

Gregory and Leander

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An Analysis of the Special Friendship
between Pope Gregory the Great
and Leander, Archbishop of Seville

By

John R. C. Martyn

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PREFACE

This book is based firstly, on my recent translation, with its lengthy introduction and annotation, of all of the surviving Latin letters that were written or dictated by Pope Gregory the Great, and were sent to his many clerical and non-clerical agents who helped him in the control of an ever-growing Catholic Church. Secondly, it relies for the most part on my recently published book on the life and writings of Saint Leander, the archbishop of Seville.¹

Several articles have also appeared in recent years based on my unexpected discoveries in Pope Gregory's letters. These cover his special use of his 'defenders' to manage his estates, and of schools to train them, his regular supply of free timber to the busy ship-yards of Alexandria, an unnamed younger brother whose special cook had been stolen by the Pope, his unusual attitude towards the Psalms, his presentation of a dozen or more manuscripts to various monks and monasteries, his possible trip far north of Milan, his formulae for equipping monasteries and convents, his practice of conducting soloists with an organ, and the influence of his chant on Leander's contribution to Spanish liturgy.²

Of course, besides these works, a wide range of medieval and modern texts and scholarship will be referred to, although this book does not purport to be a full analysis of all Pope Gregory's theological and religious concepts and concerns, which would take two or more volumes to cover. But I suspect that the very deep interrelationship between these two quite extraordinary men will shed more light on the lives and the characters and beliefs of each one of them, for the first time. Significantly, almost the longest and by far the most autobiographical of all of the Pope's letters

¹ *The Letters of Gregory the Great* trans. with Introduction and Notes by John R.C. Martyn (three vols, P.I.M.S., Toronto, 2004) and *Saint Leander: On the Teaching of Nuns and in Praise of the Church* translated and edited by John R.C. Martyn (Lexington Books, Maryland, 2008).

² These can be seen in 'Six Notes on Gregory the Great' in *Medievalia et Humanistica*, New Series, Number 29, 2003, 1-25, in *Med. et Hum.* ns, 30, 2004, 107-122 and in *Med. et Hum.* ns, 32, 1-5. See also my recent works on Gregory: *Pope Gregory and the Brides of Christ*, Cambridge Scholars, 2009, *From Queens to Slaves: Pope Gregory's Special Concern for Women*, Cambridge Scholars, 2011 and *Pope Gregory's Letter-Bearers*, Cambridge Scholars, 2012.

was one of those sent to his dear friend Leander (5.53a). This letter covers just over six pages in my translation, and it was clearly written or dictated by the Pope. However, this letter did not appear in either the earliest manuscripts, or in Norberg's edition, and yet it was mentioned by Pope Gregory himself in his *Moralia*, 11.1, and was rightly included in the Maurist edition of his letters (Paris, 1705), and also in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae* 1-2, 2 vols (Berlin, 1887-1899), as 5.5a. The short letter before it (5.5) was also sent to Leander, and my English version of both of these important letters will appear below, in full, together with the extraordinary letter in the first book, 1.41, sent to Leander, in April, 591 and letter 9.228, sent in July, 599.

This book aims to reveal the hitherto totally unexamined relationship between these two most admirable and most courageous men, two really close friends who played major parts in establishing the orthodox Catholic faith in Europe near the end of the sixth century, Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540-604) and Leander of Seville (c. 542-600). The similarities of their respective life-spans, their births and deaths, their families, their education, and their characters and careers will be shown to be most striking, and added to that, their literary works and biblical interpretations also have very much in common.

In each chapter I shall start with the first monk ever to become Pope, Gregory, and then show relevant parallels from the life of the slightly younger monk (by about four years), who became the archbishop of Seville, Leander, and who went on to play a most significant part in the establishment of the Catholic faith, both in the Spanish royal family, which at first was extremely dangerous, and later on throughout almost all of Spain. In some of the chapters, however, topics will be discussed to show their similar approaches (especially in chapters 12-13).

The manuscripts that provided the original Latin for the letters of Pope Gregory, when they had been collated by me and carefully studied, were found to belong to five main groups, the most reliable of them being P (Pa1, Pa2, Pb 1,2,3,4,5,6,7), followed by r (r1, r2) and R (R1,2,3,4) and less accurate, e (e1,2,3,4) and H (H1,2,3,4). My own recent discovery of illuminated folios, containing part or all of forty Gregorian letters, mostly taken from the key book three, will be published during 2013 in Melbourne, by Macmillan Art. The original manuscript was copied almost certainly in the famous scriptorium of Fleury-sur-Loire in the mid tenth century, as were two other tenth century manuscripts of the letters in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris, namely r. The variant readings of all three manuscripts are very close, but the Melbourne one is the only one out of all the manuscripts noted above that was for some unknown reason

adorned with illuminated capital letters. Incidentally, the r group is especially important in establishing the text of books two to four, which are missing in the P group of manuscripts.

The four very relevant and most important letters sent to Leander by Pope Gregory are included below, in my English translations. The first letter (1.41) was sent in April, 591, when Leander was still a bishop, and the second and lengthy third letters (5.53 and 5.53a) were both sent in July, 595, and by that time Leander had become the archbishop of Seville. He was certainly archbishop by August, 599, when the Pope sent another letter, carried by his special agent, the abbot Cyriacus, to Reccared, the recently converted King of the Visigoths, which ended: 'We have sent over a pallium from the See of Saint Peter the apostle, to a most reverend man, our brother and fellow bishop, Leander, and we should owe this both to ancient custom and to your character, and to his goodness and seriousness.'

