# 1 The Demonology of Saint Gregory the Great

## 1.1 *Moralia in Iob* — A Study of Temptation, Vice, and the Social Forms of Evil

**Draft version for approval.** The text has not been published on the site.

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## 1.3 Introduction

The demonology of Saint Gregory the Great occupies a distinctive place in the history of Christian reflection on evil. Gregory did not produce a separate, systematic treatise on demons. He did not analyse their nature in an ordered sequence of questions as later scholastics would. He was likewise uninterested in a demonology understood as a catalogue of spirits, their names, hierarchies and supposed specialisations. His reflection arises from exegesis of Sacred Scripture, monastic experience, pastoral practice and observation of men and societies living under the conditions of the deep crisis of late antiquity.

Its fullest expression is found in the monumental work Moralia in Iob, that is, the Moralia on the Book of Job. This commentary, comprising thirty-five books, grew out of lectures begun by Gregory during his stay

in Constantinople and was then supplemented and edited over many years. It is not merely an exposition of the biblical text. It constitutes an extensive synthesis of exegesis, moral theology, anthropology, asceticism, spirituality, ecclesiology and demonology.

The Book of Job provided Gregory with a particularly suitable structure for the analysis of evil. In its prologue Satan appears as the accuser of the righteous, who questions the disinterestedness of his faith, demands that he be put to the test and receives a limited permission to act. He then strikes at Job's goods, his family, his body, his relationships and his manner of perceiving God. He cannot, however, directly deprive him of freedom. He must bring him to the point where he himself utters a word opposed to the Creator.

For Saint Gregory the Great the story of Job becomes the image of the whole spiritual struggle. Satan acts simultaneously from without and from within: he employs events, suffering, other people, suggestion, the imagination, memory, pleasure and fear. He attacks the individual, but also constructs collective forms of evil. His activity can become entrenched in a group, an institution, a culture, the manner of exercising power, a community that is outwardly religious, and even in ecclesial structures. Gregory's demonology is thus at once a psychology of temptation and a theology of the social diffusion of sin.

The terms "psyche" and "social structures" are concepts later than Gregory's language. The Pope does not make use of modern psychology or sociology. Nevertheless, he analyses the mind, memory, will, affections, desires, imaginations, habits and the process of decision-making with such penetration that his description may justly be read as a patristic map of psychic life. Similarly, when speaking of the "body of the devil," the unity of the unrighteous, corruption in power, environmental pressure and collective justifications of sin, he presents mechanisms that we today would designate as structural or social forms of evil.

## 1.4 1. Saint Gregory on the Border of Two Ages

Saint Gregory the Great lived in a world in which the institutions of the western empire had already disintegrated, yet late antique culture continued to shape the Church's thinking. Italy experienced Lombard invasions, famine, epidemics, population displacements and administrative weakening. Rome was no longer the capital of the imperial world, but it still bore the memory of former power. The Bishop of Rome increasingly had to fulfill functions not only religious, but also administrative, social, diplomatic and charitable.

Saint Gregory was at once a man of the Roman administrative culture, a monk yearning for contemplation, a preacher, pope, steward of ecclesiastical goods and negotiator. His demonology therefore does not arise in isolation from historical experience. He sees that evil does not operate solely within the isolated interior of the individual. It manifests itself in political violence, the oppression of the poor, the vanity of the powerful, the ambitions of clerics, communal conflicts, unjust judgments, flattery, heresy and indifference to the suffering.

Saint Gregory inherits great traditions of ancient Christianity. From Augustine he takes the conviction about the fundamental significance of pride, about the necessity of grace and about the two opposing societies built by two loves. From the monastic tradition, especially that transmitted to the West by John Cassian, he draws a developed analysis of the intellect, passions and principal vices. From patristic exegesis he adopts a multi-level reading of Scripture in which persons and historical events may point to Christ, to the Church, to the soul and to eschatological reality.

At the same time Saint Gregory transforms this heritage into a form that will become extraordinarily influential in the Middle Ages. The Moralia in Iob would be read in monasteries, cathedral schools and clerical circles as an extensive map of moral life. The work served not only exegetes, but also preachers, confessors, spiritual directors and authors of later syntheses. One of the surviving medieval manuscripts has been described as a work intended primarily for the clergy and presenting the whole path of the believer's spiritual maturation. Information on the medieval function of the Moralia is provided by the description of a manuscript at the University of Utrecht.

Saint Gregory is thus a bridge not because he merely transmits the ready-made views of the ancients. He orders them, gives them a pastoral shape and ties the analysis of evil spirits to the practical discernment of processes occurring in the human heart and in the community.

Saint Gregory's demonology becomes clear only when it appears as a subtle constellation of concepts distinguishing intention from power, agency from limitation. Central to this conception are two categories, which for the modern reader it is worth preserving in their original dyad: voluntas (will) — the evil will of Satan as disposition and intent to deceive — and potestas (power) — the power which a demon wields, yet which remains subject to limits established by God. This distinction, consistently present in the Moralia in Iob, enables reading the catastrophes of the age as phenomena in which demonic intent and real destruction coexist under the oversight of divine permissio (permission/allowance). The aim is not to explain every misfortune by demonic intervention, but to situate them in a theological network: evil has intent, but not unlimited power.

Voluntas (will) — as a motivational category — appears in Gregory's texts primarily where he analyses mechanisms of suggestion and temptation. His interpretation of pride and the designs of the evil one is directed to the moral undermining of social bonds and the inner competence of the soul. Demonic causality is here recognized in the form of proposing a disordered ordering of loves, inflaming ambition, instigating violence or contempt for one's neighbor. Yet Gregory does not reduce evil to a purely external "pointing" — voluntas always acts in conjunction with human inclination, with the old man and with habitual sin. In this sense demonic voluntas is a kind of moral provocateur, not a sovereign demiurge of history.

Potestas (power), by contrast, is conceived as a limited and permitted power. In book IV of the Moralia there is a consistent emphasis that the action of the evil one lies within the framework of divine oversight; God's permissio (permission) is the fundamental theological explanation for the possibility of demonic action. The consequences of this premise are twofold: first, the impossibility of attributing to the devil absolute dominion over reality — all political upheavals, epidemics or migrations, though they raise questions about the presence of evil, do not constitute proof of divine failure; second, a practical justification for hope and responsible pastoral response. Gregory's potestas does not remove human responsibility nor relativize guilt — on the contrary, it inscribes evil into history as a possible instrument of trial or punishment, but always subservient to an overarching providence.

An analysis of permissio (permission) as a hermeneutical category — with constant reference to Job — allows one to read the structural functions of suffering and chaos in Gregory's thought. The Joban scene of temptation becomes for him an archetype: it is divine allowance, not divine assent in an affirmative sense, that opens the field of action for demonic voluntas, in order to give expression to human fidelity or its lack. Such a reading has concrete exegetical consequences: social and political catastrophes cannot be uncritically interpreted as unambiguous retribution or unambiguous good, but as elements of a difficult

dynamic in which human freedom and divine sovereignty coexist. This is therefore not a neutralization of evil, but its reading as a theologically grounded and temporal phenomenon.

Behemoth and Leviathan in books XXXI and XXXIV of the Moralia in Iob should be read primarily allegorically and morally, not as descriptions of concrete historical beings. Gregory uses these Old Testament figures as symbols of structures and powers of chaos: Behemoth depicts earthly, brutal and unreflective forces — the chaotic domination of the body and the rape of one's neighbor; Leviathan, on the other hand, personifies marine, subtler and sometimes deceptive processes of pride that spread through minds and create ideological or heretical currents. In this reading the "mystical body of Satan" is not a concrete organizational corpus, but a way of speaking about integrated forms of sin that have both an individual and a structural dimension. The essence of such a reading is to indicate a parallel: moral uprooting in people creates conditions in which the "body" of these figures can act in the world.

This moral-eschatological manner of apprehending Behemoth and Leviathan also has consequences for the understanding of the end of things. Gregory does not treat these beings as an irreversible reality, but as elements subject to divine judgment and final subjugation. In the eschatological perspective their action is temporal and serves both the experience of the Church and the formation of individual virtue. Thus the Moralia do not supply a pretext for apocalyptic fatalism, but for active life of hope and penance.

The anthropological axis of conflict in Gregory takes the classical form of the struggle of the "old man" with the renewed man (cf. Ef 4, 22–24 as theological context). Gregory reads temptation as a dialogue between demonic suggestion and sinful habit; the old man is not merely a metaphor, but a real sphere of attachment the demon seeks to exploit. It is important, however, to stress the limits of this discourse: suggestion is not identical with disease. Although Gregory employs medical analogies, he remains within the framework of a priority distinction — certain disorders require care and bodily treatment, not a reduction to questions of spiritual oppression. One must therefore clearly separate the sphere of spiritual discernment from that of medical diagnosis; Gregory's dynamic does not serve to pathologize temptation nor to adventurously demonize every form of suffering.

Discretio (discernment), as the virtue of spiritual discernment, is for Gregory the instrument by which to recognize the boundaries between suggestion and illness, between the tempter's whisper and one's own attachment. This discernment is not a technical psychological skill, but a spiritual exercise rooted in prayer, the sacraments and the sacramental life of the community. Its method consists in examining the fruits: one tests the authenticity of a spirit by its moral consequences and by the continuation of life in grace. It is through this practice that Gregory recommends prudent pastoral care — inclined to discernment, patient in repair, yet decisive toward what openly undermines the life of the Church. This guidance determines both the manner of confession and the manner of leadership in communal crisis.

Exegetical connections with biblical texts reinforce these interpretations. An experience analogous to Job is found in readings of social collapse: the trial reveals the state of faith and leads to purification, but does not nullify the guilt of historical actors. In the context of 2 Thess 2, 3–12 Saint Gregory reads the phenomenon of the "seed of lawlessness" as a process that may be permitted in order to expose falsity and uncover the truth. Such a reading allows him to combine exegesis with a pastoral diagnosis of the moral corrosion of institutions. This is, however, not an injunction to identify a particular person or institution with the "sign of lawlessness" — on the contrary, it is a call to vigilance and humility in recognizing manifestations of the avalanche of sin.

Saint Gregory's historical context as the "last Roman" lends this theology particular practical weight. In the face of the collapse of political and administrative structures his reflections on voluntas and potestas provide tools for understanding social disintegration: evil manifested in the destruction of public order is both the result of human evil and a phenomenon that may be permitted by God for pedagogical ends. Such an interpretation at the same time legitimizes ecclesial activity — care, norming and repair — as the proper response to demonic and human manifestations of collapse, without lapsing into theological determinism. The interpretative limits that must be consistently maintained are also significant: first, Gregory does not develop a systematic demonic hierarchy in the scholastic sense; his demonology is pastoral-exegetical rather than cosmological-philosophical. Second, one must not transfer his cathartic reading of evil uncritically to the field of contemporary social science or medicine. Third, his interpretation of biblical figures as structural symbols does not justify creating facile equivalences between the text and one concrete political situation — the danger of anachronism is real if one forgets the moral-didactic intention of the Author.

Finally, accepting the distinction voluntas — potestas and becoming aware of the role of permissio leads to a practical theological conclusion: the Church, acting in a world at the end of an age, is neither a passive observer of evil events nor their demiurge reducible to a single cause. It is a community of called response that, through its mercy, repair and teaching, manifests an alternative to the "mystical body of Satan." Such a perspective on the Moralia emphasizes that the struggle against demonic influence has primarily a moral and eschatological dimension — it is a confrontation for the human person, for community, and for the ultimate Kingdom of God.

See[12]

## 1.5 2. A Multilevel Reading of the Book of Job

The demonology of the *Moralia in Iob* follows directly from the exegetical method of Saint Gregory the Great (san Gregorio Magno). The biblical text can be read on several interrelated levels. The historical sense speaks of the actual Job and his suffering. The allegorical or mystical sense presents in Job Christ and His Church. The moral sense relates the events of the book to the interior life of each believer.

Job is thus at once a righteous man, a figure of the suffering Christ, an image of the persecuted Church, and a symbol of the soul under trial. The Satan who attacks Job is a historical accuser, but also the "ancient adversary" who continually operates against Christ present in His members. Job's sores point to the wounds of Christ and to the sufferings of the Church. Job's friends may signify heretics who utter partly true statements but apply them falsely and cruelly. The wife who urges Job to blaspheme can be an image of carnal persons close to the community of faith who, by their way of life, become instruments of temptation.

In Book VI of the *Moralia in Iob* Gregory explains that Job's sores signify both the passion of Christ and the persecutions of His Body, that is, the Church. Job's wife, meanwhile, represents the carnal members of the community, and the friends — teachers of error who apparently defend God but in fact harm the righteous. This method may seem to the modern reader excessively free. Gregory does not, however, attempt to replace history with symbolism. He repeatedly stresses the necessity of preserving the truth of the

[1]Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; the references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without attributing to Gregory quotations not present in the source text.

[2]See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — in accordance with the context discussed in the Moralia.

historical sense. He holds instead that the Holy Spirit shaped the events and words of Scripture so that they could simultaneously disclose enduring regularities of the spiritual life.

Thus Satan is not confined to the prologue of the Book of Job. His accusation recurs whenever a person begins to suspect that faith is merely a transactional exchange with God. The strike against Job's goods recurs when the loss of external securities is meant to lead to the loss of interior trust. The voice of his wife returns in the counsels of those close to us who, under the pretense of realism, urge a person to infidelity. The speeches of the friends reappear in religious systems that draw from suffering an automatic accusation of guilt.

Gregory therefore reads the Bible as a spiritual anatomy of temptation. Historical persons become images of functions by which evil operates in the individual and in society.

Gregorian hermeneutics operates with the mirror of Scripture not as a simple reflection of factual events but as a diagnostic instrument that exploits tensions between senses to disclose spiritual dynamics. The essence of this method is the conscious reading of apparent discrepancies: when the historical text meets allegory, the contradiction is not an error but a clue. Gregory treats such points as clinical places of the soul where grace and temptation meet; it is precisely there that the hermeneutical "rupture" allows one to perceive mechanisms of the operation of evil in individual and communal life. This way of reading requires theological discipline: every transformation of an event into an interior image is subject to the criterion of conformity with the whole of Revelation and the practice of the Church, not to arbitrary allegorizing.

The analysis of the presence of the accuser in the heavenly assembly, discussed by Gregory in Book II, reveals a subtle dichotomous dimension of divine permission and demonic activity. The biblical text presents the fallen one as a participant in the divine court, which at first sight may raise theological doubts. Gregory resolves this problem by the concept of divine permission: God does not initiate evil, but He may permit its operation within the framework of His fidelity to the created order and the freedom of creatures. In this perspective the demonic complaint exists as a real moral act, not as a theatrical attribute of the narrative; its presence in the assembly has a procedural significance — it discloses the freedom of the creature while subjecting it to a trial that serves a greater good consonant with God's plan. The consequence is theological caution: one cannot identify every life difficulty with the action of the devil, nor reduce divine permission to instrumental manipulation of evil.

Central to Gregory's interpretation is the dimension of the fallen angel's ontological "blindness." This is not a lack of cognition in a mechanical sense, but a privatio — a privation, a loss of participation in the light of the original contemplation of God. This metaphysical darkness becomes the source of a distorted representation of reality: the fallen one no longer sees the harmony of creation and interprets it through the prism of his own contradiction with God. Exegetically this translates into reading the accusation as symptomatic: not so much an exact report of facts as an expression of the internal corruption of demonic perception. For pastoral discernment this means that demonic insinuations possess no epistemic value and must be judged in the light of revealed truth, not accepted as certainties.

In connection with the above it is necessary to distinguish clearly divine permission from the autonomous action of evil. Gregory consistently defends a theology in which God is ultimately the source of good and justice, while evil remains the result of the misuse of creaturely freedom. In the practical reading of Job this means that the sufferings experienced by the righteous are not evidence of divine injustice nor an automatic punishment; they are rather a stage on which the mechanisms of temptation and perseverance are revealed. The theological precision of this distinction has important exegetical consequences: it allows

one to avoid simple moralizing of tragedy and at the same time to maintain moral responsibility of persons and spirits for their decisions.

Behemoth and Leviathan, read by Gregory in Books XXXI and XXXIV, perform the function of archetypes representing particular categories of sin and threats to the soul. Behemoth appears as an image of earthy, shameless bodily power: a monumental force that claims the right to rule the earthly world. Leviathan, on the other hand, is associated with the element of the deep — the chaos and vehemence of passions, as well as with the marine metaphor of disordered lust and pride. Gregory uses these figures not as zoological descriptions but as moral icons; their hermeneutical function lies in showing how different forms of sin manifest in the body and in the body politic. Consequently, the exegesis of these creatures becomes a diagnosis of spiritual tendencies: Behemoth points to unbridled dominion of sensibility, Leviathan — to a collective structure of fall that has both individual and social dimensions.

It is important to distinguish here the Gregorian description from contemporary medical or psychological categories. Gregory did not formulate nor possess a clinical language; he employed moral images. Therefore, when applying his exegesis to pastoral practice and moral theology one must preserve analogy rather than identity of languages. The employment of concepts such as “carnality” or “sensuality” in his interpretation is normative and ethical in character, not diagnostic in the medical sense. Translating these categories into contemporary discourses requires critical mediation: one may draw from the Gregorian intuition an understanding of temptations and their dynamics, but one must not reduce pathological experiences to a single spiritual dimension nor, conversely, on the basis of medical etiology exclude the moral dimension of disorder.

The eschatological dimension of Leviathan in Gregory deserves particular attention. Leviathan is not merely the monster of a private soul; he is also by Gregory understood as the “body” of the condemned multitude that opposes the divine order in the ultimate dimension. Such a reading emphasizes that sin can take the form of institutional or cultural structures whose strength consists in consolidating individual faults into a powerful organism of opposition to God. Gregory, however, approaches this idea with caution: the eschatological perspective serves instruction and admonition, not the concrete ascription of names or institutions to an antichristic function. The interpretative boundary is here clearly marked — apocalyptic figures may inspire moral critique, but they do not justify political speculation or personal accusations.

From an exegetical point of view such a plausible dualism — between individual passion and the collective body of sin — requires from the reader criteria of discernment. Gregory proposes them in practical form: recognition of fruits, confrontation with the heart of the community, and testing whether particular attitudes foster fidelity to the truth of the Gospel. These criteria are theological-ethical in character: they serve to assess whether given actions increase love of God and neighbor or displace it. The exegesis of the *Moralia* therefore combines the description of demonic icons with a moral method of discernment, which makes possible the application of the biblical text in the life of the Church without reduction to objectively medical schemes.

The hermeneutical consequence of this method is twofold. First, spiritual discernment requires recourse to the whole Tradition: sometimes an asymmetry of the image in the biblical text is supplemented by the documents of the Church, sacramental practice, and the life of the community. Second, interpretation may not exceed its functional boundary — the moral and allegorical sense serves the formation of life and must not become a tool for creating new scientific or political theories. This hermeneutical self-control

is one reason why Gregory's reading remains useful: it offers the reader penetrating insight while also disciplining him.

Ultimately, a deepened reading of Job according to Gregory shows that Scripture as a mirror of the soul operates on the basis of correlation between sign and interior: images and allegories act therapeutically, indicating spiritual pathologies and proposing virtues as a remedy. Yet this therapy is spiritual and moral, not medical; its efficacy is demonstrated in the ascetical and sacramental practice of the Church, where discernment and humility lead to transformation. The limits of such a reading must be clearly maintained: the exemplification of evil by demonic figures requires critical judgment and pastoral prudence, not simple analogies or socio-political expertise. In this way Gregorian hermeneutics remains the heart of a moral reading of Job — a set of tools for recognizing temptation, but always rooted in the communion of the Church and eschatological hope.

Gregory employs the metaphor of «night» not as a poetic embellishment but as a precise hermeneutical instrument: night depicts the gradual darkening of participation in the divine light, the course of temptations and their internal dynamics. In the reading of the *Moralia* night is not synonymous with illness or a clinical state but a descriptive schema that allows one to distinguish phases of the spiritual experience — from the moment of external strike, through the emerging doubts of faith, to the moments when remembrance of God is replaced by false interpretations of reality. Such a distinction enables theological discernment: apparent «darkness» may be a passing trial requiring perseverance, or a sign of deeper loss of participation in grace that requires conversion and communal accompaniment. Thus night becomes a criterion for reading the biblical narrative — the place where tensions of the literal and moral sense reveal kinds of temptation, not a pretext for their medicalization.

In the same perspective liturgy and sacramental life acquire special significance as an epistemic corrective of the Gregorian reading. For Gregory the Church is expressed not only as an interpretative context but as a practical means of restoring the "sight" of the soul: the community of prayer, the word proclaimed in the liturgy, the sacramental signs and works of mercy can reconfigure the believer's perception of the world and of his own weaknesses. Such intervention is not magical or arbitrary: it is a therapeutic and canonical restoration of participation in the light of the Trinity that corrects demonic cognitive deformations. For this reason Gregorian hermeneutics requires the interpreter's constant reference to communal life — solitary introspection, deprived of pastoral judgments, does not provide full assurance of discernment.

The practical implications of this orientation are twofold and restrictive: first, the use of the moral reading of Scripture should be based on traditional criteria — conformity with the whole of Revelation, testing the fruits of actions, and faith in the Church as the interpretative context; second, this method demands restraint toward all simplifications — both the pathologizing of spiritual experiences by medical analogies and the instrumental use of biblical figures for political accusations. As a result the Gregorian "multi-level" hermeneutic remains a method of moral diagnosis: precise, but always rooted in sacramental life and in pastoral service, capable of disclosing mechanisms of temptation without turning them into arbitrary labels or pseudo-scientific schemes.

See[34]

[3]Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; the references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without ascribing to Gregory quotations not present in the source text.

[4]See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10:13; Rev 12:12 — in accordance with the context discussed in the *Moralia in Iob*.

## 1.6 3. Satan as Accuser Dependent upon Divine Permission

The first principle of Saint Gregory the Great (san Gregorio Magno)'s demonology is the complete dependence of Satan upon God. The devil is not an equal opponent of the Creator. He cannot act beyond the limits prescribed by Providence. In the Book of Job he must stand before God, disclose his intentions, ask for permission and submit to prohibitions regarding the extent of the trial.

Saint Gregory distinguishes the purpose of God's action from the purpose of the devil's action. The devil desires to lead the righteous into sin in order to prove that their fidelity was merely apparent. God permits the trial in order to reveal the truth, to purify the person, to strengthen virtue, to guard against a hidden pride, or to make the example of his perseverance useful to others.

The same event may therefore possess two opposing intentions. The devil acts with evil will, while God, without becoming the author of evil, incorporates the devil's limited action into the order of Providence. The devil intends destruction; God permits an ordeal that may become a place of maturation.

In the second book of the Moralia in Iob Saint Gregory analyzes the dialogue between God and the devil. God displays Job's righteousness, allows the adversary to test it, but at the same time draws non-transgressable boundaries: "all that he has is in your power," yet Job himself must be spared. Saint Gregory emphasizes that even while permitting the trial, God restrains the adversary's excessive attack.

This principle secures Christian demonology against dualism and panic. The evil spirit is dangerous, but not sovereign. His knowledge is limited, his power borrowed, and the scope of his action subordinated to God's judgment. Even when events seem to escape control, this does not mean that Satan has assumed dominion over creation.

Saint Gregory does not thereby trivialize suffering. The loss of children, property, health and social esteem remains a real tragedy. He does not claim either that a man can easily read why God permitted a particular trial. The Book of Job warns precisely against such simplification. Job's friends become instruments of additional suffering because they attempt to explain the mystery by mechanically linking misfortune with personal guilt.

Demonic temptation can therefore also make use of a false theodicy. The suffering person is convinced that God has abandoned him, or is accused by others of a hidden sin. Satan acts as accuser not only directly, but also through religious language devoid of mercy and discernment.

The scene of the heavenly assembly described in the first chapters of the Book of Job appears to Saint Gregory not as a mere incidental metaphor, but as a hermeneutical structure decisive for the character of his entire demonology. The exegesis of Job 1,6–12, as formulated by the author of the Moralia in Iob, discloses the function of the devil within the judicial order: he is not an equal procedural party, but appears in the role of the accuser — a procedural figure narrowed and defined by the institution before which he appears. Understood in this way the scene gives sense to the duality of intentions that Saint Gregory consistently distinguishes: the evil voluntas diaboli (the devil's persistent and malign will) and the potestas (authority/power) legitimized by God. From this perspective it becomes necessary to specify the concepts and the theological consequences that follow from such a construction.

The first concept requires a clear distinction: voluntas diaboli (the devil's will) denotes the adversary's persistent and malign intention, bent on undermining a man's righteousness and destroying his good; potestas, on the other hand, is the competence and limitation granted to him by God within the framework of judgment and judicial permission. In Saint Gregory we are not faced with an antonomasia of two equivalent wills, but with a relation of subordination: potestas endows, limits and determines the

scope of voluntas. This distinction is essential for Gregory's theodicy because it allows one to preserve unambiguous moral responsibility (the devil remains the agent of evil will) while maintaining the transcendence and sovereignty of God (God exercises the judicial competence and permits the adversary's action for a greater good or for a manifest testing of righteousness).

An analysis of Job 1,6–12 from this perspective discloses several constitutive elements of the "heavenly court." First, the very initiation of the process is an act of communication: God asks, reveals, permits. This indicates God's sovereign initiative in unveiling righteousness and at the same time his decision to make human experience a locus of the revelation of truth. Second, the accuser's response has the character of a procedural petition — not so much a categorical verdict as a request for the possibility of testing the thesis. Such a form of dialogue demonstrates that the devil operates in legal categories rather than solely in a purely destructive sphere: his role is accusatory, not sovereignly punitive. Third, the limits set by God — instructions to leave the person unharmed — delineate the framework that prevents the escalation of evil and secures the providential order of the world. This is not merely a technical regulation; it is an expression of God's justice, who even in permitting evil protects creation from total destruction.

From this perspective it also becomes necessary to distinguish the pedagogical and penal functions of permission, which Saint Gregory develops in Book II and in Book XXXI. God's pedagogy consists in permission becoming an instrument of purification, an expositor of truth and a means of moral education. This dimension unveils the theological aspect of suffering as a means toward the ultimate good: experience can reveal the authenticity of virtues and strip away apparent attachments. The penal dimension does not necessarily mean arbitrary vengeance; for Saint Gregory punishment is measured within the context of justice and the restoration of relation with God. This distinction has important exegetical consequences: the reading of Job should not be reduced to a one-dimensional "retributive" theory nor to a mythology of the author of evil. Permission combines corrective and educational elements, whose proportions and end are determined by the authority of the divine court.

The exegetical consequence of this reconstruction is twofold. First, it confirms that the devil as accusator acts from evil will, not as a deterministic instrument of God; his intention is morally bad and accountable. Second, it shows that God's mere permission of his action does not make God the author of evil — rather it is an expression of providential disposition of the conditions in which truth may arise. In the nominalist logic of judicial concepts at work in Saint Gregory there lies the thesis that the fact a trial takes place does not eliminate the guilt of the accuser, but incorporates his action into an order aimed at revealing the essence of the human person before God and men.

A further point of deepening concerns the epistemology of the heavenly court. The difference between God's knowledge and the accuser's cognition is crucial for Saint Gregory. The accuser operates by predicting and interpreting the visible effects of blessing, inferring piety from outward signs. His reasoning is thus inductive and hypothetical; he lacks insight into the intimate motivations of the heart. God, however, judges with full insight, discerns intentions and inward affections. This asymmetry of knowledge justifies why the permission of experience is not an arbitrary gesture of "employing" the devil: it is rather a just examination conducted by the One who knows the heart and can institutionalize the trial so that irreversible evil does not arise. Consequently, interpretation of earthly events requires humility and avoidance of precipitate judgment: external grounds are not sufficient to establish guilt.

