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“For it improper to be addicted to the tedium of affliction”: Christian Responses to Pandemic in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages²

1. Introduction

In *Liber regulae pastoralis*, one of the most enduringly popular patristic works, Gregory I³, bishop of Rome between 590 and 604, at the start

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³ On Gregory see G.R. Evans, *The Thought of Gregory the Great*, Cambridge 1986; Grégoire le Grand. *Chantilly Centre culturel Les Fontaines 15–19 septembre 1982*, ed. J. Fontaine – R. Gillet – S. Pellistrandi, Colloques Internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris 1986; C. Straw, *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection*, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 14, Berkeley – Los Angeles 1988; R.A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World*, Cambridge 1997; S.B. Gajano, *Gregorio I, santo*, in: *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, v. 1, ed. M. Bray, Rome 2000, p. 546-574; J. Moorhead, *Gregory the Great*, The Early Church Fathers, London – New York, 2005; C. Hanlon, *The Horizons of a Bishop’s World: The Letters of Gregory the Great*, in: *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*, v. 4: *The Spiritual Life*, ed. W. Mayer – P. Allen – L. Cross, Strathfield 2006, p. 339-349; A.J. Ekonomou, *Byzantine Rome and the Greek Popes: Eastern Influences on Rome and the Papacy from Gregory the Great to Zacharias, A.D. 590–752*, Lanham 2007, p. 1-41; C. Leyser, *The Memory of Gregory the Great and*

of his episcopal ministry presented his thoughts on the qualities and functions of those who provide pastoral care within the Christian community⁴. Among the many gems of wisdom contained therein we find the following:

Let the ruler not relax the care of the inner life by preoccupying himself with external matters, nor should his solicitude for the inner life bring neglect of the external lest, being engrossed with what is external, he be ruined inwardly, or being preoccupied with what concerns only his inner self, he does not bestow on his neighbours the necessary external care⁵.

My interest here is with pastoral care not in normal but in extraordinary circumstances. How did these balanced directives apply in a crisis situation? The topic of episcopal crisis management is one investigated by Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil in a volume that took as its cut-off the start of Gregory's episcopacy⁶. One of the aims of this paper is to extend chronologically their research slightly to consider the pastoral care Gregory offered in a crisis. Allen and Neil note that natural disasters are one classification of crises and that among natural disasters are epidemic diseases. Most prominent among such diseases was the plague of Justinian, the first plague pandemic, which ravaged the Mediterranean world and beyond from the sixth to the eighth centuries, although there is no reference in episcopal letters except one from Gelasius (492–496), one of Gregory's predecessors in Rome⁷. Even so, they note that "it would have been impos-

the Making of Latin Europe, 700–1000, "Oxford University History Working Papers" 7 (2013), who estimates that only about a quarter of the letters in *Registrum* survive; and G.E. Demacopoulos, *Gregory the Great: Ascetic, Pastor, and First Man of Rome*, Notre Dame 2015, especially p. 57-81.

⁴ See P. Allen – W. Mayer, *Through a Bishop's Eyes: Towards a Definition of Pastoral Care in Late Antiquity*, "Augustinianum" 40 (2000) p. 345-397.

⁵ Gregorius Magnus, *Liber regulae pastoralis* 2, 7, SCh 381, p. 218: "Sit rector interiorum curam in exteriorum occupatione non minuens, exteriorum prouidentiam in interiorum sollicitudine non relinquens; ne aut exterioribus deditus ab intimis corruat, aut solis interioribus occupatus, quae foris debet proximis non impendat".

⁶ P. Allen – B. Neil, *Crisis Management in Late Antiquity (410–590): A Survey of the Evidence from Episcopal Letters*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 121, Leiden – Boston 2013. See also *Ancient Jewish and Christian Texts as Crisis Management Literature: Thematic Studies from the Centre for Early Christian Studies*, ed. D.C. Sim – P. Allen, Library of New Testament Studies 445, Edinburgh 2012 (especially B. Neil, *A Crisis of Orthodoxy: Leo I's Fight against the 'Deadly Disease' of Heresy*, p. 144-158).

⁷ Allen – Neil, *Crisis Management*, p. 83-86.

sible for contemporary bishops in the empire, both East and West, to avoid dealing with the physical, psychological and social implications of such a long-running disaster [...]”⁸. This would suggest that Gregory’s theory matched their expectations.

Had Allen and Neil extended their research, as I intend to do here, they would have discovered a rather different situation in Gregory’s *Registrum epistularum*. Of all the crises with which a bishop had to deal that of epidemic disease is particularly appropriate given the world’s present experience, which, although of a different disease, is one that, before much was known about it, was feared as being potentially just as lethal and untreatable as was the plague in the sixth to eighth centuries.

The aim here is threefold. First, I shall examine Gregory’s epistolary output to determine the extent to which the pandemic affected the kind of pastoral care he offered. Before we can begin to examine how his epistolary practice realised his theory, we need to note that his theory was not as simple as cited above. In Gregory’s hands pastoral care was about teaching and admonition more than practical action. He saw himself as a physician of the heart⁹. Regarding the admonitions a bishop was to give to various groups within his community, set out in a series of binary opposites, in the third part of *Liber regulae pastoralis*, we see an almost exclusive focus on the inner rather than outer person, the spiritual rather than the physical. He wrote regarding the different ways the healthy and sick are to be admonished:

The hale are to be admonished in one way, the sick in another. The hale are to be admonished to employ bodily health in [sic] behalf of mental health [...] The hale are to [be] admonished not to set aside the opportunity of winning eternal salvation [...] On the other hand, the sick are to be admonished to realise that they are sons of God by the very fact that the scourge of discipline chastises them. For unless it were in His plan to give them an inheritance after their chastisement, He would not trouble to school them in affliction [...] The sick are to be admonished to consider how great a gift is bodily affliction, in that it both cleanses sins committed and restrains such as could be committed [...]”¹⁰.

⁸ Allen – Neil, *Crisis Management*, p. 84.

⁹ Gregorius Magnus, *Liber regulae pastoralis* 1, 1, SCh 381, p. 3.

¹⁰ Gregorius Magnus, *Liber regulae pastoralis* 3, 12, SCh 382, p. 322-330: “Aliter ammonendi sunt incolumes, atque aliter aegri. Ammonendi sunt incolumes, ut salute corporis exerceant ad salute mentis [...]. Ammonendi sunt incolumes, ne opportunitatem sa-

Gregory's sense of pastoral care in *Liber regulae pastoralis* overall seems more about shaping appropriate attitudes rather than organising practical amelioration. This is not to say that such assistance was not considered to be part of a bishop's pastoral remit, just that such action-oriented assistance was not the subject of this work. Even if addressing one's physical needs were not as important as addressing spiritual ones¹¹, the physical needs were not to be neglected, according to the precepts of the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25 or the good Samaritan in Luke 10¹². Yet, what we find in Gregory's letters is a complete lack of interest in the physical needs of plague victims. An explanation needs to be found.

Second, attention is turned to a practical response Gregory took at the very beginning of his episcopate to the presence of plague in Rome: the great seven-fold procession. We learn of this procession from Gregory of Tours' version of Gregory the Great's homily on the occasion as well as from a version of the homily preserved in the Roman Gregory's *Registrum*. The importance of this event to Gregory of Tours will be appreciated within the wider context of the Gallic bishop's own reflections on the plague and the narrative context in which he placed his Roman colleague's homily. What we shall discover from that narrative context is that Gregory of Tours reimagined and reapplied Gregory of Rome's homily to suit his own purposes, which in turn helps us better appreciate Gregory I's pastoral intentions.

Third, I shall analyse the various ways in which Gregory's response to plague was remembered in the later tradition even beyond its impact on Gregory of Tours. Gregory's actions had a long literary afterlife, particularly recalled in other fraught moments of pandemic. Do Gregory's thoughts and actions continue to have any relevance for Christians today confronting and coping with the COVID-19 pandemic?

The central argument of this article is that Gregory's active pastoral care in managing crises as exemplified in his letters and the procession

lutis in perpetuum promerendae despiciant [...]. At contra ammonendi sunt aegri, ut eo se Dei filios sentiant, quo illos disciplinae flagella castigant. Nisi enim correctis hereditatem dare disposeret, erudire eos per molestias non curare [...]. Ammonendi sunt aegri ut considerent quanti sit muneris molestia corporalis, quae et admissa peccata diluit, et e aquae poterant admitti compescit [...]"

¹¹ See Straw, *Gregory the Great*, p. 47-65, for Gregory's complex relationship between flesh and spirit, the subservience of flesh to spirit, and the proof of the faith of the spirit through the works of the flesh.

¹² See Demacopoulos, *Gregory the Great*, p. 28-30.

never approached the balanced position of caring for both body and spirit, as he had advocated in book 2 of *Liber regulae pastoralis* in considering more typical or normal times. The ruthlessness, speed, and extent of the plague made attempts to care for victims' physical needs both overwhelming and futile. However, in later memory, Gregory was presented as the bishop who delivered Rome from the presence of the plague.