The holy pallium was restricted wear for Mass only, and it was illegal for it to be worn outside the Church, and it made the Pope very angry when he heard that it was being worn in the streets, while a bishop was riding a horse or parading in a crowded city (see letters 3.54 and 54a). It was only sent as a great honour to a few really special bishops and archbishops, and its bestowal shows how highly the Pope regarded the archbishop of Seville, who had done so much to spread the true faith in Spain. This liturgical vestment was made out of white wool, and it was adorned with six black crosses, and a new one was kept near Saint Peter's tomb, and it was normally taken to the recipient by a really trustworthy friend of the Pope. Gregory only bestowed it for Mass alone on the archbishops of Canterbury, London, York, Arles, Seville, Milan, Autun and Salona. On the condition that it was only worn for outside use, during special litanies or during the translation of holy relics, it was granted to the bishops of Messina, Syracuse, Palermo, Corinth, Prima Justiniana and Nicopolis. But a claim by Rome's rival, Ravenna, went unanswered, noticeably.

In the following letters, Gregory expresses his feelings of close friendship as follows:

Letter 1.41 begins: 'Our very reverend and very saintly brother.' Both of them became Saints after their deaths. He continues: 'Your Fraternity, so very dear to me,' and 'I actually wrote this work for your Reverence, so that I might seem to have worn myself out on my work, for him whom I love before all others' and he concludes: 'Although still absent in body, I always see you present before me, because I carry an image of your face

imprinted in the depths of my heart. May God guard you in safety, my most dear and reverend brother.'

In letter 5.53, he greets his 'most reverend and his most holy brother and fellow-bishop, Leander,' continuing: 'Since you love me greatly, you can read in the tablets of your heart with what eagerness I am longing to see you.' He adds: 'But because I cannot see you, separated as you are by a long stretch of territory, I am sending you my book on Pastoral Care.' Finally, letter 5.53a begins: 'My most blessed brother.'

In letters 5.53 and 5.53a the Pope begins with his name, Gregory, as in virtually all of his letters, but he follows it with 'servant of the servants of God' an extraordinary and self-demeaning statement, and yet no surprise with the most modest Pope one could ever imagine. In 5.53, he is doing one thing that 'my love for you dictated,' that is, to send over his Book on Pastoral Rule, and the books on Job, because their intermediary, Probinus, had just turned up in Rome. This priest would now be able to carry the books over to Leander as soon as he could find a cabin in a boat to Spain.

Unfortunately the whole work, which was initially a joint effort between the two scholars, could not yet be sent, as the Pope had kept his original of the third and fourth chapters, having given his copy of them to some local monasteries, for their scholarly monks to proof-read. He ended 5.53 with yet another apology, this time excusing the brevity of this letter 'to your Beloved, making clear what a great turmoil of business oppresses me in this Church, when I say so little to him whom I love more than all others.' There were only sixteen lines in the letter, sent very soon afterwards, but it seems that he made up for its brevity with 5.53a, a very long letter, which covered two hundred and twenty-six lines.

What is also interesting in these two letters is that the addition after the Pope's name is in both cases: 'servant of the servants of God.' Gregory added these surprising words to all four letters that he sent to Leander. It was in fact used nineteen times, but only once for the others, who were Reccared, King of Spain, Brunhilde, Queen of the Franks, Maurice, the Emperor (alluded to), Claudius, duke of Lusitania, Felix, governor of the Appian estate, Marinianus, archbishop of Ravenna, bishops Aetherius of Lyon, Augustine of the English, Maximian of Syracuse, Pelagius of Tours, Serenus of Marseilles and Virgil of Arles, abbot Mellitus, and sub-deacons Peter, in charge of Sicily, and Felix, in charge of the Appian patrimony. All of them were very influential men.

There is no doubt that Gregory really meant it, as from the time when he found himself designated as the future Pope, his initial reaction was his total unworthiness, in his opinion, as he argued in several of his early letters, and as he stressed in later letters to the very significant people

listed in the previous paragraph. Two of them were extremely close friends also, Peter and Maximian. But closest of all was his Spanish colleague, who was reminded of Gregory's modesty and self-effacement on four occasions. The letters appear below.

CHAPTER ONE

LETTERS SENT TO LEANDER

A. Letter I.41 Gregory to Leander, bishop of Spain, in April, 591

‘Gregory, servant of the servants of God, greets our very reverend and very saintly brother, Bishop Leander.¹

I should have liked to have replied to your letters² with total application, if the hard work of my pastoral care were not wearing me out in such a way that I would prefer to weep than say anything. Your Reverence with your vigilance understands this even in the very text of my letter, when I speak without care to the person whom I love so dearly. For in this position I am being shaken by such great waves of this world, that I can in no way direct my ship into port, a ship old and rotting, which I undertook to control through God’s hidden plan. Now waves crash into me from the front, now foaming waves swell up in the sea on my side, now a storm attacks me from the rear. And in the middle of all this I am confused, and I am forced now to direct the rudder into the same adversity, and now to deflect threatening waves away to one side, with the curving flank of the ship. I groan, as I know that through my negligence, a bilge water of vices is rising, and the tempest violently accosts me, and at this very moment the rotten planks give the sound of shipwreck. Weeping, I recall that I have lost the placid shore of repose, and I look with sighs at the land that I nevertheless cannot reach, as the winds of duties blow against me. So if you love me, my very dear brother, stretch out the hand of your prayer to me in these waves, so that as you aid me in my troubles,

¹ A fuller introduction appeared in H1 and H2, but was omitted by all other MSS. For this and for the separate Spanish MS tradition for this letter, see Norberg pp. 52 and 56.

² A Spanish collection of Church canons sheds further light on this point. Bishop Leander had written to Gregory concerning baptism. See Isidore *De Vir* 51, and Gregory’s letter below (letter 5.53a) prefixed to his *Moralia*.

you may stand stronger in your own troubles also, by way of payment in exchange.³

But I can in no way express my joy with words, as I know that our shared son, the most glorious King Reccared, has been converted to the Catholic faith with the most sincere devotion.⁴ As you describe his character to me in your letters, you have made me even love someone whom I do not know. But because you know the snares of the old enemy, and since he proposes a fiercer war against those who have defeated him, let your Sanctity watch more carefully now over the same son of yours, so that he may complete what has begun so well, and let him not boast of the good works he has completed, so that he may also hold on to the faith he has got to know, as well as to the merits of his life. And let him show by his works that he is a citizen of the Eternal Kingdom, so that after many years have rolled by, he may pass from one kingdom to another.

