

IS GOD INTANGIBLE OR COMPREHENSIBLE?
ACCORDING TO GREGORY THE GREAT

Harvey Egan confirms that Gregory the Great follows the negative way of the experience of God, which is the emptying of the mind from all images. Egan then says that Gregory is of the opinion that no one can see God face to face in this world.¹ Neo Platonism has not influenced Gregory, rather Augustine has.² The main texts cited by Egan are from the *Homiliae in Hiezechielem*, 2, 5, 8-17; some citations from the *Moralia in Iob* and from the *Dialogi*, which express that Gregory has a vision of light. The reason is that the soul wants to see God and then it seeks out ways to grasp Him. He imagines this process of vision as having two doors, through which the soul must pass. The first door signifies faith, which guides the soul to reach the second door, which signifies vision.³ Through faith, the soul can see traces of its creator.⁴ To see more clearly the soul must be liberated from all sins, especially temptations.⁵ And finally the soul enters the second door, which introduces us into joy, because it provides the vision of light, even if it is in incomplete form,⁶ because God is invisible. But even so, the soul receives power, joy, vision, illumination, etc.⁷ The

¹ GREGORY THE GREAT, *Homiliae in Hiezechielem*, 1, 5, 12, (BGM 3/1, pp. 176-178): “Omne quod de aeternitate per speculum et in enigmate conspicit, quasi furtim hoc et per transitum uidet”. In this opinion, Gregory follows Augustine, who has followed Saint Paul. Cf. *Mor.*, 6, 31, 101, (CCL 143B, p. 1619).

² H. EGAN, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, in Italian *I mistici e la Mistica*, *Antologia della mistica cristiana*, a cura di Luigi Borriello, Città del Vaticano 1995. p. 131. According to R. BÉLANGER, *Introduction*, SCh 314, pp. 30-47, he says that Gregory is also influenced by Origen and Aponius.

³ GREGORY THE GREAT, *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 5, 8, (BGM 3/2, p. 128): “In cognitione uero omnipotentis Dei primum ostium nostrum fides est, secundum uero species illius, ad quam per fidem ambulando peruenimus”.

⁴ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 5, 10, (BGM 3/2, p. 132).

⁵ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 5, 11, (BGM 3/2, p. 132).

⁶ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 5, 16-20, (BGM 3/2, p. 142).

⁷ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 5, 16-21, (BGM 3/2, p. 144); *Mor.*, 5, 24, 11, (BGM 1/3, p. 348); 5, 22, 50, (BGM 1/3, p. 226); 6, 31, 99-101, (CCL 143B, pp. 1618-1620).

fruit of this journey of vision are the virtues.⁸ For Gregory the Great, God is no longer invisible, but incompletely visible. In an experience of God, the soul can feel the presence of God, which is expressed in the affirmation way. Therefore this experience is sweet,⁹ sure and certain,¹⁰ joyful and quiet.¹¹

In his *Dialogues* Gregory gives an opinion more advanced than the other Fathers, and even than what is found in his other writings; this opinion is simply not found in his other books. In other writings the dependence of Gregory on Augustine and other Fathers is evident as he describes how one way have an experience of God, in which the soul does not meet God face to face, because he is ineffable.

In his teaching on the experience of God, Gregory combines negation and affirmation, which were used by preceding Fathers. By Origen the first time, the classical method, enumerated in his interpretation of the *Song of Songs*, is purification, illumination and union, and Gregory uses the same steps,¹² which are known as the affirmative way, while the method of negation is light, cloud and obscurity. When we examine both methods, we will find the same preparation of how to have an experience of God. So the next three points will present how to have an experience of God, following the affirmative way. It is not easy to examine this method in Gregory's writings, because sometimes he mixes both together (negation and affirmation). Generally Gregory prefers to use affirmation rather than negation in his writings, especially in his *Moralia in Iob*, even if he clearly shows the importance of the negative method in his *Homiliae in Hiezechielem*,¹³ which according to Egan consists in absorption, introversion and contemplation.¹⁴ This article wants to show the affirmative method in Gregory's writings.

⁸ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 5, 14, (BGM 3/2, p. 138).

⁹ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 43, (BGM 1/3, p. 322); 6, 30, 39, (CCL 143B, pp. 1518-1519); 2, 8, 50, (BGM 1/1, p. 662); 1, 5, 53, (BGM 1/3, p. 436); *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 5, 12, (BGM 3/1, p. 178).

¹⁰ *Mor.*, 5, 26, 11, (BGM 1/3, p. 460).

¹¹ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 5, 16, (BGM 3/2, p. 140); 2, 2, 14, (BGM 3/1, pp. 62-64).

¹² Cf. H. EGAN, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, pp. 40-41, 132. These are known as steps to contemplation even to modern times. For example, John of the Cross follows this method in his *Cántico Espiritual*; cf. E. TINAMBUNAN, *Is John of the Cross a Good Spiritual Guide?* in *Carmel in the World*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 2, 2000, p. 108.

¹³ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 5, 8-22, (BGM 3/2, pp. 128-144).

¹⁴ H. EGAN, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, p. 132.

1. PURIFICATION

God loves his people, his creation, and he shows it in the historical salvation of the people. God wants his people to remain with him;¹⁵ that is why he guided them through his prophets; he gave them his commandments, his word and good persons, for example Job. He even sent his Son out of this love. The purification is the first step to have an experience of God;¹⁶ a soul realizes the great love of God and it searches out ways how to reach the lover.

The love of God is a gift to his creation; he gives his love gratuitously, because he loves his creation first;¹⁷ that is why he sent his Son and the Holy Spirit to them and now he shows the same love through his Church. Jesus Christ says that he is the door and whoever enters through it will be saved; he is a shepherd who guides his sheep to the same destination. And now the Church is the door and the shepherd,¹⁸ through which God encounters sheep through the sacraments and they receive the grace, which helps them for a possible experience of Him.¹⁹ For Gregory, the soul can know the love of God in contemplation.²⁰ This is why Gregory says that contemplation is very important for a Christian.

The experience of God is grasped in the union of the soul and God, in which Gregory exactly follows Origen in his interpretation of the book *Song of Songs*. He says that the union of the soul - Christ and Church - Christ is figures by the union of bride and groom.²¹ Of course these images are the *typoi*, which are a way to interpret alle-

¹⁵ *Mor.*, 5, 24, 13, (BGM 1/2, p. 350).

¹⁶ This division is just a way to understand the process of having an experience of God. We do not know exactly the limit of end step. The importance of this division is to know the experience as a process, which could help souls.

¹⁷ Gregory interprets the gospel of *John* 15: 12: "This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you" to show the love of God for his creation, *H. in Eu.*, 2, 27, 1, (BGM 2, p. 346).

¹⁸ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 1, 8, (BGM 3/2, p. 32): "Ipse signatur in uiro, qui figuratur in monte. Vir autem iste metiri aedificium dicitur. Et recte Dominus per uirum signatur et montem, quia et ipse omnia intra sanctam Ecclesiam indicando disponit, et ipse eandem sanctam Ecclesiam portat, et portando ad caelestia subleuat. Sic in sancto quoque Euangelio idem Redemptor noster loquitur, dicens: 'Qui intrat per ostium pastor est ouium,' (*Io.* 10: 2). Et paulo post: 'Ego sum ostium,' (*Io.* 10: 7). Atque iterum post pauca subiungit: 'Ego sum pastor bonus,' (*Io.* 10: 11)".

¹⁹ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 1, 16, (BGM 3/2, p. 42).

²⁰ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 6, 5, (BGM 3/2, p. 152).

²¹ ORIGEN, *Canticum Cantorum*, 1, 2, (Sch 37, pp. 63-64). GREGORY, *Canticum Cantorum*, 10, (Sch 314, p. 86): "Sposa enim ipsa perfecta ecclesia est; sponsus, domi-

gorically the book Song of the Songs. Further these images are an expression to describe the union of the soul-Christ, which is also the union of the Church-Christ.

1.1. *Enamored and desiring*

After the soul has known the love of God through baptism,²² liturgical celebration, scripture,²³ and especially through preaching,²⁴ it tries to express this love. Knowing how great God's love, the soul is fascinated by Him. In this situation, there is a contact between the two lovers. From this moment, love does not come only from one part, which is from God, but it is a relationship, because the soul receives God's love; and now the soul is inflamed to love Him in return.²⁵ The soul finds it's beloved and is enamored of Him. The soul wishes to meet God, even wants to stay with Him always. It does not want anything except to see and be together with Him.²⁶

nus; adolescentulae uero cum sponsa sunt inchoantes animae et per nouum studium pubescentes". 44, (SCh 314, p. 134): "Et ecce, uerba sponsi redduntur ad sponsam: Si ignoras te, o pulchra inter mulieres, egredere et ubi post uestigia gregum et pasce hedos tuos iuxta tabernacula pastorum. Omnis anima nihil debeat amplius curare, quam ut se ipsam sciat. Qui enim se ipsum scit, cognoscit quia ad imaginem dei factus est. Si ad imaginem dei factus est, non debeat similitudinem iumentorum sequi, siue in luxuria siue in appetitu praesenti dissolui. Dicatur ergo ecclesiae: Si ignoras te, o pulchra inter mulieres, egredere et ubi post uestigia gregum et pasce hedos tuos iuxta tabernacula pastorum. O tu, quae foeda per ignorantiam, per fidem pulchra facta es inter aliorum animas! Quod euidenter dicitur ad ecclesiam electorum". 41, (SCh 314, p. 130): "Sed ecce, reducta anima ad gratiam creatoris sui iam amet, iam requirat ubi redemptorem suum inueniat. Vnde sequitur: Indica mihi, quem diligit anima mea, ubi pascis, ubi cubas in meridie. In meridie sol feruentior est. Omnis, qui in fede feruet, in amore desiderii feruet. Iste sponsus, qui subter hinnulus uocatur, in corde ipsorum pascit pascit uirtutum uiriditatem, in corde ipsorum recumbit in meridie, in feruore caritatis. Indica mihi, quem diligit anima mea: ubi pascis, ubi cubas in meridie".

²² *Exp. in Cant.*, 22, (SCh 314, p. 102): "Quid hoc loco adolescentulas accipimus, nisi electorum animas per baptismum renouatas? Vita quippe peccati ad ueterem hominem pertinet, uita iustitiae ad nouum. Quia ergo ungentuum foras se fudit, in amore suo adolescentulas ardentis fecit: quia renouatas animas desiderio suo flagrantis exhibuit. Puerilis aetas amori necdum congruit, senilis ab amore desinit".

²³ *Exp. in Cant.*, 39, (SCh 314, pp. 126-128).

²⁴ *Exp. in Cant.*, 10, (SCh 314, p. 86).

²⁵ *Exp. in Cant.*, 10, (SCh 314, p. 86); 18, (SCh 314, p. 96).

²⁶ *Exp. in Cant.*, 18, (SCh 314, p. 96); Gregory the Great expresses this desiring with thirsty, *Ep.*, 7, 23, (BGM 5/2, p. 456); hungry, *Mor.*, 6, 31, 99-100, (CCL 143B, pp. 1618-1619).

