

## Pope St. Gregory The Great.

Doctor of the Church; born at Rome about 540; died 12 March 604. Gregory is certainly one of the most notable figures in Ecclesiastical History. He has exercised in many respects a momentous influence on the doctrine, the organization, and the discipline of the Catholic Church. To him we must look for an explanation of the religious situation of the Middle Ages; indeed, if no account were taken of his work, the evolution of the form of medieval Christianity would be almost inexplicable. And further, in so far as the modern Catholic system is a legitimate development of medieval Catholicism, of this too Gregory may not unreasonably be termed the Father. Almost all the leading principles of the later Catholicism are found, at any rate in germ, in Gregory the Great. (F.H. Dudden, "Gregory the Great", 1, p. v).

This eulogy by a learned non-Catholic writer will justify the length and elaboration of the following article.

### I. FROM BIRTH TO 574

Gregory's father was Gordianus, a wealthy patrician, probably of the famous gens Amicia, who owned large estates in Sicily and a mansion on the Caelian Hill in Rome, the ruins of which, apparently in a wonderful state of preservation, still await excavation beneath the Church of St. Andrew and St. Gregory. His mother Silvia appears also to have been of good family, but very little is known of her life. She is honored as a saint, her feast being kept on 3 November. Portraits of Gordianus and Silvia were painted by Gregory's order, in the atrium of St. Andrew's monastery, and a pleasing description of these may be found in John the Deacon (*Vita*, IV, lxxxiii). Besides his mother, two of Gregory's aunts have been canonized, Gordianus's two sisters, Tarsilla and Æmiliana, so that John the Deacon speaks of his education as being that of a saint among saints. Of his early years we know nothing beyond what the history of the period tells us. Between the years 546 and 552 Rome was first captured by the Goths under Totila, and then abandoned by them; next it was garrisoned by Belisarius, and besieged in vain by the Goths, who took it again, however, after the recall of Belisarius, only to lose it once more to Narses. Gregory's mind and memory were both exceptionally receptive, and it is to the effect produced on him by these disasters that we must attribute the tinge of sadness which pervades his writings and especially his clear expectation of a speedy end to the world. Of his education, we have no details. Gregory of Tours tells us that in grammar, rhetoric and dialectic he was so skilful as to be thought second to none in all Rome, and it seems certain also that he must have gone through a course of legal studies. Not least among the educating influences was the religious atmosphere of his home. He loved to meditate on the Scriptures and to listen attentively to the conversations of his elders, so that he was "devoted to God from his youth up". His rank and prospects pointed him out naturally for a public career, and he doubtless held some of the subordinate offices wherein a young patrician embarked on public life. That he acquitted himself well in these appears certain, since we find him about the year 573, when little more than thirty years old, filling the important office of prefect of the city of Rome. At that date the brilliant post was shorn of much of its old magnificence, and its responsibilities were

reduced; still it remained the highest civil dignity in the city, and it was only after long prayer and inward struggle that Gregory decided to abandon everything and become a monk. This event took place most probably in 574. His decision once taken, he devoted himself to the work and austerities of his new life with all the natural energy of his character. His Sicilian estates were given up to found six monasteries there, and his home on the Caelian Hill was converted into another under the patronage of St. Andrew. Here he himself took the cowl, so that "he who had been wont to go about the city clad in the trabea and aglow with silk and jewels, now clad in a worthless garment served the altar of the Lord" (Greg. Tur., X, i).

## II. AS MONK AND ABBOT (C. 574-590)

There has been much discussion as to whether Gregory and his fellow-monks at St. Andrew's followed the Rule of St. Benedict. Baronius and others on his authority have denied this, while it has been asserted as strongly by Mabillon and the Bollandists, who, in the preface to the life of St. Augustine (26 May), retract the opinion expressed earlier in the preface to St. Gregory's life (12 March). The controversy is important only in view of the question as to the form of monasticism introduced by St. Augustine into England, and it may be said that Baronius's view is now practically abandoned. For about three years Gregory lived in retirement in the monastery of St. Andrew, a period to which he often refers as the happiest portion of his life. His great austerities during this time are recorded by the biographers, and probably caused the weak health from which he constantly suffered in later life. However, he was soon drawn out of his seclusion, when, in 578, the pope ordained him, much against his will, as one of the seven deacons (*regionarii*) of Rome. The period was one of acute crisis. The Lombards were advancing rapidly towards the city, and the only chance of safety seemed to be in obtaining help from the Emperor Tiberius at Byzantium. Pope Pelagius II accordingly dispatched a special embassy to Tiberius, and sent Gregory along with it as his *apocrisiarius*, or permanent ambassador to the Court of Byzantium. The date of this new appointment seems to have been the spring of 579, and it lasted apparently for about six years. Nothing could have been more uncongenial to Gregory than the worldly atmosphere of the brilliant Byzantine Court, and to counteract its dangerous influence he followed the monastic life so far as circumstances permitted. This was made easier by the fact that several of his brethren from St. Andrew's accompanied him to Constantinople. With them he prayed and studied the Scriptures, one result of which remains in his "Morals", or series of lectures on the Book of Job, composed during this period at the request of St. Leander of Seville, whose acquaintance Gregory made during his stay in Constantinople. Much attention was attracted to Gregory by his controversy with Eutychius, Patriarch of Constantinople, concerning the Resurrection. Eutychius had published a treatise on the subject maintaining that the risen bodies of the elect would be "impalpable, more light than air". To this view Gregory objected the palpability of Christ's risen body. The dispute became prolonged and bitter, till at length the emperor intervened, both combatants being summoned to a private audience, where they stated their views. The emperor decided that Gregory was in the right, and ordered Eutychius's book to be burned. The strain of the struggle had been so great that both fell ill. Gregory recovered, but the patriarch succumbed, recanting his error on his death bed. Mention should be

