was struck ill for trying to kill an asylum-seeker at St Julian’s shrine. When the pagans want to offer sacrifices to their gods Mars and Mercury set on a high column, the priest kneels beside the saint’s tomb and prays in tears that “the brightness of divine power finally visit these pagans who are trapped in darkness, and the blessed martyr no longer allow his own foster children to be bound by their blindness, since he possesses the happiness of eternal enlightenment.” Suddenly a terrible storm breaks, upon which the pagans hurry in panic to the shrine, begging for the mercy of God and promising the priest to abandon their idols, to request the martyr to be their patron, and to convert to his God. Upon the priest’s prayer the storm departs, the aforementioned man is both healed and converted, and the people smash their idols as they have promised.

V.2.1.2 The inculcation of wisdom

The following passage from Gregory’s pen in his foreword about the life of two abbots could stand for bishops as well:

In the firmament of human understanding God has placed... two great lights, that is to say Christ and His Church, so that they may cast light on the darkness of ignorance and illumine our humble intelligence... Then thanks to this doctrine there have been up until our times men who were like the torches of stars in this world, not only resplendent by the light of their virtues but also shining by the greatness of their teaching, who have lit the whole universe with the rays of their preaching, going to teach in every place, founding monasteries for the worship of God and instructing men to abstain from earthly cares and, having left the darkness of concupiscence, to follow the true God, the creator of all things.²³

The wisdom calling men to abstain from earthly cares and to follow the true God is in fact Trinitarian wisdom. We have seen how Gregory associated the

doctrine of the Trinity with a spiritual attitude, since it considered the qualities of the Persons rather than their physical relations with each other. The way for a bishop to turn the mind of his flock from earthly cares towards the eternal life is then above all to combat against the materialist-rationalist Arian heresy and promote the Catholic doctrine, as we see Bishop Eugenius doing in the *Histories* when being persecuted by the Arian bishop Cyrola.

In a letter Eugenius sends to his people, he exhorts and encourages them insistently to stick fast to their Catholic faith. Moreover, he successfully defends the Trinitarian doctrine before Cyrola, supporting his refutation with many miracles. Cyrola gets incensed and bribes a blind man to pretend as if he were healed by himself. Nevertheless, the man's avarice brings physical as well as spiritual blindness and his eyes really shut, only to be cured by Eugenius upon accepting Catholicism. It is thus only when he comes to see the spiritual truth and gives up materialism and avarice that his eyes open too. Another such miracle is found in *GC* 13: upon the Arian Visigothic King Leuvigild's question as to why the Arian bishops could not perform miracles like the Catholics, a certain heretic bishop bribes a man with forty gold pieces to pretend he is blind and to ask for healing at his hands ("like a new Cyrola," Gregory comments). When the bishop places his hands on his eyes, of course, the man becomes completely blind and confesses the trick he took part in because of his greediness.

As it appears from these miracle stories, Gregory believes that is the duty of a bishop to show his people the true light by opening their inner eyes; the power to heal their physical blindness is only a result of this function. The moral of a

²³ *VP* XVIII, *praef.*

comparison between Eugenius and Cyrola is also clear: Catholic bishops, as representatives and defenders of the true, spiritual faith perform miracles and cure the eye and the soul of people, while Arian bishops hope to reach their success only by money and all too worldly tricks. Catholic bishops open the eyes of their flock by directing their minds to spiritual affairs, while the Arians close them by their materialist, “false” doctrine. Revocatus is another example of such a heretic, “materialist” bishop, who has strayed from the faith for the sake of money.²⁴

Catholic bishops, on the other hand, combat heresy and the materialistic worldview behind it with all means at their disposal. Bishop Avitus’s preferred method is to write polemical letters supporting the Church of God against heresies.²⁵ He does not content himself with this, however, but also persuades the Jews in his city to see beyond the literal meaning of the scriptures, and thus, as all bishops should do, opens the eyes of his flock to the truth and directs them along the spiritual path.²⁶ Similarly, the martyr Domitius in *GM* 99 heals a Jew who begs him to heal him both of his hip ache (an area in which the saint specialized) and of his disbelief. As he wishes, the saint does not only heal the bodily infirmity of the Jew, but at the same time converts him from the “materialistic,” literal to the spiritual understanding of the Old Testament.

Not only Domitius but many other saints in Gregory’s works are shown converting people and reforming their morals. Physical healing is accompanied by moral healing in such healing miracles. Gregory dwells on this subject at some length in *VM* II.60, where he writes about his healings at the hands of St Martin: He does not only find physical healing at the hands of the saint (having been healed in

²⁴ *Hist.* II.3.

²⁵ *Hist.* II.34.

this chapter of a persistent headache), he insists, but also moral and spiritual. Hence he prays that the saint restore him the light of truth, that he snatch him from mistaken disbelief, that he purify his heart and mind from extravagance, that he cleanse his thoughts from wicked desires, and that he dissolve and overturn his entire mass of misdeeds, besides cleansing him from illnesses. St Martin does not only heal Gregory and his other clients, therefore, but also reforms their morals, so that they may be saved at the Last Judgment, not without his further aid and assistance, of course.

No doubt St Martin is not a healer and corrector of the individuals alone, but also of the whole society. This is underlined in *VM* II.40, where he deliberately cripples the hand of a certain Sisulf, and then commands him in a vision to circuit the country in this situation. He will show to the society that it is, like himself, morally and physically sick, and call its members to reform their morals, so that they can be rescued from the hatred, crimes and deaths that await them because of their sins. In *VM* I.11, Martin likewise converts and heals a whole kingdom in Galicia. The son of Chararic, a king of Galicia, who had subjected himself and his people to Arianism, and hence caused leprosy to spread widely in that region, falls sick and comes near death. He is sent to the tomb of St Martin because of the saint's fame, notwithstanding the difference in religion, but fails to recover his health because of his father's persisting heresy. Then the king builds a church in the saint's honor and proclaims himself to be ready to convert, should he be found worthy enough to acquire some relics of the saint. When the men he sends come back with a silk cloak weighed down by the saint's power, the king is converted along with his people; his

²⁶ *Hist.* V.11.

son as well as all the other sick get well; and leprosy permanently disappears from the region. Hence the saint brings both moral and physical healing to the society through opening the eyes of their king.