However, concerning the triple immersion of baptism,⁵ no truer reply can be made than what you yourselves feel, that in one faith, a different custom is in no way harmful to the Holy Church. But as we are immersed for the third time, we signify the sacraments of the burial that lasted three days, so that, while the infant is lifted out of the water for the third time, the resurrection of a three-day period is expressed. But if perhaps someone should also think that it happens for the sake of the veneration of the supreme Trinity, no objection is made to this, immersing in the water just once for baptism. For since there is one substance in three substances, it can in no way be reprehensible for an infant to be immersed either three times or once, when there is both a trinity of persons in three immersions, and the singularity of the divine can be signified in one.⁶ But if until now, an infant was immersed three times in baptism by heretics, I do not think that this should be done among you, in case they divide the divine while

³ This is one of Gregory's longest shipwreck similes, skilfully composed. Framed with foaming waves and the impossibility of reaching port, the old, rotting ship balances rotten planks, and in the middle, is first battered by a storm on all sides, and then rides against the swell, deflecting the waves. His great confusion leads to groans and weeping, while the rising bilge water threatens his Church. The shore he cannot reach is like Odysseus' Ithaca (*Od.* x. 29-31). The rescuing hand of prayer is usually his final request.

⁴ Reccared converted from Arianism in about 587 (see John of Biclar *Chronicon*; Isid *Hist Goth*). The Third Council of Toledo notes it in a decree of May 8, 589. Yet Gregory makes no acknowledgment before April 591, showing how drawn out the process of communication could be at that time.

⁵ What follows was accepted at the Spanish Council of 633 (Toledo IV).

⁶ An example of how flexible Gregory could be in liturgical matters.

counting the immersions, boasting that they have defeated your custom, doing what they used to do.⁷

I have sent codices to your Fraternity, so very dear to me, and I have inserted a note below about them. But those things which had been said in my Exposition on the blessed Job,⁸ and which you write should be sent to you, because I had made these remarks with words and senses that flow⁹ through my Homilies, I was keen anyway to change them into the form of books, which are now still being written down by the copyists.¹⁰ And if the haste of the letter's carrier had not restricted me, I should have wanted to send all of it to you without any reduction. Most of all because I actually wrote this work for your Reverence, so that I might seem to have worn myself out on my work, for him whom I love before all others.

Furthermore, if you know how to allow yourself some time from your ecclesiastical occupation, you know how it is now. Although still absent in body, I always see you present before me, because I carry an image of your face imprinted in the depths of my heart. May God guard you in safety, my most dear and most reverend brother.⁹

B. Letter 5. 53 Gregory to Leander, bishop in Spain, July, 595

‘Gregory, servant of the servants of God, greets his most reverend and most holy brother and fellow-bishop, Leander.

Since you love me greatly, you can read in the tablets of your heart with what eagerness I am longing to see you. But because I cannot see you, separated as you are by a long stretch of territory, I have done one thing that my love for you dictated, that is to send over to your Holiness the book of Pastoral Care, which I wrote at the beginning of my episcopate, and the books which you already knew I had written on the Exposition of the blessed Job, after the arrival here of our joint son, the priest Probinus.

In fact, I have been unable to send over the manuscripts of the third and fourth chapters of that work, because I only had my manuscripts for the same chapters, which I had already given to the monasteries. And so, let your Holiness peruse these earnestly and weep for my sins more earnestly, in case it is a cause of heavier blame for me that I should appear

⁷ His discussion appeared in the acts of the Council of Toledo IV (633), can. vi.

⁸ Gregory's work was sent to Leander four years later (letter 5.53).

⁹ Accepting *repentibus* in H 1 and 2 ('flowing through') rather than *tepentibus* in M, MG and Norberg ('warming' or 'cooling'), far from the right sense here.

¹⁰ Gregory continually revised his literary works, including letters.

to know what I fail to do. In truth, the very brevity of my letter to your Beloved makes clear what a great turmoil of business oppresses me in this Church, when I say so little to him whom I love more than all others.’

**C. Letter 5.53a Gregory, servant of the servants of God,
to his most reverend and most holy brother
and fellow-bishop, Leander, July, 595¹¹**

‘Most blessed brother, I got to know you long ago in Constantinople, when the official replies of the apostolic See were keeping me busy in that city, and when you came on an embassy from the Visigoths, charged with dealing with a number of matters of Christian faith. I exposed to your ears everything that I disliked about myself, since I had put off the grace of conversion for a long time, and to a great extent, and even after I was inflamed by a love of Heaven, I thought it better to wear secular clothing. For what I was seeking concerning the love of eternity was already being revealed to me, but an ingrained habit had prevented me from changing my external attire. And when my mind was still forcing me to serve the present world, as it were superficially, then many things began to build up against me, from that same worldly concern, so that I was held back in it now, not by its outward show, but by my thoughts, which is more serious.

But finally I fled anxiously from all of this, and looked for the haven of a monastery, leaving behind what belonged to the world, as I then mistakenly thought. From the shipwreck of this life, I came out naked. For just as a wave, once a storm has built up, often shakes a carelessly tethered boat even from off a bay on the safest of shores, even so I suddenly found myself in an ocean of secular cases, under the pretext of ecclesiastical rank. As for the peace of the monastery, because when I had it I did not hold on to it firmly, it was only when I had lost it that I realized how tightly it should have been held. For since I am forced by the virtue of obedience to observe the ministry of the Holy Altar, I have undertaken this office beneath the splendour of the Church. But if I could do so without punishment, I would reject it by fleeing once again.