made of the curious fact that, although Gregory's sojourn at Constantinople lasted for six years, he seems never to have mastered even the rudiments of Greek. Possibly he found that the use of an interpreter had its advantages, but he often complains of the incapacity of those employed for this purpose. It must be owned that, so far as obtaining help for Rome was concerned, Gregory's stay at Constantinople was a failure. However, his period as ambassador taught him very plainly a lesson which was to bear great fruit later on when he ruled in Rome as pope. This was the important fact that no help was any longer to be looked for from Byzantium, with the corollary that, if Rome and Italy were to be saved at all, it could only be by vigorous independent action of the powers on the spot. Humanly speaking, it is to the fact that Gregory had acquired this conviction that his later line of action with all its momentous consequences is due.

In the year 586, or possibly 585, he was recalled to Rome, and with the greatest joy returned to St. Andrew's, of which he became abbot soon afterwards. The monastery grew famous under his energetic rule, producing many monks who won renown later, and many vivid pictures of this period may be found in the "Dialogues". Gregory gave much of his time to lecturing on the Holy Scriptures and is recorded to have expounded to his monks the Heptateuch, Books of Kings, the Prophets, the Book of Proverbs, and the Canticle of V+Canticles. Notes of these lectures were taken at the time by a young student named Claudius, but when transcribed were found by Gregory to contain so many errors that he insisted on their being given to him for correction and revision. Apparently this was never done, for the existing fragments of such works attributed to Gregory are almost certainly spurious. At this period, however, one important literary enterprise was certainly completed. This was the revision and publication of the "Magna Moralia", or lectures on the Book of Job, undertaken in Constantinople at the request of St. Leander. In one of his letters (Ep., V, liii) Gregory gives an interesting account of the origin of this work. To this period most probably should be assigned the famous incident of Gregory's meeting with the English youths in the Forum. The first mention of the event is in the Whitby life (c, ix), and the whole story seems to be an English tradition. It is worth notice, therefore, that in the St. Gall manuscript the Angles do not appear as slave boys exposed for sale, but as men visiting Rome of their own free will, whom Gregory expressed a desire to see. It is Venerable Bede (Hist. Eccl., II, i) who first makes them slaves. In consequence of this meeting Gregory was so fixed with desire to convert the Angles that he obtained permission from Pelagius II to go in person to Britain with some of his fellow-monks as missionaries. The Romans, however, were greatly incensed at the pope's act. With angry words they demanded Gregory's recall, and messengers were at once dispatched to bring him back to Rome, if necessary by force. These men caught up with the little band of missionaries on the third day after their departure, and at once returned with them, Gregory offering no opposition, since he had received what appeared to him as a sign from heaven that his enterprise should be abandoned. The strong feeling of the Roman populace that Gregory must not be allowed to leave Rome is a sufficient proof of the position he now held there. He was in fact the chief adviser and assistant of Pelagius II, towards whom he seems to have acted very much in the capacity of secretary (see the letter of the Bishop of Ravenna to Gregory, Epp., III, lxvi, "Sedem apostolicam, quam antae moribus nunc etiam honore debito gubernatis"). In this capacity, probably in 586, Gregory wrote his important letter to the schismatical bishops of Istria who had

separated from communion with the Church on the question of the Three Chapters (Epp., Appendix, III, iii). This document, which is almost a treatise in length, is an admirable example of Gregory's skill, but it failed to produce any more effort than Pelagius's two previous letters had, and the schism continued.

The year 589 was one of widespread disaster throughout all the empire. In Italy there was an unprecedented inundation. Farms and houses were carried away by the floods. The Tiber overflowed its banks, destroying numerous buildings, among them the granaries of the Church with all the store of corn. Pestilence followed on the floods, and Rome became a very city of the dead. Business was at a standstill, and the streets were deserted save for the wagons which bore forth countless corpses for burial in common pits beyond the city walls. Then, in February, 590, as if to fill the cup of misery to the brim, Pelagius II died. The choice of a successor lay with the clergy and people of Rome, and without any hesitation they elected Gregory, Abbot of St. Andrew's. In spite of their unanimity Gregory shrank from the dignity thus offered him. He knew, no doubt, that its acceptance meant a final good-bye to the cloister life he loved, and so he not only refused to accede to the prayers of his fellow citizens but also wrote personally to the Emperor Maurice, begging him with all earnestness not to confirm the election. Germanus, prefect of the city, suppresses this letter, however, and sent instead of it the formal schedule of the election. In the interval while awaiting the emperor's reply the business of the vacant see was transacted by Gregory, in commission with two or three other high officials. As the plague still continued unabated, Gregory called upon the people to join in a vast sevenfold procession which was to start from each of the seven regions of the city and meet at the Basilica of the Blessed Virgin, all praying the while for pardon and the withdrawal of the pestilence. This was accordingly done, and the memory of the event is still preserved by the name "Sant' Angelo" given to the mausoleum of Hadrian from the legend that the Archangel St. Michael was seen upon its summit in the act of sheathing his sword as a sign that the plague was over. At length, after six months of waiting, came the emperor's confirmation of Gregory's election. The saint was terrified at the news and even meditated flight. He was seized, however, carried to the Basilica of St. Peter, and there consecrated pope on 3 September, 590. The story that Gregory actually fled the city and remained hidden in a forest for three days, when his whereabouts was revealed by a supernatural light, seems to be pure invention. It appears for the first time in the Whitby life (c. vii), and is directly contrary to the words of his contemporary, Gregory of Tours (Hist. Franc., X, i). Still he never ceased to regret his elevation, and his later writings contain numberless expressions of strong feeling on this point.