2. Gregory on Pastoral Care during Plague in His Letters

There is a considerable body of scholarly literature in recent decades devoted to the first plague pandemic, which emerged in 541 in the Byzantine empire of Justinian I (527-565) and continued sporadically in the Middle East, Africa, and Europe until the second half of the eighth century¹³. It was

¹³ See J.C. Russell, *That Earlier Plague*, "Demography" 5 (1968) p. 174-184; P. Allen, *The 'Justinianic' Plague*, "Byzantion" 49 (1979) p. 5-20; A. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, London – New York 1996, p. 40-43; P. Sarris, *The Justinianic Plague: Origins and Effects*, "Continuity and Change" 17 (2002) p. 169-182; W. Rosen, *Justinian's Flea: The First Great Plague and the End of the Roman Empire*, London 2007, where there is only the briefest of references to Gregory I on 313 and which received negative reviews from historians; *Plague and the End of Antiquity: The Pandemic of 541–750*, ed. L.K. Little, Cambridge 2007; D.M. Wagner *et al.*, *Yersinia pestis and the Plague of Justinian 541–543 AD: A Genomic Analysis*, "The Lancet" 14 (2014) p. 319-326; M. Drancourt – D. Raoult, *Yersinia pestis and the Three Plague Pandemics*, "The Lancet" 14 (2014) p. 918-919; M. Meier, *The 'Justinianic Plague': The Economic Consequences of the Pandemic in the Eastern Roman Empire and its Cultural and Religious Effects*, "Early Medieval Europe" 24 (2016) p. 267-292; P. Heather, *Rome Resurgent: War and Empire in the Age of Justinian*, Oxford 2018, p. 306-307; K. Sessa, *The New Environmental Fall of Rome: A Methodological Consideration*, "Journal of Late Antiquity" 12 (2019) p. 211-255; L. Mordechai – M. Eisenberg, *Rejecting Catastrophe: The Case of the Justinianic Plague*, "Past & Present" 244/1 (2019) p. 3-50; M. Eisenberg – L. Mordechai, *The Justinianic Plague: An Interdisciplinary Review*, "Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies" 43 (2019) p. 156-180; M. Keller *et al.*, *Ancient Yersinia Pestis Genomes from across Western Europe Reveal Early Diversification during the First Pandemic (541–750)*, "Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences", 4 June 2019, in: <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1820447116>; L. Mordechai *et al.*, *The Justinianic Plague: An Inconsequential Pandemic?*, "Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America" 116/51 (2019), in: <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1903799116>; and, more broadly, B.D. Shaw, *Seasons of Death: Aspects of Mortality in Imperial Rome*, JRS 86 (1996) p. 100-138; W. Scheidel, *Germes for Rome*, in: *Rome the Cosmopolis*, ed. C. Edwards – G. Woolf, Cambridge 2003, p. 158-176.

most likely to have been outbreaks of this bubonic plague that we find in several of Gregory's letters, although the precise nature of the ailment is not clear nor is it important for our purposes¹⁴. What is relevant is the fact that Gregory was responding to a widespread and seemingly uncontrollable outbreak of disease with a high mortality rate, the scale of which triggered global catastrophic risk. Gregory's reaction was not conditioned upon what sort of pandemic was present at any given time or place; what made it a crisis was its extent and impact, which was ubiquitous and seemingly lethal. We shall examine in this section four of his letters, each of which offers a slightly different perspective on how to face it, but all of which show an interest only in the spiritual rather than material welfare of survivors or victims.

In the most detailed of the four, written in the middle of 599 to Aregius, bishop of Gap (ancient Vapincum in the old Roman province of Narbonensis Secunda)¹⁵, Gregory I advised his Gallic colleague on how to offer pastoral ministry to the Christians entrusted to their care in a time of natural disaster. In his letter, Gregory did not say anything much about the nature of the disaster in southern Gaul, apart from the fact that Aregius had to leave Rome hurriedly because of the "illness of your people"¹⁶. It is impossible to tell exactly what was happening in Gap given the use of such a generic word as *infirmitas*, but it is clear that it was widespread among the people there, was causing much death over a long period of time and resulted in unbearable grief among the living. There are no graphic descriptions of the disease or its aftermath.

Gregory counselled Aregius not only "to bear his sadness with patience" but "to have a rest from grieving and to stop being sad" because

¹⁴ As M. Eisenberg and L. Mordechai (*The Justinianic Plague and Global Pandemics: The Making of the Plague Concept*, "American Historical Review" 125 (2020) p. 1632-1637) argue, the plague concept is the terrifying myth about what the plague could do, independent of its actual scientific impact. My interest is not with the wider realities of the plague as such, as exemplified by the literature in n. 12, but in how a bishop like Gregory I reacted to incidents of pandemic in light of that plague concept. In other words, whether or not Gregory was reacting to plague and whether or not the pandemic had an unparalleled impact is irrelevant to what Gregory believed he and others confronted. It is his constructed or imagined reality that is the subject of this research or, in other words, pandemic as a rhetorical reality rather than an epidemiological one.

¹⁵ L. Pietri – M. Hejmans, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire*, v. 4: *Gaule (314–614)*, Paris 2013, p. 192-195 (Aregius 3).

¹⁶ Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum* 9, 220, CCL 140A, p. 791: "hominum suorum infirmitate".

those who succumbed to the outbreak of whatever it was had “reached true life by dying”¹⁷. What happens to this life is of little consequence for those awaiting the next life. Indeed, although in the opening of the letter he stated that he was pained by Aregius’ tribulation and affliction at the loss of so many people in Gaul, Gregory went on to assert that “it is improper to be addicted to the tedium of affliction over them”¹⁸. A bishop’s responsibility was to help his flock maintain the right perspective. Such a perspective was offered by 1 Thessalonians 4:13. Being consumed by grief over the dead was a cause of blame; what bishops were to do instead is show affection for the living¹⁹. They were to do this “by reproving, by exhorting, by persuading, by soothing and by consoling”²⁰. Not only was overwhelming grief pointless, but it was in moments of sorrow and despair that the enemy, the devil, could ensnare the hapless Christian. A bishop is to pray for God’s grace that Christians can produce good works and return to God’s path²¹. This certainly aligns with what he said in the third part of *Liber regulae pastoralis*. He admonished Aregius that a bishop is to lead his community in prayer for God’s clemency²². *Clementia* would indicate that the tribulation being experienced was a punishment from God and that only God could mitigate it. Yet this is not explored in this letter; Gregory’s developed

¹⁷ Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum* 9, 220, CCL 140, p. 790-791: “atienter ferre tristitiam”; “quiesce dolere” and “ad ueram uitam moriendo peruenisse”.

¹⁸ Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum* 9, 220, CCL 140A, p. 791: “indecens est de illis taedio afflictionis addici”.

¹⁹ A. Kennedy (*The Sword of God: Plague and Episcopal Authority in the Late Antique West*, Missouri-Columbia 2017, p. 33-34, MA diss.) draws attention to the empathy that Gregory shows Aregius before reproving him for his bad example undermining the faith of the flock at a time when they need his good example the most.

²⁰ Gregorius Magnus, *Registum* 9, 220, CCL 140, p. 791: “obiurgando, hortando, suadendo, blandiendo, consolando”.

²¹ Kennedy (*The Sword of God*, p. 31) in talking of Christians meriting heaven does not pay attention to the careful way in which Gregory avoids such a Pelagian heretical statement. See C. Straw, *Gregory’s Moral Theology: Divine Providence and Human Responsibility*, in: *A Companion to Gregory the Great*, ed. B. Neil – M.J. Dal Santo, Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition 47, Leiden – Boston 2013, p. 177-204. Kennedy’s idea (*The Sword of God*, p. 35) that Aregius’ grief was manifested in too much private prayer that prevented him from attending to his pastoral responsibilities, while intriguing, is not supported here. Gregory’s information would have come from Aregius’ non-extant letter, in which it would have been more likely for the Gallic bishop to have written of his emotional paralysis in the face of such overwhelming tragedy, since Gregory’s response addresses Aregius’ suffering, sadness, grief, and torment.

²² Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum* 9, 220, CCL 140A, p. 791.

comments are only about how a surviving Christian is to react to it rather than defeat it. The only advantage of being left alive, it would seem, is that it gave the living a further opportunity to pass God's test.

Gregory tells us nothing about the impact on victims. It is difficult to analyse this letter in terms set forth in *Liber regulae pastoralis* because there is not a binary opposite that fits perfectly. Gregory was dealing with a situation that involved the dead and the grieving; it would seem there was not much point in counselling the sick because not only was their death inevitable but it was going to be swift. The dead were beyond admonition (although they could still be the subject of pastoral care in the way their bodies were treated, which was not discussed in the letter). For the sorrowful Gregory had written in his handbook on pastoral care about the spiritual admonition to be given to them:

Thus, to the joyful are to be displayed the sad things that accompany punishment, but to the sad, the glad promises of the Kingdom. The joyful should learn by severe warnings what to fear, the sad should be told of the rewards to which they may look forward²³.

Gregory did indeed seek to extinguish the anguish of those in Gap by reference to the promises of the afterlife for themselves and those who had died. In terms of how the community was coping with things, it is obvious that they were not; Gregory's position was that the community and its bishop had lost perspective and succumbed to excessive grief. The threat of a pandemic was that it undermined people's faith by making God appear arbitrary and cruel or impotent. This is the fundamental question addressed in Christian theodicy: why does a good God allow overwhelming evil to wreck havoc? In letter-writing Gregory did not present a systematic answer; he offered a theological perspective: falling victim to evil but not succumbing to evil took one more swiftly to heaven. How the community responded to Gregory's insights is not known.

Nothing at all is said about taking care of any other needs of the living besides their spiritual one of not giving way to despondency. The treatment of the sick while they suffered, the care offered to the dead through burial, or even the care for the living in terms of physical needs,

²³ Gregorius Magnus, *Liber regulae pastoralis* 3, 3, SCh 382, p. 272-274: "Laetis uidelicet inferenda sunt tristia quae sequuntur ex supplicio; tristibus uero inferenda sunt laeta quae promittuntur ex regno. Discant laeti ex minarum asperitate quod timeant; audient tristes praemiorum gaudia de quibus praesumant".

like shelter and protection, is not given the slightest attention. I take this as an indication of just how extreme and inordinate a situation had been created by plague.