From the courtly scene also follow eschatological implications that Saint Gregory develops in Book XXXIV. The figure of Leviathan and the general perspective of the future limitation of the adversary's power show

that the role of the accuser is provisional and subordinated to God's ultimate plan. The eschatological taming of the power of evil confirms that the diabolical office of accuser is not a permanent constitution of reality but an episode inscribed within the history of salvation. This shift of perspective from the momentary trial to the eschatological horizon forms a counterpoint: even if in the present accusation brings dire consequences, the final decision belongs to Christ, and the limitation of Leviathan announces the restoration of full justice. For pastoral theology this implies hope and assurance that divine potestas will ultimately reverse the effects of voluntatis.

The role of Christ as the sole defender (advocatus) must be clearly articulated since it is the point of contact between the theology of judgment and the soteriological sacramentology. In the Gregorian reading the motif of defense is not understood exclusively procedurally; Christ is a personal and salvific settlement of the accusation. His sacrifice is not a juridical "formality completed," but a real instrument that removes the basis of the accusation: by its accomplishment the truth about man is disclosed and realized, freeing him from the consequences of the overwhelming power of the accuser. In this context the appeal to apocalyptic images — where the accuser is cast down — does not so much demonize the judicial process as record its resolution in Christ. In practical theology this means that the believer finds in the sacrament of reconciliation and in Christ's sacrifice an instance that transcends the legal assertions of the adversary; this defense is ontological and relational rather than merely procedural.

From an exegetical and pastoral point of view a clear interpretive boundary is required: the role of the accuser and divine permission do not license arbitrary attribution of every form of suffering or problem to demonic action. The Gregorian text distinguishes categories and does not identify spiritual accusation with disorders of the bodily or psychic nature. In pastoral and academic practice one must therefore maintain a dichotomy of competences: spiritual discernment concerns the signs of grace and the action of spirits, whereas medical and psychological diagnosis examines natural and pathological states. Saint Gregory does not conflate these domains; his interpretation of Job rather encourages the discipline of distinguishing than the erasure of competencies.

Finally, from a historical standpoint, the heavenly scene fits within a broader biblical and patristic tradition where the motif of the accuser appears, among other places, in Zechariah 3:1–2 and in the apocalyptic image of the accuser's expulsion. In Saint Gregory this motif is thoroughly framed within a providential-judicial scheme, which corresponds to his general theological method: the union of careful exegesis with the Church's spiritual pedagogy. At the same time moral rigor is preserved — the devil remains responsible for his evil, while God is judge and final disposer of the course of history.

To summarize the analytical development: reading Job 1,6–12 through the prism of the role of the accuser and of permission allows a clear separation of the devil's malice from God's sovereign potestas, giving this distinction exegetical (understanding the motives of the parties and the difference in knowledge), moral (responsibility and the end of permission) and pastoral (the necessity of distinguishing competencies) consequences. Additionally, the eschatological limitation of the adversary's power and Christ's role as defender close the theological narrative in which the accuser remains a real, yet not final and not definitive, force within the order of salvation. Such deepening confirms Saint Gregory the Great's consistent intention: to maintain the appropriate legal and moral order in which even the permission of evil serves the revelation and renewal of justice.

See[5][6]

## 1.7 4. Two principal routes of attack: striking and persuasion

Saint Gregory the Great distinguishes two basic modes of demonic influence. The adversary may attempt to break a person through suffering or to seduce him through suggestion. He may strike from the outside or attempt to open a way into the interior.

Against Job he first employs external violence. He robs him of goods, children, health and social security. He counts on pain transforming into despair, and despair into blasphemy. When, however, he finds that Job, deprived of everything, still blesses God, he changes tactics. He makes use of the just man's wife and the voices of his friends.

Saint Gregory describes this as a transition from overt striking to subtle persuasion. The adversary has failed to seize the soul's fortress by direct assault, and therefore seeks a ladder in the nearest human relationships. In the third book of the *Moralia in Iob* he presents Job's wife as an instrument through which the devil attempts to reach the heart of the just man after the failure of external attacks.

This element of the commentary requires critical reading. Saint Gregory employs an inherited ancient hierarchical symbolism of the sexes, sometimes identifying the man with reason and the woman with the weaker sensory dimension. One must not transmute that symbolism into a timeless anthropology that evaluates women as more prone to evil. Its proper sense within the *Moralia* concerns the relation between rational judgment and the sphere of sense-perception and desire, although the mode of expression remains marked by the limitations of the age.

What is most important is the observation that the demon uses what is close to the human being. Temptation rarely appears in the overt guise of evil. It may come as the counsel of a friend, a need for security, the natural desire for relief, concern for reputation, or an attempt to give a rational explanation of suffering. The closer and more credible the instrument, the subtler the attack can be.

Satan adapts the mode of tempting to the condition of the person. He tries to break some with fear, others to win by flattery. To some he takes away goods, to others he grants the possibility of multiplying them. He pushes some toward despair, others toward arrogance. There is no single external form of temptation. Its goal remains constant: to detach the will from the truth and love of God.

The Gregorian dialectic between percussio (a striking blow) and persuasio (persuasion) operates not only as two different attack strategies, but also as two distinct logics of the adversary understood as seducer and devastator. The metaphors of the spear (lancea, ictus) and of arrows from the quiver (jaculum, persuasio) in the *Moralia in Iob* are not mere rhetorical ornament; they are oriented toward revealing the specificity of the wounds suffered by the soul. Percussio is an attack by overt force: an external strike that is meant to immediately and brutally disrupt the order of life, provoke pain and expose the person to the temptation to blaspheme. Persuasio, by contrast, presupposes subtlety of entry — an initially almost imperceptible incorporation of suggestion into the field of reason which then, if not discerned, passes into the sphere of affect and finally into an act of the will. This threefold mechanism can be unfolded into successive moments: suggestio (suggestion) — delectation (upodobanie, a felt liking) — consensus (consent). Each of these possesses distinct features and requires a different kind of discernment.

[5] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; the references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without attributing to Saint Gregory quotations absent from the source text.

[6] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — in accordance with the context discussed in the Moralia.

Suggestio appears as the "head of the serpent": the first whispered thought that takes on the appearance of rationality or a mere supposition. For Saint Gregory this is not yet a moral act; it is rather an initiation point, an intellectual seed. Its danger lies in the fact that it may remain unnoticed since at first glance it does not disturb the order of reason. In confrontation with the Joban narrative (Job 1–2) it is evident that after unveiling the dramatic percussio the adversary, when he does not attain his end, reaches for subtler means: suggestion speaks through the closest relationships, the language of friendship, the semblances of care. In this phase the bookish analogy with the "head of the serpent" illustrates how the first word introduces fissures into the intellect — not by force, but by apparent persuasion.

When suggestio encounters a weak guard of discernment, delectation ensues — an affective pleasure in considering, bending the truth, or whitening one's motives. Saint Gregory consistently isolates this stage to indicate that it is not the mere thought but the pleasure experienced in its presence that leads to a displacement of the soul's center of gravity toward error. In the moral context delectation means that the suggestion begins to act on the body of desire: reason comes to be perceived as confirming, while the feeling lends an appearance of righteousness. Here it is important to draw a distinction analogous to the grammatical-rhetorical tradition: delectation is not equivalent to modern "psychology," but serves as a bridge between the intellectual domain and the domain of the will.

Consensus, the third moment, is already an act of the will: the voluntary acceptance of the suggestion, which constitutes sin. For Saint Gregory this is the crucial point of moral responsibility; it is the place where human nature, armed with reason and will, can say "no" to the whisper. From an exegetical perspective this illuminative schema corresponds to the dynamic description of the spiritual struggle in the Letters and in the Books of Wisdom — where temptation is not a caricature of automatism but a process whose finalization requires the human being as co-participant. The pastoral and doctrinal implications are therefore clear: intellectual vigilance and mastery over delectation are necessary to prevent consensus.

The analysis of the "scales of Leviathan" (scales of Leviathan) in *Moralia in Iob* XXXIV must be read not so much as a zoological reflection as a typology of the unification of error. The scale serves here as a symbol of compatibility and of apparent unified defense: just as scales shield the body of the monster, so false doctrines can form a coherent, critique-resistant system of thought that protects against corrective intervention by the truth. Saint Gregory employs this image to display a mechanism in which demonic persuasio is not limited to a single stratagem but creates a cognitive structure — a "unity in error" — by which individual false premises mutually defend one another. In the context of polemic against heresies this is a tool for breaking the resistance of minds that external strikes did not break: where the lancea failed, the jaculum secures minds by systematically binding falsehood together.

The exegetical consequences of this interpretation extend to the way biblical and patristic texts used by Saint Gregory are read. The Joban motif of the test shows that Providence permits percussio as a trial and — in a punitive sense — as a consequence of godlessness, but also as a means of purification of the just. In the case of the "scales" we are dealing with another form of divine permission: God allows persuasio in order to demonstrate and punish the pride of the intellect which, instead of listening to the truth, constructs defensive structures against it. In this perspective Romans 7:23 (the law of the spirit fighting against the law of sin) and Sirach 10:13 (fall by pride) become texts supporting a theological reading of internal processes, not as images of somatic pathology but as metaphysical diagnosis: the source of the "boiling of the mind" is pride, which moves from the sphere of desires into the intellectual field, creating a resonance of error.

Saint Gregory's historical context intensifies the meaning of that dialectic. In the monastic and pastoral milieu his vigilance concerning persuasio was a response to real intellectual threats: heresy, sophistry and complex moral errors. The metaphor of the scale and the quiver should therefore not be read as an exclusively anthropological allegory but as a polemical instrument in the struggle for unity of faith and unity of the community. This understanding explains why Saint Gregory devotes attention not only to direct assaults but also to the formation of a "system of error" — he cares that the Church's community not be subdued by the apparent coherence of falsehood.

One must also critically underscore the limits of this interpretation. Above all, spiritual discernment, to which Saint Gregory refers, must be distinguished from medical diagnosis. To suggest that every mental distress is the work of a demon would be anachronistic and contrary to his methodology: Saint Gregory operates with moral-theological and spiritual categories, he does not replace medical understanding of illnesses with them. In exegetical practice one must be cautious not to transfer Gregorian schemes into the field of psychiatry or neurology. The mechanism suggestio — delectation — consensus may have an analogy in descriptions of cognitive processes, but that analogy has boundaries: it is a hermeneutical tool for discerning responsibility and guilt, not an instrument of somatic diagnosis.

Equally important is the explicit accentuation of the role of grace and of communal responsibility in the face of both routes of attack. Percussio unmasks the fragility of created goods and demands endurance; persuasio requires from the community and from pastors intellectual discipline and formation in discernment so that the "scales of error" may be recognized and stripped away. Here once more the theme of providence appears: God permits both kinds of experiences as means of upbringing or of justice, but their proper reception is not fatalism. Acceptance of the trial is combined with a call to virtue — above all the skill of discernment and the humility that counterbalances the pride which is the metaphysical root of the "boiling of the mind."

The metaphor of the "head of the serpent" also implies a practical hermeneutical conclusion: recognition of the beginning is key. Saint Gregory repeatedly warns against interpretive dependence on consequences; investigation of the initial suggestio allows one to counteract its escalation into delectation and consensus. In this sense intellectual discipline — sitting in the presence of truth, exercising the reason in meekness and humility — becomes a form of spiritual defense, not by forceful confrontation but by negating the conditions that allow the serpent's head to penetrate the soul.

Finally, it is necessary to set clear interpretive limits: the Gregorian analysis concerns primarily the dynamics of the relation between demonic whisper and human response; it should not be used to identify natural sufferings with demonic punishment nor to trivialize experiences of mental illness. His category of pride as the root of the inner ferment of the mind has a metaphysical and moral dimension: pride displaces the order of love, undermining the capacity for discernment and making the mind "boiling." This understanding indicates that the struggle against persuasio requires not only knowledge but also humility and readiness to amend one's moral life.

In sum, Saint Gregory's analysis of percussio and persuasio reveals the twofoldness of demonic action: open strike and covert infiltration of thought. The mechanism suggestio → delectation → consensus discloses how intellect and feeling cooperate in the process of fall, while the image of the scales of Leviathan explains how demonic persuasio can build a resistant system of error. Providence permits both routes as means of trial or justice, but their recognition requires a precise hermeneutic and spiritual

discernment that distinguishes spiritual stratagems from natural problems and protects against uncritical generalization of Gregorian metaphors.
See[7][8]

## 1.8 5. The City of the Mind and the Siege of Thoughts

Saint Gregory the Great (san Gregorio Magno) repeatedly compares the human interior to a city or fortress. The mind has gates, walls, guards and inner spaces. Evil spirits besiege that city through thoughts, attempting to find a weak point and to force their way in.
In this metaphor the Devil is not the owner of the mind. He is initially located outside and attempts to enter. His basic weapon is suggestion. He can present an image, a memory, a possibility, an apparent advantage or an interpretation of an event. Yet by the mere arising of a thought he is not able to create full sin. He needs the cooperation of human desire and will.
Saint Gregory speaks of evil spirits besieging a person in thoughts in order to force their way into the "city of the mind" and bring it under their yoke. The defence of the city consists in vigilance, discernment and the immediate recognition of thoughts that come into the heart.
This image should not be interpreted as if every spontaneous, unwanted or distressing thought were directly uttered by a demon. Saint Gregory is aware of the complexity of the human interior. Thoughts can spring from bodily desire, memory, habits, fear, fatigue and past sins. The evil spirit uses the material found there, amplifies certain associations and proposes a direction for their development.
The demon does not create the psyche or its faculties. He acts parasitically. He uses memory against truth, imagination against hope, affections against charity, the desire for good against the proper ordering of goods, and intellect against humility. He need not create new contents. It is sufficient that he changes their meaning, proportion or direction.
The city can be taken not only by a violent assault. More often it falls through neglect of the guards. A person ceases to recognise their own thoughts, allows them to circulate freely, becomes accustomed to their presence and then begins to treat them as his or her own will. Saint Gregory's demonology is therefore tightly connected with the practice of watching over the heart.
The Gregorian metaphor of the city of the mind functions not only as a defensive image but as a conceptual system in which anthropological distinctions determine the manner of repelling the siege. Within this structure it is important to read the walls and gates not as one-dimensional elements but as indications of the specific powers of the soul: memory (memoria) as storehouse and archive, imagination (phantasia) as the antechamber of thought-forms, intellect (intellectus) as the council of the city, the will (voluntas) as the chief governor. Saint Gregory, especially in books II and IV of the *Moralia in Iob*, proposes an understanding of demonic suggestion as machinatio — serial, purposeful violations of the order of these powers. In analysing this order, one must stress that the siege begins at the margins of memory or imagination, but suggestions alone are not enough to breach the wall: what is necessary is the occurrence of a moral process in which impulses are accepted by the will and ordered by the intellect in a manner contrary to truth. From this perspective the demon's "machinations" are techniques for disturbing the hierarchy of the soul's

[7] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; the references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without ascribing to Saint Gregory the Great citations not present in the source text.
[8] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — according to the context discussed in the *Moralia in Iob*.

powers, not autonomous psychological "whirlpools"; they manipulate existing spiritual material in order to push the mind beyond its proper order.

The passage from external suggestion to internal consent requires a series of intermediary acts, which Saint Gregory breaks down into discrete elements. The first is attention — whether the soul permits stimuli to enter the circulation of memory and imagination. The second is deliberation — whether the presented option is thought through and filtered by the intellective criteria of truth and goodness; the third, decisive, is the act of the will — the taking on as one's own. This sequential schema allows Saint Gregory to preserve the essential distinction between a passing "idea" and moral responsibility for it. Consequently his demonology does not reduce all intrusive thoughts to the action of impure spirits; rather it indicates at what point responsibility may be assumed by the subject. Hence it is necessary to make a discrete distinction between discernment (discretio), which examines the source and character of thoughts, and affective states, which in themselves do not determine the moral meaning of an impulse.

This distinction has practical exegetical consequences for the books of the *Moralia*. In the prologues to temptation (book II) and in the considerations on guarding the heart (book IV) Saint Gregory does not treat affects as symptoms of demonic "entry" but as elements that may facilitate or hinder discernment. An affect, for example sadness or fear, may weaken the guards at the gates of memory, contributing to the imagination's beginning to supply images favourable to evil. Yet sadness is not in itself demonic — hence the Gregorian interpretation separates the analogy of contemporary pathology from its own moral categories: affect remains a resource of the soul that ought to be formed by reason and virtue. In this light discernment requires the capacity to "look at" one's thoughts from without, to compare them with Scripture and the Church's received teaching, and also with ascetical practice, which straightens and fortifies the soul's natural powers.

A motif of particular importance in this conceptual network is the "rhinoceros" from book XXXI, which denotes the proud mind, stubbornly defending its own infallibility. The rhinoceros in Saint Gregory appears as the quintessence of categorical intellectual resistance to evangelical truth; it is a type of intellectual pride that transforms the intellect from an instrument of knowledge into a defensive bastion of its own conjectures. The conversion of this "animal" into a servant of the Gospel requires pastoral and ascetical application of bonds of discipline. The term should be read broadly: it concerns practical restraints on drives and intellectual habits — regular lectio divina, humble study of texts, spaces for silence and silence of speech, acts that affirm the truths of faith — which in sequence disable the pride of the intellect and convert it to obedience to the truth. Discipline therefore does not consist in brutally "tying down" thought, but in systematically establishing new habits of mind that change the competence of the city's guards: the intellect becomes capable of critically revising its previous position, the will learns to accept limits, memory is cleansed of false arguments.

An exegesis of the concept of lack in book XXXIV requires a careful reconstruction of the moral context: poverty here is not merely an economic category but a description of a spiritual state in which the virtues are weakened to such a degree that the soul is "stripped" of defence. Such a state precedes and prepares the enemy's final attack; it is a stage of disorganisation of the inner order, when habituation to sin or long continuance in demoralising habit makes the walls brittle. The analysis of this motif leads to two important interpretative consequences. First, lack is a moral consequence and not solely the result of external factors — it therefore indicates the subject's responsibility in the process of loss of the virtues. Second, the Gregorian interpretation gives this state an eschatological dimension: the loss of virtues is an

invitation to the experience of final decision, but also a space of grace for renewal, since the very fact of recognising the lack may lead to penance and return (juxtaposed with the Job-like sequence of experiences and psalmic penitence).

The linking of biblical images with the architectural scheme of siege is methodologically justified but must be handled with exegetical caution. The figure of Job and his experiences provides a pattern of innocent siege: Job is tested, apparently deprived of the grounds for existence, and yet preserves an inner boundary against total loss of trust — from this Saint Gregory draws criteria for perseverance and resistance to thoughts of despair. The motif of the hills of Gilboa, in tradition read as a place of falling through pride and lack of trust in God, functions contrastively: it shows how the failing of the guard leads to catastrophe. The juxtaposition of both archetypes — Job as the model of the persevering besieged, Gilboa as the model of collapse through neglect — helps to distinguish situations in which thoughts and trials are a summons to penance and trust from those in which recklessness and pride facilitate the enemy's entry.

Ascetical practice of guarding the "doors of the heart" in Saint Gregory thus acquires concrete elements: it is not merely metaphorical vigilance but an ordered formative practice. Guarding consists in establishing routines that strengthen the guards — the rule of prayer, sacramental confession, lectio, participation in the Eucharist — making the soul a city whose inhabitants know their roles and respond according to order. Yet one must stress the interpretative limit: these practices are not a magical safeguard against every intrusive thought, nor do they present a mechanical guarantee of "bolting" the demon; they are, rather, forms of cooperation with grace that reorganise the soul's powers and make it less susceptible to erosion of the virtues.

Finally, the eschatological accent of Gregorian demonology deserves specification. Reference to the apocalyptic image of the enemy, as in treatments corresponding to the symbolism of the Apocalypse, is not intended to point to specific contemporary political or social instances. It is meant to recall that the siege is an element of salvation history: the enemy may be "angry, because he knows he has little time" — from this perspective spiritual warfare has not only an individual dimension but also a cosmic and eschatological one. Recognition of this perspective gives the moral reading of lack and the transformation of the rhinoceros a character of hope: even after considerable weakening of the defence there is a possibility of renewal, provided that a return to the order of virtues takes place before the final decision.

Delineating interpretative boundaries is necessary in order to remain faithful to the Gregorian intention. One must not reduce his image to literal military terms nor transform it into a set of psychotherapeutic techniques. One must also clearly distinguish his moral and theological categories from clinical categories: for example, the presence of intrusive thoughts in a sick person need not be, for Saint Gregory, proof of a demonic siege; on the contrary, understanding and applying his metaphors requires sensitivity to the diversity of causes and to pastoral discernment. Finally, the use of Gregorian language of "city" and "siege" in the context of communal life always presupposes respect for the dignity of the subject and a faithful reading of the metaphor in the light of the sacraments and the Church's teaching.

In sum, a deepened analysis of Saint Gregory's city of the mind reveals a coherent moral anthropology: the siege of thoughts is a process that disrupts the hierarchy of the soul's powers, and effective defence requires intellectual discipline, virtuous formation and discernment that distinguishes affects from moral responsibility. The rhinoceros and lack provide narrative points of orientation — the first indicates the internal resistance of the intellect, the second the risk of loss of defence — and together they situate the individual experience within a broader eschatological horizon of hope and purification.

See[9][10]

## 1.9 6. Suggestion, Pleasure and Consent

The most influential element of the moral psychology of Saint Gregory the Great (san Gregorio Magno) is his analysis of the successive stages of sin. The basic sequence comprises suggestion, pleasure and consent. In various places in the Moralia in Iob Saint Gregory also adds the execution of the deed, the defense of the committed evil, habit and the slavery that follows from it.

He interprets this schema by means of the narrative of the fall of the first humans. The serpent corresponds to suggestion, Eve to pleasure or sensual liking, and Adam to the consent of the higher, rational power of the person. In the fourth book of the Moralia Saint Gregory presents this process directly: the serpent suggests, Eve finds delight, Adam gives consent, and afterwards man defends the sin instead of confessing it.

### 1.9.1 Suggestion

Suggestion is the first appearance of the proposal of evil. It may take the form of a thought, an image, a memory, an impulse or a question. At this level temptation is not yet a full personal choice. One may feel the pressure of a thought that one did not will and does not accept.

This distinction has great pastoral significance. It permits avoiding the identification of the mere fact of being tempted with voluntary sin. A person is not responsible in the same way for the emergence of an alien suggestion and for consciously making it into his own intention. Christ was tempted by an external suggestion, but evil did not find in Him either inner delight or consent.

At the same time Saint Gregory holds that in a human wounded by original sin even unwanted thoughts reveal a certain disorder of the condition. This does not amount to guilt equal to a deliberate act. a righteous person may experience an inappropriate thought and yet resist it before it turns into consent. In the eighteenth book of the Moralia Saint Gregory clearly distinguishes a momentary deviation of a thought from the right path from a fall into the “abyss of consent.”

### 1.9.2 Pleasure

The second stage begins when a person does not reject the suggestion but begins to entertain it. He imagines its fulfillment, tastes the possible advantage, returns to the image and allows the forbidden good to produce pleasure.

Pleasure need not yet signify a full decision to perform the act. The mind may perceive that a given possibility is evil and nevertheless linger over it emotionally. At this point the temptation moves from the area of external pressure into interior cooperation.

The demon seeks to hide this moment. The suggestion is presented as innocent curiosity, momentary relief or a fantasy without consequences. Meanwhile, repeated lingering on the image strengthens the emotional attachment. That which at first was alien becomes attractive and begins to exert pressure on the will.

### 1.9.3 Consent

The third stage is consent. The will acknowledges the suggested possibility as its own intention. Even if external execution of the deed is later prevented, the interior orientation has already been altered.

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[9] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; the references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without ascribing to Saint Gregory the Great quotations not present in the source text.

[10] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — in accordance with the context discussed in the *Moralia*.

Consent is the decisive locus of moral responsibility. The demon can suggest and increase the attractiveness of evil, but he cannot replace the human will. The enemy's victory occurs only when the person ceases to be merely the object of temptation and becomes co-author of the sinful intention.

Saint Gregory does not, however, present the will as absolutely independent of grace. A person needs the help of God in order to reject a suggestion, not to allow it to pass into pleasure, and to keep pleasure from becoming consent. In the twenty-eighth book of the Moralia he describes grace as a boundary set against a stormy sea: God sometimes restrains suggestion from passing into delight, at other times prevents delight from ending in consent.

Sugestio as "external impulse" in Saint Gregory must be understood not as a simple directive or inner necessity, but as a contact initiating a moral relation. In the Gregorian perspective the idea or image of evil most often comes from without — from the enemy whose presence in the biblical and moral narrative functions as a catalyst. It is important, however, to emphasize that suggestion itself does not yet bear the marks of guilt: it is a movement lacking belonging to the interior order of will and conscience. In this phase Saint Gregory locates the possibility of resistance and, simultaneously, a symptom of the wounded human condition — susceptibility to whispers testifies to a wounding of nature, yet it is not identified with its legitimate choice. Reading suggestion as an "external impulse" preserves a dialectic: one does not deny the responsibility of the subject, but one distinguishes different levels of his cooperation in the moral process. Such a notion of suggestion requires two kinds of discernment from the pastor and the theologian. First, one must recognize the source of the movement — whether it is from the "enemy" or whether it springs from natural inclinations or memories — without reducing everything to an automatic attribution of bad will. Second — and this is crucial for moral practice — one must observe whether that impulse meets an internal resonance that enables its passing into the next stage. Saint Gregory consistently maintains the boundary: as long as some form of interior assent does not occur, the suggestion remains an external pressure and not a moral act.

Pleasure is understood by Saint Gregory as a dramatic crisis between "the body" and "the spirit," though these notions should be interpreted in his theological categories rather than anachronistic psychological ones. For him pleasure is not a mere physiological reaction nor merely an aesthetic liking: it is the moment in which the image of evil begins to be "tasted" by the heart, and the imagination softens toward it. Saint Gregory locates this phase in the relational space between the power of the senses and the rational power of the person; it is a space of spiritual struggle, because in it the tension between a nature inclined to desire and grace or the discipline of reason is revealed. Pleasure is, meanwhile, ambivalent: it may be a triumph of overcoming — when the feeling is transformed and given to God — or the seed of evil, when it becomes a lasting liking that strengthens later decisions.

From a practical point of view Saint Gregory recommends particular discernment concerning how pleasure develops: whether it remains a fleeting emotion or becomes a recurring tension that forms a habit of duty. His analysis indicates that persistent lingering on the image of evil favors the "humanizing" of the suggestion — that is, its metamorphosis from an external impulse into an element of the interior landscape of desires. In this sense pleasure is a trial space: one must not neglect it as an innocent fantasy, yet one must not prematurely qualify it as guilt without a clear discernment of the degree of the will's engagement.

Saint Gregory treats the moment of consent as the sovereign act of the will that constitutes moral guilt. His formulation emphasizes human freedom: up to this point external forces could only tempt or stir, but did not make the person a moral subject. Only a conscious and free assent to the proposed good (even when

it is evil) becomes an act that burdens conscience. In this way Saint Gregory safeguards the dimension of moral justice — guilt is attributed not to the fact of the temptation's appearance but to the decision to accept it. This interpretation has exegetical consequences: the story of Adam and Eve is read not merely as an illustration of the devil's designs, but as a depiction of the free "assenting" of reason as the critical moment that gives the deed its moral weight.