### III. AS POPE (590-604)

Fourteen years of life remained to Gregory, and into these he crowded work enough to have exhausted the energies of a lifetime. What makes his achievement more wonderful is his constant ill-health. He suffered almost continually from indigestion and, at intervals, from attacks of slow fever, while for the last half of his pontificate he was a martyr to gout. In spite of these infirmities, which increased steadily, his biographer, Paul the Deacon, tells us "he never rested" (Vita, XV). His work as pope is of so varied a nature that it will be best to take it in sections, although this destroys any exact

chronological sequence. At the very outset of his pontificate Gregory published his "Liber pastoralis curae", or book on the office of a bishop, in which he lays down clearly the lines he considers it his duty to follow. The work, which regards the bishop pre-eminently as the physician of souls, is divided into four parts. He points out in the first that only one skilled already as a physician of the soul is fitted to undertake the "supreme rule" of the episcopate. In the second he describes how the bishop's life should be ordered from a spiritual point of view; in the third, how he ought to teach and admonish those under him, and in the fourth how, in spite of his good works, he ought to bear in mind his own weakness, since the better his work the greater the danger of falling through self-confidence. This little work is the key to Gregory's life as pope, for what he preached he practiced. Moreover, it remained for centuries the textbook of the Catholic episcopate, so that by its influence the ideal of the great pope has molded the character of the Church, and his spirit has spread into all lands.

### (1) Life and Work in Rome

As pope Gregory still lived with monastic simplicity. One of his first acts was to banish all the lay attendants, pages, etc., from the Lateran palace, and substitute clerics in their place. There was now no magister militum living in Rome, so the control even of military matters fell to the pope. The inroads of the Lombards had filled the city with a multitude of indigent refugees, for whose support Gregory made provision, using for this purpose the existing machinery of the ecclesiastical districts, each of which had its deaconry or "office of alms". The corn thus distributed came chiefly from Sicily and was supplied by the estates of the Church. The temporal needs of his people being thus provided for, Gregory did not neglect their spiritual wants, and a large number of his sermons have come down to us. It was he who instituted the "stations" still observed and noted in the Roman Missal (see STATIONS). He met the clergy and people at some church previously agreed upon, and all together went in procession to the church of the station, where Mass was celebrated and the pope preached. These sermons, which drew immense crowds, are mostly simple, popular expositions of Scripture. Chiefly remarkable is the preacher's mastery of the Bible, which he quotes unceasingly, and his regular use of anecdote to illustrate the point in hand, in which respect he paves the way for the popular preachers of the Middle Ages. In July, 595, Gregory held his first synod in St. Peter's, which consisted almost wholly of the bishops of the suburbicarian sees and the priests of the Roman titular churches. Six decrees dealing with ecclesiastical discipline were passed, some of them merely confirming changes already made by the pope on his own authority.

Much controversy still exists as to the exact extent of Gregory's reforms of the Roman Liturgy. All admit that he did make the following modifications in the pre-existing practice:

\* In the Canon of the Mass he inserted the words "diesque nostros in tua pace disponas, atque ab aeterna damnatione nos eripi, et in electorum tuorum iubarum grege numerari";

- \* he ordered the Pater Noster to be recited in the Canon before the breaking of the Host;
- \* he provided that the Alleluia should be chanted after the Gradual out of paschal time, to which period, apparently, the Roman use had previously confined it;
- \* he prohibited the use of the chasuble by subdeacons assisting at Mass;
- \* he forbade deacons to perform any of the musical portions of the Mass other than singing the Gospel.

