

A close-up, low-key photograph of a man's face and neck. The man has a serious expression, with his lips slightly parted. He has a small mole on his right cheek and a larger one on his chin. He is wearing a dark blue or black clerical shirt with a white collar. The lighting is dramatic, with the right side of his face (viewer's right) being more illuminated than the left. The background is dark and out of focus.

- Pope Gregory I -

# PASTORAL CARE

**Pope Gregory I**

# **Pastoral Care**

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# Part I.

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Gregory to his most reverend and most holy brother and fellow-bishop, John.

With kind and humble intent thou reprovest me, dearest brother, for having wished by hiding myself to fly from the burdens of pastoral care; as to which, lest to some they should appear light, I express with my pen in the book before you all my own estimate of their heaviness, in order both that he who is free from them may not unwarily seek them, and that he who has so sought them may tremble for having got them. This book is divided into four separate heads of argument, that it may approach the reader's mind by allegations arranged in order—by certain steps, as it were. For, as the necessity of things requires, we must especially consider after what manner every one should come to supreme rule; and, duly arriving at it, after what manner he should live; and, living well, after what manner he should teach; and, teaching aright, with how great consideration every day he should become aware of his own infirmity; lest either humility fly from the approach, or life be at variance with the arrival, or teaching be wanting to the life, or presumption unduly exalt the teaching. Wherefore, let fear temper the desire; but afterwards, authority being assumed by one who sought it not, let his life commend it. But then it is necessary that the good which is displayed in the life of the pastor should also be propagated by his speech. And at last it remains that, whatever works are brought to perfection, consideration of our own infirmity should depress us with regard to them, lest the swelling of elation extinguish even them before the eyes of hidden judgment. But inasmuch as there are many, like me in

unskilfulness, who, while they know not how to measure themselves, are covetous of teaching what they have not learned; who estimate lightly the burden of authority in proportion as they are ignorant of the pressure of its greatness; let them be reproved from the very beginning of this book; so that, while, unlearned and precipitate, they desire to hold the citadel of teaching, they may be repelled at the very door of our discourse from the ventures of their precipitancy.

# Chapter I.

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That the unskilful venture not to approach an office of authority.

No one presumes to teach an art till he has first, with intent meditation, learnt it. What rashness is it, then, for the unskilful to assume pastoral authority, since the government of souls is the art of arts! For who can be ignorant that the sores of the thoughts of men are more occult than the sores of the bowels? And yet how often do men who have no knowledge whatever of spiritual precepts fearlessly profess themselves physicians of the heart, though those who are ignorant of the effect of drugs blush to appear as physicians of the flesh! But because, through the ordering of God, all the highest in rank of this present age are inclined to reverence religion, there are some who, through the outward show of rule within the holy Church, affect the glory of distinction. They desire to appear as teachers, they covet superiority to others, and, as the Truth attests, they seek the first salutations in the market-place, the first rooms at feasts, the first seats in assemblies (Matth. xxiii. 6, 7), being all the less able to administer worthily the office they have undertaken of pastoral care, as they have reached the magisterial position of humility out of elation only. For, indeed, in a magisterial position language itself is confounded when one thing is learnt and another taught<sup>1</sup>. Against such the Lord complains by the prophet, saying, *They have reigned, and not by Me; they have been*

*set up as princes, and I knew it not (Hos. viii. 4). For those reign of themselves, and not by the Will of the Supreme Ruler, who, supported by no virtues, and in no way divinely called, but inflamed by their own desire, seize rather than attain supreme rule. But them the Judge within both advances, and yet knows not; for whom by permission he tolerates them surely by the judgment of reprobation he ignores. Whence to some who come to Him even after miracles He says, Depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity, I know you not who ye are (Luke xiii. 27). The unskilfulness of shepherds is rebuked by the voice of the Truth, when it is said through the prophet, The shepherds themselves have not known understanding (Isai. lvi. 11); whom again the Lord denounces, saying, And they that handle the law knew Me not (Jer. ii. 8). And therefore the Truth complains of not being known of them, and protests that He knows not the principality of those who know not Him; because in truth these who know not the things of the Lord are unknown of the Lord; as Paul attests, who says, But if any man knoweth not, he shall not be known (1 Cor. xiv. 38). Yet this unskilfulness of the shepherds doubtless suits often the deserts of those who are subject to them, because, though it is their own fault that they have not the light of knowledge, yet it is in the dealing of strict judgment that through their ignorance those also who follow them should stumble. Hence it is that, in the Gospel, the Truth in person says, If the blind lead the blind, both fall into the ditch (Matth. xv. 14). Hence the Psalmist (not expressing his own desire, but in his ministry as a prophet) denounces such, when he says, Let their eyes be blinded that they see not,*