At the same time one must clearly separate the category of consent from certain contemporary ways of speaking about intrusive disorders, compulsions or mental illness. Saint Gregory uses the language of movements of the heart, imagination and will; his analysis is an anthropological and moral reading of interior motions, not a medical diagnosis of physiology. Hence an important reservation: what in the Gregorian tradition is an examination of decision-making processes and guilt should not be unreflectively transferred to the field of medicine. Diseases that manifest in intrusive thoughts or loss of control need not be interpreted as the moral actuality of consent; many of them require medical or psychiatric diagnosis and care. The Gregorian category of movements of the heart therefore remains a tool of theological discernment that should cooperate with medical knowledge, but not be replaced by it or conflated with it.

In this perspective the freedom of the person in relation to deterministic biological conceptions acquires new meaning. Saint Gregory, recognizing the scale of wounds and inclinations of human nature, does not renounce the notion of responsibility of the rational will. Wounding is not a heresy of freedom; it is a condition that hinders its operation, which however can cooperate with grace. In his conception grace does not eliminate nature but raises it toward the possibility of abiding in resistance to suggestion and in the transformation of pleasure. It is this cooperation — between wounded nature, God's grace and the sovereign decision of the will — that constitutes the moral character of the human act. Such a formulation also sets an interpretive boundary: Saint Gregory admits neither absolute determinism, which would absolve man of responsibility, nor absolute voluntarism, which would ignore the real effects of original sin.

When consent becomes a habit, in the Gregorian view it transcends the dimension of a single act and takes on the dimension of membership — not only individual guilt, but participation in a broader "body" of evil. In book XXXIV Saint Gregory develops the image of Leviathan and its members as a structure to which a person can attach himself by persistent choice of evil. This eschatological perspective is not simple sociological moralizing: rather it indicates that repeated consent does not remain without ontological consequences for the person's relations with the Church and with the Body of Christ. Systematic assenting to concupiscence creates a kind of belonging that in the final perspective has significance for salus and damnationis; hence Saint Gregory warns against disregarding the small steps of the will that may lead to permanent incorporation into the "body of the Antichrist."

From this synthesis clear interpretive boundaries follow: first, the Gregorian analysis orients itself toward the moral significance of movements of the heart, not toward the diagnosis of mental illnesses; second, the distinction between suggestion, pleasure and consent enables pastoral and juridical differentiations of responsibility; third, the spread of evil practice — in the sense of tolerance and repeated consent — has an internal dynamic of mutual reinforcement that can lead to incorporation of the person into structures of evil of eschatological dimension, if conversion and renewal by grace do not occur.

Finally, Saint Gregory's method presupposes the responsibility of the community and sacramental ministry in countering the process from suggestion to consent. His theology indicates that there is no solitude in the fight against temptation: discernment, penance and the assistance given by the Church serve to break the chain before repeated consent forms a lasting membership in evil. While at the same

time exercising critical discernment about the limits of one's analysis, one must reject two extremes — attributing every interior movement to a demonic cause and reducing them exclusively to medical issues — and preserve a perspective in which moral responsibility and the need for spiritual and bodily care coexist and complement one another.

Saint Gregory's analysis points to practical criteria that distinguish a fleeting movement from a culpable assent, which it is worthwhile to extract and specify without anachronistic analogies. Important are the features of the moral phenomenon: the persistence of an image or fantasy (recurrence as a strengthening factor), the will's participation in sustaining the imagination (conscious "dwelling" on it), the degree of deliberation (time and space of rational reflection on the possibility of action) and the conscious choice of occasion that orients inclinations toward a particular object. Saint Gregory suggests that it is not a single appearance of pleasure but the repeat cooperation of reason and imagination with the whisper that determines the passage onto the path of consent. These indicators are descriptive-moral in character: they point to the limits of responsibility and to moments in which pastoral care may recognize the necessity of corrective action, while at the same time they do not substitute for a medical assessment of disorders that manifest in the inability to control the content of thoughts.

Such criteria imply consequences for pastoral practice and moral theology without turning into technical counseling. Discernment requires of the pastor and the community patient observation of the dynamics of movements of the heart: does the individual experience one-off temptations or live in a rhythm of repeated approval of an evil possibility. Here Saint Gregory legitimates the sacramental and formative means of the Church as the space in which freedom can be restored — not by technical "repairing" of nature but by the communal embracing of the person, spiritual direction, prayer and the way of penance that transform imagination and habits. It is important that these practices be applied according to the degree of responsibility detected by moral criteria, thus avoiding moralizing symptoms that require medical help.

In the eschatological perspective the referred subtlety of distinctions acquires weight: habitual consent, sustained over time and strengthened by communal choices, according to Saint Gregory has consequences exceeding the individual act — it creates a belonging that in the final vision becomes an antagonistic structure toward the Body of Christ. Yet this diagnosis must be read with epistemic humility: the warning against "absorption" into the body of evil does not justify simplified biological explanations nor uncritical attribution of guilt where pathological factors predominate. Hence the historical-theological reading of Saint Gregory recommends combining the rigor of moral discernment with readiness to cooperate with appropriate specialists, to meet the multidimensionality of human wounding and not to reduce responsibility nor to wash it away.

See[11][12]

## 1.10 7. From Consent to Habit and Bondage

The most dangerous feature of sin lies in the fact that a repeated act alters the capacity for later choice. Saint Gregory the Great (san Gregorio Magno) employs the image of Behemoth, who first wounds with a tooth and then binds a man with his tail. The first suggestion is gentle and easy to reject. If, however, it is

[11] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; the references in the chapter indicate the verified range of the commentary, without ascribing to Saint Gregory quotations absent from the source text.

[12] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — according to the context discussed in the Moralia.

accepted, pleasure drives a tooth into the mind, consent opens the way to the deed, and the repetition of the deed forms a strong habit.

In the thirty-second book of the Moralia in Iob Saint Gregory the Great writes that the serpent's first suggestion is soft and easy to crush, but after pleasure and consent are accepted the person becomes bound by a powerful habit. Whoever does not crush the head of the temptation can be bound by its "tail."

This image is an exceedingly apt analysis of the psychological mechanism of addiction. At the beginning a person chooses a particular act relatively freely. By repeating it, however, one shapes desires, imagination and automatic reactions. Later one may judge one's habit to be wrong, and yet experience great difficulty in acting in accordance with that judgment.

This does not mean the disappearance of responsibility nor the impossibility of conversion. It does indicate, however, that freedom can be weakened by one's own prior decisions. The demon need not create a new temptation each time. It suffices that he help to form a habit that will begin to function like an internal mechanism.

Saint Gregory the Great discerns here a difference between the beginning and the later stage of evil. In the initial suggestion the opponent speaks mildly, almost like an adviser. When a person becomes bound by a custom, the temptation takes the form of violent compulsion. What formerly encouraged now demands. What promised freedom becomes a tyrant.

Thus Saint Gregory the Great moves from the language of demonology to an analysis of the mechanism of entrenched sin. Demonic bondage need not signify extraordinary possession. It may manifest itself as an established sequence of decisions that make a person no longer able easily to do good, although he still recognizes its value.

The Gregoryan typology of the moral process of "growing together" with sin ought to be read as a subtly constructed analysis of the acts of a rational person and their mutual influence. The distinction between suggestion, liking, consent and habit is not merely a description of successive moments of action, but a sequential logic in which each act transforms the structure of the interior and directs it toward greater or lesser openness to truth and grace. Suggestio (suggestion) remains for Saint Gregory the Great a phenomenon originally external or internal, a stimulation of the imagination or of affect, which in itself does not yet entail personal responsibility; upodobanie (liking, pleasure), however, already changes the quality of the experience, for it engages appetite and memory, making the given content internally attractive. It is in liking that the work of shaping desires begins. Consent is an act of the will that gives the deed its moral character and which, for Saint Gregory the Great, is the crucial point for responsibility — consent decides moral guilt. Habit (habitus, secunda natura) is not to be understood merely as an increased frequency of acts, but as a change in the very faculties of the soul: the grounding of inclinations, the automatization of reactions, a change in the hierarchy of desires that makes subsequent choices more difficult to take in accordance with reason and God. (habitus [habit, disposition]; secunda natura [second nature])

This four-stage sequence leads to the image of a chain (catena [chain]), important for Gregoryan moral intuition. Each repeated act produces twofold effects: it functions as a punishment for the previous act and as a foundation for the next. As a punishment (poena [punishment]) it operates by leaving a trace — a weakening of the sensitivity of conscience, a taste for pleasure, the entrenchment of patterns of imagination — which impedes return to the state of innocence. As a foundation it becomes an element in the construction of the next suggestion: memory and imagination, accustomed to a particular pattern,

more easily generate tendencies toward it. In this way Saint Gregory the Great shows that sin is not a one-time anomaly but a self-sustaining process in which past choices determine the horizon of possible subsequent choices — not in an absolutely deterministic sense, but as a moral "necessity" (necessitas) resulting from shaped habits and internal conditions.

Particular exegetical attention is due to the image of Leviathan in book XXXIV of the Moralia in Iob, where the "closely fitting scales" and the mutual covering of elements of the creature serve as a symbol of the hardness of heart. This depiction has a manifold character: first, it illustrates the process of sins mutually shielding one another, protecting themselves from the light of grace and truth. The scales, layering themselves like strata, prevent direct access of light; analogously, habits and rationalizations isolate the interior of a person from a clear recognition of his condition. Second, this image shows the dynamic structure of hardness: individual habits do not exist in isolation but are arranged structurally, forming mutual connections that impede single therapeutic interventions. Third, the image of "scales" points to the role of memory and imagination in building resistance: when the experience of pleasure and consent is deposited in memory, it begins to serve as a filter of moral perception, bending most experiences toward confirmation of the previous choice. Thus Saint Gregory the Great, by means of expressed images, dramatically shows that hardness is not a simple lack of information but a defensive structure against the transforming action of grace.

It is important to distinguish rigorously this theological notion of Saint Gregory the Great's "darkening of the intellect" from modern descriptions of pathologies of the will or mental disorders. He operates with a category that has moral-theological priority: obscuratio intellectus (obscuration or darkening of the intellect) is the consequence of a persistent rejection of truth and God's goodness; it constitutes a defect in the relation to truth and the love of God, not a description of damage to neurocognitive structures. Therefore analogies with modern psychology or psychiatry may be heuristically useful, but they must not blur the specificity of the Gregoryan description. Saint Gregory the Great does not explain moral bondage as a defect of brain function, but as the result of a distortion of the person's relation to truth and the good, in which memory, imagination and free will participate as spiritual faculties turned toward evil by repeated decisions. Such a perspective emphasizes that although bondage is a real limitation of agency, it remains ontologically within the possibility of an act of transformation through divine initiative.

From this moral anthropology follows a precise theology of the will. Habit, though it weakens agency, does not abolish the ontological freedom of the person. Saint Gregory the Great consistently maintains the tension between the experience of moral necessity and the possibility of reversal: habit is a punishment and a bond, yet it does not absolutely determine choice. This tension has dogmatic implications: freedom as the being of the person is not nullified by habituation; nevertheless the effective power of the will may become in practice very limited. In theological language this means that a person in addiction experiences a limitation in his effective moral capacities (in facultate agendi [in the faculty/power of acting]), yet retains the ability to cooperate with grace, provided that grace is accepted. Saint Gregory the Great suggests that the intervention of grace requires both divine initiative and the active cooperation of the person — ne quidominus (nevertheless), the person must humbly acknowledge his weakness and turn toward the means of renewal that the Church and spiritual life offer. In this sense we do not speak of an arbitrary "forced freedom," but of a freedom that is healed and strengthened by grace rather than replaced.

From an exegetical and pastoral perspective the consequences of this account are far-reaching. First, recognition of the structure of the catena obliges us to attend to the systemic character of sin: intervention

at the level of merely superficial effects will not suffice if the foundations of internal formations remain untouched. Second, the image of "scales" and the mutual covering of sins indicates that penitential practice must include the purification of memory and the reconstruction of the moral imagination — not in the sense of therapeutic "reprogramming," but as spiritual formation that gradually transforms a person's orientational structures. Third, understanding sin as both punishment and the ground of the next sin imposes on the pastor the duty to distinguish guilt and weakness; not every difficulty in conversion is, however, equivalent to a total loss of responsibility.

At the same time interpretive limits must be clearly demarcated. One must not read the Gregoryan image of habituation as a prototype of a medical diagnosis of addiction, nor reduce his demonology to the language of mental disorders. Nor should one draw from this analysis proofs of a theological necessity of determinism — Saint Gregory the Great continues to emphasize the possibility of conversion and renewal through grace. Furthermore, this analysis does not justify an interpretation in which every suffering, emotional crisis or intrusion of thoughts must be ascribed to the action of a demon; on the contrary, Saint Gregory the Great distinguishes types of evil action and points to the complexity of the causes of human weakness.

Finally: Saint Gregory the Great's analysis of the process from suggestion to habit presents a coherent image of the human person as one whose freedom and responsibility are constituted in the dynamics of interior transformations. Habits are not a fatalistic sentence but a real hindrance by which a person may become less capable of the natural choice of good. At the same time it remains always possible, through discerning cooperation with grace, the sacraments and ascetical practices — understood in the Catholic key as means of grace and renewal — that this "chain" be broken. Saint Gregory the Great thus leaves us within a perspective of tension: a profound understanding of the mechanism of habituation and hardness requires firmness of moral judgment and at the same time a humble trust in the power of redemption, which is able to transform the second nature of the person.

Second nature, for Saint Gregory the Great understood as the effect of repeated choice, ought to be read not as a banal sum of habits but as a real transformation of the personal structure. Habits shape not so much outward behaviors as the internal order of the soul's faculties: the hierarchy of desires, the trajectories of imagination, and the mnemonic schemas that constitute the way a person "is" toward good and evil. In this sense habit acquires an ontological dimension — it does not abolish the subject but enters into the constituent identity of the moral subject, making certain choices more natural than others. Such an analysis demands subtlety from moral theology: the evaluation of an act must take into account that an act arising from an entrenched disposition has a different source-culture than a spontaneous act, without losing sight of the responsibility of the person, who still remains a subject capable of conversion.

The notion of "moral necessity" in Saint Gregory the Great thus takes on a specific meaning: it is not physical compulsion nor metaphysical determinism, but a structural tension arising from formed inclinations. Successive choices "closed" the field of possible choices by transforming the appetites and shutting the imagination to other scenarios of action; in this sense every sin becomes a "punishment" for the previous one and the foundation for the next, creating a certain regularity in the soul's functioning. At the same time this necessity remains conditional: it means increased difficulty, not logical impossibility. Such an account permits a sharp distinction between psychological compulsion and moral guilt and avoids reducing theology to a pathological model, without thereby depriving of practical significance the real limitations of agency.

Pastoral consequences follow directly from these premises: the work on habits must be aimed at the renewal of the very moral identity, that is, at the transformation of the order of affections and memory, and not only at the correction of individual acts. This entails the need for long-term formation, a discerning narrative of life and patient re-catechization of the moral imagination, while maintaining the theological distinction between guilt and weakness. In pastoral practice this requires humility in judgment and sensitivity to degrees of responsibility, as well as a constant appeal to the action of grace, which transforms second nature, making it an instrument of gift rather than a bond.
See.[13][14]

## 1.11 8. The Defense of Sin as Hardening of the Mind

After suggestion, pleasure, consent and deed there often follows another stage: the justification of evil. A man does not wish to admit that he has been overcome, and so he begins to erect intellectual safeguards around his own guilt.
Saint Gregory the Great (san Gregorio Magno) interprets the behaviour of Adam and Eve after the Fall in this light. Adam blames the woman, and indirectly God who gave her to him. Eve points to the serpent. Both speak of external circumstances, but neither utters the simple confession: "I have sinned." A sin that might have been ended by penance is enlarged by its defense.
In his description of the Leviathan Saint Gregory the Great compares the wicked to the scales of the dragon. Individual scales adhere to one another and form an armour that the arrow of truth cannot pierce. Likewise members of the "body of the devil" mutually confirm their own excuses, sustain false narratives and prevent admonition from reaching the heart. In the thirty-third book of the *Moralia in Iob* Saint Gregory the Great calls "the body of the devil" the collectivity of people who, instead of lamenting sin, construct additional shields of justification.
This is the moment of transition from individual psychology to social psychology. A solitary person may attempt to justify his action. But when many people unite around a common interest, excuses become a system. A group begins to reward certain behaviours, changes language, reverses meanings, calls a vice a virtue and a virtue a weakness.
Structural evil thus arises, among other things, from the joining together of individual defensive mechanisms. A man is afraid to admit guilt; others have a similar interest; all mutually reinforce their justifications. A "armour" is formed that impedes the action of truth.
Saint Gregory the Great does not reduce this process to the action of a demon, as if men were deprived of responsibility. The Enemy inspires, unites and exploits mutual assent, but it is people who produce the language of excuses and the institutions that protect injustice. The demonic character of the structure consists precisely in the fact that individual consents are welded into a durable order resistant to admonition.
In Saint Gregory the Great's metaphorics the "armour of justifications" is not merely a picturesque descriptive device, but a hermeneutical tool allowing one to read the process by which a single fall is transformed into a settled spiritual blindness. Crucial for an exegesis of this metaphor is the distinction between the protective function of a shield and its perverse function of covering over the light of truth.

[13] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; the references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without attributing to Saint Gregory the Great quotations absent from the source text.
[14] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — in accordance with the context discussed in the Moralia in Iob.

A shield always arises from a concrete act of choice: there is no shield without the prior assent of reason and will to the formulation of justifications. Reason, which ought to receive and examine admonition, is subjected to instrumental transformation — it becomes an instrument of defence rather than of the search for truth. From this perspective the armour of justifications not so much protects innocence as masks guilt and shelters self-confirming mechanisms that make confrontation with the fact of sin impossible.

The analysis of this image leads to a precise distinction between two kinds of cognitive deficiencies: first, ailments of a natural or situational character that may limit discernment, and second, obduratio (hardening) as a morally charged condition conditioned by repeated choice. Saint Gregory the Great consistently emphasizes that obduratio is the fruit of free cooperation — it is not an entity imposed from outside nor a simple consequence of bodily or mental weakening. Even when reason becomes less luminous through habituation to sin, the cause of this darkness remains the antecedent and ongoing culpability of the heart. Such a position preserves the tension between mercy proper to the human condition and the moral responsibility of agents, which in Saint Gregory the Great's account cannot be arbitrarily reduced to physiological factors.

The mechanism of forming the armour of justifications can be analytically unfolded into several stages which Saint Gregory the Great sketches by reference to the behaviour of the first people and to the image of the Leviathan. The first stage is impulse and consent — the individual momentary yielding to weakness. The second is the understanding of one's deed as situational, therefore demanding reinterpretation of the facts rather than contrition; here classic defensive strategies appear: shifting blame, minimizing the gravity of the act, reversing responsibility. The third stage is the sanctioning of justifications by memory and repetition; in time memory begins to consolidate the defensive narrative. The fourth stage is communal confirmation: others, having coincident interests, begin to reproduce the excuse and confer authority upon it. The fifth — critical — stage is the loss of the capacity for self-correction; the mind that formerly could undertake an interior turning withdraws from arguments prompting penance, and conscience is in a sense hidden within the cognitive sphere.

An important interpretative aspect is the distinction between the process of justifying and the property of pride as the root indicated by Saint Gregory the Great in other treatises. Justifying has an instrumental and dynamic character: it is a mode of using reason and language to secure the moral position of the agent. Pride, by contrast, is a disposition of the heart that creates the ground for such instruments; in a word, defensio peccati may be read as a "daughter" of pride, but it is not identical with pride in the sense of the primary inclination. Such a distinction is necessary in order to avoid reducing the moral offense to a one-dimensional anthropology of sin: justification is an act of reflection and moral speech, and pride is an existential stance.

In Saint Gregory the Great's account the role of the "ancient foe" consists less in direct compulsion than in supplying logical and rhetorical prompts which reason readily accepts once the will has already given consent. The demon therefore does not enter inwardly as one who rules the body; rather he inspires a web of arguments that turn justifications into powerful practical reasons. This subtle mechanism promotes the intellectual legitimations of sin: rationalizations become so convincing that they undermine the original force of the conscience's reproof. Saint Gregory the Great draws attention to the specific efficacy of bad reasons: they take the form of probable deductions that are not immediately devoid of logic, yet are socially and psychologically useful because they eliminate the tension between one's self-image and the moral

reality. Consequently the moral brain, entrusted to such an "argumentative system," gradually loses the capacity to recognize and accept the pressure of truth.

From a theological point of view the successive stages of justification lead to the state that Saint Gregory the Great designates as caecitas mentis — blindness of the mind. This stage is not, however, an absolute absence of supernatural light in the sense of the doctrine of grace, but rather a state of cognitive resistance: the mind refuses to admit admonition and does not acknowledge criteria that had previously bound it. The consequence is a closing off to the possibility of conversion; conscience is maimed, not because it ceases to exist, but because it is surrounded by theories and practices that neutralize its reprovational dimension. At this moment the discourse of justifications ceases to be merely defensive language and becomes a "structural armour" — an ontological order that organizes individual and communal life.

Exegetically significant is also the reading of the image of the Leviathan in the light of Saint Gregory the Great's eschatology. The Leviathan does not function merely as an allegory of injustice; it is a prefiguration of the ultimate splendour of evil, which has acquired shape and durability thanks to the defensive practices of men. The dragon's scales of which Saint Gregory the Great speaks are at once a sign of strength and a sign of moral ossification: the scales impede truth's strike, but they also reveal that what clings to evil is something human — language, memory, mutual confirmations. The eschatological implications of this image consist in the fact that obduracy has not only a psychological but also an ontological dimension: through the persistent rejection of penance sin takes on the form of a social being that can bear lasting and destructive fruits to the end of the moral history of persons and communities. One must not, however, interpret this thought as determinism: Saint Gregory the Great does not foretell the permanent exclusion of a single person from the possibility of grace if genuine conversion takes place; rather he warns against the accumulation of effects that make conversion ever more difficult.

The exegetical consequences for the interpretation of the *Moralia in Iob* are twofold. First, the images of the armour of justifications and of the Leviathan require reading Saint Gregory the Great not only as a didactic moralist but as an analytical thinker who understands the gravity of socio-rhetorical processes in the development of evil. Second, his description of obduracy poses questions about the criteria for recognizing responsible guilt: when is a justification only a weak excuse, and when does it transform into an element of a morally culpable structure? For Saint Gregory the Great that boundary runs through the constancy of choice — repeated consents to justification — and through the deliberate orientation of actions that fortify the system of excuses.

One must clearly demarcate the limits of interpretation: the analysis of defensive mechanisms cannot be used to reduce every manifestation of lack of discernment to demonic categories nor to identify contemporary psychological states with the obduracy described by Saint Gregory the Great. His moral categories appeal to the volitional and cognitive competences of a concrete agent and remain within the framework of a Catholic anthropology of responsibility. Nor ought the image of the armour of justifications be conflated with medical or psychopathological concepts without critical conceptual adaptation; Saint Gregory the Great employs the categories of his age, which have an ethical-pastoral, not clinical, character. Likewise the social dimension of the armour does not automatically justify reducing evil to a "system" as if people were merely effects of structures — on the contrary, it shows that structures are the product of human decisions, although over time they operate like autonomous forces reinforcing bad habits.

Finally, from a practical and hermeneutical perspective, Saint Gregory the Great proposes an ethical and pastoral strategy of counteraction: reason should be restored to the service of truth through admonition,

penance and liturgical renewal. Where the armour of justifications has arisen, mere rational arguments against a particular rationalization will not suffice; what is required is the rebuilding of moral memory and a communal language of contrition that will dismantle the scales of the armour and restore the capacity for self-judgment. This restorative work is both individual and communal, for Saint Gregory the Great indicates that the armour is strengthened by mutual confirmation — thus repair also requires communal action.

In sum, a deepened analysis of the armour of justifications in the light of the *Moralia in Iob* reveals the mechanism by which an incidental fall passes into a lasting darkness of the mind as a complex, voluntary and historically situated process. Saint Gregory the Great does not eliminate from this picture the place of the Evil One's activity, but he always locates ultimate responsibility in human choice. This interpretation preserves a balance between acknowledging the reality of the influences of evil and defending the dignity of the person, who always retains the possibility of responding to grace.

Zob.[15][16]

## 1.12 9. Pride as the Fundamental Demonic Wound

For Saint Gregory the Great (san Gregorio Magno) the source of Satan's fall and the fundamental wound of man is pride. The devil, created as a great being, desired exaltation against God. He refused to accept his proper place in the order of creation. He wished to possess greatness not as a gift and participation, but as an independent possession.

From envy he transmitted this same wound to man. In Paradise he induced him to desire likeness to God through disobedience. Man was to receive glory in relation to the Creator, but he wished to seize it apart from Him. The demon's pride became the model of human rebellion.

Saint Gregory the Great does not define pride merely as outward haughtiness. It is an interior appropriation of the good. Man ascribes to himself what he received from God, or he takes his own judgment as the measure of truth. He may be proud of wealth, office, and learning, but also of prayer, asceticism, orthodoxy, humility, preaching, and apparent holiness.

The spiritual form of pride is particularly dangerous because it hides within good. A man overcomes an obvious sin and then begins to regard himself as superior because of the victory he has won. The demon loses access by bodily vice, but tries to enter by the glory associated with virtue. Thus ascetical success may become a new occasion for temptation.

Saint Gregory the Great presents the contrast between the pride of the devil and the humility of Christ. The devil, though a creature, wished to ascend. The Son of God, being highest, voluntarily humbled Himself. Satan says, "I will ascend," "I will exalt my throne," "I will be like the Most High." Christ takes on the form of a servant, suffers, and descends toward man. In the thirty-fourth book of the Moralia in Iob Saint Gregory states that since the pride of the devil became the beginning of the fall, the humility of God became the instrument of redemption.

Victory over the demon is therefore not achieved by opposing him with human religious pride. The more a person seeks to overcome evil by exalting himself, the more he becomes like the adversary. Christ

[15] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; the references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without ascribing to Saint Gregory the Great quotations absent from the source text.

[16] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — in accordance with the context discussed in the *Moralia in Iob*.

defeats the devil by a manner utterly opposed to his nature: truth, obedience, humility, and love capable of abasement.

The notion of pride in Saint Gregory the Great as "queen of vices" (regina vitiorum) must be treated not merely as one sin among many, but as a structural principle shaping the ontology of evil. In Gregorian moral theology pride is not an anonymized behavioral trait, but a mode of being in which the created being reverses its orientation toward the Creator and strives to appropriate its participation in the divine good. This ontological rank — regina vitiorum — means that pride constitutes the conditions for the emergence and branching of subsequent vices: every envy, anger, lust, or avarice draws its dynamism at root from the subject's reorientation with respect to the good. In the terminology of the Moralia the consequence is not only a series of ethical effects, but a primordial ontological displacement: the created being, instead of participating in the existence granted by God, aspires to possess existence as an independent property. In this way pride appears as a defect of the rational being, which undermines the principle of the creature's dependence on the Creator and makes participation in the good the source of its own self-sufficiency.