St Martin's disciple Gregory, in turn, prefers to defend the spiritual stance of orthodoxy and to reform the morals of his flock by theological disputations and by writing books of history and hagiography. Gregory is very eager indeed to enter into theological disputes with whatever heretic he can find in Tours. In *Hist.* V.43, he reports at length a dispute he has had with the Arian Agilan. This chapter serves in turn as a prelude to his religious dispute with Chilperic. The bishop, as is his duty, energetically defends the "true faith," as he will do later against this "materialist-heretic" king. In *Hist.* VI.39, we find Gregory the bishop defending the Catholic faith against heresy again, this time against Oppila. As for his books, it is apparent that Gregory considered them as an important part of his activity as a bishop; namely, warning and directing his flock along the right path, and exhorting them to turn their minds away from worldly riches and affairs towards their own salvation. And it was probably because he feared lest this function be impaired if they became incomprehensible to many, or were deprived of their moral and theological content, that he expressly forbade any meddling with their language and style, and insisted on their being kept intact and whole.²⁷ He was aware that otherwise he would not be able to deliver his moral and theological teaching to future readers.²⁸

²⁷ *Hist.* X.31.

²⁸ See further Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, 84-90. What Gregory feared indeed happened, for his *Histories* were severely mutilated in the seventh century and reduced to a history of Frankish kings. See *ibid.*, 167-75 and W. Goffart, "From *Historiae* to *Historia Francorum* and Back Again: Aspects of the Textual History of Gregory of Tours," in *Religion, Culture and Society in the Early Middle Ages*, edited by T. F.X. Noble and J. J. Contreni (Kalamazoo 1987), 55-76. On Gregory's justification of using a simple language to reach his contemporaries and the posterity see H. Beumann, "Gregor von Tours und der *Sermo Rusticus*," in *Wissenschaft vom Mittelalter. Ausgewählte Aufsätze* (Köln, 1972), 41-70.

V.2.1.3 The inculcation of wisdom through preaching

Not every bishop wrote letters and books like Avitus and Gregory, of course; nor was it possible everyday to find a heretic to dispute with, or a blindman to heal. Caesarius's sermons and the Church council canons reveal that the more usual means by which the bishops hoped to bring "wisdom" to their congregations was preaching. The fact that it was the duty of every individual to read and listen to Scriptures, and to convert early to a virtuous life through penitence, did not reduce the responsibility of the bishop and his priests to preach as much as possible, admonishing their flock to mend their ways, warning them about the future punishments, and teaching them what is acceptable in the eyes of God and what not. If they did not loyally and regularly execute this duty of admonishing the people, Caesarius insisted, they would be responsible before God for the loss of the souls of their flock.

In Caesarius's eyes, bishops and other preachers who meticulously carry out this duty are in fact no less than modern martyrs.

There are martyrs also in our time, for those who reprimand with justice and charity those who conduct themselves badly, who exhort not to swear oaths easily, not to perjure oneself, not to do evil, not to damn, who bear witness for the things that are pleasing to God, will be martyrs of Christ.²⁹

Regardless of whether their flock wants to listen to these admonishments, the "martyrs" should preach and rebuke, for

the word of God should be offered to those who are willing to hear it, and it should be imposed on those who reject it, lest these latter should bring suit against us before the court of Christ, saying that we have not warned them, and lest we should be called to account for their blood.³⁰

It is the duty of the bishops and priests to plough the souls, to root out their weeds and thorns, and to water them with the words of God and the Fathers. The words of

²⁹ *Serm.* 52.1.

³⁰ *Serm.* 4.2.

God are like dew and rain for the soul, which will not bear fruits without them.³¹

That is why the priests who neglect predication are like the bad servants who do not invest their master's money for interest, and therefore deserve to be punished.³²

A reflection of such views is clearly visible in the letter to the people found together with the canons of Tours II: the dignity of bishops obliges them to apply their solicitude tirelessly to all that faces them, as much as they can, to judging, to concerning themselves with the correction of their flocks or spiritual children, and to avoiding deceiving the hope of the others because of their negligence. For a serious reflection is necessary to see to what regards the common salvation. Moreover, the shepherd shows himself to be the accomplice of the wolf when he lets it to take away the sheep while he should have prevented it from doing so; all the more so as the souls of the people entrusted to the bishop shall be demanded one by one from his hands. In order not to be held responsible for the faults of others, therefore, the bishops in the council now let the trumpet of their voices sound in the ears of all, so that nobody will have the excuse of not having been warned, instructed as they have been about the conduct to follow.

The duty of preaching is closely connected with the role bishops have undertaken as leaders of the Church. Caesarius likens them to steersmen who, with their words and examples, direct the ship of the Church along the right path over the concerns and calamities of this world, and prevent them from turning into wrong paths and being ship wrecked, right until they arrive at the day of the Last Judgment.³³ In another place he likens them to watchmen who guard the city and the

³¹ *Serm.* 1.15.

³² *Serm.* 1.9.

³³ *Serm.* 1.19.

vines of God, lest the devil and his angels should enter.³⁴ As preaching is their foremost weapon against the intrusion of mortal or venial sins, warns Caesarius, they should take this duty very seriously, and even if they cannot preach themselves, they should still have a priest or even a deacon read the sermons of the Fathers of the Church.³⁵

That Caesarius was not entirely alone amongst his fellow bishops in regarding the reform of life and the salvation of souls to be his most important duty is evident in Clermont, 1, in which it is decreed that every time the holy synod reunites, none of the bishops should permit themselves to submit a subject of dispute to the synod before the subjects concerning the reform of life, the rigor of the rule, or the remedies of the soul have been exhausted.

It would not be sufficient to convert the populace to a virtuous life, however, if it was only the bishop in his city who preached. Even if he went out to preach in the parishes during the course of the year, he could do this at most two or three times a year.³⁶ Caesarius urges therefore that preaching should be practised not only by the bishops, but also by the priests and deacons in the parishes.³⁷ Eventually, a decision allowing the priests in the parishes to preach was taken in the council of Vaison in 529, over which Caesarius presided.³⁸ Nevertheless efforts towards realizing Caesarius's vision of an effective network of parishes busily involved in profoundly christianizing the countryside would only be undertaken in the age of Carolingians.³⁹

³⁴ *Serm.* 1.4.

³⁵ *Serm.* 1.15.

³⁶ *Serm.* 6.1.

³⁷ *Serm.* 1.12.

³⁸ Klingshirn, *Caesarius*, 227-32.

³⁹ On the influence of Caesarius's ideas on the Carolingian reform see Klingshirn, *Caesarius*, 273-86.