and ever bow thou down their back (Ps. lxxviii. 24<sup>2</sup>). For, indeed, those persons are eyes who, placed in the very face of the highest dignity, have undertaken the office of spying out the road; while those who are attached to them and follow them are denominated backs. And so, when the eyes are blinded, the back is bent, because, when those who go before lose the light of knowledge, those who follow are bowed down to carry the burden of their sins.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> In this passage the phrase *magisterium humilitatis* has reference to Matt. xx. 25, &c., or Luke xxii. 25, &c., and *ipsa lingua confunditur* to Gen. xi. 7. The meaning appears to be that, when men seek and attain in a spirit of pride the office which according to our Lord's teaching is one of humility, they are incapable of fulfilling its duties by speaking to others so to be understood and edify. They are as the arrogant builders of Babel, whose language the Lord confounded, that they might not understand one another's speech.

<sup>2</sup> In *Hebr.* and *Engl.* lxxix. 24.

## Chapter II.

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That none should enter on a place of government who practise not in life what they have learnt by study.

There are some also who investigate spiritual precepts with cunning care, but what they penetrate with their understanding they trample on in their lives: all at once they teach the things which not by practice but by study they have learnt; and what in words they preach by their manners they impugn. Whence it comes to pass that when the shepherd walks through steep places, the flock follows to the precipice. Hence it is that the Lord through the prophet complains of the contemptible knowledge of shepherds, saying, *When ye yourselves had drunk most pure water, ye fouled the residue with your feet; and My sheep fed on that which had been trodden by your feet, and drank that which your feet had fouled (Ezek. xxxiv. 18, 19). For indeed the shepherds drink most pure water, when with a right understanding they imbibe the streams of truth. But to foul the same water with their feet is to corrupt the studies of holy meditation by evil living. And verily the sheep drink the water fouled by their feet, when any of those subject to them follow not the words which they hear, but only imitate the bad examples which they see. Thirsting for the things said, but perverted by the works observed, they take in mud with their draughts, as from polluted fountains. Hence also it is written through the prophet, A snare for the downfall of my people are evil priests (Hos. v.*

1; ix. 8). Hence again the Lord through the prophet says of the priests, *They are made to be for a stumbling-block of iniquity to the house of Israel. For certainly no one does more harm in the Church than one who has the name and rank of sanctity, while he acts perversely. For him, when he transgresses, no one presumes to take to task; and the offence spreads forcibly for example, when out of reverence to his rank the sinner is honoured. But all who are unworthy would fly from the burden of so great guilt, if with the attentive ear of the heart they weighed the sentence of the Truth, Whoso shall offend one of these little ones*

*which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea (Matth. xviii. 6).* By the millstone is expressed the round and labour of worldly life, and by the depth of the sea is denoted final damnation. Whosoever, then, having come to bear the outward show of sanctity, either by word or example destroys others, it had indeed been better for him that earthly deeds in open guise should press him down to death than that sacred offices should point him out to others as imitable in his wrongdoing; because, surely, if he fell alone, the pains of hell would torment him in more tolerable degree.

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Of the weight of government; and that all manner of adversity is to be despised, and prosperity feared.

So much, then, have we briefly said, to shew how great is the weight of government, lest whosoever is unequal to sacred offices of government should dare to profane them, and through lust of pre-eminence undertake a leadership of perdition. For hence it is that James affectionately deters us, saying, Be not made many masters, my brethren (James iii. 1). Hence the Mediator between God and man Himself—He who, transcending the knowledge and understanding even of supernal spirits, reigns in heaven from eternity—on earth fled from receiving a kingdom. For it is written, *When Jesus therefore* perceived that they would come and take Him by force, to make Him a king, He departed again into the mountain Himself alone (Joh. vi. 15). For who could so blamelessly have had principality over men as He who would in fact have reigned over those whom He had Himself created? But, because He had come in the flesh to this end, that He might not only redeem us by His passion but also teach us by His conversation, offering Himself as an example to His followers, He would not be made a king; but He went of His own accord to the gibbet of the cross. He fled from the offered glory of pre-eminence, but desired the pain of an ignominious death; that so His members might learn to fly from the favours of the world, to be afraid of no terrors, to love adversity for the truth's sake, and to shrink

in fear from prosperity; because this often defiles the heart through vain glory, while that purges it through sorrow; in this the mind exalts itself, but in that, even though it had once exalted itself, it brings itself low; in this man forgets himself, but in that, even perforce and against his will, he is recalled to memory of what he is; in this even good things done aforetime often come to nothing, but in that faults even of long standing are wiped away. For commonly in the school of adversity the heart is subdued under discipline, while, on sudden attainment of supreme rule, it is forthwith changed and becomes elated through familiarity with glory.