Analysing the structure of this "queen" in Saint Gregory the Great requires distinguishing an initial moment from derivative moments. The first moment is the act of appropriation: will and reason turn toward the good as possession, not as gift. The second moment is the formal transformation of social and cosmic relations: pride alters the order of participation, making a claim to rule out of a gift. In Moralia book XXXI Saint Gregory observes that pride does not always manifest itself overtly; on the contrary, its most dangerous forms conceal themselves in the light of virtue and merit. Hence a theological rule: the more a vice assumes the shape of apparent good, the more dangerous it is, because it replaces the measure of participation with the measure of possession. This notion logically leads to the conclusion that combating particular offenses is not sufficient; one must address their metaphysical source — the renewal of the relation of participation and the recognition of the transcendence of the gift.

In the context of sacred exegesis the image of Leviathan, employed by Saint Gregory the Great, functions as a hermeneutical model of "structural pride." From references to biblical texts about the power and menace of this creature, Saint Gregory develops the image of a being whose neck and strength symbolize the capacity to raise itself above other creatures and to dominate the order. Leviathan becomes not so much a concrete monster as an allegory of an ontological system in which pride dominates the order of participation. The adopted metaphor of the neck — particularly emphasized in the Gregorian tradition — indicates that pride is not solely a matter of the heart or affect, but has a "structuring" component: the neck that bears the head is the organ through which a being becomes visible as a subject striving for exaltation. In this way Leviathan illustrates pride's ability to create a hierarchy contrary to the order of creation — a hierarchy in which participation is replaced by ownership.

A significant aspect of this analysis is the Gregorian category of "darkness" understood not as the mere absence of light, but as an active relation that obscures access to the divine light. In books II and IV Saint Gregory comments on the devil's standing before God: the fact that the devil can stand in the presence of God does not mean that he participates in His light. This distinction enables one to grasp the "blindness" of the fallen intellect — a being that is located in the place of being yet does not receive participation in the source of light. This interior darkness is the consequence of a closure of will and reason; the intellect, though functioning, does not behold truth as a gift, but as an object for possessive manipulation. Saint Gregory therefore distinguishes the ontological existence of a being from its participation in divine

brightness — the fallen one remains really "before" God, yet epistemologically and morally is cut off from His illumination.

Such an account leads to the necessity of precisely separating the concept of the spiritual wound of pride from contemporary disease categories. Saint Gregory is concerned with the perversion of the will — a moral and ontological act consisting in the turning of a person toward autonomy with respect to the gift. One must not automatically read this perversion in medical or psychological terms: the presence of suffering, intrusive thoughts, or affective disorders is not in principle identical with the action of a demon nor with the classical wound of pride. The Gregorian diagnosis concerns the corruption of the relation of participation, not neurovegetative mechanisms. Thus understanding pride as a "disease" requires caution: the theological sense of the term lies in the disturbance of participation in the gift, in the revaluation of the order of goods, and not in the description of psychic symptoms.

The central explanatory notion is therefore the perversion of the will: the will, instead of being directed to the good as gift, makes of it an instrument of its own affirmation. This transformation has metaphysical consequences, because the will not only chooses particular actions but constitutes the mode of existence of the rational subject. Saint Gregory emphasizes that the power of the will is the place of decision about participation — hence its fall has the character of a wound: it deforms participation and changes the way reason and memory operate. In this moral theology the perversion of the will is primary with respect to the external manifestation of sin; it is a wound that makes possible the growth of secondary vices, yet it can be healed only by reconstructing the relation of participation.

The eschatological dimension of pride, articulated inter alia in book XXXIV through the figures of the Antichrist, must be understood as the culmination of this ontological process. The Antichrist for Saint Gregory is not merely a historical actor, but the embodiment of the tendency to absolutize the creature — the same impulse that began the fall. From this perspective eschatology displays pride as a force which at the end of history takes on a systemic and incarnate form, attempting to replace the Creator with a false centre. This interpretation does not permit a simple identification of contemporary persons or institutions with that figure; it is rather a theological indication: when pride ceases to be an individual state of will and becomes a principle of ordering the world, it transcends the limits of a moral vice and acquires an anti-evangelical character. Hence Gregorian eschatology is a warning against the slumbering of participation, against constructing reality according to the law of one's own superiority.

The practical consequences of this analysis for moral theology and pastoral practice are twofold. First, they compel a change of the focal point in moral therapy: it is not enough to combat superficial symptoms, one must rebuild the relation to the gift — restore awareness of the dependence of being on its source. Second, they demand caution in attributing demonic causality to every evil or suffering; Saint Gregory points to the presence and influence of the demon, yet understands his actions within the framework of an ontological disorder of participation, not as an explanation of every pathology of the human condition. From a pastoral point of view, therefore, careful discernment is required, one that distinguishes wilful and persistent sin — an expression of the perversion of the will — from other forms of human frailty that call for compassion and medical care.

Finally, the limits of the Gregorian interpretation must be clearly delineated. First, one must not reduce pride solely to a psychological category; for Saint Gregory it is a metaphysical fault in the relation to being. Second, the interpretation of the figure of Leviathan or the image of the Antichrist should remain within the realm of theological allegory, i.e. as tools for thinking about structures of evil, and not as literal

descriptions of concrete historical beings. Third, any analogies to contemporary psychological theories may be used heuristically, but do not replace Gregorian categories: reason, will, memory, and their participation in the gift must remain the central concepts of analysis. Finally, one must not make from the concept of pride an argument for the automatic anthropologization of evil; Saint Gregory distinguishes, with due care, the clamor of sin from the ontological wound that makes it possible.

In summary — the analysis of pride as regina vitiorum in Saint Gregory the Great reveals a theological intelligence in which pride is both the cause and the condition of the persistence of evil: it is a perversion of the will that changes the relation of participation in the gift, leads to the "blindness" of the intellect despite real presence before God, finds archetypal reflection in the image of Leviathan and attains eschatological concentration in the figure of the Antichrist. Preserving methodological distinctions — between anthropological diagnosis and medical or psychological interpretation — and respecting the allegorical and pastoral dimension of Gregorian images are conditions for the proper application of this analysis in further theological and pastoral reflection.

See[17][18]

## 1.13 10. The Seven Principal Vices as an Army of Pride

One of Saint Gregory the Great's most important contributions to medieval moral theology is his ordering of the principal vices. He draws on the earlier monastic tradition of Evagrius of Pontus and John Cassian, yet transforms the inherited scheme. He does not present the vices as a random list. They form an organized army.

Pride is the queen of all sins and the root of the whole system. When it masters the heart, it hands that heart over to seven commanders: vainglory, envy, anger, sorrow, avarice, gluttony and lust. Each of these commanders is followed by a contingent of derivative sins.

In the thirty-first book of the Moralia Saint Gregory the Great compares the seven principal vices to the generals of an army whose queen is pride. From vainglory he draws disobedience, boastfulness, hypocrisy and stubbornness; from envy — hatred, slander and delight in another's misfortune; from anger — quarrels, insults and violence; from oppressive sorrow — malice, despair and spiritual torpor; from avarice — treachery, deceit, force and hardness against mercy; from gluttony — unrestrained buffoonery, loquacity and impurity; from lust — the darkening of the intellect, inconstancy and disordered self-love.

This is not yet the identical list of the seven deadly sins known from later catechisms. For Saint Gregory pride remains above the seven vices as their root, and among the seven there is vainglory. Later tradition will modify the terminology and the relations among the individual vices. The basic model, however, will remain extraordinarily influential.

The demonological significance of this scheme lies in presenting evil as a system. One vice opens the way for another. Avarice can lead to deceit, deceit to lying, lying to hardness of heart, and hardness to violence. Envy gives rise to slander, then to rejoicing in another's fall, and finally to hatred. Sin does not develop accidentally. It has its own dynamics, in which one assent prepares the next.

The image of an army also means that the spiritual combat requires discerning the "commanders," not only isolated behaviors. A person may try to remove effects without perceiving the principal vice that

[17] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; the references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without ascribing to Gregory quotations not present in the source text.

[18] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — in accordance with the context discussed in the Moralia.

organizes his whole life. He may restrain angry words yet fail to see the wounded pride that continually produces them. He may fight avarice in particular decisions without recognizing the deep fear and desire for self-sufficiency that undergird it.

Saint Gregory gives medieval thought not a catalogue of demons corresponding to individual sins but a much more important map of moral processes. Later traditions will sometimes associate the principal vices with particular spirits, but that is not the primary intention of the Moralia. The center is the discernment of the way in which pride organizes the whole army of disordered desires.

Saint Gregory's military metaphor is not merely rhetorical imagery nor a simple analogy of social order to moral order; it constitutes a cognitive structure that apprehends evil as a purposive, hierarchical and strategically acting force. The reader of the Moralia should take up this metaphor as an analytical tool: not so much as a description of supernatural actors abstracted from the human soul, but as a model explaining the dynamics by which the heart is seized and transformed into a position of opposition to God. In this conception the "kingdom" of pride is not a homogeneous string of sins but the nucleus initiating and coordinating processes that have a politico-military form — conquest, fortification, stationing of garrisons, delegation of functions. This model allows us to operationally distinguish levels of evil: the originating intention (the root), the directing organs (the commanders), the executive formations (derivative acts and habits).

The mechanism by which the "heart" passes from one degree of subjection under pride to successive vices must be analysed as a sequence of acts of the will and habituational consolidation. The first act is the allowance by reason or will of a certain elation, an acknowledgment of one's greatness or value beyond measure — this moment need not at once assume the form of an overt sin, but it renders the soul susceptible. What follows is consolidation through repetition and self-justification, which creates a habit. Only in this perspective do the successive "field commands" enter with the permissive assent of reason and will: they are therefore not necessarily an external intrusion, but rather a regrouping of internal forces by the consent of the heart, which has previously been "occupied" by pride. Such an analysis allows one to distinguish pride as the initiating source from the vices that function as concretizations of that conquest: the first is a political idea in the soul, the subsequent ones are concrete forms of rule and exploitation.

Book IV of the Moralia furnishes the tools to understand how an "elation of the mind" opens the way for subsequent attacks. There Saint Gregory reflects on the mechanics of temptation: self-delight, resting in achievement, carelessness regarding grace — these are states that lull rational vigilance and weaken the fidelity of the will. It is important to note that in Saint Gregory we are not dealing with a medical schema of disorder; the discourse is about the inversion of the hierarchy of values and a waning attentiveness to the signs of grace and sin. In practice this means that attacks of a given vice do not appear at random but exploit previously created "holes" in spiritual discipline: closing the heart to correction, social praise that falls under vainglory, dependence on external confirmations that make thought susceptible to justifications. Hence Saint Gregory's pastoral consequence — do not combat merely the effects (e.g., public complaints, lies, malice), but examine the sequence of causes that led them onto the stage.

The analysis of the mechanism of passing the "heart" should also take into account the role of rational cognition. Saint Gregory points out that reason is not a passive witness but a participant in the process: it can collaborate with pride by justifying and reinterpreting dispositions; it may also be its first field of victory, when that which should serve to distinguish truth from falsehood begins to justify itself and its pleasures. Such a phenomenon is crucial for distinguishing pride from its "field commanders": pride

invests reason and will so that they become mechanisms reproducing its domination. Recognition of this stage requires of the reader of the Moralia an attention to how internal argumentation and the language of self-justifications shape subsequent sins, acts and habits.

The image of Leviathan in book XXXIV must be read as an illustration of the system-ness and coordination of evil, not as a zoological representation of a concrete demon. The structure of that monster's body, in the Gregorian account, indicates that different parts of the soul and social life can be subordinated to a single organisation of demonic power. The reader of the Moralia should accept Leviathan as a metaphor of organizational coherence in the workings of evil powers: there are central directing hubs and peripheral functions, supply channels (e.g., praise, wealth, fear) and lines of communication (e.g., words, slander, insults). Such a reading emphasizes that spiritual combat has a strategic dimension; it requires discerning the nodes that enable the exchange of "resources" between vices — for example, when avarice becomes a source of violence, or when the buffoonery of gluttony facilitates the spread of impurity. Leviathan also shows that evil can adapt and reconfigure itself, which justifies in Saint Gregory the necessity of continual discernment.

From this model there follows a clearly specified method of spiritual discernment. Discernment in Saint Gregory does not reduce to the registration of affects or emotions; it requires examining their origin, persistence and relation to will and reason. These criteria allow one to distinguish passing stirrings of the heart from entrenched forms of sin: a momentary anger, provoked by an injury, differs from anger that is an element of a soul's settled strategy against neighbor and God. Similarly, a transient joy at one's renown differs from vainglory, which systematically seeks confirmation through deceit and hypocrisy. In Saint Gregory's pastoral practice this means the necessity of examining continuity and repetitiveness of deeds, modes of justification and readiness to make amends — not merely categorising feelings as "good" or "bad."

Maintaining the limits of interpretation is important here: the army metaphor and the image of Leviathan must not be accepted as proof of the independent being of each "commander" in the sense of a distinct demon assigned to a single vice. Saint Gregory rather sketches a network of moral relations; demonicity manifests itself in cooperation between vices and in their capacity to weaken the relation with God. One must not yield to modern reductions that would identify these descriptions with psychiatric or neurological categories: for Saint Gregory the discourse is about moral guilt, responsibility and the need for conversion, not about medical etiology. At the same time one should not expand the schema beyond the author's intentions — Saint Gregory does not present complete demonological schemata corresponding to each sin in a systematically demonological manner, but favors a hermeneutic of moral dynamics.

The exegetical consequences of this deepened reading of the Moralia in relation to the Book of Job are twofold. First, biblical images and questions should be read not as catalogues of entities but as narrative instruments intended to make the mechanisms of spiritual combat evident. Texts about the potency of creatures and their wild, threatening order help Saint Gregory to sketch the scope and nature of dangers that threaten the soul when it is conquered. Second, this hermeneutic requires avoiding dualism: evil is shown as capable of subordinating human powers, and thus the fight against it requires reintegration of those powers around truth and love. In interpretive practice this means studying how biblical motifs function in the Moralia as tools of discernment and repair, not as literal catalogues of demons.

In the light of the foregoing one can also isolate pastoral indications deriving from the understanding of the vices as an army: spiritual therapies should be oriented toward restoring the fidelity of reason and will to

grace and toward dismantling structures of justification. This action consists less in repressing individual sinful manifestations than in effectively preparing the "defence" of the soul — that is, strengthening the habits of virtue, practising vigilance, cultivating humility as a counterweight to the organisational force of pride. A methodological consequence is also the injunction to investigate social and linguistic contexts that enable pride and its field commanders to build their position (praise, profit, social standing).

Finally, it is worth stressing the epistemological caution imposed by the Gregorian Model: the army metaphor and the image of Leviathan facilitate the recognition of patterns and strategies of evil, but they do not provide a ready map of every course of sin in an individual soul. Discernment requires patient analysis of the continuity of actions, the cooperation of reason and will, and the distinction between affect and habit. Remaining within these limits, Saint Gregory's reading remains an exceedingly useful tool for moral theology and pastoral practice: it presents evil as an organized adversary, one against which ad hoc measures are not enough and a strategy aimed at renewing the root — humility, whose restoration will unyoke the armies of vices and permit true reconciliation.

The expansion of the analytical layer that Saint Gregory undertakes makes possible the formulation of a more precise imputational criterion: pride as the root is not merely a semantic beginning of a series of sins but a fundamental motivational system shaping the moral actors — reason and will — so that subsequent vices appear no longer as isolated misdeeds but as concordant realizations of that principal disposition. From a moral point of view this means that responsibility for a particular deed extends to the structure of motives and justifications that preceded it: an act of anger, restrained once, bears a different weight than systematic anger financed by a constant sense of superiority; likewise avarice growing in the shadow of pride has a different moral gravity than a one-off lapse. This differentiability allows one to recognize degrees of guilt by examining the degree of internal assent and habitualization — whether a given disposition is the effect of a passing stirring or a durable constitution of the will, which Saint Gregory describes as the "occupation of the heart" by the queen.

For this reason the method of spiritual discernment should shift emphasis from cataloguing individual manifestations to examining their organisational condition: questions directed to the penitent should concern not so much the details of acts but the ordering of values, mechanisms of justification and responses to correction. Signs of continuity (repetitiveness), rationalization and resistance to admonition are significant here — symptoms indicating that the vice is supported by the "logistics" of pride: elegant self-justification by reason, the enfeeblement of the will by the pleasure of confirmation, and systems of social support that consolidate the position. In pastoral practice the consequence of such discernment is an orientation of the work toward transforming fundamental motives and rebuilding decision-making structures (through patient formation in virtue and tests of humility), rather than merely suppressing symptoms; this is not a technical recipe but a change of the moral field in which the duces may no longer govern effectively.

The third consequence is a clear demarcation of the moral field from the clinical: Gregorian criteria — continuity, intentionality, the composition of justifications — are a phenomenology of guilt, not a medical diagnosis. Spiritual discernment benefits from sensitivity to these signs but maintains epistemic humility regarding the scope of complementary disciplines; collaboration with psychology or medicine is possible and desirable, yet it must not lead to the reduction of moral responsibility to disorders. Such a stance allows a faithful reading of Saint Gregory's army scheme: to see in the vices commands with differing

degrees of responsibility and to act so that the restoration of the root — the humble ordering of love — will dismantle their strategic coherence.
See.[19][20]

## 1.14 11. The demon cannot replace the human will

Despite the strong language about evil spirits entering the mind, Saint Gregory the Great (san Gregorio Magno) does not hold that a demon can automatically seize the human will. He can suggest, harass, exert pressure, make use of desires and exploit external circumstances. He cannot, however, make a person morally culpable without that person's consent.
In the twenty-seventh book of the Moralia in Iob Saint Gregory the Great writes that the adversary can enter the minds of good people by planting forbidden thoughts and afflicting them with temptations, yet cannot dwell in them, because the heart of the righteous is not his lair. By the help of grace a person can refuse consent and not allow a suggestion to be transformed into a lasting presence.
"Entry" here signifies the arrival of a temptation into consciousness, not a full takeover of the person. "Dwelling," by contrast, denotes the acceptance of the adversary's logic as a settled rule of life. The difference between a momentary entry and lasting dwelling corresponds to the distinction between temptation and habitual consent.
Saint Gregory also emphasizes that the intensity of temptation remains limited by God. Evil spirits cannot arbitrarily increase the pressure. Were God not to proportion the trial to a person's strength and to provide a way out, no one could resist. Commenting on the sufferings of Job, Saint Gregory appeals to 1 Cor 10,13 and speaks of God's measuring of blows according to a person's capacities.
This does not mean that a person always subjectively experiences the temptation as easy to overcome. Grace may operate as the capacity to endure amid great suffering, the possibility of asking for help, an interior warning, the recollection of Scripture, the presence of community or the opportunity to begin penance after a fall.
Saint Gregory's demonology avoids two extremes. On the one hand it does not reduce temptation to purely natural psychic processes. On the other, it does not lay the responsibility for all human decisions on the demon. The human being remains a participant in a real struggle, and his consent has moral significance.
The key Gregorian distinction between suggestion and consent requires further terminological and functional clarification. Suggestio (suggestion) should be understood not as a unitary demonic act but as the whole cluster of influences directed toward the cognitive powers and the imagination — insinuations, images, memories, sensory stirrings and external circumstances that have the character of proposals. In Gregory's rhetoric they are moral proposals in a raw form: they do not yet present an act of the will, but only display a possibility, arouse interest, set reasoning in motion or stir concupiscence. Consent, by contrast, is an act of the will that makes these proposals one's own determination; it is the voluntary assent by which a person recognizes a given suggestion as a binding principle of action. Preserving this dichotomy is decisive: a demonic suggestion may be intense, persistent and sophisticated, but it is consent alone that transforms it into a morally culpable deed.

[19] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; the references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without attributing to Saint Gregory quotations absent from the source text.
[20] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Matt 4; 1 Cor 10:13; Rev 12:12 — in accordance with the context treated in the Moralia.

This dialectic also reveals an epistemic and moral asymmetry between God's permission and human autonomy of choice. Saint Gregory, drawing on the account of Job's experience, indicates that God's permitting of a trial belongs to the order of a just testing and does not annul the person's freedom. God may allow suggestions to reach a person and may expose him to trial, but he does not remove the capacity to resist nor grant demons competence to subordinate the will. Theologically, this is a ratification of the classical understanding of the governance of good and evil within Providence: God preserves the integrity of the sanctuary of the will, while allowing the person to be tested. The consequence is that any moral ascription of guilt requires prior discernment whether authentic consent occurred, or whether the activity remained at the level of suggestion — that is, whether the person truly engaged his will.

An analysis of the mechanism of temptation in books II and IV of the Moralia discloses various degrees and paths of suggestion. Saint Gregory distinguishes between a sudden temptation that strikes the imagination and awakens a passing thought, and a sustained, systematic temptation that seeks to obtain consent by gradually winning space in memory and habit. Here a causal distinction is important: demonic suggestion most often operates through indirect means — the senses, the imagination, bodily inclinations, and even through the use of social circumstances — but it never has direct access to the act of the will. Consequently, one must take into account a psychical-spiritual sequence: initial insinuations provoke deliberation, which, if left without the resistance of grace or the exercise of virtues, can lead to consent. Moral memory and the practice of virtues function as defensive structures that impede the tempter's gaining a lasting advantage. The image of the "inner fortress," which appears in the reflections contained in books XXXI and XXXIV, decides the inviolability of a certain precinct in the human person. Saint Gregory does not confuse that fortress with isolation or absolute self-sufficiency; rather, it is a capacious designation of the place where reason and will, supported by grace, retain autonomy from direct demonic occupation. This fortress is not something attainable solely by natural capacities — its defense rests on grace, which grants strength to resist, on the memory of Scripture, on sacramental practice and on life in community. In this way Gregory stresses that resilience is not a mere question of psychophysical endurance but a spiritual-moral structure whose violation requires not only suggestion but also its free admission by the person.

From an exegetical perspective the force of the biblical texts points to complementarity: passages in the Book of Job illustrate the permission of trial within God's judgment; 1 Cor 10,13 decides concerning God who limits the intensity of temptation and opens a way out; James 4,7 formulates the practical summons to resist the devil. Saint Gregory reads these texts as confirmation of his thesis about asymmetry: Scripture shows that temptation is real and often strong, that God permits or limits it, and that the person is called to resist it. From this hermeneutical combination follows a pastoral imperative — not to neglect suggestions, but also not to transfer moral responsibility to their source.

For interpretative precision it is also essential to delimit the applicability of Gregory's terminology to contemporary mental phenomena. One must clearly distinguish the phenomenology of temptation, which describes the dynamics of moral pressure on imagination and will, from states in which reason and will are significantly impaired as a result of illness or injury. Gregory operates with categories of moral deliberation and free consent; where there is no capacity for deliberation at all, or that capacity is seriously distorted, his criteria of imputability cease to apply in a straightforward way. This distinction has practical consequences: one must not uncritically import the whole spectrum of contemporary psychic phenomena into his explanatory system, but must exercise caution and humility before the complexity of cases,

remembering that his thought did not undertake a medical diagnosis but a spiritual-pastoral assessment of responsibility.

In the context of moral responsibility Saint Gregory formulates subtle criteria for grading guilt. Even with a considerable intensification of suggestion it remains possible that an individual does not bear full responsibility if his will was substantially weakened; however, so long as there is capacity to resist and capacity for rational opposition, moral responsibility remains. From this standpoint the sacraments, penance and communal formation are not mere cosmetic means but real instruments for strengthening the fortress of the will: they do not change the moral law, but increase the capacity to fulfil it, making the transition from suggestion to consent more difficult. Hence Gregory's pastoral outlook is simultaneously ethical and therapeutic: the call to vigilance, the exercise of virtues and recourse to grace do not, however, obviate a rational assessment of the degree of guilt in concrete cases.

Finally, clear interpretative limits must be set: the Gregorian model is neither a mechanistic determinism that assigns God or demons direct responsibility for human choice, nor a simple psychological reductionism that explains temptations as exclusively natural phenomena. His analysis is theological-pastoral and serves moral judgment and spiritual healing. It does not authorize automatically regarding every disquieting thought as a demonic manifestation nor assigning blame for the actions of persons who are in states that make conscious engagement in deliberation impossible. Moreover, one must resist an interpretation that spotlights the demon as the cause of all moral or social difficulties; in the Gregorian order demonic evil is real, but located within a broader context of Divine Providence and human responsibility.

In summary: a deepened analysis of Gregory's dialectic between suggestion and consent reveals a subtle system in which demonic insinuations are real and potentially dangerous, yet lack the power to morally imprison the will without its participation. This order of freedom — a kind of sanctuary of the will — is guarded by grace, the practice of virtues and participation in the sacramental community. From a theological and pastoral point of view, this result confirms human responsibility for choices while imposing on the Church the obligation to distinguish, to accompany and to supply the means necessary to strengthen that "fortress" against any pressures that might incline one toward consent.

In the Gregorian perspective the temporal dimension of the passage from suggestion to consent plays a key role. Saint Gregory describes not so much a one-time conversion of thought into will as a protracted mechanism of recurrences, repeat offshoots of the imagination and the gradual taming of desires which — if they encounter a passive memory and a lack of virtuous habits — over time turn into a disposition inclining one to choice. It is important to understand habit not as an automatic removal of responsibility but as a structure that increases the susceptibility of deliberation to certain impulses: habit is formed by a series of small consents and recurrings, not by a single "possession" from without. Therefore Gregory links the defense of the inner fortress to the practice of moral memory and to the exercise of virtues — elements that reconfigure the temporal trajectories of moral decision, shortening the space in which suggestio can nest and preempting the cumulative effect of repetitions. From this vantage point the ascription of responsibility is not only a function of the force of the temptation but also of the length and quality of the process in which the will gradually learns to respond; hence the possibility of gradations of guilt according to the history of internal refusal or permission.

Pastoral application of this analysis requires cautious criteria of discernment, which Saint Gregory places between vigilance and humility before the complexity of the human condition. The distinction should

be based on relatively empirical signs of the moral process: whether a thought is a one-off suggestion or a regularly returning temptation; whether there is repeated admission by the will to its realization; whether there is open seeking of means to act in accordance with the insinuation; and whether the person retains access to spiritual practices and rational opposition. Where doubt about the capacity for deliberation persists, Gregory prescribes a cautious approach — accompaniment, the provision of means of grace and formation, and didactic showing of ways out — rather than a hasty ascription of the whole cause to demons. At the same time the Gregorian model requires cooperation with medical and psychological competencies whenever signals of disorders of rational-volitional capacities appear; such cooperation is a matter of pastoral prudence, not of substituting spiritual discernment with diagnostic reductionism.
See[21][22]

## 1.15 12. Apparent Sweetness and the Falsification of the Good

Satan rarely presents evil as evil. His suggestion must contain the appearance of good or the promise of pleasure. Pride promises greatness, avarice security, envy the recovery of equality, deceit advantage, anger justice, gluttony relief, and impurity closeness or delight.
Saint Gregory the Great (Italian: san Gregorio Magno) speaks of the “sweetness” offered by the adversary. Each vice has its own taste adapted to the desires of the person. The proud man experiences sweetness in the thought of surpassing others. The avaricious person feels it in the promise of removing lack. The envious rejoices in the diminution of another. The deceiver regards craftiness as a sign of wisdom. In the fifteenth book of the Moralia in Iob Saint Gregory the Great describes how the adversary presents different “tastes” of evil to different people, corresponding to their dominant vices.
This is a demonology of false interpretation of the good. Satan does not create the desire for security, justice, meaning, or connection. He exploits natural desires and detaches them from their proper end. He proposes a partial good at the expense of a greater good, immediate relief at the cost of freedom, or justice transformed into vengeance.
Recognition of temptation therefore cannot be limited to the question: “What do I desire?”. One must ask: “In what order do I desire this, at what price, at whose cost, and toward what end?”. The same external act can spring from love or from vain glory. A gift to the poor may be an act of mercy, but it may also serve to build one’s own image. Defense of the truth may arise from concern for the good or from the need to abase an opponent.
Demonic suggestion may therefore make use even of truth and virtue. Saint Gregory the Great repeatedly warns against people who utter correct propositions in an improper manner, with an improper intention, and toward an improper person. Correct content does not automatically sanctify the speaker’s pride.
The Gregorian concept triplex tentatio (threefold temptation) should be read as a subtle mapping of the process in which evil “enters” the soul not so much by violent breach as by gradual transformation of motives and the hierarchy of ends. In Saint Gregory the Great’s terminology one can distinguish three moments: the initial arousal of desire by the presentation of a partial good; the phase of delectation, in which the interior liking for the proposed delight gives it the appearance of rationality and moral acceptability; and the final consent of the will, which consolidates the choice. Crucial for analysis is the

[21] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; the references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without attributing to Gregory citations absent from the source text.
[22] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — according to the context discussed in the Moralia.

recognition that delectation is not merely an affective epiphenomenon but a functional stage of moral illusion: it causes the will to feel the "sweetness" of accord between the proposed good and its prior habit or desire, resulting in the numbing of critical distance. In this sense delectation acts like an anesthetic of the conscience: it does not necessarily change the reasons of the argument, but it changes their meaning for the subject, making the moral cost less painful and sharpening the perspective of ends toward the partial good at the expense of the fullness of the good.