¹¹ Not in the earliest MSS, or in N, this letter was mentioned by Gregory in *Mor* 11.1 and was included by M and MG (as 5.53a). For MSS containing it, see MG p 353. It is the most autobiographical of all of Gregory’s letters, and is full of literary devices, rich imagery and irony typical of his style, and it deserves a very close analysis. The letter was sent five years after Gregory became Pope, and nine years after his return from the Royal City, where he had served for about six years as papal emissary. It contains some nostalgia, as he looks back at their halcyon days together in Constantinople.

And after this, against my wishes and my resistance, although the priesthood was burdensome, the weight of pastoral care was added to it. And the more I feel myself inadequate for this office, relieved by no consolation of confidence, the more harshly I am now enduring it. For because the state of the world has already been disturbed by an increase in evils, as its end approaches, we ourselves, who are believed to be serving the holy mysteries inwardly, are bound up in cares externally.

It was as if, at that time too when I became a priest, it was arranged for me, ignorant as I was, to accept the responsibility of the holy order, so that I might be on watch more freely in this earthly palace. Of course, many of my brethren from the monastery followed me there, bound by their brotherly love. And I see that this was done according to divine dispensation, so that by their example, I might always be tethered to a placid shore of prayer, as with the rope of an anchor, when I was tossed to and fro under the incessant pressure of secular cases. Indeed, I used to flee the great volume of earthly business and disturbances to join in their fellowship, as if to a bay in the safest of ports, and although that ministry had removed me from my monastery and former life of peace, and had destroyed me with as it were with the sword of its occupation, yet among those fellow brethren, thanks to our daily discussion of some learned readings, I was revived by a feeling of remorse. Then those same brethren, with your encouragement too (as you yourself remember), decided to urge me with a persistent request to write an exposition of the book of the blessed Job, and just as Truth would impart strength, to open up for them mysteries of such great immensity. They added this also for me in their tiresome request, that I should not only work out all of the words of the narrative, through allegorical interpretations, but should also straightaway slant my allegorical interpretations towards an exercise on morality. And those monks added something even more burdensome, namely that I should back up each interpretation with evidence, and fully explain the testimonies that I had adduced, if any of those inserted in this additional moral exposition might perhaps be seen as implicit.

Soon, facing this obscure work, never yet discussed before me, I realized that I was dealing with really great matters of an extraordinary nature, but I was overcome just by the heaviness of the discourse, I admit, and being tired out, I gave in. But suddenly, caught between fear and devotion, when I raised my mind's eye to Him who bestows gifts on us, I put aside hesitation and at once paid attention with certainty. For what my brethren had lovingly asked me to do, could not be impossible. Indeed, I despaired of being suitable for it, but in my desperation I regained my strength and cast my hope on Him, through whom 'the tongues of the

dumb are opened, and who makes the tongues of the infants eloquent',¹² and who distinguished the irrational and brute braying of an ass from the rational modes of human speech.¹³ Why is it surprising, then, if He should offer intellect to a stupid human being? For He narrates his Truth, when he wants to, even through the mouths of dumb beasts. And so, provided with strength by this thought, I aroused my dryness to track down a really deep fountain. And although the life of those for whom I was being forced to give the exposition would long outlast my own, I still did not believe it wrongful if a fluent pipe of lead should serve the uses of mankind.

And so, gathering the same brethren before me, I soon read them the first sections of the book, in person, and because I found my time a little less busy, I dictated the later sections by discussing them. When a larger space of time was available, I increased the text a lot and reduced it a little, and left some of it just as I found it, thus editing what had been written down before my eyes while I was talking, by making corrections through all the books. For even when I was dictating the last sections, I paid careful attention to employ the style that I had used for the first. And so I brought it about that, by running through what I had said with scholarly emendations, I improved it, as if it were dictated for a similar outcome, and that what I had dictated, did not differ much from the spoken word. Thus, while one part is extended and another is shortened, subject matter edited in a different way should not appear in a different form. And yet, as I extended the third part of this work by talking, I almost left it like that. For, while my brethren dragged me to other works, they did not want this section to be corrected too punctiliously.¹⁴ Of course, they gave me lots of orders, and while I was willing to obey them, now through the service of exposition, now through the ascent of contemplation and now through the furtherance of morality, I completed this work, to its final extent of thirty-five volumes, in six codices.

Therefore, I am often found postponing, as it were, the order of exposition in it, and I also sweat a little longer over its wide spread of contemplation and morality. And yet, whoever speaks about God, must take care that he examines thoroughly whatever instructs the morals of his audience, and he must allot this correct order of speaking, if he should derive from it profitably the start of his speech, when the opportunity of edification demands it.

¹² *Wisdom* 10.21.

¹³ For the talking ass, see *Nm* 22.22-34.

¹⁴ This is evidence of Gregory's methodology as an author. As a fine scholar, he used to revise his books and his more important letters quite regularly, as we have seen above.

The user of holy eloquence ought to imitate the manner of a river. For if a river, while it flows down through its bed, finds concave recesses along its sides, it at once diverts the course of its flow into those, and when it has filled them up sufficiently, it suddenly pours back into its bed. Even so, of course, the user of the divine word should behave, so that when he is discussing any matter at all, if perhaps he finds an opportunity placed nearby for suitable edification, he should divert the flow of his tongue into a nearby recess, and when he has poured his waters sufficiently over the adjoining field of instruction, he should return to the bed of his proposed sermon.

It should be known, however,¹⁵ that we are running over some things with historical explanations and examining some through allegory, using a figurative investigation, and discussing some merely by means of an allegorical morality, but at the same time we are hunting for some things throughout the work, inquiring quite carefully in three ways. For first indeed we place the foundation of history, then we build the fabric of the mind into a citadel of faith, with figurative significance, and finally also, through the grace of morality, we clothe the edifice, as it were, with a spread of colouring. For certainly, what should the words of the Truth be trusted to be, other than nourishment for refreshing the mind?