Thus Saul, who had before fled in consideration of his unworthiness, no sooner had assumed the government of the kingdom than he was puffed up (1 Kings x. 22; xv. 17, 30); for, desirous of being honoured before the people while unwilling to be publicly blamed, he cut off from himself even him who had anointed him to the kingdom. Thus David, who in the judgment of Him who chose him was well pleasing to Him in almost all his deeds, as soon as the weight of pressure was removed, broke out into a swelling sore (2 Kings xi. 3, *seq.*), and, having been as a laxly running one in his appetite for the woman, became as a cruelly hard one in the slaughter of the man; and he who had before known pitifully how to spare the bad learnt afterwards, without impediment of hesitation, to pant even for the death of the good (Ibid. 15). For, indeed, previously he had been unwilling to smite his captured persecutor; and afterwards, with loss to his wearied army, he destroyed even his devoted soldier. And in truth his crime would have

snatched him farther away from the number of the elect,  
had not scourges called him back to pardon.

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That for the most part the occupation of government dissipates the solidity of the mind.

Often the care of government, when undertaken, distracts the heart in divers directions; and one is found unequal to dealing with particular things, while with confused mind divided among many. Whence a certain wise man providently dissuades, saying, *My son, meddle not with many matters* (Ecclus. xi. 10); because, that is, the mind is by no means collected on the plan of any single work while parted among divers. And, when it is drawn abroad by unwonted care, it is emptied of the solidity of inward fear: it becomes anxious in the ordering of things that are without, and, ignorant of itself alone, knows how to think of many things, while itself it knows not. For, when it implicates itself more than is needful in things that are without, it is as though it were so occupied during a journey as to forget where it was going; so that, being estranged from the business of self-examination, it does not even consider the losses it is suffering, or know how great they are. For neither did

Hezekiah believe himself to be sinning (2 Kings xx. 13), when he shewed to the strangers who came to him his storehouses of spices; but he fell under the anger of the judge, to the condemnation of his future offspring, from what he supposed himself to be doing lawfully (Isai. xxxix. 4). Often, when means are abundant, and many things can

be done for subordinates to admire, the mind exalts itself in thought, and fully provokes to itself the anger of the judge, though not breaking out in overt acts of iniquity. For he who judges is within; that which is judged is within. When, then, in heart we transgress, what we are doing within ourselves is hidden from men. but yet in the eyes of the judge we sin. For neither did the King of Babylon then first stand guilty of elation (Dan. iv. 16, *seq.*) when he came to utter words of elation, inasmuch as even before, when he had given no utterance to his elation, he heard the sentence of reprobation from the prophet's mouth. For he had already wiped off the fault of the pride he had been guilty of, when he proclaimed to all the nations under him the omnipotent God whom he found himself to have offended.

But after this, elevated by the success of his dominion, and rejoicing in having done great things, he first preferred himself to all in thought, and afterwards, still vain-glorious, said, *Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom, and in the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? (Dan. iv. 30.)* Which utterance of his, as we see, fell openly under the vengeance of the wrath which his hidden elation kindled. For the strict judge first sees invisibly what he afterwards reproves by publicly smiting it. Hence him He turned even into an irrational animal, separated him from human society, changed his mind and joined him to the beasts of the field, that in obviously strict and just judgment he who had esteemed himself great beyond men should lose even his being as a man. Now in adducing these things we are not finding fault with dominion, but guarding the infirmity of the heart from



coveting it, lest any that are imperfect should venture to snatch at supreme rule, or those who stumble on plain ground set foot on a precipice.

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Of those who are able to profit others by virtuous example in supreme rule, but fly from it in pursuit of their own ease.