V.2.1.4 Moral reform in an eschatological perspective

Like in Gaul, in Antioch also the number of the righteous seemed to shrink fast, so in an episode much resembling the end of the world and the Last Judgment, one half of the city was punished by the hand of God. Simon, a righteous man who witnessed the angels of the Lord as they passed the verdict, was saved, we read, because he prayed a lot and gave plenty of alms.⁴⁰ That is certainly the way to choose, Gregory implies, if one wishes to be saved when the end of the world comes before long. As we learn from the mouth of Gregory's deacon in *Hist.* X.1, his namesake Gregory the Great expressed the same idea in the speech he made upon becoming pope in a Rome severely struck with floods and plague, which can be summarized as follows. "As the end of the world is approaching and disasters come one after another," said the pope,

we must hurry all the more to convert and to soften the hardness of our hearts. While there is still time for lamentation, everyone must think of his past sins and repent. It is however also necessary to do good works besides praying to God for the pardon of sins. We must not despair, but repent and pray all the more earnestly as the sword of punishment hangs over us. Change of heart and earnest prayer will please God and win his mercy and compassion.

Gregory of Tours does not quote the Pope's speech in vain; he is also of the conviction that the end is near (he comments that "the Devil begins from Peter's seat" when reporting the death of the new Pope's predecessor),⁴¹ and that all should

⁴⁰ *Hist.* X.24.

⁴¹ *Hist.* X.1. Gregory had probably hoped that when only one full-grown king was left, civil strife and its resulting ravages would come to an end, or at least be reduced. Nothing of the kind happened however; Guntram proved rather a disappointment, and conspiracies, treacheries, devastations and other sins continued even more intensely than ever. There is sufficient evidence in the *Histories* to suggest that Gregory grew desperate throughout the years and began to think that these, as well as the portents that no longer pointed to an immediately visible event (see de Nie, "Roses in January: a Neglected Dimension in Gregory of Tours' *Historiae*," *Journal of Medieval History*, 5, 1979: 279-88), were signs of the approaching end of the world. The appearance of false prophets in Gaul, as in *Hist.* IX.6 and *Hist.* X.25, bolstered this conviction. In the latter chapter, where Gaul is also struck by plague, Gregory interprets this as yet another of the sorrows which would presumably precede the Apocalypse. In any case he seems earnest in his belief about the approaching end of the world, especially in the last book, and to hold like Walter Goffart that he is simply being ironic and satirical

have a change of heart, so that as great a number of people as possible may be saved at the Last Judgment. And as we shall see in the case of the rebellion at St Radegund's convent, bishops are primarily responsible for imposing the necessary discipline and moral correction on society. Fostering the belief in the Resurrection and the Last Judgment is a principal way of accomplishing this task.

This is a belief expressed long before Gregory of Tours and Gregory the Great by Caesarius of Arles. In his view, the population will never be persuaded to do good works and to eschew wicked acts if it cannot be brought to believe in divine retribution at the end of time. An important component of the priests' duty in bringing about moral conversion, therefore, is to ensure the entrenchment of popular belief in the Last Judgment and in the other world, where the good shall be rewarded with eternal bliss while the wicked shall be delivered to the eternal tortures of hell. "Priests should never cease to preach the Last Judgment, so that the good should be incited to do more good and the bad should be dissuaded from their wicked deeds by the fear of the future judgment."⁴² In this connection he asserts that the two foundations of faith are believing, without any doubt or hesitation, the truth of God's promises and the rewards that await those who do good works on the one hand, and the truth of God's menaces and the punishments that await those who commit wicked acts on the other.⁴³ If the world is full of vices, argues Caesarius, this is because nobody thinks about and fears the future judgment to come, the anger of God and the

in such passages is quite unjustified (see Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, 187). Nor is it possible to accept his outright rejection of views that "presuppose a development in Gregory's outlook" (note 324 on page 187). The claim that Gregory's outlook remained the same throughout the period of nearly two decades during which he wrote, a period which was full of important events both on the personal and the public planes, is certainly more in need of justification than the view that it gradually grew more pessimistic.

⁴² *Serm.* 1.5.

⁴³ *Serm.* 12.6.

tortures waiting the unbelieving and the perfidious.⁴⁴ For how could someone, he asks, who believes that any moment he could migrate from this light, commit mortal sins? No doubt, he who lends careful attention to the rigorous examination he will undergo before the court of Christ, where each shall receive according to his works, will not be able to gloat over his own sins or crimes. That is why one should dedicate oneself to thinking without rest about the day of one's death and of the fearful, terrible judgment, since one cannot find a more useful remedy for the wounds of sins than thinking about the hour when one will migrate from this world.⁴⁵

Gregory similarly notes in his disputation with a priest who rejects the Resurrection and the Last Judgment that if people do not believe in these, they will feel free to do whatever they wish, following their petty desires, without fear of punishment or hope of reward for their bad and good actions.⁴⁶ As Gregory makes clear with his own example, and as also stressed by Caesarius of Arles as we have seen, it is a principal duty of bishops therefore to entrench the belief in the Resurrection and the Last Judgment in the hearts of their flocks. Only that way can people be persuaded to concentrate their mind on "higher things" and not this world: only in the context of an approaching Last Judgment can the project of a general repentance and conversion be meaningful. Otherwise there will be nothing to balance the kind of immortality proposed by Fredegund, i.e. that achieved in this world through the richness and power of the remaining relatives, whatever the crimes perpetrated by the dead man to provide them with those wealth and power.

Saints and their miracles are especially helpful to bishops in their struggle to convince the population of the truth of the Resurrection. In *VM* III.50, Lupus, a priest

⁴⁴ *Serm.* 71.3.

⁴⁵ *Serm.* 56.1.

at Bordeaux, is met by a Jew as he hurries to St Martin's shrine to find a remedy for his quartan fever. The Jew ignorantly tells him that it is impossible for a dead man to provide medicine for the living. He cannot see that Martin is not dead, but on the contrary has already embraced the eternal life; that he is not "turned to dirt by the dirt pressing down on him" in the grave, as he claims, but on the contrary has already gained the integrity of body that Adam possessed before the Fall. Consequently, he does not understand that this is precisely the reason why the saint is able to grant bodily integrity to the mortals as well.⁴⁷ Indeed, St Martin does not fail to prove the truth of the Resurrection in this case and heals the priest, whereas the Jew suffers for a long time from the same illness.

GC 51 provides a remarkable miracle that illustrates that dead saints are not turned to dirt in the ground, but instead are resurrected in Heaven: the tombs of three priests slowly rise by themselves from beneath the ground — within the territory of the village of Aire-sur-l'Adour, as Gregory underlines twice, probably to increase the credibility of the report. He comments:

This mystery exposes to this world the purity of the bodies that were buried by producing them from [beneath] the pavement. It prepares for the Resurrection those who must not be given to the worm or to dying, but who must be made equal to the bright light of the sun and who must be glorified by their resemblance to the body of the Lord.