1.2. Seeking

The soul always hopes and looks forward to the time when it will be able to speak with God. That is why the soul seeks him out everywhere and in all ways, but it does not always find him. In this situation the soul is sick because of the absence of God.²⁷ It will not be healed except with the presence and the touch of God, the groom. Since this is good for soul; it seeks him always. Gregory presents some *typoi* to describe this searching, for example to seek the voice of God,²⁸

²⁷ On this point, Gregory follows ORIGEN's book *Exhortatio ad Martirium*, because in his *Canticum Canticoerum* ORIGEN says that the soul is sick, in pain, suffering, dying, wounded because it does not find the groom, 2, 3, (SCh 37, pp. 83-86). While in his book *Exhortatio ad Martirium*, he says that suffering and dying as a martyr does, is the perfect way to union with the groom, 12; (GCS 2, pp. 324-325); 14, (GCS 2, pp. 330-333); 22, (GCS 2, pp. 346-349). Gregory interprets the personage Job as the perfect way to be united to God, because for him, Job is the typos of Jesus Christ, in his suffering and dying for our sins and the incredulity of the world, *Mor.*, praef., 2, 5, (BGM, 1/1, p. 96); *Mor.*, 1, 5, 41, (BGM 1/1, pp. 422-424); 2, 9, 96, (BGM 1/2, p. 116); 2, 6, 14, (BGM 1/1, p. 486); cf. C. DAGENS, *Introduzione*, BGM 1/1, p. 17. Gregory also wants to stress the situation of Italy at that time, namely being invaded by the Lonbards. The situation was same in Ezekiel's time, when the Jews were in exile, in Babylon. In this situation of greatest importance is to persevere in the faith in God who will save the soul; cf. V. RECCHIA, *Prefazione*, BGM 3/1, p. 8. Pope JOHN PAUL II interprets the *Noche Oscura* of John of the Cross as human and spiritual suffering; he says: "It was while the spiritual climate inspired by the fourth century of the Carmelite Saint's birth (1542-1942) was still fresh, and while Europe was being reborn from its ashes, having experienced the dark night of the war; that I worked in Rome on my doctoral thesis on faith according to Saint John of the Cross. In it, I analyzed and underlined the central affirmation of the mystical Doctor: faith is only a way, the first and the best way for communication with God. The Mystical Doctor attracts a lot of attention today from many believers and non believers for the description he offers of the dark night as the typical human and Christian experience. Our era has lived through dramatic moments: the silence or the absence of God; the experience of disasters and suffering such as war or even the holocaust of so many innocent people. All such moments have led to a better understanding of this expression of his giving it moreover the character of a collective experience, applicable to the very reality of life and not just to a stage along a spiritual path. The saint's teaching is invoked today in the face of the immeasurable of mystery of human suffering, such as illness, the courage of hunger, war, injustice, loneliness, the meaningless of life, the very fragility of human existence, the sad awareness of sin, the apparent absence of God: for the believer all of these are a purifying experience which might go under the name of the night of faith: cf. *Master in the Faith, Apostolic Letter on the Occasion of the Fourth Centenary of the Death of Saint John of the Cross*, in *Catholic International*, Vol. 2, No. 5, March, 1991, pp. 203, 207. JOHN OF THE CROSS, in his book *Cántico Espiritual*, follows Origen, in where the soul, which is prefigured by the bride, is suffering, in pain, wounded, dying, because of its desire to meet the groom; cf. E. TINAMBUNAN, *Is St. John of the Cross a Good Spiritual Guide?*, pp. 110-112.

²⁸ *Exp. in Cant.*, 5, (SCh 314, p. 76); *Mor.*, 1, 5, 66, (BGM 1/1, pp. 448-450).

to see the eternal light.²⁹ To deepen one's relationship with God, the soul uses the words Scripture, prayer and the sacraments.

1.3. *Scripture*

Gregory stresses the role of Scripture in experiencing the love of God, which actually is to have an experience of God himself, because for him, through Scripture, God comes to visit and speak to the soul.³⁰ It is not a new practice, because before him the Fathers, especially in the monastic tradition where we know it as *lectio divina*, had figured recourse the Scripture. Gribomont said that Origen was the first person to use *lectio divina* and Saint Benedict used it as the main activity of monastic life.³¹

Actually in post apostolic time Christianity also used this method, but, of course, they re-interpret the Scripture, the Old Testament, and Tradition, in the light of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit. As the result of this interpretation, the martyrdom was for them the best way to be united to God. Even if they did not use the term *lectio divina*, they read the Scriptures and knew Tradition; they meditated on them and they aimed to put them into practice in their life. Through Benedict's Rule, we know much more about *lectio divina*, which was influenced by many Fathers before him.³² For Benedict *lectio divina* is a

²⁹ *Exp. in Cant.*, 15, (Sch 314, pp. 92-94); *Mor.*, 1, 6, 59, (BGM 1/1, pp. 448-450); 2, 10, 13, (BGM 1/2, p. 144); 2, 8, 50, (BGM 1/1, p. 662); *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 2, 12, (BGM 3/2, p. 60).

³⁰ *Exp. in Cant.*, 5, (Sch 314, p. 76): "Scriptura enim sacra mons quidam est, de quo in nostris cordibus ad intellegendum dominus uenit. De quo monte per prophetam dicitur: Deus a Libano ueniet et sanctus de monte umbroso et condense, (Hab. 3:3). Iste mons et condensus est per sententias et umbrosus per allegorias. Sed sciendum est quia, cum uox domini in monte sonat, uestimenta lauare praecipimur et ab omni carnis iniquatione mundari, si ad montem accedere festinamus".

³¹ J. GRIBOMONT, *Lectio Diuina*, in *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, in *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, diretto da Angelo di Bernardino, Marietti, Genova 1994, pp. 1918-1920. *La Regola di San Benedetto*, 48, 5, Introduzione e Commento di GEORG HOLZHERR, Casale Monferrato 1992, p. 236; all citations of Benedict's rule will be taken from this edition. Probably Augustine was the first Father to use the term *lectio diuina*, *Epistulae*, 20, 3, (NBA 21/1, p. 98): "Illud sane admonerim religiosissimam prudentiam tuam, ut timorem Dei non irrationabilem uel inseras infirmiori uasi tuo, uel nutrias, diuina/lectione grauique colloquio".

³² *La Regola di San Benedetto*, *Introduzione*, pp. 16-19; the Fathers who had influence on the Benedictine Rule are: *Didascolos* of the Apostles, Irenaeus of Lyons, Cyprian, Basil the Great especially his *Moralia*, *Regulae Fusius Tractatae*, *Regulae Breuius Tractatae*, Pachomius, Augustine, Origen, Evagrius Pontus, John Cassian, *The Life of Anthony*, *The history of Monastic Life of Egypt*, *The Life of Onoratus of Lérins*, The

prayer, based on the reading of Scripture,³³ in the rectory while eating,³⁴ or in the chapel during the prayer time.³⁵ After hearing the word of God, a monk continues with an individualized hearing, repetition and responding to that word of God, which was heard before.³⁶ In this way, every monk can read and to understand the Scripture as much as possible; he does not depend on the other monks who could read the Scripture. For his spiritual needs, a monk studied how to read Scripture in the monastery and he tried to delve into its meaning and some monks even knew how to comment on its importance for monastic life.³⁷ In short, the role of the Scripture in monastic life is very important, because a monk tries to live his life animated and guided by it.³⁸

Gregory interprets *legere*³⁹ as eating and drinking in by which the Scripture becomes like the food and drink. Through these activities, the mouth eats and drinks the Truth when someone reads the word of God, and when he understands what is read; his stomach will be filled up with it.⁴⁰ On another occasion Gregory also says that the Scripture

Life of Fathers of Jura. Cf. J. T. LIENHARD, *Index of Reported Patristic and Classical Citations, Allusions and Parallels in the "Regula Benedicti"*, in *Revue Bénédictine*, 89, Abbaye de Moredsous, 1979, pp. 230-270.

³³ *La Regola di San Benedetto*, 48, 1-2, p. 236.

³⁴ *La Regola di San Benedetto*, 38, p. 211.

³⁵ *La Regola di San Benedetto*, 9, 1-11, pp. 138-139. Cf. J. LECLERO, *L'Amour des Lettres et le Désir de Dieu : Initiation aux auteurs monastiques du moyen âge*, Translation: *The Love of Learning and Desire for God, A study of Monastic Culture*, Translated by Catharine Misrahi, Fordham University Press, New York 1974, p. 17.

³⁶ *La Regola di San Benedetto*, 4, 55, p. 80.

³⁷ J. LECLERO, *L'Amour des Lettres et le Désir de Dieu: Initiation aux auteurs monastiques du moyen âge*, pp. 17-18.

³⁸ Included is the teaching of preceding Fathers like: CYPRIAN, *Epistulae*, 1, 2, (CSEL 3/2, p. 466); 9, 5-6, CSEL 3/2, pp. 498-500), who says that in the prayer and in the reading of the Scripture you speak to God and He speaks to you; and JOHN CASSIAN, *Collationes*, 14, 13, (SCh 54, pp. 199-201), who indicates that activities are effective when someone studies and meditates upon Scripture and at the same time puts it into practice in his concrete life.

³⁹ Saint Benedict divided *lectio divina* in two, *legere/audire* and *meditare/ruminare*. From these words came *lectio* and *meditatio* or *ruminatio*, which are divisions of *lectio diuina*, which was most important in monastic life in the Middle Ages and even to the present time. In antiquity, reading was not as today, principally with eyes, but with the lips, pronouncing softly what they see, and with the ears, listening to the words pronounced. *Legere* can mean *tacite legere* or *legere sibi* or *legere in silentio*. This activity requires participation of the whole body and the whole mind.

⁴⁰ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 10, 6, (BGM 3/1, p. 300): "Os enim nostrum comedit dum uerbum Dei legimus, uiscera uero nostra completur cum intelligimus atque seruamus ea in quibus legendo laboramus". *R. Past.*, 1, 2, (SCh 381, p. 134): "Et sunt nonnulli qui sollerti cura spiritalia praecepta perscrutantur; sed quae intellegendo penetrant, uiuendo

is the bread, which nourishes the soul and offers the strength to do a good.⁴¹ In this matter Gregory shows the importance of the Scripture for life, because it is the nourishment of the soul.⁴²

There is a parallel between Gregory and Pachomius who uses *meditatio* and *ruminatio* together in his book *Praecepta* to point out the same reality. *Meditatio* means to remember the word of God with one's memory during monastic activities or the *opus manuale*.⁴³ The

conculcant; repente docent quae non opere, sed meditatione didicerint; et quod uerbis praedicant, moribus impugnant". AUGUSTINE also says the same idea: "Ipsa hora iam ut dicat accedens, priusquam exerat proferentem linguam, ad deum leuet animam sitiientem, ut ructet quod biberit, uel quod impleuerit, fundat", *De Doctrina Christiana*, 4, 15, 32, (CCL 32, p. 138).

⁴¹ *Mor.*, 3, 15, 16, (BGM 1/2, p. 442): "Vel certe quia panis scripturae sacrae intelligentia non inconuenienter accipitur, quae mentem reficit eique boni operis uires praebet".

⁴² For a preacher, it is needed, because he has to share the experience of God with the people, and before he does this, he must have something to share by means of preaching. In this sense, he is the mediator of the Truth, the word of God to the people and his preaching will be more effective insofar as he realizes it in his life, *Exp. I Reg.*, 4, 72, (CCL 144, p. 331): "Quia enim eum, quem elegit, conformem facere redemptori studet, quando formam ipsam redemptoris praedicat, quasi uitulum portat. Et, quia splendorem dominicae conuersationis, quem praedicat, in uirtute operis monstrat". See also *Exp. I Reg.*, 4, 65-69, (CCL 144, pp. 327-330).