For there are some who are eminently endowed with virtues, and for the training of others are exalted by great gifts, who are pure in zeal for chastity, strong in the might of abstinence, filled with the feasts of doctrine, humble in the long-suffering of patience, erect in the fortitude of authority, tender in the grace of loving-kindness, strict in the severity of justice. Truly such as these, if when called they refuse to undertake offices of supreme rule, for the most part deprive themselves of the very gifts which they received not for themselves alone, but for others also; and, while they meditate their own and not another's gain, they forfeit the very benefits which they desire to keep to themselves. For hence it was that the Truth said to His disciples, *A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid: neither do they light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house (Matth. v. 15). Hence He says to Peter, Simon, Son of Jonas, lovest thou Me? (Joh. xv. 16, 17); and he, when he had at once answered that he loved, was told, If thou lovest Me, feed My sheep. If, then, the care of feeding is the proof of loving, whosoever abounds in virtues, and yet refuses to feed the flock of God, is convicted of not loving the chief Shepherd. Hence Paul says, If Christ died for all, then all died. And if He died for all, it remaineth that they which live should now no longer*

live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again (*2 Cor. v. 15*). Hence Moses says (*Deut. xxv. 5*) that a surviving brother shall take to him the wife of a brother who has died without children, and beget children to the name of his brother; and that, if he haply refuse to take her, the woman shall spit in his face, and her kinsman shall loose the shoe from off one of his feet, and call his habitation the house of him that hath his shoe loosed. Now the deceased brother is He who, after the glory of the resurrection, said, *Go tell My brethren* (*Matth. xxviii. 10*). For He died as it were without children, in that He had not yet filled up the number of His elect. Then, it is ordered that the surviving brother shall have the wife assigned to him, because it is surely fit that the care of holy Church be imposed on him who is best able to rule it well. But, should he be unwilling, the woman spits in his face, because whosoever cares not to benefit others out of the gifts which he has received, the holy Church exprobrates even what he has of good, and, as it were, casts spittle on his face; and from one foot the shoe is taken away, inasmuch as it is written, *Your feet shod in preparation of the Gospel of Peace* (*Ephes. vi. 15*). If, then, we have the care of our neighbour as well as of ourselves upon us, we have each foot protected by a shoe. But he who, meditating his own advantage, neglects that of his neighbours, loses with disgrace one

foot's shoe. And so there are some, as we have said, enriched with great gifts, who, while they are ardent for the studies of contemplation only, shrink from serving to their neighbour's benefit by preaching; they love a secret place of

quiet, they long for a retreat for speculation. With respect to which conduct, they are, if strictly judged, undoubtedly guilty in proportion to the greatness of the gifts whereby they might have been publicly useful. For with what disposition of mind does one who might be conspicuous in profiting his neighbours prefer his own privacy to the advantage of others, when the Only-begotten of the supreme Father Himself came forth from the bosom of the Father into the midst of us all, that He might profit many?

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That those who fly from the burden of rule through humility are then truly humble when they resist not the divine decrees.

There are some also who fly by reason only of their humility, lest they should be preferred to others to whom they esteem themselves unequal. And theirs, indeed, if it be surrounded by other virtues, is then true humility before the eyes of God, when it is not pertinacious in rejecting what it is enjoined to undertake with profit. For neither is he truly humble, who understands how the good pleasure of the Supernal Will ought to bear sway, and yet contemns its sway. But, submitting himself to the divine disposals, and averse from the vice of obstinacy, if he be already prevented with gifts whereby he may profit others also, he ought, when enjoined to undertake supreme rule, in his heart to flee from it, but against his will to obey.

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That sometimes some laudably desire the office of preaching, while others, as laudably, are drawn to it by compulsion.

Although sometimes some laudably desire the office of preaching, yet others are as laudably drawn to it by compulsion; as we plainly perceive, if we consider the conduct of two prophets, one of whom offered himself of his own accord to be sent to preach, yet the other in fear refused to go. For Isaiah, when the Lord asked whom He should send, offered himself of his own accord, saying, *Here I am; send me* (Isai. vi. 8). But Jeremiah is sent, yet humbly pleads that he should not be sent, saying, *Ah, Lord God! behold I cannot speak: for I am a child* (Jer. i. 6). *Lo, from these two men* different voices proceeded outwardly, but they flowed from the same fountain of love. For there are two precepts of charity; the love of God and of our neighbour. Wherefore Isaiah, eager to profit his neighbours through an active life, desires the office of preaching; but Jeremiah, longing to cleave sedulously to the love of his Creator through a contemplative life, remonstrates against being sent to preach. Thus what the one laudably desired the other laudably shrunk from; the latter, lest by speaking he should lose the gains of silent contemplation; the former, lest by keeping silence he should suffer loss for lack of diligent work. But this in both cases is to be nicely observed, that he who refused did not persist in his refusal,