V.2.2 Kings as spiritual leaders and correctors of the society

In *Hist.* VIII.5, Guntram is likened to a good bishop, whereas Chilperic is proved in Gregory's dream to be a bishop of the Devil. In the little *laudatio* of chapter IX.21, Guntram is portrayed as a very charitable king given to vigils and fasting. He has enough *virtutes* (virtues) in him to perform *virtutes* (miracles, as the

⁴⁶ *Hist.* X.13.

external result of inner virtues). He is indeed “like a good bishop who provides the remedies by which the wounds of a common sinner can be healed.” He organizes Rogations for the pardon of common sins; he gives plenty of alms; he is as anxious about the welfare of the health of the body and soul of his people as a bishop; and he places his confidence fully in God.⁴⁸

We observe from Gregory’s praise for Guntram that he thinks kings are as responsible as bishops for the spiritual welfare of their subjects. This would mean of course that they should impose heavenly discipline and defend the Trinitarian wisdom, just like bishops.

V.2.2.1 The enforcement of discipline

As we have already seen, Eparchius intervenes unsuccessfully before the count for the pardon of a thief who is being taken to the gibbet, and his wish is finally accomplished by the miraculous collapse of the gibbet upon his prayers.⁴⁹ The count, who has not accepted Eparchius’s request for fear of the populace, is embarrassed. As Eparchius remarks when rebuking the count, it is the duty of those in secular power to show mercy according to the precepts of religion, and not to let themselves be led by the people whom they are supposed to rule. It is difficult indeed for a ruler to do this, as King Guntram confesses in a speech, because people are steeped in vice and delight in doing evil, and even when their king and other leaders are God-fearing men, they cannot control the avaricious, cruel and egoistic instincts of their people, just as in the Old Testament. However it is the duty of the king and other leaders to enforce discipline and law, and to punish the guilty with death, as

⁴⁷ Brown, *Cult of Saints*, 75-84.

⁴⁸ *Hist.* IX.21.

⁴⁹ *Hist.* VI.8

Guntram vehemently insists, so that all the innocent should not meet the wrath of God because of the disobedient amongst them.⁵⁰

V.2.2.2 The promotion and protection of wisdom

A happy event in Gregory's eyes takes place in 587: according to what he tells, King Recared of the Goths investigates the truth of the matter concerning the Trinity, and considering that only the spiritual understanding of the Trinity allows the bishops to perform miracles, accepts Catholicism. The heretic bishop Athaloc on the other hand, who insists on leading his people astray despite the wise king's choice, gives up his spirit.⁵¹ By reporting both events in the same chapter, Gregory is probably pointing out that the king is as responsible as the bishops for directing his people to the true faith and opening their eyes to the spiritual understanding. This view is confirmed by St Avitus when he rebukes the Burgundian King Gundobad for hiding his conversion from his people because of fear. A king, the bishop points out to Gundobad, should be responsible for the faith of his subjects and lead them in spiritual affairs as much as he does on the field of battle, instead of pandering to their whims and condemning them to ignorance of the truth. Gundobad's irresponsible and cowardly attitude is also implicitly compared with Clovis's: this last has showed himself courageous enough to try to convert his people too, so God has helped him by converting their hearts even before he has spoken.⁵²

Not only increasing the numbers of the faithful, but also defending the existing ones, is the foremost duty of a king. In this connection, the greatest achievement of Clovis in the view of Gregory is no doubt his having united almost

⁵⁰ *Hist.* VIII.30.

⁵¹ *Hist.* IX.15.

⁵² *Hist.* II.31, 34. See further Mitchell, *History and Christian Society*, 70-72.

the whole of Gaul under the rule of a Catholic king. It is he who has rescued the Catholic people of Gaul from the heretic Goths with the assistance of St Martin and St Hilary (showing due respect towards their churches and lands on the way to the campaign) and of course by the help of God. Clovis's expedition is presented by Gregory solely as a crusade against Arian heretics, to rescue the people of true faith from their grip.⁵³

V.2.3 Kings and bishops versus the rebellion at St Radegund's convent: a paradigmatic "case study"

In Hist. IX.20, King Guntram expresses that it is his concern as a king to take measures, in collaboration with the council of bishops, for the correction of personal morality, for the prevention of evil deeds, and for the correction of the bishops leading a loose life by their colleagues. Gregory is of the same opinion. In the penultimate chapter of the *Histories* he expounds his view of the Sunday observance, regarding it as the first rather than the last day of the week and relating it with Christ's resurrection instead of God's day of rest.⁵⁴ His interpretation is unlike that of the bishops convened in Mâcon in 585, agreed without regard for Guntram's view, which was the same as Gregory's. Gregory is hence alluding to his ideal of bishops working in collaboration with the king to define and enforce the observances and doctrines of the Church.⁵⁵ The importance of close collaboration between the bishops and their king is underlined further in *Hist.* IV.26, where King Charibert becomes furious when he hears that Bishop Emerius, appointed by his father Lothar, has been

⁵³ *Hist.* II.37.

⁵⁴ *Hist.* X.30.

⁵⁵ Heinzelmänn, *Gregor von Tours*, 158-67.

expelled by other bishops after his death, and that he is now expected to ratify this expulsion. He refuses to sign, and fines the bishops for their independent attitude.

The rebellion at St Radegund's convent presents Gregory with a good opportunity to illustrate his thoughts on how the king and the bishops should collaborate to re-establish ascetical discipline and the otherworldly wisdom necessary for the society. Clotild, the leader of the rebels, is rebellious against the recommendations of bishops and unmindful of the promise to observe the Rule she has given in taking up the veil. According to the letter that is sent to St Radegund by the bishops upon the foundation of the monastery, however, the nuns ought to keep the promise they have given with their free will to observe the Rule, and it is the duty of all bishops to enforce this *discipline*, because upon them falls the task of ensuring the observance of promises made to God.⁵⁶ From what Gregory tells, however, it is clear that Meroveus has neglected the duty of enforcing this discipline that is incumbent on him as a bishop.⁵⁷ Since his negligence has allowed the rebellion to break out, other colleagues of his have to intervene to re-establish heavenly discipline, albeit with great difficulty. The bishops who are sent to censure the rebellious nuns write a report to Guntram and other bishops after they have been subjected to a severe thrashing by the nuns' henchmen. As understandable from the answer they receive, the bishops regard it as their duty to bridle the temerity of rebellious offenders, so that nobody thenceforth shall be led by overweening pride to commit a crime of that nature.⁵⁸ This view of the bishops is supported by the founder of the monastery, St Radegund. In her letter addressed to bishops, Radegund entrusts her monastery to the care of bishops and kings. It is their duty to ensure that the

⁵⁶ *Hist.* IX.39.