Beyond these and some few minor points it seems impossible to conclude with certainty what changes Gregory did make. As to the much-disputed question of the Gregorian Sacramentary and the almost more difficult point of his relation to the plain song or chant of the Church, for Gregory's connection with which matters the earliest authority seems to be John the Deacon (*Vita*, II, vi, Xvii), see GREGORIAN CHANT; SACRAMENTARY. There is no lack of evidence, however, to illustrate Gregory's activity as manager of the patrimony of St. Peter. By his day the estates of the Church had reached vast dimensions. Varying estimates place their total area at from 1300 to 1800 square miles, and there seems no reason for supposing this to be an exaggeration, while the income arising there from was probably not less than \$1,500,000 a year. The land lay in many places — Campania, Africa, Sicily, and elsewhere — and, as their landlord, Gregory displayed a skill in finance and estate management which excites our admiration no less than it did the surprise of his tenants and agents, who suddenly found that they had a new master who was not to be deceived or cheated. The management of each patrimony was carried out by a number of agents of varying grades and duties under an official called the rector or defensor of the patrimony. Previously the rectors had usually been laymen, but Gregory established the custom of appointing ecclesiastics to the post. In doing this he probably had in view the many extra duties of an ecclesiastical nature which he called upon them to undertake. Thus examples may be found of such rectors being commissioned to undertake the filling up of vacant sees, holding of local synods, taking action against heretics, providing for the maintenance of churches and monasteries, rectifying abuses in the churches of their district, with the enforcing of ecclesiastical discipline and even the reproof and correction of local bishops. Still Gregory never allowed the rectors to interfere in such matters on their own responsibility. In the minutiae of estate management nothing was too small for Gregory's personal notice, from the exact number of sextarii in a modius of corn, or how many soluli went to one golden pound, to the use of false weights by certain minor agents. He finds time to write instructions on every detail and leaves no complaint unattended to, even from the humblest of his multitude of tenants. Throughout the large number of letters which deal with the management of the patrimony, the pope's determination to secure a scrupulously righteous administration is evident. As bishop, he is the trustee of God and St. Peter, and his agents must show that they realize this by their conduct. Consequently, under his able management the estates of the Church increased steadily in value, the tenants were contented, and the revenues paid in with unprecedented regularity. The only fault ever laid at his door in this matter is that, by his boundless charities, he emptied his treasury. But this, if a fault at all, was a natural consequence of his view that he was the administrator of the property of the poor, for whom he could never do enough.

## (2) Relations with the Suburbicarian Churches

As patriarchs of the West the popes exercise a special jurisdiction over and above their universal primacy as successors of St. Peter; and among Western churches, this jurisdiction extends in a most intimate manner over the churches of Italy and the isles adjacent. On the mainland much of this territory was in the hands of the Lombards, with whose Arian clergy Gregory was, of course, not in communion. Whenever opportunity offered, however, he was careful to provide for the needs of the faithful in these parts, frequently uniting them to some neighboring diocese, when they were too few to occupy the energies of a bishop. On the islands, of which Sicily was by far the most important, the pre-existing church system was maintained. Gregory appointed a vicar, usually the metropolitan of the province, who exercised a general supervision over the whole church. He also insisted strongly on the holding of local synods as ordered by the Council of Nicea, and letters of his exist addressed to bishops in Sicily, Sardinia, and Gaul reminding them of their duties in this respect. The supreme instance of Gregory's intervention in the affairs of these dioceses occurs in the case of Sardinia, where the behavior of Januarius the half-witted, aged Metropolitan of Cagliari, had reduced the church to a state of semi-chaos. A large number of letters relate to the reforms instituted by the pope (Epp., II, xlvi; III, xxxvi; IV, ix,xxiii-xxvii, xxix; V, ii; IX, i, xi, ccii-cciv; XIV, ii). His care over the election of a new bishop whenever a vacancy occurs is shown in many cases, and if, after his examination of the elect, which is always a searching one, he finds him unfitted for the post, he has no hesitation in rejecting him and commanding another to be chosen (Epp., I, lv, lvi; VII, xxxviii; X, vii). With regard to discipline the pope was specially strict in enforcing the Church's laws as to the celibacy of the clergy (Epp., I, xlii, 1; IV, v, xxvi, xxxiv; VII, i; IX, cx, ccxviii; X, xix; XI, lvi a; XIII, xxxviii, xxxix); the exemption of clerics from lay tribunals (Epp., I, xxxix a; VI, xi, IX, liii, lxxvi, lxxix; X, iv; XI, xxxii; XIII, 1); and the deprivation of all ecclesiastics guilty of criminal or scandalous offences (Epp., I, xviii, xlii; III, xlix; IV, xxvi; V, v, xvii, xviii; VII, xxxix; VIII, xxiv; IX, xxv; XII, iii, x, xi; XIV, ii). He was also inflexible with regard to the proper application of church revenues, insisting that others should be as strict as he was in disposing of these funds for their proper ends (Epp., I, x, lxiv; II, xx-xxii; III, xxii; IV, xi; V, xii, xlvi; VIII, vii; XI, xxii, lvi a; XIII, xlvi; XIV, ii).

## (3) Relations with Other Churches

With regard to the other Western Churches limits of space prevent any detailed account of Gregory's dealings, but the following quotation, all the more valuable as coming from a Protestant authority, indicates very clearly the line he followed herein: "In his dealings with the Churches of the West, Gregory acted invariably on the assumption that all were subject to the jurisdiction of the Roman See. Of the rights claimed or exercised by his predecessors he would not abate one title; on the contrary, he did everything in his power to maintain, strengthen, and extend what he regarded as the just prerogatives of the papacy. It is true that he respected the privileges of the Western metropolitans, and disapproved of unnecessary interference within the sphere of their jurisdiction canonically exercised. . . . But of his general principle there can be no doubt whatever" (Dudden, I, 475). In view of later developments Gregory's dealings with the Oriental