and he who wished to be sent saw himself previously cleansed by a coal of the altar; lest any one who has not been purged should dare to approach sacred ministries, or any whom supernal grace has chosen should proudly gainsay it under a show of humility. Wherefore, since it is very difficult for any one to be sure that he has been cleansed, it is safer to decline the office of preaching, though (as we have said) it should not be declined pertinaciously when the Supernal Will that it should be undertaken is recognized. Both requirements Moses marvellously fulfilled, who was unwilling to be set over so great a multitude, and yet obeyed. For peradventure he were proud, were he to undertake without trepidation the leadership of that innumerable people; and, again, proud he would plainly be were he to refuse to obey his Lord's command. Thus in both ways humble, in both ways submissive, he was unwilling, as measuring himself, to be set over the people; and yet, as presuming on the might of Him who commanded him, he consented. Hence, then, hence let all rash ones infer how great guilt is theirs, if they fear not to be preferred to others by their own seeking, when holy men, even when God commanded, feared to undertake the leadership of peoples. Moses trembles though God persuades him; and yet every weak one pants to assume the burden of dignity; and one who can hardly bear his own load without falling, gladly puts his shoulders under the pressure of others not his own: his own deeds are too heavy for him to carry, and he augments his burden.

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Of those who covet pre-eminence, and seize on the language of the Apostle to serve the purpose of their own cupidity.

But for the most part those who covet pre-eminence seize on the language of the Apostle to serve the purpose of their own cupidity, where he says, *If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work* (1 Tim. iii. 1).

But, while praising the desire, he forthwith turns what he has praised to fear when at once he adds, *but a bishop must be blameless* (1 Tim. iii. 2). And, when he subsequently enumerates the necessary virtues, he makes manifest what this blamelessness consists in. And so, with regard to their desire, he approves them, but by his precept he alarms them; as if saying plainly, I praise what ye seek; but first learn what it is ye seek; lest, while ye neglect to measure yourselves, your blamefulness appear all the fouler for its haste to be seen by all in the highest place of honour. For the great master in the art of ruling impels by approval and checks by alarms; so that, by describing the height of blamelessness, he may restrain his hearers from pride, and, by praising the office which is sought, dispose them to the life required. Nevertheless it is to be noted that this was said at a time when whosoever was set over people was usually the first to be led to the torments of martyrdom. At that time, therefore, it was laudable to seek the office of a bishop, since through it there was no doubt that a man



would come in the end to heavier pains. Hence even the office of a bishop itself is defined as a good work, when it is said, *If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work* (1 Tim. iii. 1). Wherefore he that seeks, not this ministry of a good work, but the glory of distinction, is himself a witness against himself that he does not desire the office of a bishop; inasmuch as that man not only does not love at all the sacred office, but even knows not what it is, who, panting after supreme rule, is fed by the subjection of others in the hidden meditation of his thought, rejoices in his own praises, lifts up his heart to honour, exults in abundant affluence. Thus worldly gain is sought under colour of that honour by which worldly gains should have been destroyed; and, when the mind thinks to seize on the highest post of humility for its own elation, it inwardly changes what it outwardly desires.

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That the mind of those who wish for pre-eminence for the most part flatters itself with a feigned promise of good works.

But for the most part those who covet pastoral authority mentally propose to themselves some good works besides, and, though desiring it with a motive of pride, still muse how they will effect great things: and so it comes to pass that the motive suppressed in the depths of the heart is one thing, another what the surface of thought presents to the muser's mind. For the mind itself lies to itself about itself, and feigns with respect to good work to love what it does not love, and with respect to the world's glory not to love what it does love. Eager for domination, it becomes timid with regard to it while in pursuit, audacious after attainment. For, while advancing towards it, it is in trepidation lest it should not attain it; but all at once, on having attained, thinks what it has attained to be its just due. And, when it has once begun to enjoy the office of its acquired dominion in a worldly way, it willingly forgets what it has cogitated in a religious way. Hence it is necessary that, when such cogitation is extended beyond wont, the mind's eye should be recalled to works already accomplished, and that every one should consider what he has done as a subordinate; and so may he at once discover whether as a prelate he will be able to do the good things he has proposed to do. For one can by no means learn