⁵⁷ *Hist.* IX.40.

discipline in the convent is observed, the Rule is kept, the abbess is obeyed, and the properties of the convent are protected from infringement, as well as to take prompt action against anyone who should dare molest the abbess, steal the properties of the convent, break the Rule and go out to the world on revolt, or claim any jurisdiction or right against the monastery.⁵⁹

It becomes clear from these letters that the monastery of Radegund is meant by Gregory to be understood as a paradigm of the Frankish kingdom.⁶⁰ Materialism, avarice, arrogance, pride, cruelty, rebellion against the bishops, kings and other superiors including parents, disrespect for the saints and churches, lack of repentance, and the resulting civil strife that divides the society ever more, all the resulting crimes and devastations, are wreaking havoc in the kingdom as well as in the convent. It is the duty of bishops, with the assistance of the king who confirms and strengthens the Church in its authority, to take swift countermeasures against this situation and to bring those who stray back to the fold through strict measures that enforce obedience and respect for superiors and the law on the one hand, and impose charity and humility instead of avarice and arrogance on the other, so that the end of the world may find the society ready and prepared for the Last Judgment.⁶¹

⁵⁸ *Hist.* IX.41.

⁵⁹ *Hist.* IX.42.

⁶⁰ See also Mitchell, *History and Christian Society*, 109-10.

⁶¹ *Hist.* IX.42.

CHAPTER VI

Epilogue: Ascetical Reform of the Body and Society — A

Possible Context for Healing Miracles?

One of the more important aims of asceticism is to refine and reform the body –Augustine, following Paul, would prefer to say “the flesh,” implying all that which resists the will of God in man– in such a way that it becomes the supple and willing tool of the soul in its reaching towards God and the spiritual spheres, instead of being its indefatigable antagonist.¹ This is achieved through an ascetical practice and discipline that restores to the body its internal, autonomous balance, controllability and integrity in a measure comparable to Adam’s body before the Fall.² The humble gratitude to God and the lack of avarice which Adam had failed to display in Paradise as he ate the forbidden fruit, acting in greed against His will, is thus restored by ascetical discipline, and the body in turn returns to its integrity and immortality before the Fall.³

¹ K. Ware, “The Way of the Ascetics: Negative or Affirmative?” in *Asceticism*, edited by V. L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis, 3-15 (Oxford, 1995), 8-12; J. M. Dillon, “Rejecting the Body, Refining the Body: Some Remarks on the Development of Platonist Asceticism,” in *Asceticism*, edited by V. L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis, 80-87 (Oxford, 1995), 82, 86.

² This controllability of Adam’s body extended as far as the sexual instincts according to Augustine, who unlike the representatives of the desert tradition such as John Cassian rejected that such complete a subjection of the body to the soul could be possible for any man before the Resurrection. Brown, *Body and Society*, 420-23.

³ Desert ascetics of Late Antiquity indeed believed that Adam’s prefallen condition could be approached through an uncompromising regime of asceticism and contemplation. See W. C. Bushell, “Psychophysiological and Comparative Analysis of Ascetico-Meditational Discipline: Toward a New Theory of Asceticism,” in *Asceticism*, edited by V. L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis, 553-75 (Oxford,

The reforming of the society through ascetical discipline in such a way that henceforth it behaved in humble obedience to its “soul,” i.e. bishops and the clergy (who would in turn get rid of their darker part represented by the likes of Egidius of Rheims and become unified in a spiritual stance), and replaced all its hatred, avarice and pride by love, humility and gratitude to God, would bring about a similar transformation: all the strife, cruelty and injustice that represented the decay and disintegration of the social body would come to an end, and the society would be converted into a perfectly healthy and intact body (Christ himself being the head) that worked harmoniously by virtue of the mutual love and virtuousness of its members, as envisioned by Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours.

VI.1 Caesarius’s vision of reform

Caesarius does use the metaphor of body when describing his ideal of a charitable society, pointing to the harmony that exists among the limbs of a body, as we have seen in the third chapter. In this connection William Daly has indeed argued that Caesarius developed, although not systematically, the notion of a “Christian People,” which was

God’s new elect, his model for progressively incorporating men of all nations throughout the world into a believing, loving, peaceful, peacemaking human community. This community was created by a mutuality of love, God’s love for man, and man’s for God, the latter the result of man’s freely chosen response which found its expression and development in works of love.⁴

The perfection of the social body in such a way that it would constitute of only mutually loving members would be brought about by ascetical renunciation and

1995), 562 ff., which is an interesting study on the similarity of the bodily changes that are brought about by extended asceticism and meditation to the properties associated with Adam’s prefallen condition such as bliss and analgesia, the enhancement of the immune system, illness reduction and even aging retardation/reversal.

⁴ M. Daly, “Caesarius –a Precursor of Medieval Christendom,” *Traditio* 26, 1970: 17-18.

meditation on the scriptures under the discipline of the “soul,” i.e. bishops and their clergy, just as in the case of the perfection of an individual body. Ceasing to crave after earthly gains and pleasures, the members of such a fully Christianized society, the “Christian People,” would dedicate all their free time to reading and listening to scriptures and sermons, which would display their power to transform men’s souls in their readers’ eagerness to love others, including their enemies; in their willingness to give help to the needy, including poor people, prisoners, travelers and pilgrims; in their expectation of support in this world only from God and not from diviners, magic healers etc.; in their relegating concerns about the affairs of this world to a second place behind concerns about eternal life; and in their hurry to do penitence and to begin to lead the life of an ascetic. The clergy would assume, in Caesarius’s vision, an important role in this transformation, through the construction of a network of parish churches, each of which would function as a center for patronage of the needy on the one hand, which would draw the populace closer to the Church and render it willing to obey the clergy as a setter of moral norms; and as a center for preaching on the other, where the priests would constantly admonish, correct and teach the flock to lead a virtuous life and to avoid venial as well as mortal sins.