Exegetically important is that Saint Gregory the Great describes this sweetness not as a purely interior affection but as a moral experience embedded in social relations and in religious practices. Delectation often uses the language and forms of virtue; in practice it may take the form of an inner conviction that an action is just, merciful, or pious. Such "sweetness" is often reinforced by the community, which shares or confirms the appearance of good. Therefore recognition of the stage of delectation requires not only solitary verification but also discernment of communal practices that may strengthen it. In the exegetical context the Moralia indicate that this middle moment is the most treacherous: it is it that transforms the proposed pleasure into apparent virtue, turning the tempting proposal into a durable form of habit.

The metaphor of the "scales of Leviathan" from book XXXI provides a particularly potent image for describing the mechanism of hypocrisy as armor. Leviathan, as a great and fearsome creature, has scales that close the touch; Saint Gregory the Great uses this motif to show how hypocrisy covers inner moral corrosion with a surface of appearances. These scales operate in two ways: individually — as a defense of the person against the critical gaze of his own conscience (a sense of impunity, a conviction of the infallibility of one's motives); and socially — as a mechanism of mutual protection among persons persisting in error. A community covered with "scales" protects its members by confirming mutual interpretations of intentions and actions, which hinders both self-reflection and corrective response from the external environment. Such a hypocrisy—symbolic shell makes genuine criticism rejected as hostile, and penance as a threat to the status or security of the community.

The exegetical consequences of this image are far-reaching. First, they present hypocrisy not solely as an individual moral fault but as a social structure with its own protective dynamics. Second, they indicate that means of recognition and repair must take this multilayered character into account: confrontation with hypocrisy requires actions that remove the "scales" without simultaneously closing the way to conversion. In this context Saint Gregory the Great does not propose simple techniques of exposure; he proposes careful discernment and educational methods aimed at the transformation of the heart, not at spectacular uncovering of guilt, which often leads to further closing into the armor.

At this point a methodological distinction must be made between Gregorian discretio (discretio — discernment) and modern medical or psychiatric diagnosis. Discretio in Saint Gregory the Great is a spiritual and moral practice, grounded in an understanding of the ordering of ends, discernment of intentions, and the assessment of the fruits of an action (whether they serve charity and the common good). It is not a descriptive term referring to physiological causes or psychological pathologies, nor does it aspire to a clinical model. By maintaining this difference we avoid the reductionism that would reduce temptation to neurochemical disorders, but we also avoid a gnostic opposition of spirit and body: Saint Gregory the Great recognizes the sensory and bodily reality as a locus of the action of grace and temptation, yet he analyzes it according to criteria of the moral hierarchy of ends. Thus the contemporary scholar should respect the disciplinary autonomy of medicine, leaving Saint Gregory the Great's spiritual discourse in its own normative-pastoral field. At the same time, maintaining clear methodological boundaries allows the

coexistence of approaches: recognition of the need for medical intervention does not invalidate spiritual discernment, and recognition of a spiritual error does not eliminate the need for healthcare.

From the perspective of the Moralia, the demonic mimicry of virtues is a fundamental phenomenon: evil dresses itself in the garments of justice in order to act in their name contrary to their essence. In book IV Saint Gregory the Great sounds the alarm against the "angel of light" — the image of the adversary who takes on the appearance of piety to sow erroneous motives within its bounds. False justice appears where the language of law and righteousness serves not to restore order but to demonstrate superiority or to inflict suffering under the pretext of correction. "Toxic mercy," by contrast, is a form in which an act of compassion flows not from genuine concern for the neighbor but from the desire of self-exaltation, the building of reputation, or the instrumental maintenance of power over another. In both cases we have a perversion of the telos of virtues: the virtue retains its external features but loses its inner connection to charity and moderation, becoming a field for the parasitic activity of evil. Saint Gregory the Great shows that the criterion distinguishing authentic virtue from its demonic imitation is not formal conformity to the norm but the hierarchy of intentions and the fruits of action — fruits measurable in humility, relief of the neighbor, readiness for sacrifice, and also in durable moral transformation.

In light of this distinction, the practice of discernment requires particular sensitivity to the "fruitfulness" of the deed and its long-term effects for the community. Hence the pastoral warning against a simplifying mentality: not every critique of motives must be an accusation, but neither is every praise of action a guarantee of its authenticity. Mt 7,15 and 2 Cor 11,14, cited by Saint Gregory the Great, provide the biblical condition for understanding mimicry: external signs of holiness do not exclude the presence of wolves in sheep's clothing; therefore it is necessary to "know them by their fruits" — a criterion of external observation of the consequences of actions applied in the context of communal discipline and sacramental life.

The pictorial synthesis concerning the Antichrist as a "monkey of God" in book XXXIV may be read as the concentration of the whole problem of the falsification of the good. The Antichrist, in the Gregorian presentation, does not act mainly by obvious blasphemy but by imitating authentic holiness: he reproduces forms of cult, imitates charisms, and appropriates signs of salvation in order to draw people away from the true source of grace. This "monkey" aspect consists in imitation without participation in the essence; it creates the effect of a sacral superficiality that can transform true practices into instruments of deception. It is important that in this analysis the Antichrist is not merely an eschatological figure but a social syndrome: structures imitating the Church can grow up from broken and weakened communities, using the language of piety for purposes contrary to the inner good of the faithful.

The interpretative limits of this analysis must be stated clearly. First, understanding Saint Gregory the Great as speaking exclusively of a real demonic being would be a simplification; he often uses images and personifications to describe moral and pastoral processes. Second, one must not uncritically transpose his diagnoses onto contemporary categories — neither by neglecting the need for medical care nor by overemphasizing metaphysical explanations where psychological or social analyses suffice. Third, not every form of hypocrisy or imitation of holiness must be the result of direct demonic action; it may rather be the consequence of human weakness, neglect of formation, or cultural errors. The Gregorian interpretation should therefore serve critical and formative application: to help recognize mechanisms of falsification of the good and to indicate paths of repair, without falling into demonization of social phenomena or into simplistic psychological diagnosis.

In conclusion it is worth emphasizing the practical consequence: Gregorian discernment imposes an obligation of communal responsibility for uncovering the "scales" and for purifying practices that consolidate delectation leading to the illusion of good. Such responsibility is not a political accusation but a pastoral care aimed at restoring the order of ends and protecting members of the community from false sweetness before it becomes a source of lasting moral damage.
See[2324]

## 1.16 13. Hypocrisy as a Demonic Splitting of the Person

A particular place in Moralia in Iob is occupied by the analysis of hypocrisy. The hypocrite erects a difference between who he is before God and whom he wishes to appear to be before men. His life becomes a performance.
Saint Gregory the Great (san Gregorio Magno) compares the fame of the hypocrite to a dream in which a poor man thinks himself rich. For a moment a man receives admiration, honors and the reputation of sanctity, yet upon waking — that is, at the moment of judgment — he discovers that he possessed only the image of virtue. His wealth existed in the eyes of men, not in reality.
Hypocrisy has a demonic character because it rests upon the severance of sign from truth. Satan is the father of lies and constructs the appearance of goodness stripped of its inward substance. The hypocrite does the same: he employs the language of humility to gain praise, the gesture of mercy to obtain dependence, or orthodoxy to exalt himself.
Evil here penetrates religious structures without an overt rejection of faith. A man may teach correctly, pray publicly and defend the Church, and at the same time make religion an instrument of his own position. This is subtler than external persecution, because it uses the signs of holiness against holiness.
Saint Gregory the Great is aware that preachers and superiors are particularly exposed. Teaching can bring benefit to hearers and at the same time harm the teacher, if it feeds his vain glory. A man may vanquish the enemies of the Church with sound arguments and, simultaneously through pride, wound the Church itself. In the twenty-third book of the Moralia in Iob Saint Gregory the Great describes teachers who rightly combat errors but, by their manner of speaking and desire for their own fame, oppress the community they supposedly defend. They overcome opponents by the truth of their words, and yet they harm the Church by the pride with which those words are uttered.
The Gregorial category of interior splitting is not merely a description of bad conduct in a practical sense; it has an ontological dimension. Interior splitting signifies a division in the being of the person: the external posture (persona — the visible person) and the inner colouring of will and intention (animus/cordis — the inner disposition of will and heart) that do not enter into an organic unity. In this respect the interior simplicity that Saint Gregory the Great sets, as it were, against it, constitutes the wholeness of the human person — the simplicity of heart in which signs and intentions correspond. Understood ontologically, interior splitting is therefore a lack of proportion between what is visible and what is essential; it is not merely bad behaviour but a way of being in which a man becomes "two" with regard to the most fundamental unity of the person: the unity of will and sign. Such an ontological diagnosis allows

[23] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without attributing to Saint Gregory the Great quotations not present in the source text.
[24] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — according to the context discussed in the Moralia.

Saint Gregory the Great to show that hypocrisy harms not only morally but structurally — it disrupts the possibility of encounter with God, who calls the person as a whole.

The mechanism by which the demon exploits the appearance of good operates according to the principle of substituting the sign for reality. Saint Gregory the Great repeatedly shows that Satan does not make the reality of good but imitates its marks, creating a counterfeit that acquires power when it is received by the social and cultural religious context. This mechanism has a distributive dimension: the appearance of good, once recognized and rewarded by human approval, becomes an instrument of social reward — a veil that secures further influence of bad will. In practice this means that the hypocrite, wearing the mask of virtue, becomes an instrument that consolidates the split not only within himself but disperses it within the community, where the signs of holiness lose the force of their testimony.

The exegesis of the image of the "scales of Leviathan" in the thirty-fourth book of the Moralia in Iob is particularly telling for this analysis. Saint Gregory the Great uses the image of a mighty creature with an outer shell that protects and conceals its interior; these scales function as armor, yet are not identified with inward life. The hypocrite likewise dons the external shell of holiness — liturgical gestures, signs of penance, words of humility — which, however, do not correspond to spiritual substance. Thus emerges armored evil: a soulless shell that moves among the sheep and can wound the flock. Saint Gregory the Great's analysis of the scales therefore points to the mimetic and instrumental aspect: hypocrisy, copying the external forms of holiness, conceals emptiness and makes of it an instrument for piercing communal structures.

From this image flows an exegetical consequence for the biblical text: the comparison to Leviathan situates hypocrisy within the narrative of power and menace described in Job. The mention of the mighty body and its scales (Job 41:6–14) serves Saint Gregory the Great as a typology of substitute forms of evil that are dangerous not because they openly destroy, but because they imitate and thereby infiltrate. This typological reading does not, however, identify every apparent good automatically with diabolic activity; on the contrary, it leaves to the reader the criterion of simplicity of heart as the measure of authenticity. The psalmic question about foundations (Ps 11:3) is read in this context as a summons to vigilance: when the foundation of common life is undermined by recurring interior splitting, the community loses stability.

The distinction between deformation of intention and clinical disorders is fundamental in this analysis. Saint Gregory the Great does not employ modern psychiatric categories; his recognition pertains to the action of the will in relation to the sign. Therefore hypocrisy for him is above all a morally shaped decision — even if it may be covered by unconsciousness or self-deception — that takes the form of a mask. Analogous to contemporary descriptions of split states one can point to a structural similarity (an internal rupture), yet one must clearly separate analogy from identical interpretation: mental illness is, according to Saint Gregory the Great, neither proof of demonic action nor an automatic manifestation of moral guilt. This boundary is necessary theologically and pastorally: moral fault and responsibility must not be confused with suffering and personality disorder.

With regard to intentionality Saint Gregory the Great also adjudicates degrees of awareness. There is conscious hypocrisy — the choice of a mask for gain or power — and there is hypocrisy in which a man is gradually deceived by his own appearances to the point that he himself begins to believe in his own theatre. Both forms lead to the same moral and ontological consequence: the loss of simplicity. This distinction matters for moral assessment and the form of correction: conscious choices require punishment and repair, whereas self-deception requires conversion and a healing of conscience. Saint Gregory the Great cautions,

moreover, that only God knows the depth of the heart; human discernment should be cautious, yet not passive in the face of the harm done to the community.

One should rightly emphasize the theological consequences of interior splitting for sacramental life and ecclesial faith. Interior splitting does not invalidate the sacramental sign itself, which preserves its outward efficacy according to the forms celebrated; however, the causal efficacy of grace toward the heart requires the cooperation of simplicity. Saint Gregory the Great seems to suggest that the sacraments can become in the hands of the hypocrite an instrument for the consolidation of appearance: when received without proper simplicity, they remain signs that merely confirm outward identity. The conclusion is a warning against a configuration in which liturgy and piety operate as "scales" — effective externally, yet barren in spiritual fruit.

The eschatological dimension of hypocrisy in Saint Gregory the Great appears in the thirty-first book through the notion of members of the Antichrist. Hypocrisy is here described as an attribute of those who imitate the Lamb's humility in order in reality to enact the pride of the Beast. This imitation of humility becomes an eschatological mask: imitatio humilitatis serves to introduce a false kingdom. Yet it is important here to understand narrowly the eschatological assignment: not every one who at times acts with inauthentic motive is at once labeled a "member of the Antichrist." Saint Gregory the Great reserves this category for enduring, systemic attitudes that constitute a decisive inversion of the Christological order — when the appearance of love serves subjugation and authoritarian domination.

From this flow clear hermeneutical limits. Interpreting interior splitting as simply "lack of sincerity" oversimplifies the diagnosis and forgets its ontological gravity. Nor should all pastoral difficulties be reduced to accusations of being "members of the Antichrist": Saint Gregory the Great sees room for repair, correction and mercy, provided the diagnosis takes into account the degree of culpability and the person's interior structure. Likewise the use of the Leviathan image is warning and typological, not mechanistic: the presence of armor does not exhaust the theme of grace's action, which always surpasses every shell.

The implications for communal life are manifold. First, vigilance is required regarding what in principle ought to serve holiness — office, preaching, prayer — when these signs are detached from authentic simplicity. Second, the protection of the community's foundations requires careful correction and discipline aimed at restoring the unity of the person, not its exclusion as a human being. Third, spiritual formation should emphasize the formation of simplicity of heart — and not solely external correctness — so that sacred signs do not become "scales" used to acquire power or honors.

Finally: the Gregorial interpretation obliges one to distinguish and to act with prudence. Interior splitting is a systemic and dangerous evil because it uses the means of good against the good; recognizing it requires analysis of intention, habit and effects in communal life. Yet Saint Gregory the Great does not call for paranoiac suspicion of brothers, but for struggle for unity of heart through the sacramental and spiritual means of the Church — toward the discovery and restoration of interior simplicity that allows the signs truly to point to the reality of God.

One of the less emphasized yet key dimensions of interior splitting in Saint Gregory the Great is the structure of the so-called "double heart" as a displacement of the hierarchy of affections and moral ends. This is not merely external donning of gestures of virtue, but a fundamental reordering of the will's orientation: the good of the neighbor, humility and obedience cease to be first motives of action, yielding place to the desire for recognition, control or the securing of one's own position. As a result the Christian signs, though still recognizable, cease to be an expression of simplicity of heart and become accessories

of an inwardly degenerate hierarchy of ends. This displacement is not a one-time act but a formative process of the will in which free choice cooperates with habit: gradual accustoming oneself to act from considerations of personal advantage leads to the consolidation of a "second" order of affections, which produces a real moral disproportion between sign and reality.

This interior transformation has its rhetorical and symbolic implication: the language of virtue, forms of devotion and pastoral practices can be appropriated and used instrumentally. Saint Gregory the Great discerns not only the falsity of the deed but also the perversion of the symbol — authentic signs are assigned the function of legitimizing personal power or prestige, so that speaking of humility serves its opposite. The consequence is erosion of communal trust and difficulty for the faithful in reading signs; the signs retain their ontological value yet lose their evangelical efficacy if instrumental motives dominate them. Hence spiritual formation cannot be limited to teaching external practices: it must aim at the transformation of affections so as to restore congruence between word, gesture and disinterested love, without identifying the reparative process with a mere technical fix.

In Saint Gregory the Great's moral economy it is also important to distinguish responsibility in light of gradual entanglement: interior splitting may arise from small choices that self-deceptively convert into a lasting habitus, and therefore require a different tone of discernment than cases of conscious instrumental activity. This dimension of gradualness has practical and theological consequences — it does not diminish the gravity of the evil, but indicates the necessity of formation of conscience and the possibility of conversion. The freedom of the person remains causative; therefore a return to interior simplicity is possible through conversion of the will and repair of the affections, not merely by unmasking external pretenses. In this perspective the Gregorial critique of hypocrisy becomes a call to the reconstruction of the person's internal unity, in which signs once again become a true reflection of a life transformed by grace. See[25][26]

## 1.17 14. „The Body of the Devil" as a Social Organization of Evil

One of the most original elements of Saint Gregory the Great (san Gregorio Magno)'s demonology is the notion of the "body of the devil." It constitutes a negative analogy to the Body of Christ. Christ is the Head of the Church, and the faithful His members. Likewise the devil becomes the head of those who, through pride, injustice and consent to falsehood, make themselves like him.

This is not about a mystical incarnation of the devil nor about a substantial unity of wicked people with the demon. "Body" denotes a community of action, desire and orientation. People become members of the adversary when they perform his works and consolidate his logic in the world.

Saint Gregory the Great uses this conception in his interpretation of Behemoth and Leviathan. The biblical monsters signify Satan, but also a collectivity of people bound to him through pride. The mighty who oppress the weak are "members of the proud devil." False teachers become his mouth. Persecutors are his hands. People who mutually cover one another's wrongdoing form his scales. Those who, by flattery, support unjust authority become the foundation of his social power.

This notion allows Saint Gregory the Great to move from individual sin to institutional evil. The demon does not create a society from nothing. He binds human consents. One man desires power, another benefit,

[25] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; the references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without ascribing to Gregory quotations absent from the source text.

[26] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10:13; Rev 12:12 — in accordance with the context discussed in the Moralia in Iob.

a third security, a fourth revenge, and a fifth social recognition. Their diverse motives can be organized into a single system of oppression.

Unity of evil does not require full unity among people. They may hate one another, rival and envy each other, and yet jointly persecute the innocent. Saint Gregory the Great notes that proud people are divided among themselves, but can act unanimously against the just. Their concord does not spring from love, but from a common opposition to the good.

In its ultimate form the community of the unrighteous constitutes the eschatological body of the Antichrist. The Antichrist is not, for Saint Gregory the Great, a second incarnation symmetrical to the Incarnation of Christ. He is a man entirely devoted to the action of the adversary and a historical concentration of processes that already develop earlier in the world: pride, deception, false signs, violence, flattery and apostasy.

Gregorian understanding of the "body of the devil" should be read primarily as an ecclesiological category: it is a negative image of the social and structural form of the Church's being. From this perspective a single act of wrongdoing is not sufficient to transform a person into a member of that body; voluntary consent to orient one's life against truth and love is required, which then finds external expressions in mutual bonds with others similarly disposed. Books II and IV of the Moralia in Iob show that Saint Gregory the Great regards membership of that "corpus" (body) as a process of social and moral incorporation: pride and hypocrisy generate principles of cooperation, and cooperation strengthens and expands pride. In this dynamic the notion of consent is decisive — not necessarily a complete cognitive identification with all aspects of evil — which enables incorporation into a network of relations against justice.

An analysis of "membra diaboli" (members of the devil) in the light of Books II and IV points to functional mechanisms of this network. Saint Gregory the Great distinguishes different "members" according to their functions: speech, hand, eye, heart — each corresponding to specific socio-moral roles: false teaching, violence, oversight, the motives of the heart. The mechanism of incorporation proceeds through rituals of affirmation (flattery, compromises), through the circulation of arguments and practices that mutually confirm one another, and through the creation of a culture in which the rejection of truth is punished by marginalization. Understood thus, the anatomy of "members" is not static: roles can shift, and membership is consolidated by routine and institutionalization, which consequently makes recognition and correction more difficult.

Behemoth and Leviathan in Books XXXI and XXXIV do not serve merely to illustrate demonic power as such; their anatomical elements function as a model of the social cohesion of evil. Behemoth's "tendons" and "bonds" can be read as an analogy to networks of patronage and dependency that bind various actors around common interests. Leviathan's "scales," by contrast, metaphorically express mutual protections — reciprocal silence, defense of reputation, creation of narratives that justify — which render certain orders hard to dismantle. Finally the "heart" of these creatures symbolizes the center animating the community of opposition: the overcoming of scruples, the hard fixation on one's own rightness and resistance to the light of truth. Saint Gregory the Great therefore indicates that the characteristic of evil systems is not merely technical strength, but moral callousness and the capacity for internal self-confirmation.

From this exegetical reading an important distinction emerges: the anatomical description of Behemoth and Leviathan is metaphorical and serves to reveal social mechanisms, not to offer a literal classification of demons. Even more reason to resolutely reject the temptation of excessive identifications or the reduction of humanistic-social phenomena to simple demonic labels. Saint Gregory the Great himself treats these

images as aids to discern the nature of evil structures, not as instructions for demonstrating the presence of demons in every difficult social situation. Such hermeneutical boundaries are necessary in order to preserve the balance between institutional critique and the pastoral responsibility of the Church.

The exegetical consequences for the theology of the Church are twofold. First, the "body of the adversary" as a social structure emphasizes that the Church must recognize evil not only at the level of individual moral defects, but also as a system that exploits human inclinations to create durable forms of oppression. This requires both doctrinal vigilance and rational institutional tools to recognize and remedy pathologies. Second, opposing this body demands an adequate positive analogy: the Church as the Body of Christ has its structure of connectivity and mutual bond, whose medium is the communional practice of the sacraments and love, that is, elements that dismantle the logic of the demons' "scales" and "bonds."

On the pastoral level there arises the need for precise discernment: the warning against the "body of the devil" cannot serve as a pretext for a broadly conceived moral inquisition or the instrumental use of authority. On the contrary — discernment should incline the Church toward practices of communal repair, to discipline grounded in truth and mercy, and to the protection of those who are systemically oppressed. In this sense Gregorian demonology becomes a theology of reform: the identification of evil structures generates the duty to transform the manner in which the community regulates power, cultivates truth and practices fraternal admonition.

One must also emphasize the mechanism of "mutual entrenchment in error," which Saint Gregory the Great presents as a self-propelling dynamic of immoral communities. When individuals receive confirmation of their actions from others — by flattery, by institutional sanction, by the distribution of roles — falsehood becomes part of common practice. This mutual confirmation plays the role of an epistemological "laminate" resistant to critique: erroneous norms acquire the status of norm. Thus one of the fundamental struggles of the Church consists in restoring criteria of truth and justice where mechanisms of mutual defense of wrongdoing operate.

In reflecting on the Antichrist as the culmination of this organization Saint Gregory the Great points to a logic of concentration: it is not a closed system novel to ordinary history, but a point at which previous processes reach catastrophic intensity. Read thus, the criterion for recognizing the Antichrist remains primarily theological — related to opposition to Christ, false signs and mass apostasy — and not sociological or psychological. Maintaining this boundary is necessary in order not to reduce eschatology to political speculation or to a diagnosis of individual pathologies.

Equally important is the moral understanding of "hypocrisy" as an incorporating mechanism: hypocrisy permits simultaneous participation in liturgy or apparently good activities and participation in structures that oppose that good. Hence Saint Gregory the Great makes plain that the fight against the "membra diaboli" requires not merely the removal of the sinner, but the purification of practices and institutions so as to deprive hypocrisy of its effectiveness. In practice this concerns transparency, accountability and formation of consciences, so as to prevent ostensible scrupulous observance of external forms from concealing participation in violence and injustice.

With regard to sociological consequences one must reject simplified parallels between the "body of the devil" and specific public organizations or political categories. Gregorian analysis has a critical-diagnostic character towards any orders that oppose God's justice; its tools serve detection and curative practices, not rhetorical stigmatization. The theological duty in practice is to distinguish: to recognize objective guilt and structural processes and to mandate work on transforming those structures toward the common good.

Finally, the hermeneutical limits of Saint Gregory the Great's interpretation require intellectual humility: his images are deliberately analogical and homiletic, constructed in the service of moral instruction and mobilization to penance. Accepting them without regard for literary and theological context threatens distortion. Therefore reading the Moralia in Iob should combine historical-critical rigor with pastoral sensitivity, acknowledging the power of metaphor to describe communal evil, but also respecting the boundaries between metaphor and documentation of social facts. Only then will the notion of the "body of the devil" retain its diagnostic power, without becoming an instrument of abuse or inadequate simplifications.

Saint Gregory the Great's account of the "collectivity of the unrighteous" should be read as an analysis of the phenomenon of masses coherent in evil not through a homogeneous ideology but through practical and symbolic mechanisms of consolidation. In the Moralia in Iob he explains how the anonymity of the crowd and public rituals of honor favor the neutralization of conscience: when individuals are incorporated into an anonymous corpus, responsibility blurs and external incentives — flattery, titles, common ceremonies — act as social cement. This dynamic is specific: it does not necessarily arise from the plan of a single leader, but from an accumulation of mutual obligations and patterns of practice that sustain a status quo contrary to truth. Consequently the "multitude of the condemned" manifests as a force of resistance to reform; its durability depends not only on the power of individuals but on the way public recognition and the routine of daily action legitimize evil and render it difficult to overcome. Saint Gregory the Great also shows that such multiplication of opposition has an eschatological dimension: it is not merely a social phenomenon, but creates a space in which processes contrary to the kingdom of God may concentrate.

In view of this understanding of the Antichrist as the culmination of processes of opposition a rigorous methodological distinction becomes necessary. Recognition of eschatological phenomena must be based on theological criteria — mass apostasy, deft counterfeitings of signs and the institutionalization of lies — and not on the use of medical categories or ad hoc political labels. Gregorian diagnosis is moral-theological: it describes mechanisms of incorporating people into a network of cooperation against the good, not symptoms of mental disorder or a program of political agitation. Hence the practice of the Church should combine disciplined discernment with pastoral and canonical procedures — that is, concern for the formation of consciences, transparency of institutions and public accountability — instead of resorting to simplified demonic imputations against opponents. Such an attitude preserves moral responsibility for word and judgment, prevents rhetorical abuses and enables effective reconstruction of the community where the "collectivity of the unrighteous" has confirmed erroneous customs.