By discussing them in many ways with alternating styles, we are offering a dish of food to the mouth, so as to prevent the reader, invited to our book as it were to a feast, from finding what is presented to be unpalatable. And while he is considering the many things offered to him, he accepts what he judges to be more elegant. Sometimes, in fact, we neglect to explain obvious words of history, in case we come to obscure ones later on. But sometimes they cannot be understood literally, because when accepted superficially they in no way instruct the readers, but lead them into error. For behold it is said: 'Under whom they stoop who carry the world.'¹⁶

And concerning such a great man, who would not know that he in no way follows the empty myths of the poets, so as to suspect that the World's mass is born aloft by a sweating giant? He again says when he is oppressed by beatings: 'My soul chooses strangling and my bones choose death.'¹⁷ And what man in his right mind would believe that such a commendable person, who of course certainly received rewards from the eternal Judge for his virtue of patience, would have decided to finish his

¹⁵ The next passage has Gregory's description of the fourfold method of interpreting the Scriptures.

¹⁶ See *Job* 9.13. One of ten quotes from *Job*, not unexpectedly.

¹⁷ *Job* 7.15.

life by hanging, while being beaten? Sometimes also, the words themselves fight against being literal, so that they are not perhaps understood literally. For he says: 'Let the day perish on which I was born and the night in which it was said "A child is conceived."' ¹⁸ And a little later he adds: 'Let darkness claim it and let it be wrapped in bitterness.' ¹⁹ In the course of the same night he adds: 'Let that night be solitary.' ²⁰ Of course this day of his birth could not remain drawn out by the actual passage of time. And so how was he praying for it to be 'wrapped in darkness'? For indeed, the day had not yet elapsed and yet, if he existed in the nature of things, he could in no way feel its bitterness. Therefore, it is certainly in no way being said about a day unfelt, that is expected to be struck by a sense of bitterness. And if the night of conception had ended joined with the remaining nights, how did he pray that this night might become 'solitary'? Just as it could not be fixed by the lapse of time, even so, it could not be separated from the conjunction of the remaining nights.

He again says: 'For how long do you not depart from me, nor send me away, to swallow my spittle?' ²¹ And yet a little earlier he had said: 'What my soul was unwilling to touch before, has now become my food through necessity.' ²² But who would not know that saliva might be swallowed more easily than food? And so as he declares that he eats food, it is quite incredible where he says that he cannot swallow his spittle. And again he says: 'I have sinned, what shall I do to you, O preserver of men?' ²³ Or indeed do you wish to punish me for 'the iniquities of my youth?' ²⁴ And yet he adds with another response: 'For my heart does not reproach me as long as I live.' ²⁵ How, then, is he not criticized at all by his heart during his whole life, as he admits with a public voice that he has sinned? For the fault of a deed and the blamelessness of a heart are never found together simultaneously. But the literal words, of course, while they cannot agree when collated, show a difference, that should be looked for in them, as if they were to say with certain words: 'While you see us being destroyed externally, look for this in us, which in our case can be found within us, well ordered and self-consistent.'

¹⁸ *Job* 3.2.

¹⁹ *Job* 3.5.

²⁰ *Job* 3.7.

²¹ *Job* 7.19.

²² *Job* 6.7.

²³ *Job* 7.20.

²⁴ *Job* 13.26.

²⁵ *Job* 27.6.

But sometimes the person who fails to accept the words of history literally, conceals the light of truth offered to him, and when he seeks laboriously to find in them another light, internally, he loses this one that he could obtain without difficulty, externally. For the holy man says: 'If I have denied the poor what they wanted, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, if I have eaten my morsel alone and the fatherless has not eaten from it, if I have ignored a man who is dying through lack of clothing, and a poor man without covering, if his loins have not blessed me, not warmed with the fleece of my sheep.'²⁶

Of course, if we change that fundamentally to a sense of allegory, we make all the facts of his misery meaningless. For, indeed, just as divine speech exercises clever people with its mysteries, even so it often refreshes the simple-minded at a superficial level. In public, it has material from which it may nurture young children, in secret, it stores up matter from which it can suspend minds in admiration of the sublime.

For it is like a certain river, if I may describe it like this, one that is smooth and deep, in which the lamb walks and the elephant swims. And so, as the opportunity for each individual section demands, even so the order of the exposition changes it through study, so that the more it alternates through each type of case, to suit the demand of each topic, the more truly it discovers the sense of divine speech.

I have sent this exposition over to your Beatitude for you to review, of course, not because I consider it worthy of your attention, but because I remember having promised it at your request. Whatever your Holiness finds in it that is colourless and unpolished, please be quick to excuse me, since you are well aware that I am saying this while I am sick. For, as my troubles weaken my body, even my studies of rhetoric are languishing,²⁷ as my mind is impaired. For many years have now run their course, while I am tormented by frequent pains in my innards, and for hours and every moment I grow weary, as the strength of my stomach is entirely broken,

²⁶ *Job* 31.16-17,19-20. In the last sentence, the *non* must qualify both *benedixerunt* and *calefactus*, as in the King James Bible (AV) The NAB reads 'whose limbs have not blessed me when warmed', the wrong sense. So too with *praetereuntem* above, NAB's 'wanderer without clothing' makes little sense. AV's 'perish for want of clothing' is preferable, a common metaphorical use.

²⁷ His comments on his stomach pains are notable. Severe gout was torturing him, just as it tortured his dear friend Leander (9.228), and the Emperor Maurice, in his final months. See page 127. His study of rhetoric for nearly five years after becoming Pope shows how well versed he was in literary finesse; and the 'languishing' suggests that there was a good chance of its continuance later on.

and I pant with fevers, slow-working certainly, but continuous all the same.