Churches, and with Constantinople in particular, have a special importance. There cannot be the smallest doubt that Gregory claimed for the Apostolic See, and for himself as pope, a primacy not of honor, but of supreme authority over the Church Universal. In Epp., XIII, 1, he speaks of "the Apostolic See, which is the head of all Churches", and in Epp., V, cliv, he says: "I, albeit unworthy, have been set up in command of the Church." As successor of St. Peter, the pope had received from God a primacy over all Churches (Epp., II, xlvi; III, xxx; V, xxxvii; VII, xxxvii). His approval it was which gave force to the decrees of councils or synods (Epp., IX, clvi), and his authority could annul them (Epp., V, xxxix, xli, xliv). To him appeals might be made even against other patriarchs, and by him bishops were judged and corrected if need were (Epp., II, 1; III, lii, lxiii; IX, xxvi, xxvii). This position naturally made it impossible for him to permit the use of the title Ecumenical Bishop assumed by the Patriarch of Constantinople, John the Faster, at a synod held in 588. Gregory protested, and a long controversy followed, the question still at issue when the pope died. A discussion of this controversy is needless here, but it is important as showing how completely Gregory regarded the Eastern patriarchs as being subject to himself; "As regards the Church of Constantinople," he writes in Epp., IX, xxvi, "who can doubt that it is subject to the Apostolic See? Why, both our most religious lord the emperor, and our brother the Bishop of Constantinople continually acknowledge it." At the same time the pope was most careful not to interfere with the canonical rights of the other patriarchs and bishops. With the other Oriental patriarchs his relations were most cordial, as appears from his letters to the patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria.

#### (4) Relations with the Lombards and the Franks

Gregory's consecration as pope preceded by a few days only the death of Authari, King of the Lombards, whose queen, the famous Theodelinde, then married Agilulf, Duke of Turin, a warlike and energetic prince. With Agilulf and the Dukes Ariulf of Spoleto and Arichis of Benevento, Gregory soon had to deal, as, when difficulties arose, Romanus, the exarch, or representative, of the emperor, preferred to remain in sulky inactivity at Ravenna. It soon became clear that, if any successful resistance was to be made against the Lombards, it must be by the pope's own exertions. How keenly he felt the difficulty and danger of his position appears in some of the earliest letters (Epp., I, iii, viii, xxx); but no actual hostilities began till the summer of 592, when the pope received a threatening letter from Ariulf of Spoleto, which was followed almost immediately by the appearance of that chief before the walls of Rome. At the same time Arichis of Benevento advanced on Naples, which happened at the moment to have no bishop nor any officer of high rank in command of the garrison. Gregory at once took the surprising step of appointing a tribune on his own authority to take command of the city (Epp., II, xxxiv), and, when no notice of this strong action was taken by the imperial authorities, the pope conceived the idea of himself arranging a separate peace with the Lombards (Epp., II, xlv). No details of this peace have come down to us, but it seems certain that it was actually concluded (Epp., V, xxxvi). Dr. Hodgkin (*Italy and her Invaders*, v, 366) pronounces Gregory's action herein to have been wise and statesmanlike, but, at the same time, undoubtedly *ultra vires*, being quite beyond any legal competency then possessed by the pope, who thus "made a memorable stride towards complete independence". Gregory's independent action had the effect of rousing up Romanus the exarch. Wholly

ignoring the papal peace, he gathered all his troops, attacked and regained Perugia, and then marched to Rome, where he was received with imperial honors. The next spring, however, he quitted the city and took away its garrison with him, so that both pope and citizens were now more exasperated against him than before. Moreover, the exarch's campaign had roused the Northern Lombards, and King Agilulf marched on Rome, arriving there probably some time in June, 593. The terror aroused by his advance is still mirrored for us in Gregory's homilies on the Prophet Ezechiel, which were delivered at this time. The siege of the city was soon abandoned, however, and Agilulf retired. The continuator of Prosper (*Mon. Germ. SS. Antiq.*, IX, 339) relates that Agilulf met the pope in person on the steps of the Basilica of St. Peter, which was then outside the city walls, and "being melted by Gregory's prayers and greatly moved by the wisdom and religious gravity of this great man, he broke up the siege of the city"; but, in view of the silence both of Gregory himself and of Paul the Deacon on the point, the story seems scarcely probable. In *Epp.*, V, xxxix, Gregory refers to himself as "the paymaster of the Lombards", and most likely a large payment from the papal treasury was the chief inducement to raise the siege. The pope's great desire now was to secure a lasting peace with the Lombards, which could only be achieved by a proper arrangement between the imperial authorities and the Lombard chiefs. On Queen Theodelinde, a Catholic and a personal friend, Gregory placed all his hopes. The exarch, however, looked at the whole affair in another light, and, when a whole year was passed in fruitless negotiations, Gregory began once again to mediate a private treaty. Accordingly, in May, 595, the pope wrote to a friend at Ravenna a letter (*Epp.*, V, xxxiv) threatening to make peace with Agilulf even without the consent of the Exarch Romanus. This threat was speedily reported to Constantinople, where the exarch was in high favor, and the Emperor Maurice at once sent off to Gregory a violent letter, now lost, accusing him of being both a traitor and a fool. This letter Gregory received in June, 595. Luckily, the pope's answer has been preserved to us (*Epp.*, V, xxxvi). It must be read in its entirety to be appreciated fully; probably very few emperors, if any, have ever received such a letter from a subject. Still, in spite of his scathing reply, Gregory seems to have realized that independent action could not secure what he wished, and we hear no more about a separate peace. Gregory's relations with the Exarch Romanus became continually more and more strained until the latter's death in the year 596 or early in 597. The new exarch, Callinicus, was a man of far greater ability and well disposed towards the pope, whose hopes now revived. The official peace negotiations were pushed on, and, in spite of delays, the articles were at length signed in 599, to Gregory's great joy. This peace lasted two years, but in 601 the war broke out again through an aggressive act on the part of Callinicus, who was recalled two years later, when his successor, Smaragdus, again made a peace with the Lombards which endured until after Gregory's death. Two points stand out for special notice in Gregory's dealings with the Lombards: first, his determination that, in spite of the apathy of the imperial authorities, Rome should not pass into the hands of some half-civilized Lombard duke and so sink into insignificance and decay; second, his independent action in appointing governors to cities, providing munitions of war, giving instructions to generals, sending ambassadors to the Lombard king, and even negotiating a peace without the exarch's aid. Whatever the theory may have been, there is no doubt about the fact that, besides his spiritual jurisdiction, Gregory actually exercised no small amount of temporal power.