See[27][28]

## 1.18 15. Leviathan's Scales: Solidarity in Denying the Truth

The image of Leviathan's scales belongs among Saint Gregory the Great's deepest social metaphors (Italian: san Gregorio Magno). Scales are hard, closed, and fit tightly together. They protect the monster's body from being pierced. Likewise, unjust people mutually shield one another from the truth.

One justifies another. A superior shields a subordinate because he benefits from his actions. The subordinate flatters the superior because he expects reward. Members of a group alter the language of

[27] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; the references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without attributing to Gregory quotations not present in the source text.

[28] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Matt 4; 1 Cor 10:13; Rev 12:12 — in accordance with the context discussed in the Moralia in Iob.

description so that what is unjust appears necessary, prudent, or consistent with the common good. Criticism is presented as betrayal, and repentance as weakness.

Each scale taken separately would be more susceptible to piercing. Their adjacency, however, creates an armor. This is a penetrating analysis of the social mechanism of denial. An individual may harbour doubts, but the surroundings reinforce his justification. Over time the whole system loses the capacity to accept correction.

Saint Gregory the Great shows that admonition is effective only where a person is ready to admit fault. God's word acts like a sword, but it cannot penetrate a heart protected by successive layers of excuses. Not because God's word is weak, but because God does not annihilate human freedom.

Penitence tears the scales apart. A person ceases to speak the language of collective justification and regains personal responsibility. The confession of sin is therefore not merely an individual act. It can be a rupture with the demonic solidarity of the group.

The metaphor of Leviathan's scales in the Gregorian treatment functions less as an aesthetic description than as a precise diagnostic instrument. Taking the passage from the Book of Job as a point of departure, Saint Gregory the Great transposes the biological image into a moral-theological category: the scales are not merely a bodily covering, but a relational structure whose basic feature is "airtightness" — the absence of any aperture, any leaky spot through which the breath of life might penetrate. This "airtightness" is to be understood primarily as a structural binding of will and reason; the matter is not a random clustering of persons persisting in similar deeds, but a mutual anchoring in the defence of error. Within such understood airtightness there is simultaneously an element of hermetic closure toward criticism, admonition and grace — hence not merely an absence of informational "leakage," but a real existential resistance to the action of the Holy Spirit.

In analysing this mechanism, it is useful to draw out two related yet distinct planes: the language of protective practices and the language of identity. The first plane comprises a set of practices — mutual justification, silences, the transformation of criticism into an accusation of betrayal — that make the airtightness effective. The second pertains to the manner in which individuals constitute themselves through belonging to the layer of scales: being "inside" acquires an ontological dimension, becoming an element of moral identity. Saint Gregory the Great emphasizes that it is not a single Greek (one-off) deed that decides belonging, but the continuity of obligations and mutual commitments — a network in which each becomes in turn the "shield" of another, protecting against salutary admonition and rebuke. Such a shield is not merely a metaphor for protecting reputation; it is an instrument by which moral freedom is gradually distorted, and resistance becomes a lasting feature of the community.

In the light of the books of the Moralia (especially II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV) one may develop the view that this collective hardness has a demonological dimension, not as the direct "possession" of every member by a demon, but as the production of a relational reality conducive to demonic actions. Saint Gregory the Great consistently distinguishes demonic action from the absolute determination of the human person: the demon tempts, hardness takes hold; demonic influence certainly exists, but its "power" is revealed especially in contexts where people themselves mutually confirm and consolidate evil. In this way solidarity in denying the truth is not only a moral defect but also an ontological contribution to the construction of the "body" of the devil — not as a material entity, but as a structure of shared existence that resists the initiative of grace. This approach allows Saint Gregory the Great to speak of a demonic

community without reducing it to a formal organization or institution: mutual agreement to speak thus and the consistent choice of the path of falsehood suffice.

Exegetically significant is the understanding of the allegory of the scales as multilayered: the image from Job indicates durability and resistance, but Saint Gregory the Great shifts the emphasis from material indestructibility to the capacity of the system for self-maintenance through mutual enrolment in wrongdoing. This interpretation requires the reader not to conceive of the scales as a neutral physical barrier, but as both a social and moral network. From this vantage point one can more readily read the connections with the psalmic description of the "hard heart" or the prophetic image of social betrayals — Saint Gregory the Great integrates these traditional motifs to show that proud isolation and mutual protection are a synthetic human response to the call to conversion.

The historical context in which Saint Gregory the Great formulates this thought plays the role of spiritual exegesis. As shepherd of the Church amid late-antique and early medieval transformations, he observes mechanisms of patronage, clientage and corporate habits that fostered the creation of "protective networks" around inappropriate practices. His reflection is therefore not abstract moralizing but a reaction to real phenomena: the ease with which people carve out "internal" spheres free from criticism, and the many institutional incentives reinforcing such resistance. It must nevertheless be emphasized that Saint Gregory the Great does not reduce causes to social conditioning — his analysis always returns to the weight of individual responsibility and the gift of freedom: the making of scales is an act of will, not merely the effect of external compulsion.

The theological distinction between the Gregorian "hardness" and modern psychological categories requires methodological precision. Saint Gregory the Great speaks of hardness as a moral and spiritual state in which reason, memory and will are corroded by sin; this concept rests on a sacramental and grace-centred anthropology that presupposes the possibility and necessity of the Holy Spirit's action. This must not be equated with a medical or clinical diagnosis: hardness for Saint Gregory the Great denotes the refusal of God's action through persistent approval of evil, not a disorder of mental functions. One may analogically describe superficial similarities — for instance, repetitive behaviours — but Gregory's treatment operates with categories of guilt, conversion and grace. In exegetical praxis one must therefore separate, on the one hand, an auxiliary analogy that helps to understand mechanisms of cooperation, and on the other hand maintain a clear boundary: a moral-theological interpretation cannot be reduced to a medial explanation by contemporary psychology.

An important element of the reflections is also the assessment of possibilities and limits for tearing open that "airtightness." Saint Gregory the Great's texts indicate that opening occurs through an act of moral courage by one person who decides to accept the truth openly and admit guilt; however the consequences of such an act depend on reciprocity: if others follow, the structure collapses; if not — the transformation may remain solitary. This dynamic distinctly differentiates individual guilt from collective responsibility: the scales do not burst of themselves, yet they may be broken by the action of grace in a person, which finds its ecclesial expression. From a theological point of view this is not therefore merely a private conversion; it becomes effective toward the structure only when it triggers the community's reparative mechanisms — which in turn require genuine penance and public correction. It is worth underlining Saint Gregory the Great's subtlety of language here: he does not guarantee the automatic disintegration of the scales by a single gesture, but displays the conditions under which grace can lead to a breakthrough.

Concurrently one must delineate the limits of interpretive entitlement: the metaphor of scales must not serve as a universal sociological theory nor as an instrument for labelling political or social opponents as the "body of the devil." Saint Gregory the Great uses the image to instruct on the nature of sin and the necessity of penitence; his critique is targeted and pastoral. Taking this direction of thought, the hermeneut should avoid two errors: over-interpretation that would make the scales an explanation for every collective phenomenon, and rhetorical abuse that would transform metaphorical resemblance into a dehumanizing label for the opponent. Preserving this balance is a condition for a faithful reading of the Gregorian intention.

On the level of practical reception in pastoral care and community reform, Saint Gregory the Great proposes subtle tools: recognising defensive patterns, targeted admonition, encouragement toward public acknowledgement of guilt and moral renewal. These are not procedural rules but indications of a pastoral and theological character — aimed at reversing the mechanism of mutual defence and restoring the permeability of the relationship with God. Yet the interpretation of these recommendations should take into account the historical and contextual specificity of Gregorian realities, avoiding schematic transposition without reflection on epochal differences.

In conclusion of this deepening it is worth formulating a methodological rule for reading the Gregorian metaphor: treat Leviathan's scales as a complex instrument of moral-ecclesial diagnosis that combines anthropological, relational and demonological elements. Interpretation should respect the author's original horizon — a pastoral concern for the condition of souls and the real structures of communities — and exercise restraint toward anachronic syntheses. By so doing the image of the scales remains not only a suggestive spur against indifference to the truth, but above all a call to responsible reconstruction of relations that will restore the breath of life among the faithful.

See[29][30]

## 1.19 16. Power, Flattery, and Demonic Unity

Saint Gregory the Great (san Gregorio Magno) is particularly wary of the spiritual dangers connected with power. Power in itself is not evil. It can serve order, the protection of the weak, and the common good. Yet it becomes peculiarly vulnerable to pride, because it supplies a man with outward proofs of his own significance.

The more one possesses, the more anxieties, desires, and possibilities of loss arise. A powerful man may become a slave to the position he seemingly commands. His mind is distracted by numerous cares, and pride feeds on the signs of respect. Behemoth then devours the multiplying earthly thoughts.

Around unjust power a milieu of flatterers forms. Flattery is a social form of lying. A person does not say what he judges to be true, but what will bring him advantage. The ruler ceases to receive correction, and the servants cease to act according to conscience. Both sides mutually reinforce their bondage.

Saint Gregory the Great also describes learned men who subordinate revealed truth to earthly advantage. Their wisdom, symbolized as the rays of the sun or as gold, is thrown at the feet of Leviathan. In book XXXIV of the *Moralia in Iob* he explains that enlightened men may submit to the adversary through flattery of evil powers, intellectual pride, or by using Scripture to construct false teachings.

[29] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without ascribing to Gregory quotations not present in the source text.

[30] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — in accordance with the context discussed in the Moralia.

A demonic social structure needs not only force but also interpretation. Violence must be called order, greed must be named frugality, pride must be dignified as authority, and falsehood must be styled prudence. Those who provide evil with the language of justification therefore play an especially important role.

Central to Gregory's social interpretation of demonic activity is the notion of the body of the enemy — the image of a bodily, organized unity of evil. In this understanding evil is not merely a collection of separate offenses, but a real conglomerate of members whose cement is often a specific relation of power and flattery. The analysis of this relation requires distinguishing two functions: potestas (potestas — the organizing and dominating force) and adulatio (adulatio — flattery as an integrating and securing function). Power (potestas) gives direction, assigns ranks and distributes tasks; flattery (adulatio), however, conceals internal contradictions and removes corrective mechanisms, creating a kind of protective "skin" for the corpus of evil. These are moral and socio-theological categories that Saint Gregory the Great employs to show how individual sin can be transformed into a lasting structure of resistance to grace.

The mechanism joining these two elements is systemic. Potestas without adulatio can be brittle: tyranny rests on coercion and may be overthrown by collective opposition or the force of grace. Yet when flatterers attach themselves to power, a layer forms that muffles pangs of conscience and eliminates criticism, which morally amounts to the clogging of roads to amendment. Adulatio is not merely passive support; it actively reconstructs the master's perception of his actions — it transmutes violence into "order," and selfishness into "the wisdom of governance." Thus the flatterers act as a binder among the various members of the body of the enemy: they remove tensions, smooth out contradictions, and create the illusion of harmony. For this illusion Saint Gregory the Great holds both those who stand at the head and those who serve them responsible — both groups are co-participants in the enslavement of the will.

The allegory of Leviathan's scales in *Moralia in Iob*, book XXXIV, serves here as a particularly apt intellectual tool. The scales form an external, impenetrable covering, able to repel blows and protect the interior. In a moral sense they are a metaphor for those institutional and social mechanisms that obstruct access to grace and to genuine correction. Saint Gregory the Great employs this image to show that the matter is not only single actions or one-off falls — it is a systematized resistance in which each element fortifies the others. Consequently, to counter such a corpus it is necessary to understand both the superficial scales (flattery, ideology) and the joints that connect them (between persons: dependencies, patronage, structures of honor). Exegetically this implies that biblical texts and Gregory's images of Leviathan do not refer exclusively to the metaphysical power of evil, but to the ways in which evil organizes its social biology — its "members."

The passage from individual pride to unitas malorum (unitas malorum — the collective unity of evil) in Saint Gregory the Great is a gradual process, though violent in its effects. The initial pride of an individual, although in itself a personal sin, can become contagious as the surrounding environment begins to profit from that pride. In this dynamic the notion of "moral profit" is important: both the ruler and his flatterers receive immediate benefits — the power retains the semblance of legitimacy, the flatterers gain security and status. The growth of this exchange produces a revision of norms: what was initially rejected as immoral becomes ordinary practice. In this transformation Gregory sees the core of social unity of evil — there is no longer a need for overt coherence of intention; a mechanism selectively rewarding conformity and eliminating criticism suffices. Hence the moral unity associated with the image of eschatological evil is less an ideological coherence than a functional cooperation of interests, maintained by potestas and adulatio.

In analyzing this transition a sharp distinction of categories is required: "the perversion of the will" versus "clinical disorders." Gregory's critique concerns pathologies of the will — a damage to the capacity to choose the good due to persistent inclinations toward acts of loftiness and self-exaltation. This is a moral-spiritual category: voluntarism dominated by the pleasure of ruling, made resistant to admonition. It is not, however, a medical matter nor a psychological etiology; Saint Gregory the Great does not diagnose personalities according to clinical criteria. Maintaining this distinction has important consequences for the interpretation of the text: one ought not transpose contemporary psychiatric terms onto his analysis nor interpret Gregory's descriptions as direct observations of mental disorders. His images serve moral and pastoral assessment, not medical classification.

A detailed discussion of the role of flatterers as "ostrich wings" discloses the subtlety of Gregory's economy of guilt. The ostrich symbolizes two aspects: the imitation of virtue and the appearance of protection. Flatterers imitate virtue — they are silent about faults, echo speeches of loyalty, and present themselves as guardians of reputation — yet their "wings" do not protect against a fall; on the contrary, they consolidate it. Saint Gregory the Great sees in this a moral pretense that is worse than an overt evil deed, because it prevents the conversion of both the master and the flatterer himself. Flattery is therefore not so much a price paid for power as it is a tool of moral perversion: by imitating the good it produces a collective blindness to evil. In an existential perspective this leads to a state in which the corpus diaboli does not need an explicit plan — it suffices that each one performs his role in sustaining the system of illusion.

The eschatological implications of this structure are no less important. Saint Gregory the Great interprets the corpus as preparing the stage for the reign of the Antichrist, not in the sense of a political schema, but as the synthetic peak of a systematized resistance to God. For him the Antichrist is the symbolic expression of the perfection of this demonic cohesion: when potestas and adulatio reach full cooperation, they create conditions in which human institutions become instruments of a closed unity against the divine order. It should be emphasized that this account has a moral-eschatological dimension, not a prognostic-political one: the warning concerns the transformation of souls and social mechanisms that make human responsibility less able to receive grace.

The moral exegesis applied by Saint Gregory the Great also carries interpretative consequences: the biblical images — Leviathan, the rhinoceros, the ostrich — function as ethical types, not as literal descriptions of social history. Read together with the books of the *Moralia* (notably II, IV, XXXI, XXXIV), they indicate that the author constructs moral symmetries: strength ↔ flattery, openness ↔ pretense, individual blindness ↔ collective blindness. In reading these texts one must avoid reification of the images — not treating them as the sole key to understanding all forms of power, but as a tool for detecting mechanisms of spiritual resistance. In exegetical practice this means caution about literal allegorization and the maintenance of the criterion of sensus moralis (sensus moralis — the moral sense) as the guiding interpretative principle.

The historical Gregory's context favors understanding why the image of the body of the enemy could be so potent. In late-antique and early-medieval conditions ecclesiastical and secular institutions were often interwoven with a web of patronage, honor, and clientelist loyalty. Saint Gregory the Great, acquainted with the realities of court and administrative practice, sees in these structures material susceptible to demonic exploitation — not because of a critique of institutions per se, but because of the mechanisms of moral corruption that favor the emergence of a "skin" protecting evil. This historical context does not, however, justify anthropological determinism: Gregory still assumes the possibility of conversion and of the renewal of institutions through moral discipline and penance.

In conclusion it is necessary to set clear limits to interpretation. First, Gregory's description of structures of evil is not a reduction of all forms of power to the body of the enemy; he distinguishes between power that serves and power that enslaves. Second, the images used in the *Moralia in Iob* have a normative and formative character — their aim is to awaken conscience and indicate paths of renewal, not to provide a sociological theory. Third, the application of these ideas in contemporary studies requires methodological discipline: sensus moralis and Gregory's typology may serve for a critical examination of mechanisms of power, but without transplanting onto them contemporary clinical or political categories. Finally, the eschatological interpretation should be treated as a summons to moral vigilance and reform, not as an instruction for identifying an intellectual or political "enemy."

Summing up, the body of the enemy in Saint Gregory the Great appears as a complex structure in which potestas and adulatio not only cooperate but create self-reproductive conditions for the persistence of evil. The analysis of this relation discloses mechanisms of resistance to grace and the route by which individual pride is transformed into the collective unity of evil. Sensus moralis remains here the basic method of understanding: the images and allegories of the *Moralia in Iob* have primarily a formational power, indicating the direction of action for souls and communities toward renewal.

See[31][32]

## 1.20 17. Heresy and Evil within the Church

Saint Gregory the Great (Italian: san Gregorio Magno) often interprets Job's friends as heretics. Their danger consists in the fact that they do not speak only falsehood. Many of their statements are true when abstracted from the situation, but they are misapplied. They defend the justice of God in a manner that makes God unjust toward the innocent sufferer.

Heresy is therefore not merely a collection of erroneous propositions. It can arise through a distortion of proportion, the excision of truth from its whole, its application without charity, or the elevation of a partial perspective into the sole interpretive key. Satan need not always suggest an outright lie. It is often more effective to use a fragment of truth against the fullness of truth.

Saint Gregory the Great also perceives evil operating within the orthodox community. A person may confess the correct faith while living according to the logic of the adversary. One may oppose heresy yet be proud, cruel, and thirsty for glory. For this reason the boundary between the Body of Christ and the "body of the devil" cannot be reduced to a purely external membership.

The Church remains holy through Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the gifts of salvation, but in its visible community there are people of various motivations. A carnal member of the Church can become an instrument of temptation for the righteous. A cleric may preach truth for his own fame. A superior may use authority to protect the ego. A community may defend its reputation at the expense of an injured person. Saint Gregory's demonology therefore has a strong self-critical dimension. Evil is not found exclusively outside the Church, among pagans, heretics, or persecutors. It can operate among the faithful, using sacred words, offices, and symbols. It is most dangerous when it receives religious legitimation.

Saint Gregory's category of the "body of the devil" (the body of the adversary) should be read not solely as a polemical metaphor but as a systematic socio-spiritual theory: a constitutive perspective in which

[31] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; the references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without attributing to Saint Gregory quotations absent from the source text.

[32] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — in accordance with the context discussed in the Moralia.

individuals with formal membership in the Church community arrange themselves into a structure serving against ecclesial unity. In the Moralia in Iob this perspective is both descriptive and normative. It describes a real phenomenon — the existence of people whose motivations and actions make them instruments of Leviathan — and at the same time indicates criteria for discernment and conduct toward that phenomenon. The essence of this category is therefore not a simple inside/outside division, but the pointing out that the visible ecclesial community may contain elements spiritually alienated, functioning like the members of a single organism antagonistic to Christ.

Saint Gregory locates the foundation of this internal evil in pride — superbia (pride). For him pride is not merely a vice of character but a fundamental deformation of reason and will, which translates into a deformation of the interpretation of truth. For the theologian-pastor this means in practice that superbia transforms possession of a true element of doctrine into an instrument of self-vindication and self-worship: a fragment of truth is elevated above the whole of revelation, and personal reason imitates a judge over the community. Such pride functions in two ways: intellectually, when certain expressions of Scripture or doctrinal formulas are narrowed to a private exposition; morally, when the duty of love of neighbor is reduced to the defense of one's own reputation or institutional privileges. Thus superbia becomes the mechanism by which the "body of the devil" is formed — not by the addition of falsehood, but by the revaluation of truth above love and humility.

The consequence of such understood pride is an internal ira, often suppressed under the mask of piety, which finally develops into open schisms. Saint Gregory consistently depicts the process in which hidden anger — initially an inner resistance, envy, wounded pride — is institutionalized by rhetoric and ritual. This process has three phases: hidden hardening (obduracy of conscience against reproaches), institutionalization of anger (the creation of networks of influence and alliances), and its unveiling in activities that break unity (public accusations, separations, false judgments). Appeals to Job in the Moralia serve here as a model: Job's friends utter truths taken out of context, but their ultimate action — the lack of compassion and understanding — shows how anger and self-justification can destroy fraternal unity. Saint Gregory therefore sees a correlation between the rhetoric of righteousness and the moral withering of neighborly love.

In Gregory's reading the figures of the Sabaeans and the Chaldeans must be understood typologically rather than ethnographically. In this formulation the Sabaeans function as a figure of those who follow cultic novelty and external spectacularity while abandoning authentic piety of humble imitative faith. The Chaldeans, by contrast, appear as a figure of those who attempt to "explain" the divine mystery by excessive trust in human wisdom, in astrological or systematic interpretation that corrupts the humility of faith. In both types what matters is that their doctrine and practice "consume" the spiritual heritage of the faithful: by diverting attention from the salvific narrative, by embroiling the community around contentious minutiae, or by promoting a way of life contrary to the principles of mercy and bearing the cross. This interpretation is supported by the books Saint Gregory chooses as exempla — where he discusses temptations, scholastic diversions, or false devotions — and allows him to draw frameworks for recognizing inner heresiogenic action.

The eschatological tension in this analysis is twofold and must be precisely separated from sensationalist anti-apocalypticism. First, Saint Gregory holds that in final periods (or in times of crisis) the mechanisms of the "body of the devil" intensify: the simulation of holiness, perverse exegeses of Scripture, and organizational manipulations then become tools that "prepare" the manifestation of the powers of

lawlessness described in the letter to the Thessalonians (2 Thess 2:3–12). Second, however, he does not automatically identify particular institutions or persons with the Antichrist; rather he sees a long-term process of spiritual preparation in which many members imitate holiness in order to gain influence over souls. Such an account warns against naive acceptance of external piety and embodies a call to intensified discernment: false piety can have eschatological consequences because it serves as an instrument of deception that hastens, though does not determine, the revelation of the "power" of lawlessness.

Methodologically it is important to separate clearly Gregory's spiritual discernment from medical diagnosis. Saint Gregory uses demonic, moral, and pastoral categories within a theological understanding of guilt and grace; thus this is not a description of somatic or psychic states in the medical sense. In pastoral practice Saint Gregory recognizes human weakness, illness, or oppression as possible instruments of experience and purification, yet stubborn rebelliousness, enduring hostile disposition of the heart, and persistent pride he qualifies as the sphere of the enemy's spiritual activity. Therefore any extrapolation of Gregory's thought to contemporary psychological diagnoses would be anachronistic: one may use a psychological analogy helpfully to understand the dynamics of behavior, but it must not be confused with its theological evaluation. In practice this also entails an ethical limitation: not every suffering and not every disordered emotion is evidence of demonic infiltration — often they are trials or illnesses requiring tender care and medical diagnosis.

From this follows a concrete criterion of conduct: spiritual discernment, according to Saint Gregory, should combine the awareness of truth with the patience of charity. Criticism of internal members of the "body of the devil" is not to serve purification by elimination but correction and improvement through instruction, admonition, and, if necessary, just punishment — always, however, with the intention of repair and love of the truth. In this way Saint Gregory rejects revolutionary and violent solutions, which can easily enter the service of the same pride they seek to combat. His intra-ecclesial demonology is therefore at once a theology of humility: it indicates that even actions aimed at defending the truth must be permeated by patience and humility so as not to become another link in the "body of the devil."

Finally, interpretative limits must be clearly delineated: Gregory's understanding does not justify unreflective identification of specific persons or contemporary institutions with members of the Antichrist, nor does it permit a simple transposition of Old Testament typology onto the political-confessional map of our times. His types (Sabaean, Chaldean) function as heuristic tools for recognizing spiritual tendencies, and their application requires consideration of historical context: sixth-century polemics, the structure of ecclesiastical authorities, and particular doctrinal challenges of that period determine the way Saint Gregory formulates his diagnoses. Interpretative humility commands consideration of both the allegorical method of the Moralia and the pastoral intention of the author: the goal is the protection and repair of the Body of Christ, not the creation of a litany of condemnations against real people without an aim toward their conversion.

In summary, a deeper analysis of Gregory's conception of the "body of the devil" reveals a complex mechanism in which pride revalues truth, internal ira triggers processes of separation, and typological biblical figures serve to recognize forms of destruction of spiritual heritage. In this perspective evil within the Church is above all a trial of faith, a test of the patience and charity of believers; the response should combine firm discernment with pastoral delicacy and a long-term hope for renewal through humility and grace.

Saint Gregory the Great draws attention to specific mechanisms of institutional legitimation through which the "body of the devil" acquires resistance to correction: offices, rituals, and liturgical language can be used not so much as means of salvation as shields for actions contrary to the spirit of the Gospel. This is not a simple critique of external forms but an analysis of how sacramental practice and ecclesial terminology, removed from the context of penance and love, begin to mask selfish motivations. When the authority of office becomes a guarantor of reputation rather than of service, and tradition is cited selectively to preserve position, structures themselves cease to support the renewal of the heart and begin to reproduce patterns of defensive power. In the Moralia in Iob such a process is not recognized merely as a technical institutional defect but as a symptom of spiritual hardening that takes the form of religious legitimation of immorality.

Consequently Saint Gregory emphasizes procedural and pastoral criteria of discernment: interventions should be preceded by careful investigation, evidence and — above all — a remedial intention. Discernment does not replace law nor vice versa; rather it should complement it through instruction, admonition, and, if necessary, penalties as therapeutic measures for the community. He attaches particular importance to testing the fruits of teaching and life: the authenticity of piety is proved in love of neighbor, in bearing the cross, and in humility of office. Discipline without the aim of conversion readily reproduces the same mechanism of retaliation it was meant to curb; therefore a remedial policy must combine doctrinal clarity with patience and concrete paths for restoration to the community.

The theological justification of these demands lies in the alternating emphasis on the Church's holiness and its pilgrimage on earth. Saint Gregory reads evil within the community as a trial that calls for purifying patience and reform of hearts and structures simultaneously. In practical terms this means that institutional critique must preserve a hermeneutic of hope: the goal is not the delegitimization of offices but their reform through conversion and the restoration of their service function. This perspective prevents reduction of analyses to cheap demonization and requires of the contemporary reader of the Moralia both intellectual rigor and pastoral humility.

See[3334]

## 1.21 18. Persecution and Steering by Fear

Satan operates in society not only through seduction and flattery, but also through violence. He can make use of rulers, judges, crowds, a system of punishments and social exclusion to force a person into apostasy. Saint Gregory the Great (san Gregorio Magno) interprets the sufferings of the Church as a prolongation of the trial of Job. The devil first attempts to touch external goods, then the body, and finally the faith. The aim is not pain for its own sake. Suffering is meant to elicit consent to evil: blasphemy, renunciation of the truth, flattery or silence.

A persecutor may kill the body, but cannot, without the man's consent, change his will. Hence martyrdom is a victory even when the opponent triumphs outwardly. Satan has the power to inflict a wound, but he does not win the heart.

A subtler form of violence is the fear of losing position, income, recognition or relationships. A learned man may flatter authority not because his life is physically threatened, but because he wishes to keep his

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[34] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — according to the context discussed in the Moralia.

advantage. In that case an external system meets an internal defect. The structure of evil works because it can find in the person the appropriate desire and make it a point of leverage.