While I anxiously consider, amid these pains, that with the Scripture's witness 'Every son who is received by God is scourged,'²⁸ the more harshly I am being depressed by present ills, the more certainly I recover, due to my anticipation of eternity. And perhaps this was the plan of divine providence, that being shattered myself, I should write an exposition on the shattered Job, and that I would better understand the mind of one who is being whipped, through being whipped myself. And yet it is clear to those considering this correctly, that with an immoderate suffering from my hard work, my bodily distress acts against my studies in this manner, that when strength of body hardly suffices to exhibit the service of public speaking, the mind cannot intimate what it feels properly.

For what is the office of the body other than the organ of the heart? And however skilled an expert in singing might be, he cannot do justice to his music, unless external services are also in harmony with it, because, of course, an organ that is broken does not spring back properly for a song, even when it is conducted by an experienced hand, nor does its wind produce an artistic effect, if a pipe is split with some cracks, and is too shrill.²⁹

And so, how much more heavily is the literary quality of my exposition depressed, in which damage to the organ dissipates the charm of my expression, so that no skill from experience can compose it? But I request this, that in running through the words of this work, you do not look for flowery language in them. For, through holy eloquence the lightness of unfruitful loquacity is most studiously repressed, while in the temple of God the planting of a grove is prohibited. And without doubt we all know that, whenever the stalks of a healthy crop make poor progress with their leaves, the ears of grain swell with less fullness.

For this reason, I have declined to follow even the art itself of eloquence, which the teachers of that external discipline recommend. For just as the style of this letter also makes clear, I do not avoid the clashing of final 'm', I do not shun the confusion of barbarism, I refuse to observe syntax and moods, and the cases governed by prepositions, as I am certain that it is unworthy that I should restrict the words of the Heavenly oracle

²⁸ *Heb 12.6.*

²⁹ The organ is clearly making use of a wind-box, pumped by a slave. For the organ, see chapter 13 below.

beneath the rules of Donatus.³⁰ For these have not been observed by any of the interpreters of the authority of Holy Scripture.

Because our exposition arises from that, of course, it is certainly proper that a newborn child, as it were, should imitate the appearance of its mother. However, I am discussing a new translation. But if I find it necessary to quote a proof text, sometimes I select my testimonies from the new translation, sometimes from the old one, so that, because the Apostolic See, over which I preside, with God's authority, uses both of them, the work of my perusal may also be supported by both.'

When he wrote letter 1.41, after Leander had been back in Spain as bishop of Seville for three years, he told his friend that he had revised his work on Job, as we have seen, and his scribe was turning it into a book, and he mentions his Spanish friend's request for a copy. But it was four years before the Pope sent him his revised copy, in July 595, letter 9.228, and it still lacked books 11 to 22, which were being revised by some monks in monasteries.³¹ Then in his next letter to Leander, in August 599, he fails to mention whether he has finally supplied those missing books.

D. Letter 9.228, Gregory to Leander, bishop of Spain, July 599

9.228 Gregory to Leander, bishop of Spain,³² July 599

Gregory, servant of the servants of God, to his most reverend and most holy brother, Bishop Leander.

'I have received the letter of your Holiness, written simply with a pen of love. For from your heart, your tongue had coloured what you sent back on the page of your letter. Good and wise men were present when it was being read out, and they were at once deeply affected with remorse. Each began to grasp you within his heart with a hand of love, because in that letter it was possible not just to hear the sweetness of your mind, but also to see it. Individuals were inspired and amazed, and the very passion of

³⁰ The ironical dismissal of Donatus is very neatly written, carefully following his rules, with a tricolon, anaphora and parataxis, and a complex triple rhyme, and the verbose language is ideal in his pseudo-attack on verbosity, as he jokes with his erudite friend.

³¹ This interesting comment shows how the Pope improved his literary works, by using monks who were sufficiently scholarly.

³² The title is 'of the Spains' but Pope Gregory is not consistent with 'Spain' and 'Spains.' See letter 229c

those listening demonstrated what ardour the speaker had.³³ For unless torches are first alight by themselves, they cannot ignite another torch. And thus we saw with what great love your mind was inflamed there, as it set others alight also in this way. However, they did not know about your life at all, while I myself shall remember it always, and with great veneration. But the loftiness of your heart was quite clear to them from the humility of your speech.³⁴

And that letter of yours says that all men should imitate my life. But let what is not so, as it is stated, become so, because it is stated to prevent you from telling a lie, which is unusual for you. But to this I briefly reply with the words of a certain good woman: 'Do not call me Naomi, that is fair; but call me Mara, for I am full of bitterness.'³⁵ Because today, good sir, I am not that man whom you knew. By accomplishing much externally, I have fallen as much internally, I admit it, and am afraid that I am among those about whom it has been written: 'You cast them down when they were lifted up.'³⁶ For he is cast down when being lifted up, who rises with his honours, but falls in his morality. For, as I followed the paths of my Leader, I judged myself to be very much a disgrace among men, and worthless among the common people, and running with the luck of the person about whom it is said again by the psalmist: 'The ascents in his heart he has arranged in the valley of tears,'³⁷ so that I might ascend, of course, all the more truly inside, as I might fall all the more humbly outside, through the valley of tears. But now an onerous honour presses me down greatly, and countless cares resound around me, and when my mind prepares itself for God, the cares cut through it with their pressure, as if with some swords. My heart has no rest. It lies prostrate in the depths, depressed by the weight of its own thoughts.

It is rarely or never that a wing of contemplation raises it among the sublime. My sluggish mind is torpid, now almost reduced to a stupor by the temporal cares that bark around it, and it is forced now to deal with earthly things, and now even arrange things of the flesh, but sometimes it is compelled by the force of disgust to dispose of some things even sinfully. But why do I say so much? Overcome by its own weight, my

³³ The quite large audience is surprising, although Leander was the brightest star in the Spanish galaxy. It is possible that this letter was first read out to the Pope by his secretary, when his gout kept him in bed, with several of his priests and monks gathered around him.

³⁴ The humblest of Popes matches the humility in Leander's speech.