⁴³ PACHOMIUS, *Praecepta*, 116, (PL 23, pp. 79D-80A): "Quando farinam conspergunt aqua, et massam subigunt, nemo loquatur alteri. Mane quoque quando tabulis ad furnum uel ad clibanos deportant panes, simile habebunt silentium, et tantum de Psalmis et Scripturis aliquid decantabunt, donec opus impleatur. Si quid necessarium habuerunt, non loquentur, sed signum dabunt his qui possunt afferre, quibus indigent". See also *Praecepta*, 37, (PL 23, pp. 71D-72A); 28, (PL 23, 71A). Benedict expresses the same idea, *La Regola di San Benedetto*, 8, 3, p. 136: "Quod uero restat post uigilas a fratribus qui psalterii uel lectionum aliquid indigent meditationi inseruiatur." *Meditatio* means to recite always Psalms by memory. Cf. *La Preghiera Bibbia, Teologia, Esperienze Storiche*, a cura di ERMANNO ANCILLI, Città Nuova, Roma 1990, p. 238: "Meditazione è lo studio di recitare ed intendere l'opus Dei e tutta l'intelligenza spirituale della disciplina monastica". M. HERRAIZ, *Meditazione*, in *Dizionario di Mistica*, a cura di L. BORRIELLO, E. CARUANA, M. R. DEL GENIO, N. SUFFI, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1998, p. 803: "Meditazione è la preghiera come espressione essenziale della vita teologale e dell'uomo e strettamente unita alla vita della persona". J. GRIBOMONT, *Meditazione*, in *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, pp. 2202-2203: "Nell'antichità la meditazione non indica una preghiera puramente mentale, ma un'assimilazione personale, mediante la recita continua e a voce bassa, delle parole sacre attinte alla liturgia e alla *lectio divina*. E l'esegesi origeniana spiega la meditazione con la *ruminatio*, caratteristica degli animali. La meditazione fatta durante il lavoro manuale e durante gli spostamenti era una pratica caratteristica del monaco pacomiano, che doveva perciò imparare a memoria buona parte della Scrittura. Evagrio è la personificazione, fu di andar sempre più al di là dell'attenzione alle parole e ai concetti per concentrarsi sulla semplicità di Dio. Perciò *meditatio spiritualis* è un'azione che è al tempo stesso della bocca e del cuore".

ruminatio means to pronounce again in a low voice or always to repeat or to whisper the word of God all day long, even one's activities.⁴⁴ It means also that a monk must remember God's word by memory, which is then the same meaning as *meditatio*. For Pachomius a monk should keep the word of God in his memory, and especially the Psalms and New Testament and so they sought to have the word with pervade their monastic activities.⁴⁵ Here, to pervade means to harmonize the word of God in one's whole body, mind and activities. In this way Gregory is parallel with Pachomius in the use of *lectio divina* (*lectio, meditatio/ruminatio*).⁴⁶ Because the importance of *lectio divina* Gregory asks the preacher to be familiar with the Scriptures and he asks the same thing of all believers. To show the importance of the role of Scripture, he always bases his teachings with spiritual citations, with the hope that when we read his writings, we could forge a relationship with God.

Gregory points out that the Scripture is the source of Christian activities, by which God himself guides his people in this world. We hear the word of God when we read and meditate the word of God. God is transcendent, but through the Scriptures God speaks to his people;⁴⁷ it makes God immanent as well. Thus Gregory asks all Chris-

⁴⁴ PACHOMIUS, *Praecepta*, 122, (PL 23, p. 80B): "Quando domi sedebunt, non eis liceat loqui aliquid saeculare: sed si quid praepositus de Scripturis docuerit, vicissim inter se ruminent, et referant quae quis audierit, uel quae memoriter teneant".

⁴⁵ PACHOMIUS, *Praecepta*, 139-140, (PL 23, p. 82A-B): "Qui rudis monasterium fuerit ingressus, docebitur prius quae debeat obseruare: et cum doctus ad uniuersa consenserit, dabunt ei uiginti Psalmos et duas Epistolas Apostoli, aut alterius Scripture partem. Postea uero scribentur ei elementa, syllabae, uerba, ac nomina: et etiam nolens legere compelletur, et omnino nullus erit in monasterio, qui non discat litteras, et de Scripturis aliquid teneat: qui minimum usque ad nouum Testamentum et Psalterium".

⁴⁶ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 5, 1, (BGM 3/1, p. 168): "Tbique uirdissimus sententiarum herbas legendo carpimus, tractando ruminamus". *R. Past.*, 1, 11, (SCh 381, pp. 168-170): "Si autem candorem sibi iustitiae seu sapientiae tribuit, a luce se supernae cognitionis excludit; et eo claritatem ueri luminis nequaquam penetrat, quo se apud se per arrogantiam exaltat".

⁴⁷ V. RECCHIA, *Le Omelie di Gregorio Magno su Ezechiele*, (1-5), Adriatica, Bari 1974, p. 28. Pope John Paul II, on Monday, October 20th 1997, the day after he had declared St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face a doctor of the universal Church granted an audience to the pilgrims who had come for the occasion; he cited St. Gregory's *Moralia in Iob*, 4, 20, 1, (BGM 2/3, p. 86), in which Gregory says that the Scripture is superior than any science, but when anybody makes it in meditation, he will love it and he could express it with the simple words and his soul will be elevated. Pope John Paul II wanted to express that the teaching of Gregory the Great is fulfilled in Thérèse life; *Carmel in the World*, XXXVII, No. 1-2, 1998, p. 35.

tians to read and hear the Scriptures every day in order to establish a relationship with Him, as he expressed in his letter to Theodore in Constantinople.⁴⁸ Augustine also expressed this idea at his conversion; he accepted Scripture, which is the guide of life at every moment.⁴⁹ He was aware that Scripture is an extraordinary book.⁵⁰ On this subject, Gregory systematically follows Augustine's conception of the meaning of Scripture and Pachomius, description of putting the word of God into practice. God communicates by means of many signs in the Old and New Testaments,⁵¹ and of course to the people in our time.⁵² Therefore there is the unity between the two Testaments. To show this unity, Gregory describes Scripture as a wheel with four faces. The Old Testament has two faces symbolizing the Law and the Prophets; while the New Testament also has two faces, symbolizing the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles.⁵³ All the faces are more or less equal because all are the word of God and all are united,⁵⁴ insofar as they offer salvation to soul. In reality, the New Testament follows on the Old Testament; but the New Testament opens up new

⁴⁸ *Ep.*, 5, 46, (BGM 5/2, p. 226): "Sed quia ille plus diligit, qui plus praesumit: erga dulcissimam mentem gloriosissimi filii mei domni Theodori habeo aliquam querellam, quia donum ingenui, donum rerum, donum misericordiae, atque caritatis a sancta trinitate percipit, sed tamen indesinenter saecularibus causis astringitur, assiduis processionibus occupatur et cotidie legere negligit uerba redemptoris sui. Quid autem est scriptura sacra nisi quaedam epistula omnipotentis Dei ad creaturam suam?" For Gregory a simple Christian must be familiar with both Old and New Testaments; cf. V. PARONETTO, *La Figura del "Praedicator" nella "Regula Pastoralis" di Gregorio Magno*, in *Miscellanea*, VIII, Amato Pietro Frutraz, Roma 1978, pp. 170-172.

⁴⁹ AUGUSTINE, *Confessiones*, 3, 5, 9, (NBA 1, p. 64). Cf. V. RECCHIA, *Le Omelie di Gregorio Magno su Ezechiele*, (1-5), p. 29.

⁵⁰ AUGUSTINE, *De Doctrina Cristiana*, 2, 42, 63, (CCL 32, p. 76): "Et cum ibi quisque inuenerit omnia, quae utiliter alibi didicit, multo abundantius ibi inueniet ea, quae nusquam omnino alibi, sed in illarum tantummodo scripturarum mirabili humilitate discuntur".

⁵¹ R. A. MARKUS, *Signs and Meanings, World and Text in Ancient Christianity*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1996, pp. 66-67.

⁵² Cf. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 2, 3, 4, (CCL 32, pp. 33-34).

⁵³ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 6, 12, (BGM 3/1, p. 194): "Vnde et rota eadem quae iuxta animalia apparuit quatuor facies habere describitur, quia Scriptura sacra per utraque Testamenta in quatuor partibus est distincta. Vetus etenim Testamentum in lege et prophetis, nouum uero in Euangelis atque apostolorum actibus et dictis". Probably Gregory follows JEROME, because this idea is found in his *Commentarii in Hiezechielem*, 1, 1, 15-18, (CCL 75, pp. 19-21). Four directions symbolize the task of the preacher to announce the Scripture to all over the world. This idea is also found in THEODORET OF CYRUS, *Interpretatio in Hiezechielem*, 1, 17-18, (PG 81, pp. 827C-830A).

⁵⁴ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 6, 14, (BGM 3/1, p. 194): "Vna ergo est similitudo ipsarum quatuor, quia diuina quod eloquia etsi temporibus distincta, sunt tamen sensibus unita".

dimensions for the Old Testament and the New Testament leads to prophesy and New Testament,⁵⁵ and that is why both Testaments provide rich nourishment for the Christian life. For Gregory, a preacher is a sign of God, because he has the duty of sharing the connection of the words of God with own concrete life. In the Old Testament the prophets performed this task of guiding Israel to the mountain of God.

Scripture furnishes the foundation of all the teachings of Gregory. Through *lectio diuina*, the word reminds always to keep on the way of God and there is desire of soul to search Him every time to have illumination from the light without sunset.⁵⁶

1.4. Prayer

Throughout his writings, Gregory stresses the importance of prayer in a preacher's life. In his vision, he is influenced by Augustine's work *De Doctrina Christiana*, book IV, which deals with preparation for one's preaching. He says that before a preacher presents his homily, he should commence his discourse with prayer that God places a suitable preaching into his mouth.⁵⁷ Augustine cited Esther the prophetess who fasted before the Lord God, before presenting her discourse.⁵⁸ And just before this point, Augustine says that a preacher is a teacher; before he teaches, he must pray to God, for himself and for those he is about to address; he ought to open his mouth, to lift up his soul to God, to drink in what he is about to distribute to his listeners, because he will preach and teach the word of God. What Augustine is saying, is that just as the Spirit speaks through the mouth of those who are persecuted for faith, so he will speak through the mouth of those who preach.⁵⁹ God inspires the true teacher through inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who gives preachers directions how and

⁵⁵ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 6, 15, (BGM 3/1, p. 196): "Rota intra rotam est Testamentum Nouum, sicut diximus, intra Testamentum Vetus, quia quod designauit Testamentum Vetus, hoc Testamentum Nouum exhibuit."

⁵⁶ Cf. *Mor.*, 2, 10, 33, (BGM 1/2, p. 166); 2, 10, 53, (BGM 1/2, p. 186).

⁵⁷ AUGUSTINE, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 4, 30, 63, (CCL 32, p. 167): "Siue autem apud populum uel apud quoslibet iamiamque dicturus siue quod apud populum dicendum uel ab eis, qui uoluerit aut potuerit legendum, est dictaturus, oret, ut deus sermonem bonum det in os eius".

⁵⁸ *Est.* 4: 16-17.

⁵⁹ AUGUSTINE, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 4, 15, 32, (CCL 32, p. 139): "Si ergo loquitur in eis spiritus Sanctus, qui persequentibus traduntur pro Christo, cur non et in eis, qui tradunt discentibus Christum?"

what they should teach.⁶⁰ He is the Creator; this means that he also gives the art of speaking. In the preacher's prayer, he asks God to teach him; he asks for wisdom to speak about Him.⁶¹ Gregory divides prayer into two parts, before prayer and in the prayer. "Before," he indicates the prayer, which is taught by Jesus Christ, to forgive whatever offense you have against anybody.⁶² Gregory interprets this as to forgive one's enemy before prayer as a condition to begin prayer, because it introduces us into peace or into a relationship with God. Peace with neighbor or to be without enemies is a characteristic of this prayer. For this reason, to pray means to have proper relationship with all people and it is also the proper relationship with God. So compunction before the prayer is needed.