In September 591 he had written to Praeiectus, bishop of Narni (ancient Narnia in the old Roman province of Tuscia et Umbria)²⁴. It would seem that information had not come to Rome from Praeiectus himself. Here Gregory is explicit; sin is the cause of the deadly epidemic that is everywhere²⁵. This sin is committed not only by Christians themselves but by pagans and heretics. The reaction from Gregory was one of distress. The solution was for the bishop to admonish and exhort in an effort to convert those outside to the true faith in order that either heavenly compassion in light of their conversion may help (presumably by keeping them safe) or, if they died, their conversion into a sinless state would guarantee their reception into heaven. The latter was preferable for Gregory²⁶. Unable to offer anything that would alleviate or mitigate the spread of the plague or the symptoms people suffered, Gregory was not advising a Stoic ‘grin-and-bear-it’ attitude but, even more radically, was calling on believers to welcome and embrace death as a way out of this decaying world.

In the absence of any aetiology of disease being the result of pathogenic microorganisms and parasitic infestation, supernatural responsibility, as a punishment for wrongdoing, was Gregory’s explanation. Of course, the notion of divine origin for disease not only was not peculiarly Christian, it was not the only theory about disease in the antique and late antique worlds. Galen’s notion from late in the third century of pestilence as the result of miasma upsetting the balance of the humours in the body, for instance, one that offered a more naturalistic explanation than divine vengeance, was not embraced by Gregory²⁷. Gregory’s only treatment was to

²⁴ See C. Pietri – L. Pietri, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire*, v. 2: *Italie (313–604)*, Rome 1999, p. 1814 (Praeiecticius).

²⁵ Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum* 2, 2, CCL 140, p. 90-91: “mortalitatem omnino grassari. Quae res nimis addixit [Martyn reads afflixit]”.

²⁶ See Markus, *Gregory the Great*, p. 51-67; K.L. Hester, *Eschatology and Pain in St. Gregory the Great: The Christological Synthesis of Gregory’s ‘Morals on the Book of Job’*, *Studies in Christian History and Thought*, Eugene 2008; J. Baun, *Gregory’s Eschatology*, in: *A Companion to Gregory the Great*, ed. B. Neil – M.J. Dal Santo, Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition 47, Leiden – Boston 2013, p. 157-176.

²⁷ See R. Flemming, *Galen and the Plague*, in: *Galen’s Treatise Περὶ Ἀλωπτίας (De indolentia) in Context: A Tale of Resilience*, ed. C. Petit, *Studies in Ancient Medicine* 52, Leiden – Boston 2019, p. 219-244, for questions the idea that the Antonine plague was smallpox. See also L. Cilliers, *Roman North Africa: Environment, Society and Medical*

try and ameliorate the divine wrath. But beyond that, Gregory follows the Irenaean theodicy of seeing God's indiscriminate punishment of everyone as an opportunity for the righteous to escape this world and reach their preferred and ultimate destination. The idea of being purged or proved through suffering is evident²⁸. How the community was coping before and after Gregory's letter is not revealed. Death was punishment for the sinful but escape for the righteous.

Within about a month after having written to Aregius, Gregory wrote to the aristocratic Venantius and his wife Italica in Sicily²⁹. Venantius suffered from gout, as did Gregory, which had seen the bishop confined to bed for eleven months. It was taken to be a punishment for sin, for which the only (real) remedy was death³⁰. Our interest is not with the personal suffering of two individuals, but with the plague taking its toll around them. Gregory mentioned the widespread impact of feverous sickness (*febrium languores*) in Rome and its surrounds, among all classes of people, and indicated that it must be even worse in Sicily because of its proximity to Africa, and that the situation was even worse in the East. This seems to be another reference to plague. Gregory took this as a sign of the end of the world and recommended that Venantius not to be so engrossed in his own private suffering but, fearing the nearness of the strict judge, to attend only to his soul (and not to his body) through the cultivation of piety in the hope that, following 1 Timothy 4:8, it would lead to long life here and eternal joy in the next³¹. This is very much in line with what he had written about the healthy and the sick in *Liber regulae pastoralis*, where sickness is a test or an opportunity for growth. What is different here is that the scale of the natural disaster has apocalyptic implications that makes individual suffering inconsequential.

In a further letter to Venantius in January 601, Gregory again referred to their shared debilitating affliction of gout, noting that the pain was a re-

Contribution, Social Worlds of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, Amsterdam 2019, p. 79-95.

²⁸ See J. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, New York 2010, p. 201-242, who contrasts an Augustinian theodicy based on fall and free will with an Irenaean one based on human development, where evil is a testing ground for improvement.

²⁹ See Pietri – Pietri, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire*, v. 2, p. 2255-2256 (Venantius 6) and 1164–1165 (Italica 3).

³⁰ Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum* 9, 232, CCL 140A, p. 814. On understandings of gout and its treatment in antiquity see G. Nuki – P.A. Simkin, *A Concise History of Gout and Hyperuricemia and their Treatment*, "Arthritis Research & Theory" 8 (2006) in <https://doi.org/10.1186/ar1906>.

³¹ Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum* 9, 232, CCL 140A, p. 814.

minder of sin and an opportunity to thank God³². The idea of suffering as not simply punitive but remedial is explicit³³. Pain that leads to conversion is atoning, but pain that is ignored by not addressing its underlying sinful cause is bound to be eternal. For the living Gregory can say that God is merciful because despite deserving lethal punishment they have not been slaughtered; it is better that the threat produces change rather than is acted upon. Suffering is a warning³⁴. This second letter to Venantius does not mention pandemics but the idea of suffering, whatever its cause, is transferable.

A little over a year after he wrote to Aregius, in August 600, Gregory wrote to Dominic, bishop of Carthage³⁵, about how he had learnt that plague was sweeping through Africa. Gregory's words would seem to indicate that he had not learnt of this from Dominic³⁶. This may be the reason why Dominic was not admonished as Aregius had been, simply because Dominic had not revealed his thoughts and feelings about the pandemic. Gregory admits that he is full of grief³⁷. He even admits that this, what we may take as an initial reaction, would have led to hopelessness had he not had his faith upon which to rely. Turning to Matthew 24:31³⁸, Gregory mentions the trumpet of the gospels sounding long ago for the faithful. By "long ago" did Gregory mean in the time of Jesus (which would be to twist the meaning of Jesus' words, which are about the final judgement), which is probably the most likely, or a couple of generations before his own time when the plague of Justinian burst forth? He even says that the trumpet announced the arrival of pestilence, war, and other things, which gives us an apocalyptic dimension³⁹. The initial human reaction of fear is

³² Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum* 11, 18, CCL 140, p. 887.

³³ Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum* 11, 18, CCL 140, p. 887: "Quoniam qui ex carnis blandimento multa peccauimus, ex carnis afflictione purgamur".

³⁴ Straw, *Gregory the Great*, p. 142-143.

³⁵ On Dominic see Markus, *Gregory the Great*, p. 197-198 and 201-202.

³⁶ Cf. Kennedy, *The Sword of God*, p. 38-39, who thinks that Gregory was "empathizing with his correspondent." If this letter were not a reply to one Dominic had sent, but one sent on Gregory's own initiative from information he had received from some third party, it cannot be said that he was empathizing with Dominic but rather imagining what he would have felt.

³⁷ Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum* 10, 20, CCL 140A, p. 850.

³⁸ Mark 13:27 does not mention the trumpet associated with the sending of the angels to gather the elect at the coming of the Son of Man, and, further, Luke 21:27-28, does not mention the sending of the angels.

³⁹ Luke 21:11 had added plagues or pestilence (λοιμοί) to wars, earthquakes, and famine as signs of the coming of the final judgement recorded in Mark 13:8 and Matthew

to be replaced. The Roman bishop writes of the loss of limbs people suffer and other cruelties. Life is a torment and death its remedy.

Indeed, he goes so far as to suggest that dying from the plague was rather swift in comparison with other ways to die. He takes his cue from 2 Samuel 24:10-17, where David chose as a punishment three days of pestilence, rather than three months of defeat at the hands of his enemies, or three years of famine (and one may note the parallel with the eschatological gospel passages mentioned above about the signs of the final judgement), since it was a divine rather than human punishment and a sign of mercy, even though 70,000 are reported to have died⁴⁰. For Gregory, death by plague was to suffer less than one deserved. Yet, a swift death was only beneficial if the person was prepared for what came next: judgement. Mixed here with the idea of punishment is the idea of purging, of being scourged for sin in order to participate in eternal life once cleansed. Retribution and correction do not sit together equally compatibly as the divine motive, yet they cover the fact that some people will not heed the warning, which turns into punishment for them, while others do (through good works and tears of penitence), which turns into purification for them.

Perhaps when he wrote this letter to Dominic Gregory was more despondent in the face of what seemed a never-ending tragedy than he had been the year before when he wrote to Aregius. His natural human grief seemed less easy to shake off. Yet, therefore, the pastoral requirement to offer consolation was even more important and the other-worldly focus is even more strident. The loss of temporal things (among which is life in this world) is more than outweighed by the benefits of eternal things, and this is the hope that Christian bishops must instil in their congregations⁴¹. Another part of this pastoral ministry was to instil a fear of eternal punishment. Provoking God through evil deeds was just asking for more punishment, according to Gregory. It is the sinner who should stop sinning rather than God who should stop punishing. The ability to stop sinning only comes with divine assistance, as Gregory rightly notes at the end of the letter, ensuring that he could not be accused of Pelagianism. Yet, at the same time, he seems to indicate that prayers for clemency are needed in order to activate that divine assistance to do good works, which seems to contradict the

24:7, yet this was to happen before the coming of the Son of Man and the trumpet calling the angels to gather the elect, not after it, as Gregory outlines.

⁴⁰ How three years of feminine would have been suffering at human rather than divine hands is not explained in the biblical text.

⁴¹ Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum* 10, 20, CCL 140A, p. 851.

point about grace that he was trying to make. The clemency of God is not to avoid the plague but to have responded in time with a good life before the plague comes in order to be snatched away from evils (eternal punishment) and to enjoy eternal rewards.