VI.2 Gregory’s vision of reform

A similar emphasis is placed by Gregory on the perfection of the social body through the agency of the clergy, but his vision is more focused on the activity and authority of bishops, and moreover he considers the leadership of the king as being extremely important in this respect. For him, as for Caesarius, the society comes increasingly under the threat of such sins as heresy, avarice, cruelty, rebelliousness and pride as the end of the world approaches, which all stem from the same source of

materialism, of the over-evaluation of material goods and comfort in this life, and in turn emerge as the principal reason for the civil strife and the military defeats that ravage the country, killing innumerable innocent people, devastating God's churches, and attracting God's wrath in the form of epidemics and other natural disasters. Under these conditions, and as preparation for the Last Judgment which is nearing, he insists that it is the duty of bishops as pastors of souls to exhort the society to adopt an ascetic stance, so that its members turn their minds away from worldly riches and power towards the things of the other world, and in connection with this, to promote the ideal values of charity, humility, peacefulness, and mercy. The result of this would be a peaceful society united in mutual love and humility and in respect and obedience towards its spiritual and secular leaders, and ready, with its regular practice of ideal values, for the Last Judgment. For the purpose of socio-moral reform the bishops would work in close collaboration with kings who showed bishop-like qualities in their concern for the spiritual and material well-being of their people but also with saints, the members of the Eschatological Church they represented on earth, who through their miracles exemplified and promoted the ideal values on the one hand, and acted as the protectors of the poor and the weak on the other.

VI.3 Saints and their miracles in the service of socio-moral reform

We have seen indeed that in many of the miracle stories of Gregory of Tours, and not only those in the *Histories* but also in the miracle books, saints take an active part in the realization of the ideal values and the establishment of an ideal society through exemplifying and promoting the ideal values such as charity, humility, peacefulness, and mercy, and through punishing the greedy, proud, warlike and

cruel, as well as the rebellious. Moreover, they help and encourage the bishops in transferring these values into public action by the help of the institutional power and wealth of their churches, taking the lead in punishing the “slayers of the poor,” securing mild treatment for convicts and redeeming captives and slaves, acting as mediators, protecting little people from the power of the mighty, and supporting city populations in wars, epidemics, and against the unjust exertions of secular powers. But the bishops’ duties do not end there, as we saw: their primary duty lies in persuading their congregation to be ever mindful of the Last Judgment, and therefore to be more occupied with the salvation of their soul than with the affairs of the present world. In this task also they see the saints at their side, as when these help them prove the truth of the Resurrection by their healing miracles, and when they heal sinful people, Gregory the bishop not excluded, both of their spiritual and physical diseases.

VI.4 A possible context for healing miracles?

And there is the rub. For I would suggest that healing miracles, and especially those in which the healed person undertakes some sort of ascetical practice before the healing miracle, like a pilgrimage, a relatively lengthy period of stay and prayer in the church where the relics are kept, or alternatively those in which he vows never to commit certain sins after the miracle, or better still, enters the ranks of the clergy, can be considered in the very context of this vision of ascetical socio-moral reform. The suppliant at the saint’s shrine in this kind of miracle story is mostly a sick or possessed person, not infrequently a slave, who is buried in worldly concerns up to his neck, steeped in sins, and diseased and divided both in his body and his soul, just like a society riven by civil war as a result of the avarice and pride of people. And

just like a society taking steps toward an ascetical reform under the leadership of its stern, pious king and willing to have its spiritual and bodily wounds cared for by the spiritual bishop, this man or woman decides to undertake a commitment, a commitment to bear the considerable hardships of a journey to the tomb of the saint in the conditions of sixth-century Gaul, and remains loyal to it to the end.

VI.4.1 The ascetical commitment

The commitment to a pilgrimage to the saint's shrine no doubt imposes an ascetical discipline on the patient, because in it there is the vow of a journey (remembering that monastic life was widely considered as a journey, an *iter* in this world); there is the determination to bear deprivation and poverty; there is the step taken, albeit generally for a short period, outside the social structures that impose the daily chore of work and social obligations on every member of the society; there is the abandonment of the basic economic social activity to produce and share food (begging it instead); there is the period in the church, similarly passed outside the society, this time in prayers and vigils.⁵ A particularly illustrative healing story in this context is found in *VM* I.12, in which Queen Ultrogotho decides to go to Martin's church to see the famous miracles occurring there. Before coming she abstains from eating and sleeping, and sends very generous alms in advance. Upon her arrival she refuses to approach the tomb however, saying that her sins are too great to allow her access to the holy place. After passing a night in vigils, praying, and profuse weeping, she presents many gifts and celebrates a mass, during the course of which three blind men are healed. All features of the ascetical stance and

⁵ For a sophisticated analysis on the difficulties of pilgrimage in this age, the timeless quality of pilgrimage, and the importance of the commitment involved in undertaking it, see Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles*, 116-17 and 125-28.

practice are hence brought together in this story: the vow of a journey, prayers and vigils, penitence, abstinence, and good works. We shall follow these individual strains, in the order indicated, through other healing miracles.

VI.4.1.1 The vow of a journey

When yet a young man, Gregory falls gravely ill with sores and a fever, unable to eat or drink anything. When close to death he calls on Martin's name and feels a little better, after which he begins to burn with a longing to visit the saint's tomb. Although still very ill, he sets out on a pilgrimage with his companions. Two or three days later he collapses with fever, but vehemently objects when his friends want to take him back, rather than let him die in the wilderness: "If I deserve to see the church of St Martin, I thank my God; if not, take my lifeless body and bury it there, because it is my decision not to return home unless I will be worthy to be present at his tomb." Weeping together, they set out on the way again, and after a night of vigils in the church Gregory regains his health.⁶ In a similar case, Bishop Ragnemod of Paris becomes gravely ill with dysentery when he is still a deacon in the service of Bishop Germanus. When, because of this sickness, Germanus orders him to remain at the villa they were visiting at that time, instead of going to Tours to celebrate the vigils before the feast, Ragnemod objects, stating his firm belief that he will be cured at the saint's church. Immediately he jumps on his horse and comes to the church, where dust from the tomb restores him his health.⁷

Remaining loyal to the vow of journey despite all such sufferings and difficulties is so valuable that in some cases the healing occurs even before the patient's arrival at the destination. Hence in *VM* III.32, a woman with crippled hands

⁶ *VM* I.32, 33.

persists in completing her journey to the holy tomb, despite great suffering, and her hands are partially healed while still on the road. She gets her full health at the tomb after a prayer. In *VM* IV.40, Mauranus, a mute man from the north coast of Spain, sends by means of some sailors a small gold coin to Martin's church; when he returns home, he finds a small gold coin weighing like a big one, and is filled with a desire to visit the holy tomb. Although his parents restrain him twice from taking a ship to Gaul, he does manage to take the third ship, and receives his voice back while still on the open sea. When they land at Bordeaux he travels to Tours and fulfills his vow.