Of Gregory's relations with the Franks there is no need to write at length, as the intercourse he established with the Frankish kings practically lapsed at his death, and was not renewed for about a hundred years. On the other hand he exercised a great influence on Frankish monasticism, which he did much to strengthen and reshape, so that the work done by the monasteries in civilizing the wild Franks may be attributed ultimately to the first monk-pope.

#### (5) Relations with the Imperial Government

The reign of Gregory the Great marks an epoch in papal history, and this is specially the case in respect to his attitude towards the imperial Government centered at Constantinople. Gregory seems to have looked upon Church and State as co-operating to form a united whole, which acted in two distinct spheres, ecclesiastical and secular. Over this commonwealth were the pope and the emperor, each supreme in his own department, care being taken to keep these as far as possible distinct and independent. The latter point was the difficulty. Gregory definitely held that it was a duty of the secular ruler to protect the Church and preserve the "peace of the faith" (Mor., XXXI, viii), and so he is often found to call in the aid of the secular arm, not merely to suppress schism, heresy, or idolatry, but even to enforce discipline among monks and clergy (Epp., I, lxxii; II, xxix; III, lix; IV, vii, xxxii; V, xxxii; VIII, iv; XI, xii, xxxvii; XIII, xxxvi). If the emperor interfered in church matters the pope's policy was to acquiesce if possible, unless obedience was sinful, according to the principle laid down in Epp. XI, xxix; "Quod ipse [se imperator] fecerit, si canonicum est, sequimur; si vero canonicum non est, in quantum sine peccato nostro, portamus." In taking this line Gregory was undoubtedly influenced by his deep reverence for the emperor, whom he regarded as the representative of God in all things secular, and must still be treated with all possible respect, even when he encroached on the borders of the papal authority. On his side, although he certainly regarded himself as "superior in place and rank" to the exarch (Epp., II, xiv), Gregory objected strongly to the interference of ecclesiastical authorities in matters secular. As supreme guardian of Christian justice, the pope was always ready to intercede for, or protect anyone who suffered unjust treatment (Epp., I, xxxv, xxxvi, xlvii, lix; III, v; V, xxxviii; IX, iv, xlvi, lv, cxiii, clxxxii; XI, iv), but at the same time he used the utmost tact in approaching the imperial officials. In Epp., I, xxxix a, he explains for the benefit of his Sicilian agent the precise attitude to be adopted in such matters. Still, in conjunction with all this deference, Gregory retained a spirit of independence which enabled him, when he considered it necessary, to address even the emperor in terms of startling directness. Space makes it impossible to do more than refer to the famous letters to the Emperor Phocas on his usurpation and the allusions in them to the murdered Emperor Maurice (Epp., XIII, xxxiv, xli, xlii). Every kind of judgment has been passed upon Gregory for writing these letters, but the question remains a difficult one. Probably the pope's conduct herein was due to two things: first, his ignorance of the way in which Phocas had reached the throne; and second, his view that the emperor was God's representative on earth, and therefore deserving of all possible respect in his official capacity, his personal character not coming into the question at all. It should be noted, also, that he avoids any direct flattery towards the new emperor, merely using the exaggerated phrases of respect then

customary, and expressing the high hopes he entertains of the new regime. Moreover, his allusions to Maurice refer to the sufferings of the people under his government, and do not reflect on the dead emperor himself. Had the empire been sound instead of in a hopelessly rotten state when Gregory became pope, it is hard to say how his views might have worked out in practice. As it was, his line of strong independence, his efficiency, and his courage carried all before them, and when he died there was no longer any question as to who was the first power in Italy.

#### (6) Missionary Work

Gregory's zeal for the conversion of the heathen, and in particular of the Angles, has been mentioned already, and there is no need to dwell at length on the latter subject, as it has been fully treated under AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY, SAINT. In justice to the great pope, however, it must be added that he lost no opportunity for the exercise of his missionary zeal, making every effort to root out paganism in Gaul, Donatism in Africa, and the Schism of the Three Chapters in North Italy and Istria. In his treatment of heretics, schismatics, and pagans his method was to try every means — persuasions, exhortations, threats — before resorting to force; but, if gentler treatment failed, he had no hesitation in accordance with the ideas of his age, in resorting to compulsion, and invoking the aid of the secular arm therein. It is curious, therefore, to find him acting as a champion and protector of the Jews. In Epp., I, xiv, he expressly deprecates the compulsory baptism of Jews, and many instances appear in which he insists on their right to liberty of action, so far as the law permitted, both in civil affairs and in the worship of the synagogue (Epp., I, xxxiv; II, vi; VIII, xxv; IX, xxxviii, cxcv; XIII, xv). He was equally strong, however, in preventing the Jews from exceeding the rights granted to them by the imperial law, especially with regard to the ownership by them of Christian slaves (Epp., II, vi; III, xxxvii; IV, ix, xxi; VI, xxix; VII, xxi; VIII, xxi; IX, civ, ccxiii, ccxv). We shall probably be right, therefore, in attributing Gregory's protection of the Jews to his respect for law and justice, rather than to any ideas of toleration differing from those current at the time.