3. Gregory of Tours on Plague and on Gregory I and the *laetania septiformis*

Beyond Gregory's own letters, we learn more about the plague, as it was experienced in Rome in 590, at the beginning of Gregory's time as bishop, from Gregory, bishop of Tours (ancient *Ciuitas Turonum* in the old Roman province of *Lugdunensis Tertia* – †594)⁴². What we discover is that Gregory I organised a procession in Rome, the purpose of which is worth considering.

In order to evaluate the significance of this preserved memory in Gregory of Tours, we need to contextualise it first within his own understanding of epidemic disasters in Gaul. In his history of the Franks, Gregory of Tours noted various disease occurrences in Gaul from 543 onwards⁴³. Michael McCormick's recent study has examined the extent to which Gregory's narrative is reliable and argues that Gregory did believe "the plague was a devastating epidemic disease"⁴⁴. My concern, however,

⁴² See Pietri – Hejmans, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire*, v. 4, p. 915-954 (Gregorius 3); M. Heinzlmann, *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century*, tr. C. Carroll, Cambridge 2001; *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. K. Mitchell – I. Wood, Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions: Medieval and Early Modern Peoples 8, Leiden – Boston 2002; W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550–800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon*, Publications in Medieval Studies, Notre Dame 2005, p. xx–xxvi and 112-234; and *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*, ed. A.C. Murray, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 63, Leiden – Boston 2015.

⁴³ Gregorius Turonensis, *Libri historiarum X* 4, 5, 32; 5, 33-34, 41; 6, 14; 9, 21-22; 10, 23, and 25, MGHSSrerMerov 1/1, p. 138, 164-166, 237-241, 248, 283-284, 441-442, 514-515, and 517). See A.J. Stoclet, *Consilia humana, ops divina, superstitio: Seeking Succor and Solace in Times of Plague, with Particular Reference to Gaul in the Early Middle Ages*, in: *The End of Antiquity: The Pandemic of 541–750*, ed. L.K. Little, Cambridge 2007, p. 135-149; L.K. Bailey, *Christianity's Quiet Success: The Eusebius Gallicanus Sermon Collection and the Power of the Church in Late Antique Gaul*, Notre Dame 2010, p. 50-51 and 82-104; and A.E. Jones, *Death and the Afterlife in the Pages of Gregory of Tours: Religion and Society in Late Antique Gaul*, Social Worlds of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, Amsterdam 2020, p. 28-30, 60-61, and 70.

⁴⁴ M. McCormick, *Gregory of Tours on Sixth-Century Plague and Other Epidemics*, "Speculum" 96 (2021) p. 41. On Gregory exaggerating his facts see B. Bachrach, *Plague*,

is with Gregory's pastoral care responses to it, no matter what epidemic illnesses they were (calculable to some extent from the lurid depictions of the sufferings endured)⁴⁵ and no matter how much he might have exaggerated. Thus, I am not so much interested in the phenomenon itself of plague as I am in Gallic responses to it.

In an exploration of disease in Gregory of Tours, Kennedy concludes that Gregory saw disease as divine punishment for sin and that cures were possible and that God could work through any instrument or agent as desired, although miraculous cures had a more profound impact⁴⁶. The idea of an angry and vindictive God, contrary to the general thrust of the teaching of Jesus recorded in the New Testament, took hold. In the presence of disease people were to do whatever they could to combat it, prayer being part of such a course of action. The fact that Gregory mentions the other natural disasters as portents of oncoming plague also suggests that he thought that people did not heed the warnings given them. As Allen Jones writes: "He [Gregory] expected readers to study, compare, and contrast the details about particular people's actions, characters, and deaths, which done they might realize the need to repent of their own sins and implore the likelihood of salvation"⁴⁷.

Certainly, in describing a variety of natural disasters in the Auvergne in 580, Gregory listed an epidemic as the ultimate disaster, to which all others had been pointing. These disasters instilled anxiety about death and encouraged people to flee. For Gregory, the only response ought to have been prayer. Those who stayed to pray were held up as worthy of imitation while those who fled were eventually stricken was Gregory's conclusion. Sometimes people recovered and sometimes they did not. Gregory's consolation involved turning to Job and the inscrutable mystery of divine will. Being struck down could be punishment for sin but it could also be a sign of someone's faith being tested, like Julian of Randan, whose death did not diminish his holiness (4, 32). Punishment was for people to repent and reform, but even when they did, as in the case of King Chilperic (†584), this

Population, and Economy in Merovingian Gaul, "Journal of the Australian Early Medieval Association" 3 (2007) p. 29-57.

⁴⁵ McCormick, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 55-60, for the different pandemics Gregory described. Despite their differences my point remains: in the face of rampant and uncontrollable outbreaks Gregory urged people to pray both for the forgiveness of their sins and for miraculous recovery.

⁴⁶ Kennedy, *The Sword of God*, p. 48-82. See also McCormick, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 51.

⁴⁷ Jones, *Death and Afterlife*, p. 110.

did not always prevent death, as in the case of his two sons (5, 34). We do get some indication of the sense of helplessness with the comment that those who caught plague had no chance of survival and that the plague continued until it burnt itself out, but also a sense of people seeking to avoid getting into that position by preventative prayer and supplication. In contrast with Gregory of Rome's letters, it seems to me that Gregory of Tours was just as keen to promote practices that averted these episodes of disease where a locality seemed to have been spared due to the repentance of some individual or community. The rogations (prayer and fasting associated with processions seeking to appease divine anger) of Gall in Clermont-Ferrand (4, 5) as well as the promise to him in a dream that as long as he lived his church would not fall victim are evidence of this belief, as are the rogations and fasting ordered in 582 by King Guntram (†592) in Marseilles as an effort to assuage divine punishment (9, 21). Of course, as we have noted, individual holiness and prayer could also work to save cities, as with Theodore of Marseilles (10, 22). Gregory's own response too was to establish rogations, processions and chanting of the litany of the saints, as well as preparatory fasts in order to appease the divine wrath after another outbreak of plague in early 591⁴⁸. Such responses were deemed effective. All of this was in a successful effort to appease God for the eradication of disease and to show the powerlessness of non-Christian efforts⁴⁹. It is more than likely that Gregory of Tours' pastoral strategy derived from earlier Gallic practice. Questions about whether Gregory of Rome was inspired by such Gallic practices or simply shared in a common practice must be left to one side⁵⁰.

It is within this context of Gregory of Tours' understanding that we may assess his comments about plague in Rome. His information came from his deacon Agiulf, who had returned from Rome, as he himself tells us in the narrative context in which he framed Gregory of Rome's homily. In November 589 there had been a flood in Rome when the Tiber burst its banks⁵¹. The inundation led to the destruction of the food supply, serpents and dragons be-

⁴⁸ Gregorius Turonensis, *Libri historiarum* 10, 30, MGHSSrerMerov 1/1, p. 525.

⁴⁹ McCormick, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 53.

⁵⁰ See J. van Waarden, *The Emergence of the Gallic Rogations in a Cognitive Perspective*, in: *Rituals of Early Christianity: New Perspectives on Tradition and Transformation*, ed. A. Heljon – N. Vos, *Vigiliae Christianae Supplements* 164, Leiden – Boston 2020, p. 201–220. The fact that Rome had held such a procession in 590 must have been taken as an endorsement by Gregory of Tours for the Gallic tradition.

⁵¹ See P. Squatriti, *The Floods of 589 and Climate Change at the Beginning of the Middle Ages: An Italian Microhistory*, "Speculum" 85 (2010) p. 799–826.

ing flushed out, and, in January 590, the appearance of an epidemic (*clades*, literally a “devastation” or “disaster”) in which people suffered swelling in the groin. One of the first victims in Rome was its bishop, Pelagius II (579-590), who died on 7 February⁵². The parallels with outbreaks Gregory narrated in Gaul would suggest that whatever happened in Rome was seen within the framework in which Gregory understood the world and that in retelling whatever Agiulf told him Gregory has moulded the account into his standard narrative structure for such matters.

One of the deacons of Rome and former urban prefect, Gregory, was elected in place of Pelagius but before his episcopal ordination, which took place in September, while waiting for imperial confirmation, the plague continued⁵³. This confirmatory process was a feature of what has come to be called the Byzantine papacy in the two centuries from 537 when Justinian’s army under Belisarius retook much of Italy for the ‘Roman’ empire during the Gothic War⁵⁴. It meant delays of at least several months between election and installation.

Gregory of Tours records an address Gregory delivered at the time⁵⁵. In it the bishop-in-waiting referred to the fear, terror, and anguish (*timeo, metuo*,

⁵² Gregorius Turonensis, *Libri historiarum X* 10, 1, MGHSSrerMerov 1/1, p. 477. On Pelagius II see C. Sotinel, *Pelagio II*, in: Bray, *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, v. 1, ed. M. Bray, Rome 2000, p. 541-546. On the death of Pelagius see *Liber pontificalis* 65, 2-3 (*Le Liber Pontificalis. Texte, introduction et commentaire*, ed. L. Duchesne – C. Vogel, Bibliothèque des Écoles française d’Athènes et Rome, v. 1, Paris 1955-1957, p. 309). On the death of Roman bishops in the sixth century see B. Neil, *Death and the Bishop of Rome: From Hormisdas to Sabinius*, “Scrinium” 11 (2015) p. 109-121.

⁵³ Gregorius Turonensis, *Libri historiarum X* 10, 1, MGHSSrerMerov 1/1, p. 478-479: “At ille gratias Deo agens pro amicitia diaconi, quod reperisset locum honoris eius, data praeceptione, ipsum iussit institui. Cumque in hoc restaret, ut benediceretur, et lues populum devastaret [...]”. Gregory of Tours implies that the homily and events to be described occurred between the issuing of the *iussio* in Constantinople and the episcopal ordination and enthronement in Rome, although he might have presented his material out of a strict chronological order. The imperfect subjunctive *devastaret* suggests not a second wave of plague but its continuing presence.