VI.4.1.2 Prayers and vigils

Praying and keeping vigils at the saint's shrine are the most frequently encountered ascetical practices in the healing miracle stories. In *VM* II.48, Floridus's crippled hands and feet are healed after he spends a few days keeping vigils and praying in Martin's cell at Candes. In *VM* III.9, a cleric from Poitiers regains the use of his foot after he prays for three days. In *VM* III.26, a crippled girl lies for many days at Martin's church, weeping and praying, before she regains her health. The period passed in the church can extend to many years. In *VM* I.8, Chainemund, a leprous and blind woman, every day feels her way to Martin's church, but does not get healed before three years. In *VM* III.20, a blind man passes no less than four years praying at the saint's church before he regains his sight. Vigils are frequently kept holding a very tall candle. In the vigils at Martin's oratory at Sireuil, a paralyzed man holds a wax candle matching his own height during the entire night, and jumps

⁷ *VM* II.12.

up with his health restored in the morning.⁸ In *VM* II.11, Mummola, the wife of the tribune Animus, loses the use of a foot and regains her health by holding a candle in her hand during the entire night in the saint's church. In *GM* 15, a woman's hand recovers after she spends the whole night praying and holding a candle as tall as herself in her hand.

VI.4.1.3 Repentance

Inseparable from prayer is repentance, accompanied by profuse tears. In the preface to *VM* III, Gregory says:

Before [Martin's] blessed tomb passion is to be humbled and prayer is to be raised. If tears flow and genuine remorse follows, if sighs rise up from the bottom of the heart and guilty breasts are beaten, then weeping will find happiness, guilt will find pardon, and the grief in our breasts will end with a remedy.

Hence in *VM* I.7, a mute and deaf man called Theodomund comes every day to the church and prays so persistently from inside that he weeps strongly while moving his lips. He is healed after three years. In *GC* 15, a woman suffering from quartan fever spends a whole night motionless at St Venantius's tomb, crying and praying, and gets away healed in the morning. In *VM* III.22, a woman suffering from blurred vision is brought by her husband to the saint's cell at Candes, where she prays and performs penance for many days before being healed.

VI.4.1.4 Abstinence

Abstinence is another ascetical practice that frequently accompanies praying. Gregory notes in *VM* I.38: "And what will I say about possessed people and people suffering from chills? If abstinence and faith have been truly joined, soon all treacheries are removed from them with the assistance of their patron."

⁸ *VM* I.18.

Nevertheless, the patients who practice abstinence before healing are by no means limited to these two sorts. In *VM* I.19, for example, a blind woman named Bella deserves to get her sight back by devoting herself to “frequent fasting and praying.” In *VM* I.27, Charivald, a lame man, devotes himself to fasting and praying for almost an entire year before he gets healed. In *VM* II.5, the twisted feet of a man from Auxerre called Mallulf get straight again after he devotes himself to praying and fasting “without ceasing.” In *VM* III.7, the hands of Senator, a man from the environs of Angers, which had been stiffened due to work on a Sunday, get healed after he prays and fasts for four days. In *VM* III.36, Augustus, a man from Tours, fasts and prays for seven days at the saint’s church before his kidney pain and crippled legs are healed.

Abstaining from only wine and meat are also shown to work: in *VM* IV.44, Principius, “a good man and a citizen of Périgieux,” goes to Martin’s church to be healed of the madness he is suffering from. He remains four months there, abstaining from eating meat and drinking wine, before he returns home with his health. In *VM* II.18, Landulf, a madman from the territory of Vienne, gets healed by the saint, but then begins to drink too much wine and has one side paralyzed. When he dedicates himself to abstinence and tonsures his head, his health is restored again.

VI.4.1.5 Good works

Serving the poor in the church and giving plenty of alms is also highly conducive to healing. In *VJ* 38, a blind girl is brought to Martin’s church by her father, who offers drink and food to the poor people who are listed on the register of the poor. While the men eat the meal the girl has a headache and goes to sleep. She gets up when the meal is over, and is healed even before she offers a prayer. The mute and deaf Theodomund we have met in *VM* I.7 immediately donates the charity

given him to other poor people like himself, and similarly gives the proceeds of the alms he begs to the needy. In *VM* II.22, Remigia, a married woman suffering from a crippled hand, comes to Martin's cell at Candes, where she devotes herself to charity as well as vigils and prayers. While helping with the register of poor people gathered there her hand gets healed, so that she can prepare drinks for them. She returns home with a healed hand after helping these poor people all day, and every year thereafter brings them adequate food. A man named Vinast is also healed of his blindness while providing food for the poor gathered at the same cell. Despite the fact that he is blind, he travels there regularly to nourish these people, and serves them like a servant after most piously keeping vigils. One day, when he fulfills his service and pledge, his eyes are slightly opened, and he is commanded by the saint in a dream to undertake a pilgrimage to his church in Tours, where he completely regains his sight.⁹

VI.4.2 The resulting physical and moral cure

Because the sick person applies such an ascetical discipline to his person, turning away from the world towards God and doing works of charity even for a limited period, he also “merits”¹⁰ to receive physical and spiritual healing and wholeness from the saint, who like a spiritual bishop mediating in conflicts, relieving poverty, and preaching, brings wholeness, order, peace and freedom both to the body and to the soul of his patient. In this context the

⁹ *VM* II.23.

¹⁰ Gregory occasionally uses the word “merit” (*mereor*) to relate the ascetical practices undertaken by the patient to the cure, as in *VM* I.19: “having devoted herself to frequent fasting and prayer [at the saint's shrine], she *merited* to receive the sight that she had lost,” or in *VJ* 50: “a blind man came, piously offered a prayer, and *merited* to recover his sight.” It is plausible to suggest that when Gregory does not explicitly use this word in such cases, he means it to be taken for granted. Of course the word should not be understood in the sense that one can compel saints to grant a cure by such activities; it only indicates that the patient thereby proves himself worthy enough to receive a cure.

healing of the bodily infirmity is but the natural result of the healing of the soul. The opening of the sufferer's physical eye, as already discussed in the last chapter, is nothing other than the result of his awakening to the fact that the things of the other world, and not of this one, are to be esteemed. Another nice case that illustrates this analogy between physical and moral healing is found in *VM* II.13. A man who has been blinded because of trying to mend a fence on Sunday comes to Martin's church and constantly serves there for two months, continuously fasting and praying. When his eyes are opened at the end of this period, he also comes to see that the concerns of this world are less important than those of the other, as Gregory explicitly states:

Behold, two miracles were displayed for one blind man: first [Martin] opened the eyes of this man's body so that he might see the things of this world, and now he has illuminated the eyes of his heart lest he lust after the things of this world.

Significantly, the man is dedicated as a cleric to the saint's church after this double miracle.