#### (7) Gregory and Monasticism

Although the first monk to become pope, Gregory was in no sense an original contributor to monastic ideals or practice. He took monasticism as he found it established by St. Benedict, and his efforts and influence were given to strengthening and enforcing the prescriptions of that greatest of monastic legislators. His position did indeed tend to modify St. Benedict's work by drawing it into a closer connection with the organization with the organization of the Church, and with the papacy in particular, but this was not deliberately aimed at by Gregory. Rather he was himself convinced that the monastic system had a very special value for the Church, and so he did everything in his power to diffuse and propagate it. His own property was consecrated to this end, he urged many wealthy people to establish or support monasteries, and he used the revenues of the patrimony for the same purpose. He was relentless in correcting abuses and enforcing discipline, the letters on such matters being far too numerous for mention here, and the points on which he insists most are precisely those, such as stability and poverty, on

which St. Benedict's recent legislation had laid special stress. Twice only do we find anything like direct legislation by the pope. The first point is that of the age at which a nun might be made abbess, which he fixes at "not less than sixty years" (Epp., IV, xi). The second is his lengthening of the period of novitiate. St. Benedict had prescribed at least one year (Reg. Ben., lviii); Gregory (Epp., X, ix) orders two years, with special precautions in the case of slaves who wished to become monks. More important was his line of action in the difficult question of the relation between monks and their bishop. There is plenty of evidence to show that many bishops took advantage of their position to oppress and burden the monasteries in their diocese, with the result that the monks appealed to the pope for protection. Gregory, while always upholding the spiritual jurisdiction of the bishop, was firm in support of the monks against any illegal aggression. All attempts on the part of a bishop to assume new powers over the monks in his diocese were condemned, while at times the pope issued documents, called *Privilegia*, in which he definitely set forth certain points on which the monks were exempt from episcopal control (Epp., V, xlix; VII, xii; VIII, xvii; XII, xi, xii, xiii). This action on Gregory's part undoubtedly began the long progress by which the monastic bodies have come to be under the direct control of the Holy See. It should be mentioned that in Gregory's day the current view was that ecclesiastical work, such as the cure of souls, preaching, administering the sacraments, etc., was not compatible with the monastic state, and in this view the pope concurred. On the other hand a passage in Epp., XII, iv, where he directs that a certain layman "should be tonsured either as a monk or a subdeacon", would suggest that the pope held the monastic state as in some way equivalent to the ecclesiastical; for his ultimate intention in this case was to promote the layman in question to the episcopate.

#### (8) Death, Canonization, Relics, Emblem

The last years of Gregory's life were filled with every kind of suffering. His mind, naturally serious, was filled with despondent forebodings, and his continued bodily pains were increased and intensified. His "sole consolation was the hope that death would come quickly" (Epp., XIII, xxvi). The end came on 12 March, 604, and on the same day his body was laid to rest in front of the sacristy in the portico of St. Peter's Basilica. Since then the relics have been moved several times, the most recent translation being that by Paul V in 1606, when they were placed in the chapel of Clement V near the entrance of the modern sacristy. There is some evidence that the body was taken to Soissons in France in the year 826, but probably only some large relic is meant. Venerable Bede (Hist. Eccl., II, i) gives the epitaph placed on his tomb which contains the famous phrase referring to Gregory as *consul Dei*. His canonization by popular acclamation followed at once on his death, and survived a reaction against his memory which seems to have occurred soon afterwards. In art the great pope is usually shown in full pontifical robes with the tiara and double cross. A dove is his special emblem, in allusion to the well-known story recorded by Peter the Deacon (Vita, xxviii), who tells that when the pope was dictating his homilies on Ezechiel a veil was drawn between his secretary and himself. As, however, the pope remained silent for long periods at a time, the servant made a hole in the curtain and, looking through, beheld a dove seated upon Gregory's head with its beak between his lips. When the dove withdrew its beak the holy pontiff

spoke and the secretary took down his words; but when he became silent the servant again applied his eye to the hole and saw the dove had replaced its beak between his lips. The miracles attributed to Gregory are very many, but space forbids even the barest catalogue of them.