Saint Gregory therefore does not oppose "personal evil" to "social evil." Social pressure acts through interior desires, and personal vices create institutions. Individuals' greed builds a system of exploitation, fear sustains unjust silence, pride produces a hierarchy of contempt, and flattery shields power from the truth.

- The passage from hidden temptation to overt persecution, in Saint Gregory's view, should not be read as a linear, mechanical stage but as a dynamic constellation of free acts and significant external conditions. Hidden temptation — as the initial stirring of a passion or the enticement of reason — creates an internal structure of susceptibility; external persecution, on the other hand, activates an instrumentarium designed to exploit and dramatize that susceptibility. The key interpretive moment here is the understanding that only the relation between personal inclination (the desire to preserve goods, the fear of shame, the propensity to yield) and the social means of pressure (the threat of losing office, exclusion, violence) makes the threat into a real psychospritual "steering." Saint Gregory treats this relation as a coordinated strategy of the enemy: the external system does not act in vain if it does not encounter anchoring points in the human heart — on the contrary, it finds in them an effective lever that transforms temptation into action.
- To understand this transformation it is necessary to deepen the distinction between servile fear and pure fear. Servile fear in Saint Gregory appears as instrumental fear, subordinated to the desire to avoid punishment or loss of advantage; it paralyzes discernment, narrows perspective to the categories "what will I gain / what will I lose," and favors compromise of conscience. Pure fear, by contrast, is a relation to God which, although it contains an element of discomfort before evil, opens the will toward conversion and the courage of love; it is not subordinated to social calculation. From the Gregorian perspective the spiritual opponent willingly strengthens and exposes servile fear, making of it an instrument of steering: he does not so much desire that a person go astray of his own accord as that, out of fear for himself, he choose silence, falsehood or conformity.
- The mechanics of this "steering" contain several repeatable elements that can be distilled from Saint Gregory's analyses. First — selection of the point of pressure: the enemy exploits what is valuable to the particular person (property, status, family, the possibility of public action). Second — escalation of uncertainty: by threats of arbitrary punishments, by publicity and humiliation, he creates a climate of unpredictability that weakens the capacity for long-term discernment. Third — narrowing of attention: fear reduces care to the immediate securing of goods, which in turn inhibits spiritual and civic practices that require time and courage (prayer, conversation, solidarity). Saint Gregory sees pastoral consequences here: a community left without means of resistance collapses not because of the supremacy of physical force, but because of the dispersion of moral and spiritual capacity to endure.
- In this optic violence appears not only as an external violation; it is also a technique of appropriating the imagination and communal memory. Narratives built by fear — that maintaining the status quo protects the weak, that opposition will bring only ruin — gain authority when they become quotidian practices of self-preservation. Saint Gregory perceives that these practices have a ritual character: avoidance of the truth, quiet legitimization of injustice, adaptation of language to oppressive norms — all this cements a structure of domination that after some time begins to function independently of the original persecutor.

Consequently, persecution becomes an element of social reproduction rather than a merely incidental assault.

- The metaphor of Leviathan in the *Moralia in Iob* supplies a useful key for understanding the internal dynamics of destabilization whose aim is the loss of the peace of heart. For Saint Gregory Leviathan is not confined to the representation of a powerful external enemy; it is rather the image of a gigantic passion and aggression that breaks into the interior of the person, shattering the harmony of reason, memory and will. That which externally looks like an empire of violence from within takes over the function of an "intimidating phantasm" — the imagination of permanent danger that reproduces fear even in moments of safety. The result is a lasting deficit of peaceful attention, necessary for prayer and the discernment of conscience; without it the heart becomes a field of pushing and shoving rather than a space of encounter with God.
- From this point of view one must distinguish an attack as an event from oppression as a long-term deformation of spiritual relations. An attack may be spectacular; oppression is subtle and gradual. The Gregorian description of the permanent establishment of the power of the Antichrist — using the metaphor of a body organized against the faithful — indicates that oppression has a structural character: it strikes at practices of piety and mercy distributed over time, ruining their communal layer. Hence the struggle against oppression cannot be limited to heroic acts of courage by isolated individuals; it requires the renewal of communal practices that restore moral and spiritual resilience.
- Exegetically this thread counsels restraint in interpreting the passages of Job in which suffering appears as a test. In the Gregorian reading not every encounter with pain is automatically the clatter of a demon; what matters is how suffering as a circumstance is used by persons and structures. In hermeneutical practice the context therefore counts: does suffering produce in the heart humility and trust, or does it function as an instrument of pressure intended to break the will and make the person complicit in injustice? Framed thus, the question shifts the emphasis from "does God permit" to "how did the social and spiritual constellation answer the experience of suffering."
- Historically Saint Gregory's outlook had to be saturated with observation of real mechanisms of power: patronage, political threat, clientelistic ties and reputation, which in late-antique society decided a person's being or non-being. From this perspective we realize that the fear of losing goods or position was not for Saint Gregory an abstract example but a living pastoral category. This experience shaped his vigilance toward situations in which the desire to preserve status could become a moral constraint on freedom. For the modern interpreter this means that the Gregorian analysis is at once a spiritual and anthropological diagnosis — a diagnosis of concrete threads of social connection that the enemy can exploit.
- The limits of such a reading must be clearly specified. Gregorian demonological language operates with categories of moral and spiritual causation; it is not a naturalistic or medical language. Therefore in interpreting his images one must avoid transferring onto them directly contemporary medical categories. In other words: where Gregory describes mechanisms of susceptibility and pressure, a commentator may analogically point to factors that increase the risk of fearful acquiescence, but one must not on that basis reduce Gregorian descriptions to the symptomatology of mental illness nor, conversely, identify every form of fear with the action of a demon.
- Practical methodological implications follow from this: demonological theology and medicine retain their autonomy, yet stand in a complementary relation. Theology addresses the assessment of moral

choices, the analysis of spiritual causes and pastoral discernment surrounding guilt and freedom; medicine analyzes somatic processes and the conditions of anxious processes and proposes therapeutic means. In working on cases that provoke interpretive unease, criteria of distinction must remain clear: the scale and character of social pressure, the capacity to return to the raison d'être of the community, the presence of purposeful action aimed at breaking conscience — these are indicators proper to the Gregorian reading; somatic symptoms, clinical course and response to therapeutic intervention — these belong to the medical domain.

- Finally, accepting this dichotomy does not mean dispersing pastoral responsibility. On the contrary: Saint Gregory's analysis indicates that pastoral care should reinforce practices that restore the peace of heart's primacy before the calculus of fear. This task requires yet another clear interpretive boundary: not to attribute demonization where work is needed on social structures and moral self-awareness. The demonological category makes sense when it indicates systems and actions of ill-situated powers that exploit fear as a tool of enslavement of the heart; it should not serve as an etiology replacing the necessary reflection on political and economic conditions.
- In sum: a deepened Gregorian reading shows that fear as an instrument of persecution primarily has an instrumental function — it destroys freedom by turning a good desire (for security, care, recognition) into a force that closes the heart. Recognizing this transformation requires a subtle hermeneutic that distinguishes servile fear from pure fear, reads Leviathan as a metaphor of the inner storm that disturbs the peace of heart, and sets clear boundaries between theological analysis of oppression and clinical diagnosis. Taken thus, the interpretive enlargement does not weaken the Church's historical responsibility nor substitute for medical care; rather it enables fuller spiritual discernment and more effective forms of pastoral care toward those whose freedom has been subjected to "steering" by fear.

See[35][36]

## 1.22 19. The Antichrist as the Concentration of Dispersed Evil

In the final books of the Moralia, especially in the commentary on Behemoth and Leviathan, the reflection of Saint Gregory the Great (Italian: san Gregorio Magno) acquires an eschatological dimension. The monsters signify Satan, but also his historical and social activity, which will attain particular intensity in the Antichrist.

The Antichrist does not appear suddenly as a reality completely detached from prior history. He is the culmination of processes already present: pride, false wisdom, seduction by signs, political power, persecution and the subjection of people through fear or advantage.

Saint Gregory the Great does not speak of an incarnation of the devil in the same sense in which the Son of God became man. The Antichrist remains a man who becomes exceptionally susceptible and wholly devoted as an instrument of Satan. His "body" is formed by all who cooperate with the logic of the adversary.

The eschatological power of evil will also rest on the unity of the unrighteous. Saint Gregory notes that the dispersion of the wicked limits their ability to harm, whereas their unification increases the pressure

[35] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without attributing to Gregory citations absent from the source text.

[36] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — in accordance with the context discussed in the *Moralia in Iob*.

upon the faithful. In the thirty-fourth book of the Moralia he describes the unity of the rejected as an additional weight by which Leviathan strikes the elect.

This is not, however, a unity analogous to the communion of the Church. The body of Christ is united by love and the mutual giving of good. The body of the adversary is joined by interest, fear, pride and common hatred. Its unity is functional but internally unstable, because each of its members ultimately serves himself.

Within Gregory's eschatological reflection the notion of corpus Antichristi (the body of the Antichrist) must be understood primarily as a metaphorical-theological construction describing the manner in which dispersed evil is concentrated, and not as a purely ontological category of a new substantial being. Saint Gregory the Great uses the metaphor of "body" intentionally: he points by it to a certain fact of social and moral cohesion that transforms dispersed manifestations of pride and unrighteousness into an organized historical force. In this sense the "body of the Antichrist" is not merely the sum of individuals, but a formation in which particular elements perform specialized functions — just as the members of a body have their roles — and in which mutual linkages allow evil to act with an intensity surpassing what would be possible absent that structure.

The analysis of the means by which that "body" is constituted requires attention to two recurring metaphors in Saint Gregory's later books of the Moralia: the neck and the face of Leviathan. The neck functions in his imagery as the place of transition and control of movement — it is through it that the body can turn toward the victim, it is by it that it is directed. The neck-imagery displays the mechanism of directing people and events: an axis of power arises that binds together various social and moral elements, enabling coordinated action against virtue. The face, by contrast, is the place of visible attraction and apparent credibility; it conceals intentions and deceives: the face of Leviathan may be adorned to attract, while at the same time hiding inner emptiness and corruption. A joint reading of these metaphors in Saint Gregory leads to the conclusion that the Antichrist as a concentration of evil operates simultaneously through control of structures (the neck) and manipulation of image (the face). This symbiosis of pride with political power and techniques of persuasion creates conditions in which virtues are insidiously corroded and people are persuaded to accept evil orders.

From an exegetical perspective, the commentaries on Behemoth and Leviathan in the *Moralia in Iob* must be read in the light of the biblical images of the Judaeo-Hebrew and apocalyptic traditions (Job 40–41; Rev 13), whereby Saint Gregory interprets these texts morally and pastorally. He is not concerned with a literal, identified description of a future monster, but with a typological or sign-reading that displays the mechanisms of the adversary's action. The mutual connection of biblical motifs and 2 Thessalonians 2 (concerning the man of lawlessness) allows him to indicate that historical processes — the increase of pride, the acquisition of power, the exploitation of signs — may reach a point at which they become institutionally organized. Gregory's exegesis therefore does not limit itself to identifying traits: it reconstructs the dynamics by which dispersed manifestations of evil obtain a coherent, historically effective form.

An important element of this dynamic for Saint Gregory is the question of the "withdrawal of miracles" (cessatio miraculorum). His reading of this phenomenon should not be understood as a theological denial of God's power, but as the space in which the final test of faith takes place. When signs and miracles withdraw, the faithful are deprived of external proofs of the supernatural and stand before the necessity of making a decision based on freedom and virtue, not on evident signs. For Saint Gregory the Great this is the moment when the strategy of the Antichrist may attain its greatest effectiveness: without direct appeal

to miracles the Antichrist relies more on the systemic organization of fear, advantage and authority — the elements that comprise his "neck" and "face." Interpretively, therefore, cessatio miraculorum should be seen as the humiliation of the human tendency to seek external confirmations of faith and as the condition for testing the authenticity of the Church as the body of believers — not as evidence of the failure of Divine providence.

In the pastoral and theological context the distinction introduced by Saint Gregory the Great between moral diagnosis (pride, deceit, instrumentalization) and medical categories is of fundamental importance. The author of the Moralia consistently rejects medical-psychiatric lexicon as the key to describing demonic processes; he employs rather moral, anthropological and sacramental categories. For him pride is the fundamental desiccating force that, through seduction and persuasive power, corrupts the will, whereas sickness or suffering are not automatically ascribed to a demonic cause. This method preserves a hermeneutical distance from the temptation to reduce spiritual analysis to the expert terminology of contemporary medicine; at the same time it protects against the politicization of interpretation that could lead to an uncritical labelling of opponents as "members of the body of the Antichrist."

The concept of the devil's "members" operating within temporal structures requires precise delimitation: Saint Gregory does not intend to stigmatize every participant in evil as a being wholly deprived of moral responsibility. "Members" in his imagery are functional roles — organs and instruments — which nevertheless retain a degree of responsibility. Thus the anti-body should not be understood as a deterministic machine, but as a network of moral relations in which freedom and individual guilt remain real. This has further hermeneutical consequences: the interpretation of historical events through the prism of corpus Antichristi should serve moral and pastoral discernment, and not constitute a ready key for prognosticating particular persons or institutions as archaic incarnations of evil.

The historical context from which Saint Gregory looks helps to explain his choice of metaphors and emphasis on the institutional aspects of evil. His outlook is shaped by social experience in which manifestations of pride and the pursuit of power had real consequences for the community of the faithful. In the literary and rhetorical register of the Moralia, Leviathan and Behemoth are employed to interpret corporate, political and religious dynamics — yet always from the perspective of moral correction and the call to virtue. One must not, therefore, draw simple anachronistic parallels from these images to contemporary structures; rather they should be treated as analytical categories that help recognise recurring mechanisms: the consolidation of interests, the masking of truth by appearances, and the instrumentalization of authority.

From this perspective Saint Gregory's conceptualization of the Antichrist combines personal and structural elements. The person of the Antichrist for him is a focal point that gathers and exploits existing centers of power and human tendencies; but his real strength lies in his taking on already existing members, organizing them toward an end contrary to the common good. This approach has significant implications for the interpretation of apocalyptic texts: the anti-body is not an abstraction detached from history, but a phenomenon in which history itself can be transformed into an instrument of opposition to God.

Hermeneutical consequence entails an obligation to limit certain interpretations. First, one must clearly mark the boundary between typological reading and literal identification: the images of Leviathan and Behemoth are exegetical devices for diagnosing a process, not precise political maps. Second, apocalyptic causality and paranoia must be replaced by moral critique that distinguishes the structure of evil from

persons, recognises guilt, yet does not abandon sobriety of judgment. Third, from a theological viewpoint the action of grace cannot be reduced to external signs; Saint Gregory urges understanding the trial of faith as a matter of the heart and perseverance in virtue despite the absence of spectacular confirmations. In ecclesiological terms the comparison of the "body of the Antichrist" with the Church is contrastive and pastorally useful: the Church as the body of Christ is a unity built on love, service and the sacraments; its antipode creates an instrumental unity based on interest, force and persuasion. This difference is not merely semantic but has practical implications for communal life and political discernment: the consequence of Gregory's understanding is a call to strengthen the structure of good — formation in virtues, dialogue, justice — that neutralises the Antichrist's capacity for consolidation. The appropriate pastoral response is therefore not panic, but persistent educational and liturgical work that fortifies resistance to manipulation of the "neck" and the outward attractiveness of the "face."

Finally, one must stress the limits of the interpretative method proposed by Saint Gregory the Great. His image of the corpus Antichristi functions as a diagnostic and motivational instrument: it is meant to warn and to mobilise towards virtues. Its aptness consists in its capacity to grasp mechanisms of moral evil in the social dimension. Yet in applying it to historical and contemporary situations one must retain a critical distance: one must not make of such hermeneutics an instrument of political accusation or of labelling particular persons or milieus as literal "members" of the Antichrist. To adopt Gregory's analysis is at the same time to understand it within the framework of Catholic moral theology — as a summons to conversion and resistance to pride — and as an exercise of the interpretive mind that can distinguish moral truths from contextual metaphors.

See[37][38]

## 1.23 20. Grace as Boundary, Light, and Interior Support

The psychology of temptation in Saint Gregory the Great is not an autonomous technique for mastering thoughts. A person does not defeat the demon solely by knowing the stages of temptation. Discernment is necessary, but its effectiveness depends on grace.

Saint Gregory describes grace by means of images: a boundary set against the sea, light penetrating darkness, a wall protecting a city, a hand sustaining the struggler, and a voice resounding in the heart. God can halt a suggestion, diminish its attractiveness, strengthen the will against consent, or use the fall to arouse humility and penance.

Grace does not always remove the temptation. At times a person needs the struggle in order to know his own weakness, cease ascribing virtue to himself, and learn to rely on God. Saint Gregory even allows the thought that a temptation may protect a person from the greater danger of spiritual pride. With regard to certain righteous ones, the experience of one's own fragility becomes a safeguard of merit, because it does not permit them to be exalted by attained holiness.

This does not mean that God needs sin or positively wills consent to evil. God may, however, permit the pressure of temptation and use the struggle itself as a medicine. Satan intends the fall, and God limits his action and can cause that the person emerges from the trial more humble and vigilant.

[37] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without attributing to Gregory quotations not present in the source text.

[38] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — in accordance with the context discussed in the Moralia.

In this sense the demon suffers defeat also when his attack exposes a hidden fault and leads the person to conversion. Evil is not turned into good, but its effect is taken away from the opponent.

One must first emphasize that for Saint Gregory grace functions not so much as an external instrument but as an ontological category: the real participation of the soul in the order of grace, which changes its mode of being and its relation to the evil. The image of the "hedge" (sepes) is not for him a mere pedagogical metaphor; it is a full-fledged description of the way in which God sets a limit to the possibility of total penetration of evil into the human person. This boundary does not annul freedom — on the contrary, it protects its authentic possibility of turning toward the good — but at the same time it limits it in a protective sense: it enables the free will to remain inwardly capable of rejecting demonic tyranny. From an ontological perspective, then, Saint Gregory treats grace as a real constituent of the moral being of the human person, not merely the result of an arbitrary act of God, but a proper existential transformation able to resist the totalization of evil.

This ontological conception of grace is closely bound up with the Gregorian notion of divine permission described in book II of the *Moralia in Iob*. God permits the action of evil within bounds that he himself sets; grace is thus both the frame of those bounds and the means of their effective functioning in the person. From this perspective permission is not a passive withdrawal of God, but an act of sovereign delimitation, in which grace functions as an ontological safeguard: not a temporary incapacitation of the temptation, but a lasting establishment of the premise of a being free from total servitude. Such a reading allows one to understand Saint Gregory's permission as a form of salvific economy in which grace constitutes the conditions of possibility for a spiritual response — ontological conditions, not merely external circumstances.

The second essential dimension of this ontology is the function of grace as the light of discernment. For Saint Gregory this light possesses a cognitive and formative nature: it enlightens mind and heart so that they may recognize the "nose" of the beast — the hidden artifices and subtilties of the evil one. Book XXXI shows that discernment is not a simple technique for distinguishing thoughts, but a gift that permits participation in God's knowledge of the spiritual situation. It is useful here to distinguish two levels: first, grace illuminating the eyes of the mind, which reveals the essence of the temptation; second, grace forming the will, which supplies the fundamental means of resistance against associative and enticing representations. The cooperation of these two dimensions makes discernment not only diagnostic but a real means of defense: seeing the nose of the beast, the person can properly orient his "no" to evil, not contenting himself with intellectual recognition.

This function of light also has an exegetical consequence for the way Saint Gregory reads demonic images. When he interprets texts about Leviathan, about the night of temptation, or about the human heart, he does not speak merely of external signs; he uses the language of seeing and clarity to indicate that without supernatural light discernment of spiritual images can be misleading. Hence his emphasis on ecclesial means that culturally and sacramentally signal this grace: liturgy, the sacraments, the Word of God. Yet one must immediately mark an interpretative limit: the Gregorian image of light is not an optical metaphor reducible to gradual illumination of rational knowledge; rather it is a supernatural adhesion of mind and heart to truth, by which discernment becomes morally efficacious.

The third pillar of the analysis is grace as interior support countering the "hardening of the heart" — an image Saint Gregory develops in book XXXIV, contrasting the softness of a soul open to instruction with the stony nature symbolized by Leviathan. What is crucial here is the distinction: Saint Gregory

posits a notion of spiritual power — the enduring strength of the spirit that arises from cooperation with God — and a notion of mechanical resistance, which might be understood as a trait of the person independent of grace. This power is a necessary fruit of grace: it does not mean hardness insensitive to God's call, but the capacity for lasting perseverance in good despite attacks and falls. One must therefore reject an anachronistic reading: spiritual perseverance is not identical with "resilience" understood in psychophysical categories nor with soullessness — on the contrary, it is a disposition of the heart deepened by grace, which strengthens the will while preserving openness to conversion.

In this context Saint Gregory distances himself from the image of sporadic human force, fundamentally emphasizing the gratuitous origin of the "hardness" against demonic power: where the heart is hardened apart from grace, it turns to stone and will neither recognize nor accept God's action; where grace operates, a spiritual power arises — a lasting capacity to respond that remains in a relation of dependence upon God. From this follows an important pastoral consequence: the distinction between hardening of the heart as the effect of sin and rejection of God and the strengthening of the heart by grace, which is a formation toward freedom. The interpretative boundary for Saint Gregory is here a clear prohibition against reducing spiritual experiences to purely natural mechanisms of "toughening" — everything that possesses salvific value has its source in grace.

The analysis of the state of "poverty" (lack), which according to Saint Gregory precedes the appearance of the Antichrist, allows one to specify another function of grace: being a support when external signs of power and consolation are withdrawn. Saint Gregory describes a form of spiritual destitution in which the person is already deprived of external trusts — manifestations of God's power or social forms of support — and must seek support only in the interior light of faith. This scene requires careful reading: we do not have here a catastrophic theory, but a theological scenario of purification in which prevenient grace and the sustaining grace replace the lack of external signs. This state of lack is therefore a condition that discloses the essence of the believer's relation to God: the fundamental dependence on grace, without which faith will not endure. Interpretatively this means that Saint Gregory sees in periods of spiritual poverty not only punishment or failure but a space in which the true nature of grace as means of perseverance is revealed.

In this perspective the metaphor of the "hedge of thorns" from the Book of Hosea becomes a key hermeneutical tool. Saint Gregory reads it as an image of a protective boundary that is at once a limitation of freedom — not arbitrary violence but a salvific restriction that prevents greater harm. Such a reading requires highlighting a duality: grace limits the sinner's freedom in a protective sense against ruinous license, but does not nullify his fundamental capacity to respond. Theologically, this limitation reveals the paternal character of God's action: God does not remove freedom but establishes the conditions for its endurance in truth. The interpretative boundary here is the prohibition of using this image to justify despotic intrusion into conscience; Saint Gregory employs it as a pastoral category of protection, not as a theory of metaphysical compulsion.

Exegetically, it should still be noted that these images — boundary, light, spiritual power, and lack — operate in the *Moralia in Iob* not in isolation but in dynamic relation. The image of the boundary points to the limitation of the power of evil; light permits recognition of that boundary; spiritual power enables perseverance within it; lack reveals the necessity of trust in that interior structure in times deprived of external signs. From this nexus it follows that grace for Saint Gregory is both the condition of the possibility of repelling demonic domination and the locus of formation of spiritual responsibility: it is not

a passive ameliorant of the situation but a factor that fundamentally shapes the capacity for resistance and maturity.

Historically, Saint Gregory's outlook must be situated in the pastoral-monastic context of late antiquity, where demonic threats were read both individually and socially. His interpretative strategies respond to the need to protect the community and to form virtues, and at the same time reflect a long biblical-patristic tradition that saw in grace a real transformation of being. This historical placement indicates the limits of adapting his thought: one may draw from him the theological structure of the action of grace, but one must avoid a simplistic transposition of ancient terminology onto contemporary categories of the empirical sciences.

Finally, one must clearly mark interpretative limits. First, the Gregorian description does not permit identifying every spiritual difficulty with demonic intervention — Saint Gregory himself distinctions fall, temptation, and permission, and this intellectual discipline must be preserved. Second, his ontology of grace does not license speculation about the "mechanics" of grace in a quasi-physical sense; grace remains real but supernatural and need not be reduced to natural processes. Third, although the images of "limiting freedom" by grace are paternal and salvific in character, they cannot be used to legitimize practices that violate conscience or the dignity of the person. Lastly, any applications of Saint Gregory's conception to contemporary pastoral situations must respect his own categories and avoid anachronistic instrumentalization: interpretation must remain within the bounds of what the author himself suggests in his Moralia — i.e., as an analysis of the internal mechanism of grace's action in the soul, and not as a diagnostic key for describing every extraordinary form of human experience.

See[39][40]

## 1.24 21. Means of spiritual combat

Saint Gregory the Great (Italian: san Gregorio Magno) does not propose a single technique of protection against the demon. The struggle encompasses the whole moral, sacramental, and communal life.

The first means is vigilance over the beginning of the thought. A suggestion is more easily rejected before it arouses pleasure and consent. One should recognize dominant vices, circumstances of weakening, and the ways in which particular thoughts present themselves as good.

The second means is humility. A person aware of his own weakness does not trust the first judgment without reserve nor attributes victory to himself. Humility allows one to accept admonition, to confess fault, and to tear open the armour of excuses.

The third is the Word of God. Scripture purifies the language in which a person describes himself and the world. Evil spirits attempt to seize the interpretation of events; the Word of God restores the proper measure. Yet mechanical citation of texts is not sufficient. The friends of Job use true propositions, but they lack proper discernment.

The fourth means is prayer, which directs the mind to God and counteracts distraction. The fifth — fasting and the ordering of bodily desires. Saint Gregory the Great does not disdain the body, but holds that lack of mastery over one's nearest needs hinders the struggle with subtler vices. He compares uncontrolled

[39] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; the references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without attributing to Gregory quotations absent from the source text.

[40] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — in accordance with the context discussed in the *Moralia in Iob*.

gluttony to a traitor within the city walls: it is hard to fight an external enemy when the gates are open from the inside.

The sixth means is love. In the twenty-eighth book of the Moralia the virtues are compared to doors, and love to the bolt that holds them together. Individual ascetical practices can be broken by temptation if they are not united by love of God and neighbor.

The seventh means is a community capable of genuine admonition. Since evil creates an armour of mutual excuses, good must create a bond of mutual correction, support, and accountability. A spiritual director, superior, or preacher should, however, adapt the remedy to the condition of the person. Not every truth should be spoken in the same way, at the same moment, and to every person.

The Gregorian architecture of defensive virtues appears not as a set of isolated practices but as an ordered internal economy whose foundation, pillars, and connectors organize a person's activity in the face of temptation. In this structure humility plays the role of the essential foundation: it is not merely one virtue among others, but the condition of the possibility of their true efficacy. Humilitas (humility) in Saint Gregory the Great is the acceptance of the truth about oneself before God and neighbor, the recognition of the limitations of a fallen nature, and openness to the restorative power of God's action. The effect of authentic humility is the capacity to receive admonition and to acknowledge one's fallibility, which, by tearing the armour of evasions and justifications, makes real conversion possible. Consequently, humility is not a strategy of manipulative "pretended" submission, but a lasting disposition of the spirit: it accepts truth, thereby exposing the mechanisms of pride which Saint Gregory the Great — appealing to the Old Testament image of Leviathan and other beasts of Job — treats as the principal source of resistance to God's action.