⁵⁴ See J. Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, The Church in History 2, Crestwood 1989, p. 299. See also the collected essays in C. Sotinel, *Church and Society in Late Antique Italy and Beyond*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, Farnham – Burlington 2010. On the growing complexities in the relationship between the church of Rome and the court and church of Constantinople in the time before that conquest see P. Blaudeau, *Le siege de Rome et l’Orient (448–536). Étude géo-ecclésiologique*, Collection de l’École française de Rome 460, Rome 2012.

⁵⁵ Gregorius Turonensis, *Libri historiarum X* 10, 1, MGHSSrerMerov 1/1, p. 479-481.

and *dolor*) that the plague brought. It was caused by the sword of the wrath of heaven (*caelestis irae mucrone*) in response to human hardness of heart, for which the only solution was conversion. Everyone was under attack and many were dying at any one time. In fact, the disease killed so rapidly that people did not even have time to feel sick, let alone repent. As Gregory I is reported as saying: “The blow falls: each victim is snatched away from us before he can bewail his sins and repent”⁵⁶. This conversion ought to consist of repentance, lamentation, prayer, and good works. Quoting Ezekiel 23:11, Gregory tells his new flock that God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked but wants them to turn from their evil ways and live.

‘Life’ gave Gregory the opportunity to have a bet each way: those who avoided the plague or miraculously recovered from it must obviously have repented or been living righteously, but even those who succumbed would, if they had converted beforehand, live eternal life. The sword of punishment hanging over them required greater persistence in prayer⁵⁷. The important thing was to win God’s mercy, compassion, and pardon through prayer more than to achieve recuperation. Since no one could do anything to heal the body, the only thing to do was heal the soul. Gregory’s desire was that his community had the opportunity to receive pardon for their sins more than the eradication of the disease. The trembling trust (*tremore nostro fiduciam*)⁵⁸ is in a heavenly rather than earthly event. The whole purpose of the practical action Gregory went on to propose was so that God, the stern judge, “would acquit us of this sentence of damnation which He has proposed for us”⁵⁹. Damnation would not be the loss of life but the loss of eternal life.

McCormick says that this liturgical procession was the measure by which Gregory defended his people⁶⁰. But from what was he trying to defend them? McCormick is certainly right that the aim of the procession was “[to appease divine anger”⁶¹, but how would successful appeasement be manifested? A careful reading of the address shows that would be in the salvation of souls rather than in the freeing of flesh.

⁵⁶ Gregorius Turonensis, *Libri historiarum X* 10, 1, MGHSSrerMerov 1/1, p. 479: “Percussus quisque ante rapitur, quam ad lamenta paenitentiae convertatur”.

⁵⁷ Gregorius Turonensis, *Libri historiarum X* 10, 1, MGHSSrerMerov 1/1, p. 480: “Imminente ergo tantae animadversionis gladio, nos inportunis fletibus insistamus”.

⁵⁸ Gregorius Turonensis, *Libri historiarum X* 10, 1, MGHSSrerMerov 1/1, p. 479.

⁵⁹ Gregorius Turonensis, *Libri historiarum X* 10, 1, MGHSSrerMerov 1/1, p. 480: “a sententia propositae damnationis parcat”.

⁶⁰ McCormick, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 86.

⁶¹ McCormick, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 87.

The power of prayer was best experienced communally, so Gregory organised a sevenfold litany (*septiformis laetaniae*) to be held at dawn on a Wednesday. Seven processions of different groups within the local church were to start from designated churches, along with the presbyters of that region, to meet at the basilica of the blessed virgin Mary, mother of our Lord Jesus Christ⁶². According to *Liber pontificalis*, it had been Fabian, bishop between 236 and 250 who had organised the fourteen regions of Augustan Rome into seven ecclesiastical regions to each of which a deacon, subdeacon, and notary was attached for the purposes of administration and charity⁶³. It was in the basilica of Mary (the current Santa Maria Maggiore) that prayers and lamentations were to be offered to God so that through the supplication of tears and groans they could win pardon for their sins⁶⁴.

The plague was a divine sentence of damnation (*sententia [...] damnationis*) for sin, for which the only response was conversion and the winning of God's pardon. The wailing and sorrow was not on behalf of the dead but for the living themselves ("to concentrate our minds upon our troubles")⁶⁵, and even here not because of the possible (or even

⁶² Gregorius Turonensis, *Libri historiarum X* 10, 1, MGHSSrerMerov 1/1, p. 480-481. We can tabulate the information as follows:

Group	Church	Region
Clergy	Cosmas & Damian	6
Abbots & monks	Protasius & Gervasius	4
Abbesses & nuns	Marcellinus & Peter	1
Children	John & Paul	2
Laymen	Stephen the protomartyr	7
Widows	Euphemia	5
Married women	Clement	3

One may presume that the clerics were those in minor orders as well as presbyters from outside the seven districts or even those inside the city but not assigned to a specific region.

⁶³ *Liber pontificalis* 21, 2 (*Le Liber Pontificalis. Texte, introduction et commentaire*, v. 1, p. 148). For a recent study of this work see R. McKitterick, *Rome and the Invention of the Papacy: The Liber pontificalis*, Cambridge 2020.

⁶⁴ Gregorius Turonensis, *Libri historiarum X* 10, 1, MGHSSrerMerov 1/1, p. 481: "[...] ut, ibid diutius cum fletu ac gemitu Domino supplicantes, peccatorum nostrum veniam promerire valeamus".

⁶⁵ Gregorius Turonensis, *Libri historiarum X* 10, 1, MGHSSrerMerov 1/1, p. 480: "devota ad lacrimas mente".

probable) loss of one's own life but at the possible loss of the heavenly inheritance. Yet, no doubt, the parents attending the funerals of their children were indeed grieving about the fate of their children much more than being concerned about their own loss of eternal life. Is there a fatalism in this address? Is the repentance and conversion only so that when it is the turn of the people in the procession to die from the plague they might be ready for heaven or is the lamentation and penance an attempt to convince God to end the plague? The reference to Nineveh (Jonah 3:1-10) would tend to suggest the second (although Gregory's point is that the sins of the Ninevites was forgiven rather than that the people were spared) while the repentant thief upon the cross with Jesus (Luke 23:43) suggests the first⁶⁶.

Interestingly, we do have a similar account in appendix 9 to Gregory I's *Registrum epistularum*, dated to 29 August 603, near the very end of Gregory's life (the register version)⁶⁷. It had been inserted into the extract of Gregory's letters compiled on the order of Adrian I, bishop of Rome between 772 and 795⁶⁸. The major difference is with the instructions for the *laetania septiformis*. Instead of being specifically on a Wednesday, this register version has it on the next day. The groups are somewhat different as are the churches from which they depart and there is no mention of ac-

⁶⁶ Gregorius Turonensis, *Libri historiarum X* 10, 1, MGHSSrerMerov 1/1, p. 479-480. The mentioning of the three-day penance in Nineveh comes from the LXX reference to the destruction of the city in three days' time rather than the Masoretic version of Jonah, which has the destruction to come forty days after Jonah's warning.

⁶⁷ Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum* appendix 9, CCL 140A, p. 1102-1104. In Martyn (*The Letters of Gregory the Great*, v. 3, p. 888) the date is given as 25 August, while in J.R.C. Martyn, *Four Notes on the Registrum of Gregory the Great*, "Parergon" 19/2 (2012) p 19, n. 31, it is given as 28 August. In fact, iv. Kal. Sept. is 29 August.

⁶⁸ On the transmission of Gregory's letters see D. Jasper, *The Beginning of the Decretal Tradition: Papal Letters from the Origin of the Genre through the Pontificate of Stephen V*, in: *Papal Letters in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. D. Jasper – H. Fuhrmann, History of Medieval Canon Law, Washington 2001, p. 70-81; L. Castaldi, *Il Registrum Epistularum di Gregorio Magno*, "Filologia Mediolatina" 11 (2004) p. 55-97; M. Costambeys – C. Leyser, *To be the Neighbour of St Stephen: Patronage, Martyr Cult, and Roman Monasteries, c. 600–c. 900*, in: *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300–900*, ed. K. Cooper – J. Hillner, Cambridge 2007, p. 262-287; and Leyser, *The Memory of Gregory the Great*, p. 8-9. On Adrian I see O. Bertolini, *Adriano I*, in: Bray, *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, v. 1, ed. M. Bray, Rome 2000, p. 681-695.

companying presbyters from particular regions⁶⁹. There is a statement that people are to refrain from work. The indication is that Gregory was preaching in Santa Sabina on the Aventine.

For our purposes, the reaction of bishop and people (as described and prescribed by the bishop) is the same. Yet, it is interesting to ask how it may be possible to reconcile these two accounts. John Martyn suggests that we are dealing with two separate outbreaks of plague and that Gregory's pastoral response was virtually the same thirteen years apart⁷⁰. However, he considers the first to be real plague and the second perhaps to be a protest against Phocas, Byzantine emperor from 602-610. To say that the 603 account refers to plague only allegorically since there is no mention of plague in the homily while the 590 one does⁷¹, is to apply a double standard, since the two homilies (apart from the details of the processions) are virtually identical.

⁶⁹ Again, this information may be presented in tabular form:

Group	Church
Clergy	John Lateran
Men	Marcellus
Monks	John & Paul
Nuns	Cosmas & Damian
Married women	Stephen
Widows	Vitalis
Poor & infants	Cecilia

One may note that the church of Gervasius and Protasius (presented in that order) – the *titulus Vestinae* – was dedicated during the episcopate of Innocent I, according to *Liber pontificalis* 42, 3 (*Le Liber Pontificalis. Texte, introduction et commentaire*, v. 1, p. 220) and later renamed as San Vitale. See M. Webb, *The Churches and Catacombs of Early Christian Rome*, Brighton 2001, p. 80-81; and H. Brandenburg, *Ancient Churches of Rome from the Fourth to the Seventh Century: The Dawn of Christian Architecture in the West*, tr. A. Kropp, Bibliothèque de l'Antiquité Tardive 8, Turnhout 2005, p. 153-155.