Gregory reminds a Christian that he should ask for eternal life for himself and also for ones enemies;⁶³ this means that it is not enough to forgive them and have compunction, but a Christian must also feel responsible for the salvation of souls. Therefore in Christian prayer one does not ask for riches, for material things, for glory, but for light, which reveals to the life of the angels to souls.⁶⁴ He gives as a model the prayer, in which the blind man asked Jesus Christ for light;⁶⁵ he did not ask for anything except light.

Humility is needed in the prayer, therefore Gregory asks a Christian to pray humbly as the tax collector does, not as the Pharisee,⁶⁶

⁶⁰ AUGUSTINE, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 4, 16, 33, (CCL 32, p. 139): "Quisquis autem dicit non esse hominibus praecipendum, quid uel quemadmodum doceant, si doctores sanctus efficit spiritus, potest dicere nec orandum nobis esse". Cf. *Mt.* 28: 18-19: "He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; to the end of the time'".

⁶¹ *Ps.* 143: 10: "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. May your generous spirit leads me on even ground." AUGUSTINE also interpreted this Psalm to confirm the same idea, *Narrationes in Psalmos*, 143, 12, (CCL 40, pp. 2082-2083).

⁶² *H. in Eu.*, 2, 27, 8, (BGM 2, p. 354): "Ante orationem debitoribus nostris dimitendum". *Mc.* 11: 25; *Mt.* 6: 14-15.

⁶³ *H. in Eu.*, 2, 27, 8, (BGM 2, p. 354): "Nam et uitam inimicorum petimus, et tamen ne exaudiamur, timemus." *Mor.*, 3, 13, 25, (BGM 1/2, p. 330).

⁶⁴ *H. in Eu.*, 1, 2, 7, (BGM 2, p. 74): "Non falsas diuitias, non terrena dona, non fugitiuos honores a domino, sed lucem quaeramus: nec lucem quae loco clauditur, quae tempore finitur, quae noctium interruptione uariatur, quae a nobis communiter cum pecoribus cernitur: sed lucem quaeramus, quam uidere cum solis angelis possimus, quam nec initium inchoat, nec finis angustat".

⁶⁵ *Lc.* 18: 41.

⁶⁶ *Mor.*, 3, 12, 36, (BGM 1/2, p. 282): "Nam pharisaeus ingressus templum, dicebat: 'Ieiuno bis in sabbato; decimas do omnium quae possideo sed iustificatus magis

because God knows all things, which a person has done. In humble prayer, a Christian always appeals to God's compassion and to have compunction, is to be aware, of one's own imperfections and to search out and to confess one's fault of which one must be purified it each time;⁶⁷ he asks Him to not allow him to fall into temptation. In another place, Gregory interprets Ezekiel⁶⁸ as affirming that every evangelist has four wings, two wings link up between them and the other two cover the body. Jerome says that these wings are the symbol of virtues (love, hope, fear of God and penitence),⁶⁹ which are the fruit of prayer. Gregory follows this interpretation of Jerome and says that the last two wings are figures of fear of God and penitence for sins.⁷⁰ The parallel text is in *Moralia in Iob*, where Job puts his hands on his mouth; this means that he is aware of his imperfection and he perseveres in his faith and doing well.⁷¹ A Christian must be vigilant in his life, he must examine or behave or despise himself, in his life, because God requires harmony between the interior and exterior life,⁷² between prayer and one's action or the model of life. In prayer, a Christian asks humbly to be made worthy to live before God, as Job had done in his life and so God elevated him among the peoples. The life of Job is a figure of the Christian, who achieves harmony between his interior and exterior life. Job finds favor before God because of his attitude,⁷³ which is expressed by his humble prayer. He realizes his prayer in doing good. In prayer, God fills the interior life or the soul

publicanus, quam ille exiit', *Lc.* 18: 12". ORIGEN also presented the figure of Job as one who perseveres in all temptations, and finally God bestowed life on him; cf. *De Oratione*, 30, 2, (GCS 3, p. 249).

⁶⁷ *H. in Eu.*, 1, 17, 18, (BGM 2, p. 218): "De peccatorum nostrorum relaxatione quotidie cogitemus, ne nostra uita peccato obligata remaneat, per quam omnipotens Deus quotidie alios soluit".

⁶⁸ *Ez.* 1: 23.

⁶⁹ JEROME, *Commentarii in Hiezechielem*, 6, 8a, (CCL 75, p. 259).

⁷⁰ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 4, 5, (BGM 3/1, p. 160): "Duae autem pennae tegunt corpora, quando eorum mala praeterita a conspectu aeterni iudicis timor et paenitentia abscondunt".

⁷¹ *Mor.*, 6, 32, 2, (CCL 143B, p. 1626): "Vsu sacri eloqui in manu operatio, in ore locutio solet intellegi. Manum ergo super os ponere est uirtute boni operis culpas tegere incautae locutionis". In this context, Gregory reminds the preacher to have compunction as relation to his tasks.

⁷² *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 4, 8, (BGM 3/1, pp. 162-164): "Quisquis uero uitae suae custodiam neglegit, discutere quae agit, quae loquitur, quae cogitat aut despicit aut nescit, coram se iste non ambulat, quia qualis sit in suis moribus uel in actibus, ignorat".

⁷³ Cf. *Mor.*, 2, 7, 53, (BGM 1/1, p. 594).

of a Christian,⁷⁴ as he decries his sin. Gregory asks the preacher to examine continuously the compatibility of his prayer with his action,⁷⁵ for the effectiveness of his homilies.⁷⁶

2. ILLUMINATION

Illumination is the soul's second step in its experience of God. The soul knows how great God's love is and the soul tries to respond and searches for the manner to be ever to God, especially through the Scriptures and prayer. Through these ways, the soul tries to grasp an experience of God, but it is not yet sure because of sins or temptations. By purification, the soul continues its way toward an experience of God to deepen what it has been grasped.

2.1. *Grace of God*

God bestows his grace on his creatures through the Church in the various sacraments. This grace guides the soul to perfect its way to have of an experience of God.⁷⁷ Gregory clearly stresses the importance of grace, which is bestowed by Holy Spirit,⁷⁸ for the Christian life. It is a gift to everyone and one can refuse it. He says that a per-

⁷⁴ Cf. *Mor.*, 2, 10, 28, (BGM 1/2, p. 160; *R. Past.*, 4, (Sch 382, p. 318).

⁷⁵ *Mor.*, 2, 10, 29, (BGM 1/2, p. 160): "Vt ergo ad pacem facies sine macula leueatur, ante orationis semper tempora debet sollicitate conspici quicquid potest in oratione reprobari".

⁷⁶ *R. Past.*, 1, 10, (Sch 381, p. 162): "Qui orationis usu et experimento jam didicit, quod obtinere a Domino quae poposcerit, possit, cui per effectus uocem jam quasi specialiter dicitur: 'Adhuc loquente te, dicam, ecce adsum', *Isai.* 58: 9". AUGUSTINE also stresses the importance of prayer for a preacher, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 4, 15, 32, (CCL 32, p. 138): "Et haec se posse, si potuerit et in quantum potuerit, pietate magis orationum quam oratorum facultate non dubitet, ut orando pro se ac pro illis, quos est allocuturus, sit orator antequam dictor: Ipsa hora iam ut dicat accendens, fundat, priusquam exerat proferentem linguam, ad deum leuet animam sitientem, ut ructet quod biberit, uel quod impleuerit, fundat". 4, 24, 53, (CCL 32, p. 159): "Moxque sermone finito ad agendas deo gratias corda atque ora conuertit", 4, 30, 63, (CCL 32, p. 167): "Illi uero qui ea dicturi sunt, quae ab aliis acceperunt, et antequam accipiant, orent pro eis, a quibus accipiunt, ut eis detur, quod per eos accipere uolunt; et cum acceperint, orent, ut bene et ipsi proferant, et illi, ad quos proferunt, sumant, et de prospero exitu dictionis eidem gratias agant, a quo id se accepisse non dubitant, ut qui gloriatur, in illo gloriatur".

⁷⁷ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 1, 18, (BGM 3/2, p. 44).

⁷⁸ *Mor.*, 3, 11, 14, (BGM 1/2, p. 202).

son who welcomes this grace, it will be helped to accomplish his tasks as a Christian especially in doing well.⁷⁹ With prevalent grace followed by our good will, what is God's gift to us becomes our merit. The reference to Saint Paul is clear, as cited by Gregory to show the role of the grace of God in a Christian life.⁸⁰ In his explanation, in order to stress the function of this grace, Gregory also cites Augustine against Pelagius and Caelestius; as the doctor of grace he interpreted the first letter of Paul to Corinthians. Paul says that in the doing well, I was fatigued, but not I, but I as well. He intends to say that "not I" insofar as I was preceded by the gift of God's grace; "but I as well" insofar as I seconded the gift my will.⁸¹ In this citation Gregory follows Augustine for the role of the grace in the Christian life, in which one cannot do anything except with the grace of God.⁸²

2.2. *Compunction*

This Spirit enables the Christian to do good, but there is still a wound in the soul, which is an interior wound. Through grace,⁸³ the soul could have an experience of God, but it is still obscure because of sins and temptations, which are symbolized by a wound. That is why compunction is needed, to purify the soul from various wounds.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 9, 2, (BGM 3/1, p. 266): "Sed sciendum est quia mala nostra solummodo nostra sunt; bona autem nostra, et omnipotentis Dei sunt, et nostra, quia ipse aspirando nos praeuenit ut uelimus, qui adiuuando subsequitur ne inaniter uelimus, sed possimus implere quae uolumus. Praeueniente ergo gratia et bona uoluntate subsequente, hoc quod omnipotentis Dei donum est fit meritum nostrum".

⁸⁰ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 9, 2, (BGM 3/1, pp. 266-268): "Quod bene Paulus breui sententia explicat, dicens: 'Plus illis omnibus laboraui', *1 Cor.* 15: 10. Qui ne uideretur suae uirtuti tribuisse quod fecerat, adiunxit: 'Non autem ego, sed gratia Dei mecum', *1 Cor.* 15: 10. Quia enim caelesti dono praeuentus est, quasi alienum se a bono suo opere agnouit, dicens: 'Non autem ego', *1 Cor.* 15: 10. Sed quia praeueniens gratia liberum in eo arbitrium fecerat in bonum, quo libero arbitrio eandem gratiam est subsecutus in opere, adiunxit: 'Sed gratia Dei mecum', *1 Cor.* 15: 10".

⁸¹ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 9, 2, (BGM 3/1, p. 268): "Ac si diceret: In bono opere laboraui, non ego, sed et ego. In eo enim quod solo Domini dono praeuentus sum, non ego, in eo autem quod donum uoluntate subsecutus, et ego". Cf. AUGUSTINE, *De Gratia Christi et de Peccato Originali*, 1, 5, 6, (NBA 17/2, pp. 142-144); *De Spiritu et Litera*, 24, 40, (NBA 17/1, 310); 29, 50, (NBA 17/1, p. 330); 30, 52, (NBA 17/1, p. 334).

⁸² *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 9, 3, (BGM 3/1, p. 268): "Sed iam iacentes uox Domini consolatur ut in opere surgamus, quod tamen nos facere nostra uirtute non possumus. Ipsius ergo spiritus nos implet et leuat, et super pedes nostros statuit, ut qui proni in paenitentia pro culpa iacuumus, recti postmodum in bono opere stemus".

⁸³ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 7, 11, (BGM 3/1, p. 220).