³⁵ *Ru* 1.20.

³⁶ *Ps* 72[73]18.

³⁷ *Ps* 83[84]5-6.

mind sweats blood. For unless sin was censured with the name of blood, the psalmist would not say: 'Deliver me from blood-guiltiness.'³⁸ But when we add sins to sins, we complete this also, which is said by another prophet: 'Bloodshed follows bloodshed.'³⁹ For blood is said to touch blood, when a sin is joined to a sin, so that the mass of wickedness is multiplied.

But amid all of this, I pray you by almighty God, as I slip beneath the waves of mental disturbance, hold on to me with the hand of your prayer. For I was sailing with a following breeze, as it were, when I was living a life of tranquillity in a monastery.⁴⁰ But then a storm arose suddenly with a tempestuous motion, and it snatched me away amid its own disturbance, and I lost the good fortune of my journey, because with my loss of peace, I endured a mental shipwreck. Look, I am now adrift in the waves, and I seek the plank of your intercession. Although I did not deserve to reach the shore, rich with an intact ship, at least after my losses, let me be brought back to harbour through your plank.

But your Holiness writes how you are afflicted with the trouble of gout, and I have also been worn out terribly by persistent pain from it. But consolation will be easy, if, amid the lashes that we suffer, we remember each sin that we have committed. And we see that these are no longer lashes but gifts, if we who have sinned through bodily delight, are purified by bodily pain.

Furthermore, with the blessing of Saint Peter, the prince of the apostles, we have sent over a pallium for you to use only for solemn Mass. After sending it, I certainly should have warned you how you should be living, but I suppress such speech, as you anticipate my words in your way of life. May our almighty God guard you with his protection and bring you to the reward of his Heavenly home, with a multiplied harvest of souls.⁴¹ But this brief letter testifies to the great deal of business and physical debility that weighs me down, and in it I have not spoken enough to him too, whom I greatly love. May God protect and keep you safe, reverend brother.'

³⁸ *Ps* 50[51]14.

³⁹ *Hos* 4.2. The Pope seems to be almost obsessed with blood, perhaps reflecting his own disease, although his imagery is not medical. Beside the 'sweats blood' he has a 'wing' of contemplation and worries that 'bark' may cut through his mind like a 'sword'.

⁴⁰ This nostalgia refers to the two years (576-578) Gregory spent as a monk in the monastery of Saint Andrew, once his family mansion.

⁴¹ The reward of a harvest of souls certainly came true for Leander when King Reccared accepted the orthodox faith.

These four letters may seem few for close friends, but they often needed an agent to bear them, and only one was short. One is equal to the longest letter written by Gregory. In the English they run to 88 lines in 1.41, 24 lines in 5.53, 336 lines in 5.53a and 95 lines in 9.228.

CHAPTER TWO

FIRST ENCOUNTER

As we have seen, Gregory and Leander first met in the cultured and very religious capital of the eastern empire, Constantinople, in about 580, when the deacon Leander joined a group of Italian monks who had crossed over from Gregory's monastery of Saint Andrew in Rome, determined to accompany their charismatic leader. Pope Pelagius II had sent him over there, as his emissary. The Spaniard before long became his close companion and his confidante, and a valuable sounding board and helpful critic for the impressive explanations in his analysis of Job, which was finally published as his greatest work, his *Moralia in Job*, after receiving considerable assistance from his new friend.

Besides this, the two monks must have greatly enjoyed the Byzantine churches and their colourful services and the grand parades, both religious and military, while they were studying and discussing the Holy Writ, first in some local monastery, and later, without doubt, in the royal palace of the Emperor Maurice. The Byzantine city's very long tradition of theological scholarship, of music, including the organ, and of religious art, clearly impressed both of them, even if their primary mission was to obtain military and financial support from the Byzantine Emperor, which was to prove to be only partly successful. For Leander did manage somehow to extract a very well-equipped contingent of Byzantine troops, to help the Catholic prince whom he had converted to the orthodox faith in Seville, Hermenegild, who was now in urgent need of enough troops to resist the large army led by his very canny Arian father, King Leovigild, who saw his son as a traitor. The King was already besieging Seville, and before much longer he would starve it into submission.

But the cunning old King had soon bribed the Byzantine force to withdraw, and Leander, who had returned to join his prince in Seville in 583, was at once exiled to the east, for good, or so it seemed at the time, in 584, while the King's once beloved son and heir, Hermenegild, was captured and was thrown into prison in chains. An agent of his father soon murdered the prince, before he had had any opportunity to make his peace with his still angry father. We shall see more on this bitterness below.

Thus, during the years 584 to 586, Leander was back in Constantinople, together once again with his friend, the deacon Gregory, who was still studying and working hard in the city, with his fellow monks, although by then he was part of the royal family, and was staying in the magnificent palace of the extremely pious new Emperor, Maurice. Although it appears that he was not free even there from local priests and monks and laity, who were no doubt trying to use him as a means of entering the Royal Court, by requesting his help on the interpretation of doctrinal points. He comments on this in letter 11.27 sent to Theoctista, the Emperor's sister, warning her about heretics and false prophets.

In about 579, the new deacon, Gregory, had been sent to Constantinople to act as the emissary of Pope Pelagius II, and he had first attempted to persuade the Emperor, Tiberius II, to provide some gold and troops and officers for Pope Pelagius to use in defending Italy against the ever more aggressive Lombards, who were by then even threatening Rome, but Gregory had no success at all. However, a lot of gold was supplied for ransoms, as several Italian towns fell before the Lombard attacks, and the inhabitants were used by the Germans to raise funds when their captives were put up for sale.