## (9) Conclusion

It is beyond the scope of this notice to attempt any elaborate estimate of the work, influence, and character of Pope Gregory the Great, but some short focusing of the features given above is only just. First of all, perhaps, it will be best to clear the ground by admitting frankly what Gregory was not. He was not a man of profound learning, not a philosopher, not a conversationalist, hardly even a theologian in the constructive sense of the term. He was a trained Roman lawyer and administrator, a monk, a missionary, a preacher, above all a physician of souls and a leader of men. His great claim to remembrance lies in the fact that he is the real father of the medieval papacy (Milman). With regard to things spiritual, he impressed upon men's minds to a degree unprecedented the fact that the See of Peter was the one supreme, decisive authority in the Catholic Church. During his pontificate, he established close relations between the Church of Rome and those of Spain, Gaul, Africa, and Illyricum, while his influence in Britain was such that he is justly called the Apostle of the English. In the Eastern Churches, too, the papal authority was exercised with a frequency unusual before his time, and we find no less an authority than the Patriarch of Alexandria submitting himself humbly to the pope's "commands". The system of appeals to Rome was firmly established, and the pope is found to veto or confirm the decrees of synods, to annul the decisions of patriarchs, and inflict punishment on ecclesiastical dignitaries precisely as he thinks right. Nor is his work less noteworthy in its effect on the temporal position of the papacy. Seizing the opportunity which circumstances offered, he made himself in Italy a power stronger than emperor or exarch, and established a political influence which dominated the peninsula for centuries. From this time forth the varied populations of Italy looked to the pope for guidance, and Rome as the papal capital continued to be the centre of the Christian world. Gregory's work as a theologian and Doctor of the Church is less notable. In the history of dogmatic development he is important as summing up the teaching of the earlier Fathers and consolidating it into a harmonious whole, rather than as introducing new developments, new methods, new solutions of difficult questions. It was precisely because of this that his writings became to a great extent the compendium theologiae or textbook of the Middle Ages, a position for which his work in popularizing his great predecessors fitted him well. Achievements so varied have won for Gregory the title of "the Great", but perhaps, among our English-speaking races, he is honored most of all as the pope who loved the bright-faced Angles, and taught them first to sing the Angels' song.

## HIS WRITINGS

Genuine, Doubtful, Spurious

Of the writings commonly attributed to Gregory the following are now admitted as genuine on all hands: "Moralium Libri XXXV"; "Regulae Pastoralis Liber"; "Dialogorum Libri IV"; "Homiliarum in Ezechielem Prophetam Libri II"; "Homiliarum in Evangelia Libri II"; "Epistolarum Libri XIV". The following are almost certainly spurious: "In Librum Primum Regum Variarum Expositionum Libri VI"; "expositio super Cantica Cantorum"; "Expositio in VII Psalmos Poenitentiales"; "Concordia Quorundam Testimoniorum S. Scripturae". Besides the above there are attributed to Gregory certain liturgical hymns, the Gregorian Sacramentary, and the Antiphonary. (See ANTIPHONARY; SACRAMENTARY.)

Works of Gregory; complete or partial editions; translations, recensions, etc.

"Opera S. Gregorii Magni: (Editio princeps, Paris, 1518); ed. P. Tossianensis (6 vols., Rome, 1588-03); ed. P. Goussainville (3 vols., Paris, 1675); ed. Cong. S. Mauri (Sainte-Marthe) (4 vols., Paris, 1705); the last-named re-edited with additions by J. B. Gallicioli (17 vols., Venice, 1768-76) and reprinted in Migne, P.L., LXXV-LXXIX. "Epistolae", ed. P. Ewald and L. M. Hartmann in "Mon. Germ. Hist.: Epist.", I, II (Berlin, 1891-99); this is the authoritative edition of the text of the Epistles (all references given above are to this edition); Jaffe, "Regesta Pontif." (2nd ed., Rome, 1885), I, 143-219; II, 738; Turchi, "S. Greg. M. Epp. Selectae" (Rome, 1907); P. Ewald, "Studien zur Ausgabe des Registers Gregors I." in "Neues Archiv", III, 433-625; L.M. Hartmann in "Neues Archiv", XV, 411, 529; XVII, 493; Th. Mommsen in "Neues Archiv", XVII, 189; English translation: J. Barmby, "Selected Epistles" in "Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers", 2nd Series, XII, XIII (Oxford and New York, 1895, 1898), "Regula Pastoralis Curae", ed. E. W. Westhoff (Munster, 1860); ed. H. Hurter, S.J., in "SS. Patr. Opuse. Select.", XX; ed. A. M. Micheletti (Tournai, 1904); ed. B. Sauter (Freiburg, 1904); English translations: "King Alfred's West Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care", ed. H. Sweet (London, 1871); "The Book of Pastoral Care" (tr. J. Barmby) in "Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers", 2nd Series, XII (Oxford and New York, 1895). "Dialogorum Libri IV": very many editions of the whole work have appeared, and also of Bk. II, "Of the Life and Miracles of St. Benedict", separately; an old English translation has been reprinted by H. Coleridge, S. J. (London, 1874); L. Wiese, "Die Sprache der Dialoge" (Halle, 1900); H. Delehaye, "S. Gregoirele Grand dans Phagiographie Grecque" in "Analecta Bolland." (1904), 449-54; B. Sauter, "Der heilige Vater Benediktus nach St. Gregor dem Grossen" (Freiburg, 1904). "Hom. XL in Evangelia", ed. H. Hurter in "SS. Patrum Opuse. Select.", series II, Tom. VI (Innsbruck, 1892). G. Pfeilschifter Gregors der Gr." (Munich, 1900). "Magna Moralia", Eng. tr. in "Library of the Fathers" (4 vols., Oxford, 1844); Prunner, "Gnade und Sunde nach Gregors expositio in Job" (Eichstätt, 1855).