⁸⁴ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 40, (BGM 1/3, p. 320): "Plagae uero in secretioribus uentris sunt interna mentis uulnera, quae per compunctionem fiunt. Sicut enim uenter cibis reple-

Compunction begins with *lectio divina*⁸⁵ because Scripture is the word of God; in the light of the Holy Spirit the lector and a preacher present this word to the people; or else one reads it by himself. The nature of compunction rooted in humility, by which one realizes one's wounds, and he cries over them. Gregory compares the tears with the water of snow, which is coming down from sky.⁸⁶ A humble person cleans up his wounds with this water in order to pursue an experience of God. Humility is contrary to pride, which is the source of temptations and sins.⁸⁷ These result in disobedience to God; pride is the domination the God's work as his work.⁸⁸ Humility means to deny oneself so that God can raise one up.⁸⁹ So Gregory believes that to enjoy an experience of God, one must be converted from sins and leave all behind evil.⁹⁰

2.3. *Sadness and happiness*

The consequence of compunction is sadness and happiness. The soul is in sadness because it recognizes its sins, committed during one's life. In this sadness, the soul weeps because of knowing all the sins. This is why that through compunction, and even in sadness, the

tus extenditur, ita mens prauis cogitationibus dilatata subleuatur. Abstergunt igitur mala et liuor uulneris et plagae in secretioribus uentris, quia et disciplina exterior culpas diluit et extensam mentem compunctio paenitentiae ultione transfigit. Sed hoc inter se utraque haec differunt, quod plagae percussio dolent, lamenta compunctionum sapiunt." Cf. *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 5, 1-3, (BGM 3/1, pp. 168-170). Cf. R. GILLET, Introduction, in *SCh.* 32B, p. 73, says that compunction is regret for faults committed, «Componction uient de *com-pungere*; au uerbe *pungere*, poindre, piquer, le préfixe donne le sens de percer de part en part, transpercer. *Compungere* désigne donc le regret senti et uolontaire des fautes que l'âme a commises».

⁸⁵ *Mor.*, Praef. 1, (BGM 1/1, p. 82); 2, 6, 22, (BGM 1/1, p. 494); *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 7, 11, (BGM 3/1, p. 220).

⁸⁶ *Mor.*, 2, 9, 56, (BGM 1/2, pp. 78-78). ISIDORE OF SEVILLE clarifies that the humility is inseparable with compunction, *Sententiarum*, 2, 12, 1, (PL 83, p. 613).

⁸⁷ *Mor.*, 3, 14, 19, (BGM 1/2., p. 368); cf. *Eccli.* 10: 13.

⁸⁸ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 44, (BGM 1/3, p. 324): "Bene ergo dicitur quia homo cum ab his quae fecit auertitur de superbia liberatur. Contra conditorem quippe superbire est praecipua eius peccando transcendere, quia quasi a se iugum dominationis eius excutit, cui per oboedientiam subesse contemnit. At contra qui quod fecit uitare appetit, id quod a Deo factus est recognoscit, et ad conditionis suae ordinem humiliter redit, dum sua opera fugiens, talem se qualis a Deo factus est, diligit". *Mor.*, 2, 9, 86, (BGM 1/2, pp. 104-106). The superb is the fragility of the body, *Mor.*, 1, 3, 10, (BGM 1/1, p. 248).

⁸⁹ *Mor.*, 1, 6, 24, (BGM 1/1, p. 496); 2, 9, 55, (BGM 1/2, p. 76); 5, 23, 23-24, (BGM 1/3, p. 302).

⁹⁰ *Mor.*, 3, 13, 44, (BGM 1/2, p. 244); 3, 13, 49, (BGM 1/2, pp. 246-248).

soul could have happiness,⁹¹ by which it could have an experience of God, even if not in an eminently clear way.

2.4. *Fear and love of God*

For Gregory, compunction generates a fear and love of God. Fear of God is the attitude of the soul, by which one knows one's sins, which are obstacles to having an experience of God. And because of the importance of its goal, the soul tries any manner to eliminate sin. So the fear of God is actually the fear of his judgment. In other words, the fear of God is the fear to commit sin. This fear creates security for the soul and cultivates a love for the reign of God.⁹²

According to Gregory, there are four motives for compunction; they are *ubi fuit*, *ubi erit*, *ubi est* and *ubi non est*.⁹³ *Ubi fuit* is to acknowledge one's sins, which were committed in the past.⁹⁴ Gregory gives Saint Paul as an example when acknowledged his fault in persecuting the Christians.⁹⁵ *Ubi erit* is the second motive of compunction in which the soul is faced with the final judgment of God. Therefore, the soul must prepare itself for the sentence of God. To clarify his statement, Gregory cites the letter of Saint Paul who fears the judg-

⁹¹ *Mor.*, 5, 24, 10, (BGM 1/3, p. 348): "Illa compunctio afficientes ac tristes, haec uero laetas lacrimas mouet. Iubilum namque dicitur, quando ineffabile gaudium mente concipitur, quod nec abscondi possit, nec sermonibus aperiri; et tamen quibusdam motibus proditur, quamuis nullis proprietatibus exprimatur. Vnde Dauid propheta intuens electorum animas tantum gaudium mente concipere quantum sermone non ualent aperire, ait: 'Beatus populus qui scit iubilationem', *Ps.* 88: 16. Non enim ait: Qui loquitur; sed: Qui scit, quia sciri quidem iubiliatio intellectu potest, sed dicto exprimi non potest. Sentitur per illam quippe, quod ultra sensum est." *Dial.*, 4, 61, 2, (SCh 265, p. 202); cf. R. GILLET, *Introduction*, SCh 32B, p. 75.

⁹² *Dial.*, 3, 34, 2, (SCh 260, p. 400): "Principaliter uero compunctionis genera duo sunt, quia Deum sitiens anima prius timore compungitur, post amore. Prius enim esse in lacrimis afficit, quia, dum malorum suorum recolit, pro his perpeti supplicia aeterna pertimescit. At uero cum longa moeroris anxietudine fuerit formido consumpta, quaedam iam de praesumptione ueniae securitas nascitur et in amore caelestium gaudiorum animus inflammatur; et qui prius flabet ne duceretur ad supplicium, postmodum flere amarissime incipit quia differtur a regno". Cf. *Dial.*, 3, 34, 4, (SCh 260, p. 402).

⁹³ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 41, (BGM 1/3, p. 320): "Quattuor quippe sunt qualitates quibus iusti uiri anima in compunctione uehementer afficitur, cum aut malorum suorum reminiscitur; considerans ubi fuit; aut iudiciorum Dei sententiam metuens et secum quaerens, cogitat ubi erit; aut cum mala uitae praesentis sollerter attendens, maerens considerat ubi est, aut cum bona supernae patriae contemplatur, quae quia necdum adipiscitur, lugens conspicit ubi non est".

⁹⁴ Cf. R. GILLET, *Introduction*, SCh 32B, p. 73.

⁹⁵ *1 Co.* 15: 9. *Mor.*, 5, 23, 41, (BGM 1/3, p. 320).

ment of God.⁹⁶ Gregory presents the third motive for compunction, which is *ubi est*, which means to examine seriously the maliciousness of the present time. Again, Gregory cites the letter of Saint Paul who says:

“We are always full of confidence, then, realizing that as long as we are at home in the body we are exiled from the Lord”.⁹⁷ “I see that acting on my body there is a different law, which battles against the law in my mind. So I am brought to be a prisoner of that law of sin, which lives inside my body”.⁹⁸

The last motive for compunction is *ubi non est*, in which Gregory wants to show that the soul grasps something the eternal benefits, which have not yet reached. Through the grace of God, The soul has grasped something, but because of one’s sins, not in a complete way. Completion will come in the eternal house.⁹⁹

2.5. *Nostalgia*

The goal of compunction is to arrive at an experience of God, which is the ultimate goal of a Christian. R. Gillet says that compunction is also nostalgia, because compunction directs the desire for an experience of God.¹⁰⁰ The real definitive experience of God actually is eternal life, for which a Christian has hope. F. Giardini, after many citations from Scripture,¹⁰¹ concludes that the hope is equal to the nostalgia and then he adds that nostalgia marks to the past, including the history of salvation from the Old and New Testaments, and

⁹⁶ *1 Co.* 9: 27. *Mor.*, 1, 4, 35, (BGM 1/1, p. 338); 5, 23, 41, (BGM 1/3, p. 320). Cf. R. GILLET, *Introduction*, SCh 32B, p. 73.

⁹⁷ *2 Co.* 5: 6.

⁹⁸ *Rm.* 7: 23. *Mor.*, 5, 23, 41, (BGM 1/3, p. 320). Cf. R. GILLET, *Introduction*, SCh 32B, p. 74.

⁹⁹ To confirm his argument, Gregory cites again Saint Paul; the first citation is always using as reference of the vision in the contemplative: *1 Co.* 13: 12: “Now we see only reflections in a mirror; mere riddles, but then we shall be seeing face to face. Now, I can know only imperfectly; but then I shall know just as fully as I am myself known.” *2 Co.* 5: 1: “For we are well aware that when the tent that houses us on earth is folded up, there is a house for us from God, not made by human hands but everlasting, in the heavens”. *Mor.*, 5, 23, 41, (BGM 1/3, p. 320). Cf. R. GILLET, *Introduction*, SCh 32B, p. 74.

¹⁰⁰ R. Gillet, *Introduction*, SCh 32B, p. 76: « La compunction est donc aussi cela, nostalgie qui accompagne les plus pures joies de la contemplation. De plus, comme la contemplation, elle élève ». Cf. *Mor.*, 2, 9, 58, (BGM 1/2, pp. 78-80).

¹⁰¹ F. GIARDINI, *La Nostalgia Cristiana del Paradiso, Saggio di Spiritualità Escatologica*, Tipolitografia Pioda sas, Roma 2000, pp. 129-132.

especially the redemption of Jesus Christ; of course the present time is also included.¹⁰²

2.6. *Temptation*

Temptation comes from Satan, who is always near us and is always ready to attack all people into sin.¹⁰³ Gregory does not distinguish different kinds of temptation and maliciousness because temptation simply comes from the evil or bad spirit; and maliciousness is an exhortation inviting to sin, which also comes from the bad spirit as an enemy of the soul. So he concludes that temptation and maliciousness are the same thing because both are always ready to provoke war against the soul.¹⁰⁴ To illustrate this fact, Gregory identifies the north wind with a malignant spirit, because it brings in cool air, which dries down flowers and plants¹⁰⁵ and causes them to wither or at least makes them shrink and close when it strikes them.¹⁰⁶ Gregory aims to say that this wind is the symbol of Satan, who always wants to prevent the soul from experiencing God. And the south wind, which brings warm or hot air, is the symbol of the Holy Spirit, who enlivens up the plants and the flowers.¹⁰⁷ The purpose of the temptation is to

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 133: “Questa speranza ha indubbiamente lo stesso oggetto della nostalgia del paradiso. Non è detto però che insieme alla speranza i cristiani non nutrano nei loro cuori anche una vera e propria nostalgia. Ed è possibile scoprirne l’esistenza nella stessa Scrittura, benché essa non usa mai la parola nostalgia. Le vie per farlo sono almeno due. La prima passa attraverso la complessa situazione storico-salvifica nella quale si trovano in cristiani in questo mondo, l’altra segue la successione nella storia dei principali eventi salvifici che costituiscono il complesso Mistero del Figlio di Dio Gesù Cristo e nostro Salvatore: la sua incarnazione, la sua morte, risurrezione e ascensione in cielo, il suo ritorno glorioso alla fine del tempo”.