⁷⁰ Martyn, *Four Notes*, p. 16-23. This is followed by J.A. Latham, *The Making of a Papal Rome: Gregory I and the letania septiformis*, in: *The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity*, ed. A. Cain – N. Lenski, Farnham – Burlington 2009, p. 295 (with proviso in n. 7); J.A. Latham, *Inventing Gregory 'the Great': Memory, Authority, and the Afterlives of the Letania Septiformis*, ChH 84 (2015) p. 1 (without proviso); M. Andrews, *The Laetaniae Septiformes of Gregory I, S. Maria Maggiore and Early Marian Cult in Rome*, in: *The Moving City: Processions, Passages and Promenades in Ancient Rome*, ed. I. Östenberg – S. Malmberg – J. Bjørnebye, London 2015, p. 155-164; Kennedy, *The Sword of God*, p. 3 and 26; and McCormick, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 87.

⁷¹ Martyn, *Four Notes*, p. 22.

As an alternative suggestion for the relationship between these two similar accounts, Owen Chadwick, more than seventy years ago, proposed that there was only the one procession (in 603) and that both the narrative and address in Gregory of Tours were probably later interpolations into his history (given that he died in 594)⁷². His conclusion flows from an examination of the manuscript tradition (a whole group of manuscripts omit several chapters including 10, 1), the language used in both addresses, which suggests that the 603 version was earlier (the elaborate reference to Santa Maria Maggiore, the reference to Stephen as protomartyr, and the inclusion of Euphemia in Gregory of Tours, show late-seventh or eighth-century Greek influence, while the reference to Vitalis in Gregory I reflects the then practice), the earlier (before 588) dating of Gregory of Tours sending his deacon to Rome to collect relics (recounted in *Gloria martyrum*), and the repetition at the start of book 10 of the date. While Chadwick's argument was picked up by Adriaan Breukelaar⁷³. Latham notes that it has not found many supporters⁷⁴. This argument seems completely unknown to Martyn and Kennedy, but it makes some sense, although the narrative framework into which the address is inserted in Gregory of Tours is typical of what he presented elsewhere, as we noted above. In other words, there might not have been a procession in 590 during the outbreak of plague that killed Pelagius II if Chadwick were correct.

In describing events following the homily (part of the narrative context), Gregory of Tours reported that his deacon was in Rome for this event, noting the singing of psalms for three days before the procession and the singing of psalms and the *Kyrie eleison* during the procession in which eighty people died. The deacon was also in Rome for Gregory's episcopal ordination⁷⁵. Despite the seemingly eye-witness-nature of the narrative and address, it is clear that Gregory of Tours has recast this event within an apocalyptic framework to suit his own purpose. According to Jacob Latham, Gregory of Tours' comments about an intervening three days of prayer between homily and procession could have been a misinterpretation of this sevenfold procession with Gallic rogations and the flood he mentioned before the outbreak of plague in Rome made the Roman event fit

⁷² O. Chadwick, *Gregory of Tours and Gregory the Great*, JTS 50 (1949) p. 38-49.

⁷³ A. Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority in Sixth-Century Gaul: The Histories of Gregory of Tours Interpreted in their Historical Context*, Göttingen 1994, p. 66-69.

⁷⁴ Latham, *Inventing Gregory*, p. 14.

⁷⁵ Latham, *Inventing Gregory*, p. 14.

into the theme he hammered home in his Gallic narratives about signs and portents⁷⁶. True as this is, I would note also that Gregory of Tours has not altered Gregory I's perspective in the homily itself but, by placing the homily within his own narrative context, Gregory of Tours has offered a contrasting interpretation of Gregory I's purpose in holding the procession. What we have established is that Gregory the Great, despite his theoretical framework in *Liber regulae pastoralis*, consistently displayed no interest in pastoral care of the body only of the soul when confronted with an emergency pandemic situation (and thus the death of eighty during the procession would not have been a sign of failure since they had demonstrated repentance), while Gregory of Tours had an added interest in the possibility of miraculous plague mitigation (and the death of the eighty would have been equally untroubling for him, as the death of Chilperic's sons was untroubling). Thus, when Gregory of Tours says that in the three days before the procession the people were entreating for the Lord's pity ("depraecare Domini misericordiam") and during the procession were making supplication to the Lord ("ad Dominum supplicationis emisit")⁷⁷, it is quite possible that Gregory of Tours was thinking that they were asking for God not only to forgive their sins but to spare their lives, only the first purpose of which seems to have been in Gregory the Great's mind according to his homily (and the evidence of his letters).

Whatever the case about there being only the procession in 590 or another one in 603, what we have here is Gregory of Tours turning to Gregory of Rome as evidence for his belief that such disasters were foretold by preceding events, and that the holiness of individuals or communities could combat disaster. For Gregory of Tours that could mean people being punished or purified through death depending upon repentance before death or it could even mean that pandemics were stopped in their tracks and people's earthly lives would be spared. Gregory made this point in the narrative into which he inserted the homily. However, the homily itself, he did not touch to any great extent, even though Gregory I gave no indication in what he said in that homily that he wanted the *laetania septiformis* to occur in the hope that God would quell the pandemic itself, only that God would take people's participation in it as a sign of true repentance and offer eternal life to them when they died of the plague.

⁷⁶ Latham, *Inventing Gregory*, p. 15-16.

⁷⁷ Gregorius Turonensis, *Libri historiarum* X 10, 1, MGHSSrerMerov 1/1, p. 481. I note that Thorpe's translation of *miseriordia* as forgiveness suggests a more other-worldly purpose that Gregory of Tours' Latin implies.

4. Gregory I's Procession in Later Memory: Paul the Deacon and John Immonides

This recasting of Gregory I's homily and procession was not limited to Gregory of Tours. By the time Paul the Deacon (†799) composed his *Vita sancti Gregorii Magni* – an effort to rehabilitate the reputation of the pope, which had not been held in high regard in the many decades since his death – in which the narrative framework of Gregory of Tours and the homily of Gregory the Great is repeated, although without the details of how the procession was before Gregory's ordination as bishop, how it was to be organised with seven groups, or the role played by Agiulf. By mentioning priests, monks, and people together, Paul seemingly made it a single procession⁷⁸. He seems to have been totally unaware of the register version of the homily of 603. He takes from Gregory of Tours the idea of the purpose of the procession to entreat the Lord (“deprecturus Domini”) in his *Vita sancti Gregorii Magni*⁷⁹, while in *Historia Langobardorum* he identifies the procession as a rogation and asserts that the people were making supplication to the Lord (“ad Dominum supplicationis emitteret”⁸⁰). Even though abbreviated, it is clear that Paul has adopted Gregory of Tours' interpretation of the purpose of Gregory of Rome's homily. Within the frameworks of both texts, Paul was interested to include this story to draw attention to the fact of Gregory's election or as a prelude to Gregory sending Augustine to Canterbury more than he was keen to discuss Gregory's theory of pastoral care.

⁷⁸ Paulus Diaconus, *Vita sancti Gregorii Magni* 10-12, PL 75, 45-47. See also Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum* 3, 24, MGH, *Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum* 1, p. 104-105, where the sevenfold procession is mentioned, although without Gregory I's homily and without the details of the churches in which each group would assemble or of the destination church. On Paul see Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, p. xxx–xxxiv and 329-431; R. McKitterick, *Paul the Deacon and the Franks*, “Early Medieval Europe” 8 (1999) p. 319-339; C. Heath, *The Narrative Worlds of Paul the Deacon: Between Empires and Identities in Lombard Italy*, Amsterdam 2017, p. 66-84; and M. Costambeys, *Paul the Deacon and Rome*, in: *Writing the Early Medieval West*, ed. E. Screen – C. West, Cambridge 2018, p. 49-63. On Paul and Gregory of Tours see D. Bianchi, *Da Gregorio di Tours a Paolo Diacono*, “Aevum” 35 (1961) p. 150-166. Latham (*Inventing Gregory*, p. 17) states that Paul was only concerned with the priests and monks, but a reading of the text itself at this point does not support such an assertion.

⁷⁹ Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum* 3, 24, MGH, *Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum* 1, p. 105.

⁸⁰ Paulus Diaconus, *Vita sancti Gregorii Magni* 12, PL 75, 47.

About a century later, John Hymonides (John the deacon of Rome – †c. 880) also wrote his own *Sancti Gregorii Magni uita*, quite possibly to offer support to John VIII, bishop of Rome from 872 to 882, against Carolingian and Byzantine impositions upon papal authority, for which efforts he was poisoned and clubbed to death by his own clergy⁸¹. In his work, John mentions Gregory's election as bishop by the clergy, senate, and people of Rome (with the mention of the need for imperial approval from Constantinople), obviously derived from Gregory of Tours' version⁸². While Gregory of Tours had been explicit that Gregory acted before his episcopal ordination ("Cumque in hoc restaret, ut benediceretur"), John modified the wording slightly ("Interim dum ab urbe regia imperatorius praestolaretur assensus"), but the meaning remained the same and therefore John followed the 590 dating⁸³. The address follows, and it is clear that John followed the register version with its different churches and the mention of the fact that people were to abstain from work⁸⁴. After it, John returned to following Gregory of Tours' brief account of the actual event and the death of eighty participants, although omitting the details about what was sung⁸⁵. Here he shows an awareness of Paul the deacon's account as a source when he called this event a rogation⁸⁶. Latham notes this and suggests the extra detail in John (in contrast with that in Paul) was to inject a greater reliability into his account as opposed to the earlier one by Paul, yet Latham is surprised that even though John had gone back to the Lateran archives rather than just

⁸¹ On the relationship between John Immonides and Anastasius Bibliothecarius see B. Neil, *Seventh-Century Popes and Martyrs: The Political Hagiography of Anastasius Bibliothecarius*, *Studia Antiqua Australiensia* 2, Turnhout, 2006, p. 64-66. On John the Deacon see G. Arnaldi, *Giovanni Immonide e la cultura a Roma al tempo di Giovanni VIII*, "Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo" 68 (1956) p. 48-75; and B. Neil, *The Politics of Hagiography in Ninth-Century Rome*, in: *Text and Transmission in Medieval Europe*, ed. C. Bishop, Newcastle, 2007, p. 58-75. On John VIII see A. Sennis, *Giovanni VIII*, in: *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, v. 2, ed. M. Bray, Rome 2000, p. 28-34; and N. Cariello, *Giovanni VIII. Papa medioevale (872-882)*, *Studi e Documenti* 19, Rome 2002.