More hardened troops with proper training and with experience leaders after warfare in Persia and along the Danube, were badly needed, so as to train and lead the somewhat unreliable Italian mercenaries, who were very short of training and were mostly lacking in fortitude and morale. Despite a very eloquent appeal, Gregory failed to move the Emperor Tiberius at all, and then he failed to convince Tiberius' son-in-law and successor, Maurice, who had taken over as Emperor in 583. This was despite the fact that in August, 584, Gregory had become part of the new Emperor's family, as the godfather to his son and heir, Theodosius, the first of the eight healthy children to whom Constantina was to give birth.¹

Maurice had in fact found the palace's coffers almost empty when he took over from a spendthrift Tiberius, and he quickly realized that he could no longer afford the usual handouts, nor support the armies in the east against Persia, in the north against the Danube invaders and in Italy as well as that, against extensive Lombard attacks. As Michael Whitby showed in his valuable book on the Emperor Maurice: 'Italy had to be left

¹ Michael Whitby *The Emperor Maurice and his Historian* (O.U.P. 1988), on p. 18 describes how Queen Constantina gave birth to a son on August 4th, 583, called Theodosius, and adds: 'Seven other children followed, Tiberius, Peter, Paul, Justin, Justinian, Anastasia, Theoctista and Cleopatra.' That should have been 'eight other children,' surely. The usurper Phocas murdered all nine of them.

to fend for itself.² In fact, it was left to the Pope to raise and finance and even lead a mercenary army of sorts, when he was not bribing the invaders, especially while Rome was being besieged and was about to capitulate.

As we shall see, both Gregory and Leander had to face a well-equipped, well-trained and very savage army, but Leander did at least die before the army of the Danube had mutinied against their leader, Peter, the Emperor's brother. They had been ordered to take up winter quarters in hostile territory, and had refused to do so, thereby rebelling. They then chose a popular centurion, Phocas, to lead them back to Constantinople.

There they swept aside the loyal troops and the palace guards, and in the next month or so Phocas murdered all of the royal family and almost all of their friends and their courtiers. One of these aristocratic families, the wealthy Egyptian patrician, Appio, together with his wife, Rusticiana, had been warned by the Pope to leave the Golden City and settle in their property in Italy – at once. He understood how dangerous the Danube troops might prove to be. Rusticiana was in fact a very close friend of the Pope, and she was also the granddaughter of the brilliant scholar and talented writer, Boethius. Like her grandfather, she was to become the innocent victim of a bloodthirsty military ruler.

The two monks, Gregory and Leander, must have been very well acquainted with the Emperor and his wife and with all of their offspring, but unfortunately none of the letters sent by Leander, perhaps including some like Gregory's to the Emperor himself, or to the Empress and her sister Theoctista, have survived. He certainly wrote several, and his young brother Isidore could well have collected and published them, but it seems that he chose not to publish any of them. He let his brother down.

For Pope Gregory, the murder of the royal family and its courtiers must have been most distressing, having been accepted as a welcome part of Maurice's large and very pious family. His tactful letter to the usurping Emperor, the military thug Phocas, is full of irony, but if Phocas had had the brains to understand its irony, an assassin would have been sent over at once to murder the defenceless and very sickly old Pope.

As a very significant prelude to those murders, letter 13.24 had been sent by Pope Gregory to warn one of his closest friends in Constantinople, the elderly patrician Rusticiana, informing her that an agent of the new Emperor, called Beator, had come over from his leader's private treasury, in February, a time normally avoided by nearly all ships, and was now at

² Whitby lists all of Maurice's eight children in his work on *The Emperor Maurice*, Theodosius, Tiberius, Peter, Paul, Justinian, Justin, Anastasia and Cleopatra, all killed by the usurper, Phocas. See Whitby, *op. cit.* p. 11.

work bullying her staff and her granddaughters, who were on the estate of Rusticiana quite close to Rome. The Pope strongly urged Rusticiana to cross over, at once, with her husband, the Egyptian aristocrat and courtier, Appio, and with the rest of their family, but unfortunately she and Appio were elderly, and they procrastinated, which proved to be disastrous for them all.

The grandson of Rusticiana, a young aristocratic boy called Strategios, was almost certainly the godson of Pope Gregory, who clearly showed a special concern for him in letters 8.22, 11.26, 13.24 and 13.33. In the first, the Pope is writing to Rusticiana, and ends hoping that she will be comforted ‘by the life and health of my most charming son, his lordship Strategios.’

In letter 11.26, again sent to Rusticiana, he ends a very interesting account of monks trying to escape from their monastery in Rome, with: ‘I request that my most charming son, his lordship Strategios, may be greeted on my behalf, together with his glorious parents, your children.’

Letter 13.24 was also sent by a really worried Pope to Rusticiana, but he cannot avoid greeting the young man whom I am sure was his godson. He tells her: ‘I ask that my very sweet son, lord Strategios, be greeted on my behalf, and may almighty God nurture him for himself and for you, and may he console you always with his grace and life.’ In the light of the growing crisis, this long finale would be unexpected for a grandson, but not for a godson, who had the status of a natural son.

Finally, in letter 13.33 he writes to Eusebia, the daughter of Rusticiana, who lived with her in Constantinople, and exhorts her to leave the city, ending with a prayer to God to allow the daughter to live in tranquillity with her noble husband, rejoicing over the good health of lord Strategios. His charming, sweet son is surely the Pope’s godson, although no other scholar has suggested it.

When Whitby argued that the Pope had ‘welcomed the news of Phocas’ success with embarrassing warmth’³ it showed how even an eminent modern scholar can be taken in by Roman irony, so evident in Cicero’s speeches. And he was not alone.⁴ The very few disagreements between the Pope and the Emperor are expressed with humour, in fact, and usually with mock indignation, an approach that was quite usual between equal and well-educated intellects. The Pope was keen to allow some soldiers to become monks, which was not popular with the Emperor, but

³ See his work on *The Emperor Maurice*, p. 24.

⁴ See the Introduction to my *Letters*, pp 42-47, and his letter to Phocas on pp 848-849. The brutal, ill-educated Phocas lacked the decency, humanity and sophistication of Maurice.