¹⁰³ Gregory says that the Satan is always at the door, *Mor.*, 1, 4, 36, (BGM 1/1, p. 340). Gregory says that the malicious is identified with temptation, *Mor.*, 2, 8, 8, (BGM 1/1, p. 612): “Hoc in loco translatione ueteri nequaquam militia uita hominis, sed temptatio uocatur. Sed si utriusque uerbi sensus aspicitur, diuersum quidem est quod exterius resonat, sed unum eundemque concorditer intellectum format”.

¹⁰⁴ *Mor.*, 2, 8, 8, (BGM 1/1, p. 612): “Temptatio itaque ipsa militia est, quia dum contra malignorum spiritum insidias uigilant, in bellorum procinctu procul dubio exudat”.

¹⁰⁵ Flowers and plants are the symbol of the virtues.

¹⁰⁶ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 2, 9, (BGM 3/1, p. 120). This north wind is called *aquilone* because it flows through the region of *Aquilone* to Israel: ORIGEN, *Homiliae in Hiezchielem*, 1, 11, (GCS 8, p. 334). The character of this wind deprives all plants of life, which is really the work of the Satan: JEROME, *In Hiezchielem*, 1, 1, 4A, (CCL 75, pp. 7-8).

¹⁰⁷ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 2, 9, (BGM 3/1, p. 120). Gregory of Nyssa, *Homeliae in Canticum Canticorum*, 10, 4, 16, (PG 44, p. 979B-D). AUGUSTINE, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 47, 5, (CCL 38, pp. 542-543). But JOHN OF THE CROSS has a particular interpretation of the

blind the soul and make it deviate from the experience of God; the role of the Holy Spirit is to rouse the soul and to open its eyes. Both winds meet in the soul. In the second step of negation, which is the cloud, the soul is deviated from the experience of God by the temptations of the Satan; the cloud is the figure of temptation.¹⁰⁸ Temptation always accompanies our way of life with promises, which show their treasury to make the soul of interests to follow their way.¹⁰⁹ Of course in his temptation Satan has a particular approach; he emphasizes the pleasures of the body, which seem very interesting. He seeks out many ways to make the soul deviate into these pleasures. When the soul falls into these temptations, it will suffer much, because it will lose the experience of God.¹¹⁰ The present life always will be marked by temptation. For example, the Christian could keep his body from debauchery, but he must persevere to liberate even his fantasy from debauchery.¹¹¹ So after Gregory examined this reality, he concludes that life on earth is a temptation or maliciousness.¹¹² Therefore, Gregory asks that a Christian always have compunction throughout his life. The grace of God was received in baptism, but until death one must take care not to lose it and so prevent an experience of God.¹¹³

There are five ways of access, by which exterior things experienced: they are ears, eyes, nose, mouth and hands, which are called the exterior senses. The five creates the exterior pleasure and to satisfy body. The soul has the same senses, which are interior senses; and

south wind, which is not found in the Fathers of the Church. He says that this wind brings water and causes rain, which is the symbol of the Holy Spirit, who causes the virtues to germinate in the soul, *Cántico Espiritual*, 16, 4, p. 651.

¹⁰⁸ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 39, (BGM 1/3, p. 318): "Ac si diceret: In hac obscuritate uitae praesentis uidere te appeto, sed adhuc infirmitatis nubilo circumscribor." This idea was expressed by GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Canticum Canticorum*, 2, 4, (PG 44, p. 792A-C). And then he also says that evil often comes from other people who work hand-in-hand with Satan.

¹⁰⁹ *H. in Eu.*, 1, 11, 1, (BGM 2, pp. 146-148).

¹¹⁰ R. GILLET, *Introduction*, Sch 32B, pp. 54-56.

¹¹¹ *Mor.*, 2, 8, 9, (BGM 1/1, p. 614): "Alius namque a luxuria iam carnem refrenat, sed tamen ad hoc luxuriae phantasmata tolerat quia quae uolens fecit, horum inuitus meminit et poenam sustinet quod uoluptatem putauit".

¹¹² *Mor.*, 2, 8, 10, (BGM 1/1, p. 616): "Bene ergo dicitur: Temptatio est uita hominis super terram". *Mor.*, 2, 8, 11, (BGM 1/1, p. 618): "Bene igitur dicitur: Militia est uita hominis super terram, quia dum per spatia temporum crescere appetit, ab eodem spatio quod perdendo colligit, crescendo pertransit". *Mor.*, 5, 24, 27, (BGM 1/3, p. 364). AUGUSTINE also had expressed the same idea; cf. *Confessiones*, 10, 28, 39, (NBA 1, pp. 332-334); 10, 32, 48, (NBA 1, p. 342).

¹¹³ *Mor.*, 5, 24, 25-34, (BGM 1/3, pp. 362-374).

their function is contrary to that of the exterior senses, because the interior senses direct the soul to experience God. Temptation enters into the soul through the exterior senses, which seemingly promise more pleasure than the interior senses. The exterior senses have a facility to deviate or to deceive a person into choosing the exterior pleasure, which is considered better and or superior to the other.¹¹⁴ The soul has senses like a body, because it can hear, see, smell, speak and feel in having an experience of God. Temptation deviates the senses of the soul through the exterior senses. Temptation will be not be able to deviate, when the exterior senses are coherent with the interior senses.

2.7. *Silence and hearing*

The first temptation could come through the ears, which have direct contact with the outside world. God speaks and his people hear him through their interior ears, when they are insensible to exterior desires. Gregory gives the example of Moses. When he was in Egypt, he did not hear the voice of God, because of the surrounding tumult; when he and Israelites escaped into desert, and after forty years of wondering, he perceived voice of God. They received the God's commandments; and penetrated, allowed them to their interior senses; to hear the voice of God, they must have escaped from exterior tumults.¹¹⁵ After Moses had descended from the mountain, he went into tent to hear God, in order that he gave the correct decision to the people, publicly proclaim it to them. When in doubt, he always entered the tent to hear God.¹¹⁶ Gregory intends that a person escapes from exterior tumults, which means that he directs exterior hearing to interior hearing, thus the soul cannot be disturbed in its gust for the experience of

¹¹⁴ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 43, (BGM 1/3, p. 324).

¹¹⁵ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 37, (BGM 1/3, p. 316): "Moyses admixtus Aegyptiis quasi uigilabat et idcirco uocem Domini in Aegypto positus non audiebat. Sed exstincto Aegypto, postquam in desertum fugit, illic dum quadraginta annis deguit, quasi ab inquietis terrenorum desideriorum tumultibus obdormiuit; atque idcirco diuinam uocem percipere meruit, quia per supernam gratiam quanto magis ab appetendis exterioribus torpuit, tanto uerius ad cognoscenda interiora uigilauit. Rursus israelitici populi turbis praelatus, ut legis praecepta percipiat, in montem ducitur, atque ut interna penetret, ab externis tumultibus occultatur".

¹¹⁶ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 38, (BGM 1/3, p. 316): "Hinc est quod idem Moyses crebro de rebus dubiis ad tabernaculum redit, ibique secreto Dominum consulit et quid certius decernat agnoscit. Relictis quippe turbis ad tabernaculum redire, est postpositis exteriorum tumultibus secretum mentis intrare. Ibi enim Dominus consulitur et quod foras agendum est publice, intus silenter auditur".

God. Exterior hearing becomes temptation, when it comes interior hearing to deviate from its goal; there must be coherence: the exterior must help interior hearing to have an experience of God. That is why Gregory declares that during sleep, the exterior hearing is gust, but the interior hearing perceives. And now, when we want to hear the interior reality, it must be coherent the exterior and interior hearing, which create the tranquility. The voice of God is heard by soul as if in a body slept; when there is rest from the activities of this world, as the mind remains gust. Divine teachings are meditated in the very silence of the mind.¹¹⁷ So on this point, whether sleeping or waking, the soul is always able to hear the voice of God, because the hearing of the soul never rests. To confirm his opinion, Gregory cites the Song of the Songs: "I sleep, but my heart is awake."¹¹⁸

2.8. *To be blind and to see*

Gregory warns that searching for truth, one must not be deceived by the some limited vision image; all fascinating imaginations are to be rejected, all efforts should be to fix the eyes of the soul on the radiance of uncreated light. Therefore control of the exterior eyes is needed so as to not create corporal fantasies.¹¹⁹

In his *Homiliae in Hiezechielem*, Gregory presents his argument with a comparison, in which the incarnation of Jesus Christ is described as a door or a window before the eyes of the people, because he could be seen by the soul from both outside and inside. This outside part is his humanity and the inside part is his divinity. The Jewish people saw him dead; therefore they doubted that promises of the prophets had been fulfilled in him; this means that they saw him from the outside, his passion, death, and the other human activities, which showed that he was just a man, and not the Messiah. But the people,

¹¹⁷ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 37, (BGM 1/3, p. 316): "In somnio enim exteriores sensus dormiunt et interiora cernuntur. Si ergo interna contemplari uolumus, ab externa implicatione dormiamus. Vox uidelicet Dei quasi per somnium auditur, quando tranquilla mente ab huius saeculi actione quiescitur et in ipso mentis silentio diuina praecepta pensantur".

¹¹⁸ *Sg.* 5: 2. *Mor.*, 5, 23, 38, (BGM 1/3, p. 318).

¹¹⁹ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 42, (BGM 1/3, p. 322): "Perfectam scilicet animam ista compunctio afficere familiaris solet, quia omnes imaginationes corporeas insolenter sibi obuiantes discutit, et cordis oculum figere in ipso radio incircumscriptionis lucis intendit. Has quippe figurarum corporalium species ad se intus ex infirmitate corporis traxit. Sed perfecte compuncta hoc summopere inuigilat, ne cum ueritatem quaerit, eam imaginatio circumscriptionis illudat, cunctasque sibi obuiantes imagines respuit".

who believed in him, saw both his sides, because his passion, death, his miracles and human activities, showed the presence of God, the divinity in him. This means that he is true man and true God.¹²⁰ To see on the inside part of the door or of the window, faith is needed and without it, there is no entering into the inner part.¹²¹

In the same *Homiliae in Hiezechielem* Gregory clearly indicates that the soul can enjoy the eternal light, if a person is able to cast out the burden of mortality,¹²² or corporeal things,¹²³ which cause the mind to deviate into fantasies, which divert the eyes of the soul from the experience of God.¹²⁴ But it must be remembered that through the mortality's things or corporal eyes, the soul also could see the inside part of the door or the window.¹²⁵

2.9. *To rest and to get up*

Another obstacle to having an experience of God is the pleasure of the body, which is the tendency for exaggerated comfort and relaxation. Gregory compares these pleasures of the body with bed, or bedding, or matting, namely, resting from doing good. He claims that in the Scriptures, the bed designates pleasure of the body.¹²⁶ Gregory points to the paralyzed person, who was cured by Jesus Christ. Gregory points out that before Jesus cured this paralytic, he lies on his bed, which is the symbol of pleasures of the body,¹²⁷ in which he wishes to remain. After Jesus cured him, he asked the paralytic to get up and carry of his bed. To explain the meaning of this getting up, Gregory

¹²⁰ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 1, 15, (BGM 3/2, pp. 38-40).

¹²¹ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 1, 16, (BGM 3/2, pp. 40-42).

¹²² *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 1, 17, (BGM 3/2, p. 42): "Aliquid per quamdam imaginem laetur; sed tamen, mortalitatis suae pondere reuerberatus, ad ima relabitur et quibusdam poenae suae uinculis ligatus tenetur".

¹²³ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 1, 18, (BGM 3/2, p. 44).