⁸² Iohannes Diaconus, *Sancti Gregorii Magni vita* 1, 39-40, PL 75, 79.

⁸³ Iohannes Diaconus, *Sancti Gregorii Magni vita* 1, 41, PL 75, 79.

⁸⁴ Iohannes Diaconus, *Sancti Gregorii Magni vita* 1, 41-42, PL 75, 79-81. The PL version mistakenly says John was following Gregory of Tours.

⁸⁵ Iohannes Diaconus, *Sancti Gregorii Magni vita* 1, 43, PL 75, 81.

⁸⁶ Iohannes Diaconus, *Sancti Gregorii Magni vita* 1, 43, PL 75, 81: "[...] ad Dominum supplicationis emitteret".

relying on Paul, he failed to mention the destination of the procession⁸⁷. Yet, this is simply incorrect⁸⁸.

What both Paul and John were doing was providing lives of Gregory the Great and were not particularly interested in plague *per se*, apart from the fact that it marked the start of the episcopate of this praiseworthy Roman bishop.

5. Gregory I's Procession in Even Later Memory

Here is not the place to discuss the later conflation of the *laetania septiformis* with Gregory's *laetania maior*⁸⁹. However, there are two pieces of later evidence that we ought to consider. The first is a thirteenth-century extension in *Epilogum in gesta sanctorum* by Bartholomew of Trent (†1251), a Dominican papal diplomat, to the account found in Gregory of Tours of Gregory the Great's procession. In Bartholomew's account, during the procession Gregory saw Michael the archangel atop Hadrian's mausoleum sheathing his sword. Gregory dedicated the mausoleum as a Christian church⁹⁰. Since the homily, as reported in Gregory of Tours and the register version, refers to Jeremiah 4:10 about the sword in the soul with the comment that the people were struck down with the sword of heavenly anger⁹¹, the vision of Michael sheathing his sword as a sign of God's wrath coming to an end is a not-inappropriate embellishment even as it takes the story further from initial version.

⁸⁷ Latham, *Inventing Gregory*, p. 21.

⁸⁸ Iohannes Diaconus, *Sancti Gregorii Magni vita* 1, 41, PL 75, 80: "[...] quatenus ad sanctae genitricis Dei ecclesiam convenientes". Thus, I would disagree with Latham (*Inventing Gregory*, p. 22) when he writes, "it [John's version] decontextualized the procession and compressed its organizational complexity". John's version has just as much complexity as the register version does and, since it follows Gregory of Tours in enclosing the address within a narrative framework, has all the complexity that Gregory of Tours' version has.

⁸⁹ On this see Latham, *Inventing Gregory*, p. 22-23. The current bronze statue on top of Castel Sant'Angelo was by Peter Anton von Verschaffelt and dates to 1753.

⁹⁰ Bartolomeus Taurinorum, *Epilogum in gesta sanctorum* 161, in: *Liber epilogum in gesta sanctorum*, ed. E. Paoli, Florence 2001, p. 119.

⁹¹ Gregorius Turonensis, *Libri historiarum X* 10, 1, MGHSSrerMerov 1/1, p. 479 and Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum* appendix 9, CCL 140, p. 1102: "[...] ut enim profeta teste praedictum est, 'pervenit gladius usque ad animam'. Ecce! Etenim cuncta plebs caelestis irae mucrone percussitur, et repentina singuli caede vastantur [...]"

For some scholars, this gives validity to the claim found in *Martyrologium* of Ado, archbishop of Vienne (†875), that Boniface IV (608-615), one of Gregory I's near successors, dedicated a church to Michael on the summit of the mausoleum⁹². Bartholomew's story probably gave the idea to Nicholas III (1277-1280) – a member of the Orsini family and elected at one of several conclaves that took place in Viterbo, who decorated the *sancta sanctorum* at the Lateran, moved residence to the Vatican, and built the protected walkway between Castel Sant'Angelo and the Vatican that would come in so handy for Clement VII (1523-1434) when the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V (1519-1556) occupied Rome, infamous for his nepotism and simony⁹³ – to commission frescoes in the chapel depicting Gregory's procession⁹⁴. More critically, Louis Schwartz has argued that Ado is not to be trusted for accuracy and that the chapel was not built in the early seventh century but in the first half of the eighth century, inspired by the cult of Michael in Monte Sant'Angelo sul Gargano in Puglia (a church having been built there during the time of Gelasius)⁹⁵ under the Lombards, probably Liutprand (712-744), early enough to have been forgotten by the time of Ado⁹⁶. This is the origin of Hadrian's mausoleum being known today as Castel Sant'Angelo⁹⁷. Incidentally, in Monte Sant'Angelo sul Gargano, during Holy Week 2020, the sword held by the statue of Michael in the sanctuary was carried in procession (as it had been in 1656 during another time of plague) as part of a petition to the archangel to save the world from what one

⁹² Ado Viennensis, *Martyrologium* 29 September, in: *Le martyrologie d'Adon. Ses deux familles, ses trois recensions: texte et commentaire*, ed. J. Dubois – G. Renaud, Paris 1984, p. 336.

⁹³ On Clement VII see A. Prosperi, *Clemente VII*, in: *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, v. 3, ed. M. Bray, Rome 2000, p. 70-91.

⁹⁴ On Nicholas III see F. Allegrezza, *Niccolò III*, in: *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, v. 2, ed. M. Bray, Rome 2000, p. 437-446; E.S. Nelson, *The Religious, Political, and Personal Aspirations of Pope Nicholas III in the Frescoes at Old St Peter's and the Sancta Sanctorum*, Austin 2002; and K.A. Triff, *Rhetoric and Romanitas in Thirteenth-Century Rome: Nicholas III and the Sancta Sanctorum*, "Artibus et Historiae" 30 (2009) p. 71-106.

⁹⁵ *Liber pontificalis* 51, 1, *Le Liber Pontificalis. Texte, introduction et commentaire*, v. 1, p. 255.

⁹⁶ L. Schwartz, *Gargano Comes to Rome: Castel Sant'Angelo's Historical Origins*, *JEH* 64 (2013) p. 453-475.

⁹⁷ See T. Squadrilli, *Castel Sant'Angelo: Una storia lunga diciannove secoli. Misteri, segreti, curiosità e personaggi di uno dei più famosi monumenti del mondo*, *Quest'Italia* 284, Rome 2000.

website called the Wuhan virus⁹⁸. Although he was not so interested in the historicity of Bartholomew's story, simply stating that it is a later fabrication⁹⁹, Schwartz's argument would indicate that the story originated in an attempt to find an explanation for why Hadrian's mausoleum became associated with Michael. Suspicion should be raised about Bartholomew's story when one considers the sevenfold routes in the *laetania septiformis* in either Gregory of Tours or the register version. None of them would have passed by Hadrian's mausoleum to get to Santa Maria Maggiore, unless they followed a very circuitous itinerary.

What is significant for us is that Gregory I's citation of Jeremiah 4:10 to indicate God's sword softening the heart through suffering so as to induce the required repentance and bringing death as a feature of pastoral care of the soul not the body, in Bartholomew's hands has become something even more different from what it was in Gregory of Tours' hands. Here the procession was not just in the hope of there being a miracle intervention to halt the plague but, in the person of Michael, the plague supposedly was halted. Gregory I is transformed from someone who called upon the Christians of Rome to march together as an act of penance and contrition to prepare the soul to meet God into someone who was able to induce (or at least benefited from) a miracle that brought a halt to the plague in Rome.

The second piece of evidence comes from Jacobus da Varagine (†1298), another Dominican and archbishop of Genoa and the compiler of *Legenda aurea*, a popular collection of legendary lives of saints published about 1270¹⁰⁰. In his version, after the flood, Gregory, before his episcopal ordination, organised a procession and exhorted the people to pray and they pleaded with God. The death of ninety people (inflated by ten!) processing is recorded. The purpose of the procession according to

⁹⁸ M. Moyski, *Archangel's Blade Processed through Streets of Gargano to Combat Virus*, "Church Militant" (11 April 2020), in: www.churchmilitant.com/news/article/the-swords-of-st-michael. The sword is usually carried in procession on Michael's feast on 29 September (Michaelmas), the day of the dedication of a church to Michael on the Via Salara, which *Liber pontificalis* (53, 9, *Le Liber Pontificalis. Texte, introduction et commentaire*, v. 1, p. 262) says Symmachus (498-514) enlarged. See *Le Liber Pontificalis. Texte, introduction et commentaire*, p. 268, n. 36, for discussion of the date. On Symmachus see T. Sardella, *Simmaco, santo*, in: *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, v. 1, ed. M. Bray, Rome 2000, p. 464-473.

⁹⁹ Schwartz, *Gargano Comes to Rome*, p. 458.

¹⁰⁰ See S.L. Reames, *The Legenda Aurea: A Reexamination of its Paradoxical History*, Madison 1985; and J. Le Goff, *In Search of Sacred Time: Jacobus de Voragine and The Golden Legend*, tr. L.G. Cochrane, Princeton 2014.