Discernment (discretio) occupies a qualitative place in this architecture: it is a cognitive and moral virtue that enables the distinction of origin and intention in inward movements. Saint Gregory the Great distinguishes truth from the appearance of truth and shows the danger of superficially hitting the form without seizing the essential cause — hence the critique of Job's friends, who proclaim truth but lack proper discernment. For him discernment is not a technical method or a checklist; it is rather a formed capacity to see fruits: whether a given movement leads to peace, humility, and love, or to the growth of unjustified self-assurance and the closing of the heart. In practice this means the formation of spiritual perception through the Word, prayer, and community, so that the believer can distinguish diabolical suggestions from movements of his own ego or from inspirations originating from God. It is important here to make a clear separation between the Gregorian category of discernment and contemporary clinical categories: Saint Gregory the Great describes spiritual and moral states, not medical diagnoses; spiritual discernment ought to be conducted with respect for medical reason and the differentiated competence of pastoral care.

The figure of the war horse, present in the reading of the texts of Job, is transformed by Saint Gregory the Great into an archetype of the Christian warrior, but not in the sense of military glory, rather as a symbol of the transformation of fear into apostolic zeal. The horse in Job demonstrates strength, courage, and the capacity to serve under the rider's command; in Saint Gregory the Great these qualities become an allegory of submitting the forces of nature to the service of God. Fear, which naturally accompanies the struggle with uncertainty and evil, is neither idealized by him nor regarded as a necessary element of heroism; on the contrary, the courage given by God allows fear to be transformed into vigilant engagement for the good of neighbor and for the glory of God. An important aspect of this figure is relationality: the power of the horse is rightly expressed only when it is guided by the rider — that is, by reasoned virtue

and love. Thus the image of the war charger emphasizes that effectiveness in spiritual combat does not consist in unbridled savagery, but in the unity of gifts and virtues under the governance of humility and discernment. From this reading follows also the endorsement of apostolic courage as a virtue that is not an expression of pride but a fruit of trust in God and readiness to give one's strength for the salvation of others.

The mystical unity of the Body of Christ is understood by Saint Gregory the Great as a protective structure against the "scales" of the enemy, which operate in a fragmentary and protective manner: the scales symbolize fused layers of self-justifications, indifference, and mutual excuses that make a community susceptible to the action of Evil. Nevertheless Gregorian defence rests on real spiritual unity, not on a mechanical assemblage of agreements or institutional structures. Mystical unity presupposes participation in Christ through the sacraments, mutual love, and responsibility — it is a living, organic bond whose strength consists in mutual holiness and a common striving to live in truth. Mechanical social structures, based only on an external composition of roles or regulations, can only seemingly resemble unity, but do not have the capacity to break the crusts of hardness. Therefore community formation for Saint Gregory the Great emphasizes sacramental, liturgical, and works-of-mercy practices that integrate personal transformation into the social body without reducing spiritual unity to administrative uniformity.

The Word of God and prayer perform penetrative functions against the armour of hardness for Saint Gregory the Great: the Word directs the heart to truth, indicates the sources of error, and exposes the structures of falsehood; prayer prepares and maintains the heart in the disposition that allows the cleansing power of the Word to be received. It must be emphasized that Saint Gregory the Great distances himself from simple citation as a habitual defensive means: citation without conversion and without interior adhesion to the content does not pierce the hardness of the heart. True reception of the Word requires a prayerful orientation that opens persons to the action of grace and to the long-term transformation of the habits of the heart. In this sense the Word and prayer act synergistically: the Word enlightens, prayer perfects the disposition to receive grace, and the community — as a house of prayer and listening to the Word — creates the space in which the armour may be gradually pierced.

An important element of deepened exegesis is the distinction of spiritual states from clinical categories. Saint Gregory the Great operates with moral and spiritual categories: hardness of heart, attachment to sin, the growth of pride, or weakening of the will are described within a moral anthropology. One should not, however, draw from these descriptions the thesis that for Saint Gregory the Great every suffering or inner difficulty is the result of demons or lack of faith. On the contrary, he shows the complexity of causes and the need for wise pastoral discernment that takes into account both spiritual remedies and the necessity of medical or therapeutic care when the situation requires it. Such a distinction is necessary not only from the point of view of the truth about the human person, but also from the vantage of pastoral ethics: legitimate help means respecting the dignity of the person and the cooperation of the Church's mercy with human reason in its various specializations.

From this theological construction follows a clear practical consequence: spiritual combat for Saint Gregory the Great is not a set of magical procedures nor a repertoire of detoxifying techniques against evil. It is rather a formative process in which, through grace and cooperation with it, a person receives new habits, a new vision, and new measures of values. Elements such as fasting, prayer, the Word of God, or community are bearers of grace and channels of transformation, not spells guaranteeing immediate success. Hence the pastoral application of the Gregorian strategy must take into account: the long duration

of work on the virtues, the necessity of individual discernment, and the proper distinction between spiritual action and medical competence. In this Saint Gregory the Great remains unwaveringly convinced that it is through humility, through love, and through internal ordering of the virtues that a person becomes able to resist the power of evil and to participate in the defensive unity of the Body of Christ.

At the boundary of interpretation it should be made clear that reading Gregorian proposals as psychotherapeutic programs is an anachronism. Analogy can be applied only by understanding that both spheres — spiritual formation and care for mental health — concern the whole person, but operate with different categories, goals, and means. Saint Gregory the Great directs his gaze to the ultimate goal of Christian life — union with God in love — and therefore the means he proposes are evaluated through the prism of that goal. Where contemporary medical and psychological practice provides helpful tools, their use is not contrary to the Gregorian vision; on the contrary, it ought to be integrated into pastoral care, preserving the principle that spiritual combat is above all a process of sanctification from harmful attachments and an opening to grace.

In summary: assimilating the architecture of defensive virtues according to Saint Gregory the Great requires integrating humility as foundation, discernment as cognitive and moral organ, strength found in gifts directed by love (the archetype of the war horse), and the living unity of the Body of Christ as a barrier against shells of hardness and divisions. The Word and prayer serve as instruments piercing hardness, but only as elements of a longer process of interior formation, grounded in grace and realized in communal and sacramental life. The limit of application is clear: this is not a magical system nor a set of simple recipes, but a theological anthropology of act and grace that remains in full harmony with reason and pastoral responsibility.

See[41][42]

## 1.25 22. The Limits of Saint Gregory the Great's Demonology

A close reading of *Moralia in Iob* requires a distinction between the enduring value of his insights and those elements conditioned by his age. Saint Gregory the Great (san Gregorio Magno) employs an elaborate allegory that does not always conform to contemporary principles of historical-critical exegesis. Some of his symbols of gender, the body, and social hierarchy require correction. His interpretations of nature are based on late-antique knowledge, not on modern science.

One must also not translate every statement about evil thoughts into a conviction of direct demonic intervention. Gregory describes the spiritual dimension of temptation, but he did not possess contemporary knowledge of trauma, obsessive disorders, depression, addictions, or neurological mechanisms. His demonological language should not be used to automatically ascribe all psychological difficulties to evil spirits.

At the same time, his distinctions can protect against such simplification. Suggestion is not consent. An intrusive thought is not yet a moral decision. Emotional pleasure does not always indicate full consent. Habit can limit freedom of action. Suffering does not prove personal guilt. The person who is tempted is not the same as the person who has made temptation a principle of life.

[41] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; the references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without attributing to Saint Gregory the Great quotations absent from the source text.

[42] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — according to the context discussed in the Moralia.

Gregory's demonology is therefore most valuable when it serves discernment rather than labeling. Its aim is not to ascribe every problem to a demonic cause, but to show how personal evil can exploit the natural and moral mechanisms of the human interior.

- The ontological framework of demonic power in Gregory requires systematic extraction. In his picture, demons remain created beings: they are not an autonomous being opposed to the Creator, they do not participate in divine sovereignty, and they do not possess absolute initiative. The *Moralia* must not be read as if the author attributed to evil the capacity to compete with God on the field of being. On the contrary, Gregory consistently places the actions of the evil one within the order of divine permission (permissio divina (divine permission)): their activity is possible only because God allows it and defines its boundaries. This ontological subordination has far-reaching theological consequences: on the one hand it recognizes the reality and personal character of evil, on the other it eliminates any pantheistic or Manichaean temptations to elevate the demon to the rank of co-sovereign of the world. Interpretatively, this means that any ascription to the demon of powers beyond those which the Creator explicitly manifests by his permission is hermeneutically unjustified.
- From this perspective one must specify what "power" of the demon means for Gregory. It is not the power to create, but the capacity to influence the possibilities of creation: temptation, guile, scandal, the exploitation of creatures' weaknesses. His distinction between essential nature and its perversion allows one to understand demonic strength as parasitic upon the created order. It is not granted rights to constitutively shape human nature; rather it can distort volitional acts and exploit the weaknesses of body and soul. Consequently demonic action is always relational and dependent: on the constitution of the human person (his freedom), on the context of creation, and on the moral and sacramental fora in which the person participates.
- In the epistemic realm Gregory sets a clear limit: demons do not possess insight into the innermost interiority of conscience as such. Book II of the *Moralia*, discussing the question of permission and vision, emphasizes that evil spirits are limited in knowledge and do not have access to hidden intentions without external signs or without extraordinary revelation. This distinction has a double function: it protects the dignity of the human person — his most hidden decisions remain in direct relation to God — and at the same time it sets a task of discernment, so as not to attribute to the demon knowledge he does not possess. In pastoral practice this implies caution in formulating accusations of demonic "reading of the heart"; substantiated evidence must be sought in visible moral signs or in Divine revelation, not in suppositions about internal contents of thought.
- From the same epistemic perspective methodological consequences follow: recognition of demonic action requires external, historically situated, and morally rational criteria. Gregory suggests — without using modern terminology — that there are behaviors which testify to the external consistency of the evil's action (stubbornness in sin, relapse after conversion, persistent dwelling in pride), yet he allows no automatic inference from thought to supernatural intervention. Consequently the hermeneutic of his demonology prescribes caution: posit hypotheses of demonic influence only when context and constitutive signs justify such a conclusion.
- In the somatic sphere Gregory clearly distinguishes spiritual oppression from bodily disease. Book IV devotes analysis to situations in which the body suffers while the spirit remains steadfast; the author does not confuse the organ with the soul. This distinction has practical and ethical dimensions: not every bodily ailment should be read as a demonic result, just as not every soul's suffering is a manifestation of

"oppression" by the evil one. The consequence is the necessity of two-track discernment — medical and spiritual — conducted in parallel yet independently within their respective competencies. In theological practice this means respect for the responsibilities of physician and therapist and forbids instrumental use of demonology to justify medical neglect or to stigmatize the suffering.

- This distinction also determines the attitude toward categories of guilt and moral responsibility. Gregory admits that demonic temptation can weaken a person, yet it does not automatically remove his responsibility. If a bodily or psychological oppression leads to repetitive acts without an internal structure of consent, one cannot immediately assert that the person was "possessed." On the other hand his distinction allows one to perceive situations in which freedom is in fact politically or spiritually enslaved by persistent proud resistance — and toward such postures the Church's liturgy and pastoral care should respond appropriately. It must be emphasized that for Gregory those responses do not consist in an irrational appeal to demonology, but in disciplinary moral and missionary discernment.
- In the eschatological sphere Gregory formulates explicit limits to the power of the Antichrist. His narrative, although using strong symbolism (including references that comment on books XXXI and XXXIV), presents the figure of the Antichrist not as an absolute being but as an instrument of trial and judgment; his reign is temporary and purposeful: it is intended to test those who persist in pride, not to have ultimate dominion over all. Such differentiation of the addressees of the Apocalypse and the *Moralia* helps avoid universalizing conclusions that would identify the Antichrist with any form of political or cultural power. Gregory stresses that the effectiveness of this phenomenon depends on the consent of human arrogance; without the collaboration of pride the Antichrist remains impotent before enduring attitudes of humility and faith.
- From this follows an important pastoral and exegetical implication: the announcement of the end of the dominion of the evil one and of God's final triumph is, for him, united with a call to interior conversion. The eschatological limitation of the Antichrist is expressed not only in the temporality of his action, but also in his addressability — he is dangerous above all to those who have themselves yielded to the dominance of their own pride. Thus Gregory links the history of salvation to the personal response to grace, not to an impersonal domination by forces of evil.
- As a consequence for the hermeneutics of prophetic and apocalyptic texts one should adopt the principle of analogy, not ecstatic literalism. Gregory employs symbol and typology whose purpose is moral and spiritual instruction, not the supply of a single closed historical map. In exegetical practice this means that images of Leviathan, the unicorn, or the power of the Antichrist should be read in the light of their didactic function — indicating the mechanisms of pride, violence, and deception — and not as an instruction for identifying particular contemporary political actors. This is the hermeneutical boundary Gregory consistently marks out by his allegorical method.
- In synthesis: the ultimate sovereignty of God over the "mystical body" of the enemy is, for Gregory, a theological axiom. There is no place in him for a parity-based dichotomy between a lesser god and God; evil acts, craftily exploiting created means, but always within the context of God's permission and judgment. This stance preserves a balance between acknowledging the reality of demonic action and forbidding its mythologization. As a result it not only guards against demonic absolutism, but also provides ethical grounds for hope and pastoral action: the fight against the demon is possible because his rule is relative and passing.

- Finally, a clear delineation of interpretive limits: first, Gregory's demonology is not for labeling everyday difficulties as demonic interventions; second, it does not permit identification of contemporary persons or institutions with apocalyptic figures; third, it does not replace or negate medical competencies — it is rather a supplementary spiritual perspective; fourth, it requires exegetical discipline: symbolic images must be read in the light of their moral-pastoral function, not as literal historical maps. Adhering to these limits, the study of Gregory remains for contemporary Catholic thought a valuable tool of discernment that situates evil in relation to God and summons a responsible response on the part of the Church.

One of the less exploited implications of the chapter's plan is worth deepening: the Gregorian analysis of the addressability of eschatological evil — that is, the question to whom and in what dimension the Antichrist is a real "tester" of faith. For Gregory this figure does not function as a universal historical factor of uniform effectiveness; rather, its action is selective and morally conditioned. The key criterion of that selection is pride: it is pride, through an interior consent to self-dependence from God, that makes the soul susceptible to the deceptive attractions the apocalyptic figure personifies. Consequently the Antichrist appears to Gregory as an instrument of trial whose "effectiveness" is measured not by abstract might but by the degree of interior resistance to grace. Such an approach shifts the emphasis from searching for historical culprits toward analysis of the spiritual condition of the addressees — both individual and collective — and stresses that eschatology has primarily a formative function: it warns and mobilizes to humility, and does not establish a political-catastrophic map of culprits.

The second dimension that in the *Moralia in Iob* should be made clearer is the social and liturgical dimension of resistance against the "mystical body" of the enemy. Gregory does not isolate temptation and fall within the private sphere; he also understands them as phenomena that can take root in communal practices through entrenched habits, philosophies of life, or celebrations which, instead of directing toward God, cultivate self-sufficiency. Hence his indications are not reducible to individual remedies but aim at shaping spiritual structures — prayer, sacramental discipline, penitential practices — that rehabilitate humility as a constitutive virtue of the community. Interpretatively this means that the "limitedness" of the Antichrist is also recognized by malfunctioning of those structures: where the community loses the capacity for conversion and self-critique, this figure finds fertile ground; where there exists a durable practice of humility, his influence is reduced to the role of a test rather than dominion.

From these two points emerges an important theological method for contemporary reading of Gregory: eschatology and demonology are not to serve political exposure nor a psychologizing label, but moral-formative interpretation. The study of the limits of evil's power must therefore remain a discipline of discernment that combines attention to signs of persistent pride and loss of capacity for conversion with respect for medical and psychological competencies. For the historical reception of Gregorian images one should adapt recognition criteria of a long-term and communal character — perseverance in sin, systematic undermining of grace, durable refusal of penance — so as not to confuse clinical or social pathologies with the eschatological trial that Gregory primarily describes as a summons to transformation of the heart, not as a tool for labeling specific people or structures.

See[43][44]

[43] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; the references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without attributing to Gregory quotations not present in the source text.

[44] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — in accordance with the context discussed in *Moralia in Iob*.

## 1.26 23. Bridge to the Middle Ages

The significance of Saint Gregory the Great (san Gregorio Magno) for the Middle Ages lies in his synthesis of several great strands. He takes over Augustinian theology of pride, grace, and the social character of evil. He preserves the monastic tradition of discerning thoughts. He systematises the principal vices. He links demonology with pastoral care and exegesis. He creates images that can be used in preaching, spiritual direction, and the formation of the clergy.

Medieval authors will adopt from him above all the model of the principal vices, the distinction of stages of temptation, the image of pride as the root of sin, the notion of the community of the unrighteous as the body of the adversary, and the allegorical understanding of Behemoth and Leviathan. His authority will be visible among monastic writers, in exegetical compilations, pastoral manuals, and among the scholastics. Thomas Aquinas will repeatedly appeal to the Gregorian analysis of the principal vices, although he will present it in the more technical language of causes, acts, and moral faculties.

Saint Gregory transmits to the Middle Ages a demonology still firmly rooted in the patristic struggle for the human heart. Later centuries will develop more detailed reflections on the nature of angels, their cognition, their power to move matter, and the ways they affect the senses. For Saint Gregory the centre remains practical: how suggestion passes into consent, how a vice becomes habit, how habit creates slavery, and how individual consents join into a social body of evil.

In this sense he is indeed a bridge. He completes the great epoch of the Western Fathers, yet his works become one of the foundations of the moral and spiritual imagination of the Middle Ages.

The shift we observe in Saint Gregory, compared with earlier patristic demonology, is not merely a rhetorical change but a consistent redirection of the weight from the cosmological order toward the moral-ascetical order. While acknowledging the reality of the demons, Saint Gregory transforms their primary significance from a being primarily "cosmic" — a participant in the clash between the forces of light and darkness in the structure of the universe — to a being whose essential action is pedagogical with regard to the human will and communal life. That change implies different pastoral tools: less speculative cosmology, more recognition of stages of temptation, the mechanisms of consent and habit, and practices of asceticism as response. Thus constituted, this perspective becomes a point of reference for later medieval authors, who will find in it ready categories for describing both individual transformation and social phenomena.

Central to this Gregorian synthesis is the metaphor of the body of the adversary — the body of the adversary — and the related understanding of the "members of the Antichrist." In Book XXXI the figure of the hypocrite becomes not so much a single moral accusation as the building-block of a social body of evil: particular corruptions of manners, false piety, and pastoral unrighteousness conjoin to form structures that function as members of a broader organism opposed to the mystery of the Church. A compact juxtaposition of this symbolism with biblical means (among others, the images of the Antichrist and the description of persecutions) gave medieval theorists of morality a frame for analysing not only individual sin but institutional pathology. It is important to note that for Saint Gregory this social anthropology remains pastorally oriented: the identification of "members" is meant to lead to amendment and instruction, not to geopolitical stigmatization.

Significant for the transformation of social imagination is the way Saint Gregory uses the figure of the hypocrite. Hypocrisy for him is not exclusively a personal fault; it is a form of inner division that manifests itself publicly and affects communal order. Thus the metaphorical "members" of the Antichrist — those

who feign piety or service but act for their own ends — are shown as mechanisms of the disintegration of faith within the community. Medieval social theology, which required concepts to describe corruption, heresy, and false ambition, readily adopted this structure; yet that adoption was ambivalent: it served both reform and the justifications of political ostracism toward opponents, which indicates the necessity of carefully distinguishing the Gregorian pastoral intention from later political applications.

The motif of "lack" (deficiency), which precedes the appearance of Leviathan in Book XXXIV, should be read as a significant step in Saint Gregory's apocalyptic ordering. This lack — understood not solely as material scarcity, but above all as the loss of grace and authentic charisms — functions literarily and theologically: it is the condition for the emergence of a visible manifestation of evil, symbolised by Leviathan. Such a reading resonates with biblical images rooted in the apocalyptic text and in Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians, where there appears the idea of an unveiling of an opposing order together with the cessation of certain divine protections. For Saint Gregory "lack" therefore becomes a figurative description of periods of spiritual dryness that precede and make possible the action of stronger forms of the adversary — a motif later medieval historiography readily invoked when attempting to interpret crises of the Church through the prism of revelations and the withdrawal of spiritual gifts.

The significance of this metaphor for later centuries did not lie only in an apocalyptic explanation of spiritual collapse, but also in a theological justification of penitential and reforming practices. If the lack of charisms is a sign of God permitting a period of trial, the Church's response should be ascetical and renewing — the path Saint Gregory consistently proposes. Hence medieval movements of renewal (both monastic and reforming) could appeal to this schema as a legitimation of their practices without falling into determinist fatalism: lack is not final, but stimulates responsible renewal of communal life.

At the foundation of Gregorian thought lies also a subtle distinction between the ontological nature of the demon and his functional place in the economy of salvation, which rings particularly in Book II. Saint Gregory accepts the existence of the demonic being without reducing it to a moral aspect of human inclinations, yet at the same time interprets the activity of this being within the perspective of divine permission, which is meant to serve purification, the making of conscience, and the testing of virtue. Such a relation of "existence" and "officium" (officium — office or function) — the demon is real, but his activity functions within the framework of God's pedagogy — became a convenient model for the scholastics who later systematised the ontology of spiritual creatures, distinguishing their nature from their tasks in the history of salvation.

The influence of this dichotomy on scholastic development consisted in providing an interpretive model: one could maintain the transcendental gravity of spiritual beings while formulating rules of discernment and pastoral practices. The scholastics adopted from Saint Gregory the idea that questions about "what" a demon is (his onticity) must be separated from questions about "how" he acts (his function in the moral world). As a result, scholastic demonology preserved a twofoldness — metaphysical precision and pastoral usefulness — the outline of which Saint Gregory significantly proposed, although he himself did not treat the problem with the analytic meticulousness of later treatises.

Attention to the specific elements of the symbolism of Leviathan in Saint Gregory permits, in turn, noticing how theological literature shaped visual imagination in the Middle Ages. The motif of Leviathan's "neck," although superficially anatomical, in Saint Gregory becomes an anthropological image of intellectual pride, that is, the capacity to elevate oneself above subjection to God and to the community. The neck as the axis of raising the head symbolises here the possibility of the intellect's exalting itself; in political and ecclesial

hands the same trait is turned into a mechanism of domination and rule. Medieval iconography, drawing on the rich stock of biblical and patristic imaginings, readily transferred this metaphor into depictions of monsters, dragons, and tyrants, showing them with emphasised "necks" or lofty heads — signs of the pride of power.

It must, however, be emphasised that there was great variety in the routes by which this symbolism reached the visual arts. It was not a simple word → image transfer. Sermons, commentaries, bestiaries, and liturgical-homiletic practice mediated and adapted Gregorian exegesis to local needs and aesthetics. Consequently, one cannot ascribe to Saint Gregory a monopoly on a given iconographic motif, but one can recognise his exegesis of Leviathan as one of the significant points that made possible the identification of intellectual pride with concrete signs of temporal power in the visual culture of the Middle Ages.

From the reading proposed here clear interpretative limits follow. First, Saint Gregory was not a systematiser of angelic ontology nor of the metaphysics of evil in the sense of scholastic precision; his aim was theological-pastoral, not speculative. Second, the images and categories he created functioned primarily as educational and homiletic tools — useful to preachers and spiritual guides — which limits the possibility of transporting them directly into constructions of long-lasting philosophical systems without interpretative mediation. Third, medieval adaptations did not always preserve the Gregorian intent of correction; they often also served as justifications of power or social demarcation, which requires, when studying them, a critical sensitivity to the various rhetorical functions of the same motifs.

Finally, one must clearly distinguish the scope of influence from its absolutisation. We can safely claim that Saint Gregory provided conceptual tools and images that facilitated medieval thought and art in forming a certain social, eschatological, and pastoral demonology. Yet we should not identify this heritage with a uniform "program" of all later authors. His contribution consisted rather in creating an enduring repertoire of concepts — the body of the adversary, "members of the Antichrist," the motif of lack preceding the image of Leviathan, the distinction of the being and function of demons — which, once subjected to interpretations and adaptations, became one of the pillars of the medieval moral and theological imagination. The boundary of interpretation consists in the awareness that it is a repertoire of homiletic and pastoral concepts, not a lecture in metaphysics, that remains the heart of Gregorian demonology.

See[45][46]

## 1.27 Conclusion

The demonology of Saint Gregory the Great does not focus on extraordinary manifestations of evil spirits. Its principal sphere is the ordinary life of human freedom. The demon acts primarily as accuser, deceiver, and organiser of temptation. He strikes through suffering, but when force is not enough he resorts to persuasion. He suggests a thought, presents the appearance of good, arouses pleasure, seeks consent, and then consolidates sin in habit.

This process has a precise structure. Suggestion is not yet full sin. Pleasure means that the person begins to cooperate with the suggested image. Consent makes the intention one's own. Repeated action creates habit, and habit limits subsequent freedom. The defence of guilt leads to hardening, because instead of repenting the person builds a shell of justifications.

[45] Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; references in the chapter indicate the verified scope of the commentary, without ascribing to Saint Gregory quotations absent from the source text.

[46] See Job 1–2; Gen 3; Mt 4; 1 Cor 10,13; Rev 12,12 — in accordance with the context treated in the *Moralia in Iob*.

The same process takes place in society. Individual consents join into collective interests. People mutually confirm each other's excuses, creating the scales of Leviathan. Pride organises an army of vices, flattery protects unjust power, hypocrisy separates the religious sign from truth, and scholars provide evil with the language of justification. Thus is born the "body of the devil": not as a substantial communion with the demon, but as a community of people performing his works.

Yet Saint Gregory does not deprive the human of responsibility. The evil spirit can suggest, incite, and exert pressure, but he cannot create moral guilt without the consent of the will. He also lacks independent sovereignty. In the Book of Job he must ask for permission, and God draws boundaries to his activity. That which Satan intends for destruction Providence can use for purification, the revealing of truth, the growth of humility, and the strengthening of virtue.

The ultimate opposite of demonic pride is the humility of Christ. The devil wished to rise up, though he was a creature; the Son of God humbled himself, though he is supreme. Satan conquers through the promise of self-exaltation; Christ saves through voluntary emptying. Therefore one does not overcome the demon by religious self-sufficiency, but by participation in the humility, truth, and love of the Saviour.

Saint Gregory's most enduring contribution lies in showing the continuity between the demon, thought, vice, and social structure. Personal evil supplies an interpretation; the psyche gives it pleasure; the will expresses consent; habit consolidates the direction; the group supplies justification; the institution organises repetition; power protects the system; culture names it good. Thus the social body of evil is born.

The process can, however, be reversed. Vigilance arrests suggestion, love orders desire, grace strengthens the will, penance breaks habit, the confession of guilt pierces the shell of justifications, genuine admonition splits the scales of Leviathan, and a humble community builds relations contrary to the logic of the demon.

For Saint Gregory the spiritual struggle is therefore not a search for hidden demons behind every event, but the recovery of truth in the heart, in relationships, and in the way common life is organised.

## 1.28 Bibliography and sources


1. Saint Gregory the Great (Italian: san Gregorio Magno), *Moralia in Iob* / *Morals on the Book of Job*, especially books II, IV, XXXI and XXXIV; English translation available on the Lectionary Central website.
2. Holy Scripture: Job 1–2; Job 40–41; Genesis 3; Matthew 4; Matthew 23; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Corinthians 12:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 12:12.


### 1.28.1 Links to sources

- Moralia in Iob, book II
- Moralia in Iob, book IV
- Moralia in Iob, book XXXI
- Moralia in Iob, book XXXIV