¹²⁴ To clarify his statement, he cites Saint Paul, 1 Co. 2: 9: "What no eye has seen and no ear has heard, what the mind of man cannot visualize". Cf. *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 1, 17, (BGM 3/2, p. 42).

¹²⁵ For example through the miracles and suffering of Jesus Christ seen in the faith; these deeds are more than the human activities, *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 1, 15, (BGM 3/2, p. 40).

¹²⁶ *Mk.* 2: 9-12.

¹²⁷ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 46, (BGM 1/3, p. 324): "In scriptura sacra lectus, siue grabatus, siue stratum, aliquando uoluptas carnis, aliquando repausatio in bonis operibus, aliquando requies temporalis accipitur. Quid est enim quod in euangelio sanato cuidam Dominus dicit: 'Surge, tolle grabatum tuum et uade in domum tuam,' nisi quod per grabatum uoluptas corporis designatur? Et iubetur utique ut hoc sanos portet, ubi infirmus iacet in uoluptatibus carnis".

cites *Acts*: “Peter said to him, ‘Aeneas, Jesus Christ cures you: get up and take up your bed.’ Aeneas got up immediately.”¹²⁸ This citation, in relationship to the Gospel of Mark, means that the paralyzed person, who was cured by Jesus Christ, must leave the evil, to which he was committed; and “take up your bed” means that he must persevere in doing good.¹²⁹ Of course, after all one’s good activities, corporal rest is needed. Gregory is interested in the scene, in which Jesus asked the paralyzed person to get up and take up his bed, because he interprets this as an attitude by which one leaves the body’s pleasures, which are the world’s temptation.¹³⁰ Gregory actually intends that all Christians prepare themselves for eternal rest; that is why that the present life should be the way to our fatherland.¹³¹

Satan uses temptations to disrupt the journey of life toward eternal life, which disturbs one’s experience of God, which could be had by everyone in this present life. The pleasure of the body, of course, is very pleasant, but causes a person to deviate from the goal of life; for the present life to be a joy temptation must be overcome and this facilitates an experience of God.¹³²

2.10. *Silence and eating*

Temptation could also come from the mouth, and this actually happens very often in this life. The mouth has the function of speaking, of eating; so the temptation comes from speaking or talking, other by oneself or by another person.

Gregory understands bread as the preaching of heretics, who try to influence people with the good words, but in fact they have another goal, which is veiled behind their preaching and fine words. To clarify this statement, Gregory interprets the book of Proverbs, which says

¹²⁸ *Ac.* 9: 34.

¹²⁹ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 46, (BGM 1/3, p. 326): “Quid est dicere, *surge*, nisi, mala quae perpetrasti, derelinque? Et quid est dicere, *sterne tibi*, nisi, mercedis causas in quibus requiescere debes operare? Vt et deserat surgendo quod fecit, et inueniat sternendo quod fecerit”.

¹³⁰ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 46, (BGM 1/3, p. 326): “Sed quia in hac uita adhuc homo positus, in cuiuslibet ordinis loco, in cuiuslibet secreti recessu uiuere sine temptationibus nullatenus potest, plerumque in id quod ad requiem construitur, maior dolor temptationis inuenitur”. *Mor.*, 5, 23, 47, (BGM 1/3, p. 326): “Quia ergo in hac uita omnis nostra, quam fortasse parauimus, requies turbatur”.

¹³¹ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 47, (BGM 1/3, p. 326): “Via quippe est uita praesens, qua ad patriam tendimus”.

¹³² Cf. *Mor.*, 5, 23, 47, (BGM 1/3, p. 326).

that stolen water is sweet, and bread tastes better when eaten in secret;¹³³ this means that their preaching seems to have a better taste.¹³⁴ In this way Gregory wishes to remind us to be careful in listening and in understanding the preaching of the heretics. Of course he takes for granted that the preacher prepares himself for his preaching, and he avoids heretical teaching to his listeners.

Bread is understood as the maintenance of the present life. Gregory interprets the gospel of John,¹³⁵ in which the people sought out Jesus because he gave them bread to eat, which maintained them in the present life. According to Gregory, the people must search out Jesus in order to apply the virtues in their concrete lives and not to seek for the advantage in this present life and in material things,¹³⁶ because often greed for the thing of the world over becomes more and more overwhelming.

Bread is understood as joyfulness, which is the pleasure which people often search for in expensive or prestigious material things of the present life. They think that these things will sustain them in this life in the satisfying of their desires. They forget that all these temporal goods will end and will cause them to miss their eternal destiny.¹³⁷

All these are the figures of bread, which has a sweet taste, but are all temptations. Therefore, Gregory stresses that in having an experi-

¹³³ *Pr.* 9: 17.

¹³⁴ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 49, (BGM 1/3, pp. 330-332): “Sunt enim nonnullae haereses quae aperte metuunt praedicare quod sentiunt, et apud infirmorum mentes uerba sua tanto magis condiunt, quanto quasi amplius reuerentur abscondunt. Vnde non immerito dicitur: ‘Aquaе furtiuae dulciores sunt, Panes occultos libenter edite’. Miseris enim cordibus occulta haereticorum uerba eo magis sapiunt, quo cum reliquis communiter non habentur”.

¹³⁵ *Jo.* 6: 26-27: “In all truth I tell you, you are looking for me not because you have seen the signs but because you had all the bread you wanted to eat. Do not work for food that goes bad, but for food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of man will give you, for on him the Father, God himself, has set his seal”.

¹³⁶ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 49, (BGM 1/3, p. 332): “Et per eorum personam Dominus illos intra sanctam Ecclesiam detestatur qui per sacros ordines ad Dominum propinquantes, non in eisdem ordinibus uirtutum merita, sed subsidia uitae praesentis exquirunt; nec cogitant quid uidendo imitari debeant, sed quae compendia percipiendo satientur. Satiatos quippe de panibus Dominum sequi est de sancta Ecclesia temporalia alimenta sumpsisse. Et non pro signis est Dominum, sed pro panibus quaerere, ad religionis officium, non pro augendis uirtutibus, sed pro requirendis subsidiis inhiare”.

¹³⁷ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 49, (BGM 1/3, p. 332): “Sed et pretiosa quaeque pro cibo dat, quia uirtutes mentis in appetitu transitoriae delectationis inclinatur. Et refocillare animam nititur, quia peruersis suis desideriis satisfacere conatur. Vilis quippe plebs Dei efficitur, quando prauorum numero crescente, in eis non summa et caelestia, sed adiecta et terrena sectatur”.

ence of God, this temptation must be overcome; there is no way except to avoid this type of pleasurable food.¹³⁸ Actually Gregory wants to accentuate that the real bread is the faith in Jesus Christ, grace and God's teachings.

Bread is the symbol of Jesus Christ, because he himself says in the Gospel: "I am the bread that has come down from heaven. I am the living bread, which has come down from heaven".¹³⁹

Bread is understood as the grace of the Holy Spirit; to clarify this symbolism, Gregory goes to the book of Isaiah¹⁴⁰ and to the Psalm,¹⁴¹ which implicitly refer to bread. For him, this bread is spiritual food, because in the hope of the heavenly things, earthly things are renounced and humility is the guaranty of this promise.¹⁴²

According to Gregory, finally bread is understood as the instruction in divine teachings. He interprets the words of Isaiah: "Bring water for the thirsty! Inhabitants of Austro, with bread to greet the fugitive".¹⁴³ Austro is the Church under the protection of the Spirit of God;¹⁴⁴ and "with bread to greet the fugitive" refers to the people, who are the Church. The Spirit of God and the Scriptures are the way to avoid the evil.¹⁴⁵ The Scripture is to be maintenance, because if you

¹³⁸ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 50, (BGM 1/3, pp. 332-334): "Quia uidelicet omne quod prius de ipsa prosperitate uiuendi dulce sapiebat, postmodum per uiam temptationis amarescit. Vnde ab omni mox iucunditate quasi frangitur; et escas prioris laetitiae respuenes, eo quem solum libenter appetit luctu satiatur. Quia igitur homo temptatus ab ore cordis omnem cibum respuit delectationis, nihilque ei aliud quam semetipsum et cognoscere et flere delectat".

¹³⁹ *Jo.* 6: 41, 51. Cf. *Mor.*, 5, 23, 49, (BGM 1/3, p. 330).

¹⁴⁰ *Is.* 33: 15-16: "The one who acts uprightly and speaks honestly, who scorns to get rich by extortion, who rejects bribes out of hand, who refuses to listen to plans involving bloodshed and shuts his eyes rather than countenance crime: such a man will live on the heights, the craggy rocks will be his refuge, he will be fed, he will not want for water".

¹⁴¹ *Ps.* 132: 15: "I shall generously bless her produce, give her needy their fill of food".

¹⁴² *Mor.*, 5, 23, 49, (BGM 1/3, p. 330): "Panis ei datur est, id est refectionem spiritalis gratiae percipit, quia se a bonis infimis caelestia sperando suspendit. Hinc etiam de sancta Ecclesia per Daud Dominus dicit: 'Pauperes eius saturabo panibus,' quia in illa positaementes humilium spiritalium implentur refectione donorum".

¹⁴³ *Is.* 21: 14.

¹⁴⁴ Austro is also the symbol of the Holy Spirit, cf. *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 2, 9, (BGM 3/1, p. 120). The same idea is found in GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Homiliae in Canticum Cantico-*, 10, 4, 16, (PG 44, p. 979B-D); JEROME, *Commentarium in Hiezechielem*, 1, 1, 4a, (CCL 75, pp. 8-9); AUGUSTINE, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 47, 5, (CCL 38, pp. 542-543).

¹⁴⁵ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 49, (BGM 1/3, p. 330): "Rursum per panem diuinae doctrinae eruditio designatur, sicut per prophetam dicitur: 'Qui habitatis in terra Austri, cum panibus occurrite fugienti, *Is.* 21: 14'. In terra quippe Austri habitant qui in sancta Ecclesia positi

listen while eating you will only pressure the literal sense and you will lose the riches of interior reflection by means of the spiritual understanding.¹⁴⁶ Therefore the exhortation on or the preaching of the Scriptures is needed in order to maintain the validity of the Scripture in the spiritual life.

2.11. *Silence and sense of smell*

This way of having an experience of God is actually an experience of the negative method, in which God is intangible, inaccessible and incomprehensible. According to this method, there is no way of experiencing God except by the smelling of His perfume, which is called nard, because it is collected from various grasses. The groom perceives this nard and its odor is the figure of union with him; therefore the character of this nard is as the groom. The union of the soul with God is the participation into his purity, immortality, stability and incorruptibility of this groom.¹⁴⁷

Gregory in his *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum* indicates that in an experience of God, one receives unction from God with perfume, in which his soul accommodates his creator.¹⁴⁸ “Unction” is understood as experience of the incomprehensible God, which is precisely the third step to have an experience of God. Here there is reference to the various obstacles to having an experience of the incomprehensible God. Temptations are figured by the other perfumes or carnal perfume, which is presented by Satan to avoid the nard of groom. The purpose of Satan is to attract the soul into his reign. In his *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum*, Gregory says that the presence of the groom in the Church, which is also in the soul, makes better the wine and the odor of the nard overcomes any aromatics.¹⁴⁹ Aromatics mean the temptations of the Satan.

superni Spiritus caritate perflantur. Fugit autem qui huius mundi mala euadere concupiscit. Qui ergo in terra austri habitat, fugienti cum panibus occurat, id est, is qui iam sancto Spiritu intra Ecclesiam plenus est eum qui mala sua euadere nititur, eruditionis alloquio consoletur”.