Varagine was for the people to continue in prayer until God drove the plague away. This is certainly not what is found in Gregory's homily and, like Bartholomew, builds on the implication in Gregory of Tours that the Roman pontiff's motive in calling for the procession was to urge God to deliver people not only from a negative final judgement but from a plague-induced death as well.

Then Gregory tried to flee Rome to escape being made bishop. After he was duly ordained another procession (seen in hindsight as the traditional procession), a circuit of the city, was held during Easter with the Lukan picture of the Virgin carried at the head, which repelled the infection and the turbulent air. This certainly goes well beyond what earlier evidence provides. The procession was accompanied by angels singing *Regina coeli*. Gregory saw an angel on top of the castle of Crescentius (the name by which the mausoleum of Hadrian was known from the tenth century) wiping the blood from his sword and sheathing it and realised that the plague had come to an end¹⁰¹. As Latham notes, the story has changed dramatically: two processions instead of one, each procession of the entire population and not split into seven parts, the carrying of the deodorising and sanitising image of the Virgin, and angels singing, as well as the sword being bloody (not to mention the presence of the angel atop the mausoleum)¹⁰².

Of course, the versions in Bartholomew of Trent and Jacobus de Veragine reflect contemporary thirteenth-century concerns with plague in their imaginative retelling of Gregory the Great's response to plague. A further, fourteenth-century response, after the second plague pandemic (the Black Death) to the story of Gregory the Great is to be found in two of the books of hours commissioned by John, duke of Berry (†1416), the third son of John II, king of France (1350-1354) and brother of Charles V (the Wise) (1364-1380). The first is in *Belles Heures du Duc de Berry* (finished in 1409 and now held by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the Cloisters, New York) (f. 73r and v) and the second, *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (Musée Condé, Chantilly, MS 65), both illuminated by the Limbourg brothers (Herman, Paul, and Johan) from Nijmegen, which was left unfinished when all three brothers and their patron died in 1416, possibly of the plague. The second is possibly the best-surviving medieval illuminated

¹⁰¹ Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea* 46, Iacopo da Varazze, *Legenda Aurea*, ed. G.P. Maggioni, Millennium medieval 6, Florence 1998, p. 288-290.

¹⁰² Latham, *Inventing Gregory*, p. 25. Later in *Legenda aurea* (Iacopo da Varazze, p. 473-474), Jacobus de Voragine demonstrates his knowledge of the *laetania septiformis*.

manuscript and most expensive book in the world¹⁰³. At the end of the collection of penitential psalms (f. 64-71) comes a double-folio illustration of the procession of Gregory the Great (f. 71v-72r).

In the earlier book of hours, the relevant illustrations come after a collection of penitential psalms (f. 66r-72v). Gregory is shown in the first illumination (f. 73r) in a pulpit, dressed as pope with tiara and dove, preaching to a group of cardinals, some of whom are reading, and a congregation of laypeople, some of whom are beseeching God, while a procession seems to be forming. In the foreground a man is lying on the ground, while another is kneeling, apparently sneezing. The text accompanying the illustration indicates that the plague was in punishment for people's lack of Lenten observance¹⁰⁴. In the second illumination (f. 73v) the procession is leaving through a gate with clerical attendants at the front carrying processional banners and a book, followed by Gregory, wearing a mitre, followed by cardinals and people, while two people in white are prostrate in penitence, one man in blue is in rigor mortis, and the man in yellow with the conical hat is making a sign of the cross while sneezing, which the text indicates was a sign of the plague and the swiftness of its effects¹⁰⁵.

In the more famous image from the second book of hours, a procession is departing from the gates of the city. Ahead of the people are cardinals and in front of them is a tiaraed Gregory with uplifted arms. We see a late Gothic version of a castle with a golden angel on its summit with a blood-red sword being returned to its scabbard (71v). Ahead of Gregory are clerics carrying a model of a church and, on the following folio (72r) other clerics carrying relics, books, thuribles, water, banners, and a cross. Across both folios there are laypeople, monks, and clerics who are collapsing during

¹⁰³ See J. Longon – R. Cazelles, *The Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry*, New York 1969; E. Pognon, *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, Geneva 1987; M. Camille, *The Très Heures: An Illuminated Manuscript in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, "Critical Inquiry" 17 (1990) p. 72-107; and L. Schacherl, *Très Riches Heures: Behind the Gothic Masterpiece*, Munich 1997. On the Limbourg brothers see J.J.G. Alexander, *The Limbourg Brothers and Italian Art: A New Source*, ZKG 46 (1983) p. 425-435; and T.B. Husband, *The Art of Illumination: The Limbourg Brothers and the Belles Heures of Jean de France, Duc de Berry*, New York 2008.

¹⁰⁴ The text on the folio reads: "Tempore magni Gregorii pape institutefuerunt letanie que cum Romani in xl continenter vixissent et post ea, luxurie frena laxarent. Provocatus, Dominus in eos pestem inguinariam misit, unde letanias Gregorius instituit".

¹⁰⁵ The text on the folio reads: "Tam seva autem illa pestis fuisse fertur quod homines in via, in mensa, in ludis subito sternutando morentur. Unde cum aliquis sternutantem audiebat, vix in ejus auxilium dicebat adjuvet te Deus et spiritum exalabat".

the procession. The presence of the angel with the bloody sword clearly indicates that the Limbourg brothers took their inspiration from Jacobus de Veragine rather than any other version of the story.

In passing, we may conclude this section by mentioning Giovanni di Paolo (†1482), a Siennese artist who might have been an apprentice to the Limbourg brothers. In an oil on wood painting, now in the Louvre (RF 672), we find another depiction of the procession of Gregory. In this version the procession is heading over a bridge (presumably the Ponte Sant'Angelo) towards the Castel Sant'Angelo, with the angel and sword standing on its pinnacle. In this painting we only see clergy: cardinals before the ornately adorned pontiff and attendants following him. What is interesting here is that between the cardinals and Gregory we see one cleric carrying the icon of the Virgin. Di Paolo has included this detail from Jacobus de Veragine, which the Limbourg brothers had omitted.

6. Conclusion

Gregory was concerned about the pastoral care of Christians as his *Liber regulae pastoralis* indicates and at one point he stated that those who offer pastoral care need to be concerned with both the physical and spiritual needs of people. Yet, elsewhere in the same work he reveals a concern with spiritual needs alone. In response to the perceived crisis of rampant pandemic throughout his episcopate, four of Gregory's letters show us his exclusive interest in addressing spiritual needs, to such an extent that he tells one of his correspondents not to be addicted to the tedium of affliction. At the start of this paper I raised the question of where there is this absence of any concern for people's practical needs. Part of the answer must lie in the nature of the crisis, at least as far as Gregory understood it. Disease seemed to strike at random, to resist any treatment, and to kill swiftly. There seemed to be little that could be done for the physical comfort of victims. Such an apocalyptic scenario focused the mind on what was Christianity's ultimate purpose: eschatological fulfilment.

Thus, in the sevenfold procession that took place even as he awaited episcopal ordination (and possibly or probably again in 603), Gregory's purpose was to prepare his people to face their inevitable death by repenting of sin and seeking God's forgiveness and mercy. His homily on this occasion speaks of the need for people to face the divine judge with contrite hearts. Failure to allow the plague to be purgative meant that it would

be punitive, which leads not to death itself but to the eternal death of hell. In incorporating this work into his Merovingian history, Gregory of Tours placed Gregory of Rome's homily into a narrative framework, one which is evident throughout his work. For the Gallic bishop not only was disease a sign of punishment (corrective or retributive depending upon people's reaction to it), but sometimes, miraculously, God could work through that prayerful reaction to terminate the spread of pestilence and spare lives.

My conclusion is that Gregory of Tours has recast Gregory I's sevenfold procession to become an episode of pastoral care for both spirit and flesh, something foreign to Gregory I's actual purpose. Further, as the story of the sevenfold procession was transmitted over the centuries, the sense that Gregory's purpose had been to have the church petition God for deliverance from disease became stronger until the story of Michael sheathing his sword and vanquishing the plague, made concrete in the mid-eighteenth-century statue atop the Castel Sant'Angelo and in the illustration in the renowned *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, became even stronger. A careful reading of Gregory's homily and his letters would indicate that this was not his pastoral concern.

Gregory's pastoral care in the time of crisis was to tend to the spirit not the flesh for he took Christianity's eschatological other-worldly thrust seriously. In later memory, however, Gregory I is presented very much as having a this-worldly concern with the sevenfold procession being reinterpreted not as a pastoral exercise to prepare for death but to prevent it.

“For it improper to be addicted to the tedium of affliction”: Christian Responses to Pandemic in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

(summary)

Gregory I offered a model of pastoral care that attended both to needs of the flesh as well as of the spirit. Yet, in practice, when confronted by a crisis such as a pandemic Gregory's letter-writing as well as the homily he delivered in association with the sevenfold procession held even before he was ordained bishop, reveal an exclusive interest with spiritual health. I suggest that part of Gregory's lack of interest in caring for the body was that he felt the pandemic was so overwhelming that there was little point in attending to physical concerns. Gregory of Tours transmits this homily to us within a narrative framework in which the Merovingian bishop not only shared Gregory of Rome's concern to prepare Christians to meet their maker through repentance of sins but held out the possibility that there could be miraculous deliverance from death. This is consistent with the framework elsewhere in the monumental history. This narrative framework around Gregory's homily started a transformation of the way in which Gregory I's pastoral care was remembered

that over the centuries his sevenfold procession was remembered not so much as an effort to induce repentance in order to welcome death but as a ritual that not only petitioned God to spare the lives of the people of Rome but was effective in having the petition granted through the legend of the angel sheathing his sword of punishment, an example perhaps of a “de-eschatologising” of Christianity.

Keywords: pastoral care; plague; pandemic; *laetania septiformis*; Gregory the Great; Gregory of Tours; Paul the Deacon; John Hymonides; Rome; Castel Sant’Angelo

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