The saint is able to grant this bodily and spiritual integrity thanks to the fact that he has preserved his own sinless state and his exclusively ascetical and spiritual orientation to the end of his life, and in turn has gained the kind of wholeness and completeness that Adam enjoyed before the Fall.¹¹ The patient, because his commitment is lighter and shorter, does not reach the situation of man before the Fall, but nevertheless he becomes better in spirit as well as in body, vowing never to commit particular sins again. Hence in *GM* 15, a woman's hand begins to burn when she attempts to bake bread on Sunday. Hurrying to the church of the village in which relics of St John the Baptist were kept, she promises never to work on that day again, and to pray instead. She recovers after this vow. Similarly, in *VM* III.55, a woman

¹¹ Brown, *Cult of Saints*, 75-84.

whose hand is crippled because of doing work on Sunday goes to Martin's shrine, and when she promises never do anything inappropriate on the day of the Lord's Resurrection, she sees her health restored.

It is indeed important to keep the vows one has given to the saint after healing. For healing should bring a change of heart with it; if it does not, the sickness returns. In *VM* III.56, a woman whose hands are crippled because of baking bread on Sunday comes to the shrine and leaves with her health after promising to serve one week at the church every month. After one year, however, she neglects to do her service, and promptly becomes blind in both eyes. Running to the shrine, she confesses her negligence and performs penance for eight days, after which she receives her sight back. We meet a more drastic case in *VM* II.53. A citizen of Bayeux goes out of his mind because of drinking too much wine, and is brought to Martin's church. Here he is healed after pledging to return each year and fulfill his vows to the saint. Although he is tonsured, he fails to fulfill the vows, however, and after four years slips into madness again. Brought to the church, he prays for at least six months and fulfills the vows he had earlier ignored before he can regain his health. Nevertheless, he begins to drink again after returning home, and dies of the same affliction.

VI.4.3 The perfect cure: entry to the Church

Together with this last example we have already mentioned two cases where the patient enters the Church after the healing. There are indeed several stories in which the spiritual healing of the patient through ascetical discipline is so complete that he renounces all his earthly power and property and enters the Church. Hence the ascetical commitment, undertaken to reach the cure, becomes the cure itself! A

significant example is provided by *VM* III.15, where temporary asceticism brings partial healing, and only permanent conversion to the Church, together with the renunciation of earthly status and wealth (to the benefit of the Church), completes the healing. Gundulf, a servant of Chlothar's son Gunthar, has both his feet crippled at different times. His second crippled foot is healed when he offers a prayer at the saint's church, but he continues to limp for thirty years more because of his other foot. At last he comes to examine the guilt of his conscience, and decides to receive tonsure and serve the saint. After getting the king's permission to donate all his possessions to the Church while still alive, he fulfills his vow. When he is tonsured, his atrophied foot is lengthened again.

There are many other examples of such permanent conversions. In *VM* I.26, a young man called Aquilinus is healed of his trembling by prayers and long fasts in the saint's church, and afterwards abandons his parents to serve the place. In *VM* II.15, Merobaudis, a blind man from the territory of Poitiers, receives his sight at the saint's church and becomes a cleric in the same place. In *VM* III.19, a blind man from Avranches spends much time fasting and praying in Martin's church, and when his sight is restored, he vows to be tonsured there — which vow he later piously fulfills. *GM* 76 is a true success story in this respect. The servant of the patrician Aurilianus, suffering from demonic possession and often biting himself with his own teeth, is brought to the church of St Victor in Marseilles, where he is cleansed after three days. He was thereby so strengthened in the reward of his faith, Gregory informs us, that he was tonsured, achieved the rank of an abbot, and presided over a monastery.

When we consider Gregory's vehement objection to Berthegund's daughter, who wanted to abandon her husband and to enter her mother's convent,¹² it is rather surprising that he included the conversion of married women in his stories: in *VM* II.9, a blind woman comes to Martin's church, where she serves for many days. When she deserves to receive sight in one eye, she abandons her husband and children, adopts a habit, and "at the instigation of the Lord" becomes a nun in the church. In *VM* III.22, a woman suffering from blurred vision is brought by her husband to the saint's cell at Candes, where she prays and performs penance for many days. When she is healed such an intense faith begins to burn in the woman that she does not leave the place until her death.

It should be indicated at this point that not a single story from *VM* IV, the last book of the *Miracles of St Martin*, is found among the stories that include a mention of ascetical practices before or after healing. This is a fact also noted by J. Schlick, who points to the drastic decrease in mention of what he calls "penitential practices" in this book, along with the considerable increase in the occurrence of the words like *mox* and *virtus* that emphasize the saint's supernatural power, not to forget the greater chronological precision of the stories.¹³ What could be the reason for this? Among the reasons Schlick suggests, the most plausible seems to be that Gregory's death before he was able to complete the book (as proved by the fact that there are only 47 stories instead of the expected 60, and that the capitals of the last two stories are missing in all the manuscripts, a point noted by its editor Bruno Krusch) prevented him from subjecting it to an extensive revision during which exhortative material would be added. The greater chronological precision of the book that

¹² *Hist.* IX.33.

Schlick points out also supports the view that it was as yet in a raw state when Gregory died, perhaps existing only as a collection of the records kept by notaries in the shrine, plus several other stories concerned with subjects like the miraculous release of prisoners etc. If this is indeed the reason for the different character of Book IV, which implies that Gregory added the accounts of ascetical practices at a later stage to the stories, it reinforces the possibility that Gregory consciously deployed the stories of healing miracles as a means of promoting his reform vision.

VI.4.4 Beyond symbolism

In such healing miracles, every individual was doing what society as a whole was expected to do in order to recover its integrity, and in this respect the healing had an obviously symbolic value. Its significance was not limited to the symbolic plane however, since at the same time, by undertaking a commitment to turn his or her back (at least temporarily) on the concerns of the world, by praying and repenting, and finally by practicing abstinence and deeds of charity, each pilgrim helped society to approach one step nearer the envisioned socio-moral reform. The miracle stories in turn, by encouraging their readers and hearers to undertake a similar commitment in order to be cured of their physical and spiritual diseases, and by showing them the necessity of remaining loyal to their vows to become better persons if they wanted to avoid a return of the disease, also contributed on their part to this ascetical socio-moral reform that was envisioned by Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours.

¹³ J. Schlick, "Composition et chronologie des 'De virtutibus Martini' de Grégoire de Tours," in *Studia Patristica VII*, 278-86 (Berlin, 1966), 282-84.

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APPENDIX

Years of the Merovingian Councils Convened in the Sixth Century¹

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¹ As given by *Les Canons des Conciles Mérovingiens (VIe-VIIe Siècles)*, the latin edition of C. de Clercq translated with an introduction by J. Gaudemet and B. Basdevant, vol. 1, *Sources Chrétiennes* 353 (Paris, 1989), 66.