¹⁴⁶ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 49, (BGM 1/3, p. 330): “Fugienti scilicet cum panibus occurrere est metuenti aeterna supplicia doctrinae sacrae escas offerre, et modo tumorem terrore comprimere, modo pauorem exhortatione refouere. Ac si diceret: Pensatis sacra eloquia, sed non in refectione, quia dum solam speciem litterae custoditis, de spiritali intelligentia pinguendinem internae refectionis amittitis”.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Canticum Canticorum*, 1, (PG 44, p. 765A-D).

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *Exp. in Cant.*, 20, (SCH 314, p. 100).

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *Exp. in Cant.*, 13, (SCH 314, p. 90).

2.12. *Resisting to temptation*

Gregory in his *Moralia in Iob* presents the personage of Job as the typos of Jesus Christ and also as typos of a real Christian. The reason is that Job tried to not commit any sin against God.¹⁵⁰ But Satan always surrounded him in order to tempt him, like Jesus Christ was in his time in presence of Satan during his life in this world. This Satan's nature disturbs the soul from the thinking correctly, which comes from the Holy Spirit. So when the soul thinks in the right way, the Satan presents it with carnal things to cause it to deviate.¹⁵¹ Gregory says that Satan is permeates the world in order to scrutinize the soul to search a good occasion to tempt it or if possible to cut it off from the goodness, which comes from the Holy Spirit. Once Satan has occasion, he increases the evil and brings it into maximum as his nature.¹⁵² Therefore the soul must remember that whole it does not live in this world without temptation, still God is always present.¹⁵³ But in this situation of life, the soul must defend itself by vigilance in combating this temptation.¹⁵⁴

2.13. *Humility*

Humility is a way to avoid temptation. According to Gregory, humility means to always realize one's sins or weaknesses and to confess them openly before God.¹⁵⁵ It is contrary to pride, in which when a person is tempted and commits sin, he keeps what is done secret,

¹⁵⁰ *Mor.*, 1, 2, 62, (BGM 1/1, p. 216).

¹⁵¹ *Mor.*, 1, 2, 63, (BGM 1/1, p. 216): "Nam cum filii Dei assistunt coram Domino inter eos quoque assistit et Satan, quia plerumque bonis nostris cogitationibus quae in corde nostro aduentu sancti Spiritus operante, seminatur; antiquus ille callide se interserit et subiungit inimicus ut bene cogitata perturbet male perturbata dilaniet. Sed nequaquam nos in temptatione deserit, qui creauit".

¹⁵² *Mor.*, 1, 2, 65, (BGM 1/1, p. 216): "Satanae terram circuire, est carnalia corda perscrutari et unde occasionem accusationis inuenire possit, exquirere. Terram circuit quia humana corda circumuenit, ut bona tollat, ut mala mentibus inserat, ut inserta cumulet, ut cumulata perficiat, ut perfectos in iniquitatibus ad poenam socius acquirat".

¹⁵³ *Mor.*, 1, 2, 63, (BGM 1/1, p. 216): "Sed nequaquam nos in temptatione deserit, qui creauit. Nam hostem nostrum qui se contra nos in insidiis contegit, illustratione sui luminis nobis deprehensibilem reddit".

¹⁵⁴ *Mor.*, 1, 2, 63, (BGM 1/1, p. 216): "Callidum namque hostem requirere, est eius nobis insidias declarare ut quo eum subintrare cor cernimus, forti contra illum circumspectione uigilemus".

¹⁵⁵ *Mor.*, 4, 22, 30, (BGM 1/3, p. 242): "Haec sunt namque uerae humilitatis testimonia, et iniquitatem suam quemque cognoscere, et cognitam uoce confessionis aperire".

denies what he has committed, justifies what it is committed and does it more and more.¹⁵⁶ The first sin, committed by Adam and Eve, is an example. When they sinned, they covered their face,¹⁵⁷ which means they kept their sins secret and then they justified themselves, because Adam accused Eve; while she accused the serpent.¹⁵⁸ In humility, a person is not ashamed to confess wrongdoing. In confession, one leaves asides the body dead because of temptation and sin, and then he rises from that evil. David is an example of this humility. When he was tempted and fell into sin, he rose from his sinful state through confession, in order to start a new life.¹⁵⁹ Humility must be sincere. Gregory, citing Proverbs, says that the first of plead is adjudged to be upright, until the next come and cross-examines him.¹⁶⁰ This is to say that nobody can escape from temptation and sin. If he proudly defends himself, he is not sincere; only too often we will spontaneously admit we will not accept if others accuse us of it.¹⁶¹ Another person who is sincere is Job; he is not ashamed of his weakness and he admits it before God.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁶ *Mor.*, 4, 22, 30, (BGM 1/3, pp. 242-244): "Ad contra, usitatum humani generis uitium est, et labendo peccatum committere, et commissum negando abscondere, et conuictum defendendo multiplicare." According to M. BAASTEN, Gregory distinguishes two kinds of pride, the possession of some in secular, which transforms in moral progress and spiritual concerns, which shows into spiritually-minded and virtues, *Pride According to Gregory the Great, A Study of the Moralia*, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston - Queenston 1986, pp. 18-19. This Idea had been founded in JOHN CASSIAN, *De Institutis Coenobiorum*, 12, 2, (Sch 109, pp. 451-452); 12, 24, (Sch 109, p. 485). And M. Baasten defines pride, he says: "Although pride causes them to misconceive both their relationship with God and man, it is imperative that we grasp that what lies at the heart of pride is a failure to recognize their dependency upon God. In pride, such men strive to stand on their own, rejecting any notion that they have a need to be aided and regulated by God. Self-sufficiency surfaces as the chief mark of pride in Gregory's writings".

¹⁵⁷ *Gn.* 3: 12-13.

¹⁵⁸ *Mor.*, 4, 22, 30, (BGM 1/3, p. 244); 4, 22, 31, (BGM 1/3, p. 244). Gregory prefigures the proud with birds, *Mor.*, 4, 19, 2, (BGM 1/3, p. 20).

¹⁵⁹ *Mor.*, 4, 22, 31, (BGM 1/3, p. 244). In the same context, Gregory interprets the gospel of John (11: 43), in which Jesus Christ called Lazarus from the dead as he says: "Lazarus, come out!" Jesus does not say: "Lazarus, come to life!" This means that when one sins, he dies in his body, hidden in it, buried in it, and then through the confession, that person comes out from himself before God.

¹⁶⁰ *Pr.* 18: 17.

¹⁶¹ *Mor.*, 4, 22, 33, (BGM 1/3, p. 246): "Quod si superbe defendimus, liquet quia peccatores nos ex nobis fecte dicebamus. Vnde summopere curandum est ut mala quae fecimus, et sponte fateamur, et haec aliis arguentibus non negemus. Superbiae quippe uitium est ut quod de se fateri quisque quasi sua sponte dignatur, hoc sibi dici ab aliis dedignetur".

¹⁶² *Mor.*, 4, 22, 32, (BGM 1/3, p. 246); 4, 22, 34, (BGM 1/3, pp. 244-246).

2.14. *Discipline*

Humility must be accompanied by discipline, says Gregory. Discipline is the coherence of the interior humility with exterior activities. This means that care is taken that the exterior senses do not fall into temptation or nor that temptation leads us to sin. Therefore the exterior senses need discipline for this coherence,¹⁶³ which is manifest in the conversion of one's life or in daily conversion.¹⁶⁴

Penitence is a way to discipline, because it heads the soul, which is afflicted by temptation or by sins.¹⁶⁵ For Gregory penitence means that every Christian accuses himself of being a sinner and he seeks ways to avoid committing sins again; he does so by weeping or by the other virtues or by doing good. A Christian, who does penance, is also vigilant not repeat the sins, which he had committed.¹⁶⁶ So penance is not a punishment, but a way to guide the soul to avoid temptation or sin. Humility, both interior and exterior, is the key to this penance, because pride is the source of temptations and sins.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 40, (BGM 1/3, p. 320). GREGORY in his *Regula Pastoralis*, 2, 6, (Sch 381, pp. 208-218), asks the pastor to undertake the discipline of humility in interior and exterior activities. Interior humility is for his relationship with God. When a pastor falls into pride, he does not take care of soul anymore, but is a pastor who searches the glory from the people. Gregory in his *Regula Pastoralis*, 3, 15, (Sch 382, pp. 348-352), 3, 26 (Sch 382, pp. 438-446), suggests counseling for a lazy person. He says that laziness loses vigilance; therefore discipline is needed to be vigilant in all temptations.

¹⁶⁴ *Mor.*, 5, 24, 29-33, (BGM 1/3, pp. 366-372). Cf. R. GILLET, *Introduction*, Sch 32B, p. 60.

¹⁶⁵ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 40, (BGM 1/3, p. 320).

¹⁶⁶ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 7, 23-24, (BGM 3/1, pp. 330-332). AMBROSE had the same idea about the penitence, *Paenitentia*, 2, 1, 1-2, (Sch 179, p. 132); 2, 1, 4-5, (Sch 179, pp. 132-134). Ambrose was right in his diocese, where Novatians were very strong. They had an idea of a rigorous Church; so Christians who converted to their sect, had to be re-baptized. People who reconverted into Catholicism, according to Ambrose, did not need re-baptism. Penitence is enough to renew their life with the doing good or the virtues; cf. M. G. MARA, *Ambrogio di Milano*, in *Patrologia* 3, a cura di Angelo di Berardino, con presentazione di Johannes Quasten, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Marietti, Genova 1992, pp. 162-163. E. MAROTTA, *Introduzione*, in *La Penitenza*, traduzione, introduzione e note a cura di EUGENIO MAROTTA, Città Nuova, Roma 1996, pp. 13-18. See also H. J. VOGT, *Novaziano*, in *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, pp. 2436-2439. In our time penance is the reconciliation of one's rapport with God. Penance is identified with compunction, conversion with mortification or repentance or forgiveness or asceticism, cf. M. E. POSADA, *Penitenza*, in *Dizionario di Mistica*, p. 1006.

¹⁶⁷ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 51, (BGM 1/3, p. 334); *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 5, 2, (BGM 3/1, pp. 168-170); 2, 6, 8, (BGM 3/2, pp. 154-156); *H. in Eu.*, 2, 32, 2, (BGM 2, pp. 410-412).

2.15. *To deny oneself*

Obedience to the word of God in Scripture is also a way to avoid the temptations of Satan.¹⁶⁸ Gregory says that to obey is to deny oneself; this means to act not according to one of desires but according to God.¹⁶⁹ He must sacrifice his will and strive only to accomplish the will of God. The will is affected by carnal desires, through which Satan enters with temptations. Therefore abnegation is necessary if this obedience is to attain an experience of God.¹⁷⁰

2.16. *Discernment*

The fruit of exterior and interior humility is discernment, which is the capacity of the soul to identify temptations and sin. Gregory compares this capacity with the nose; through it, the soul can distinguish a good or bad perfume/odor. This means that through the interior nose, the soul can identify what is coming from a good or a bad spirit.¹⁷¹ He interprets the Song of the Songs, which contains the

¹⁶⁸ Saint Benedict asks his monks to obey the abbot in an absolute way; to imitate the obedience of Jesus Christ to his Father or like the obedience of a martyr; *La Regola di San Benedetto*, 5, 1-5, p. 97; 4, 10, p. 80; 4, 61, p. 80; 7, 34, p. 112. The reason is that the abbot is compared God, who commands his people, *La Regola di San Benedetto*, 5, 4, p. 97. Or a person who has the duty of teaching and decision making according to the commandments of God, *Regula Magistri*, v. II, 2, a cura di MARCELLINA BOZZI e ALBERTO GRILLI, Paidea, Brescia 1995, p. 33: "Qualis debeat esse abbas." Cf. M. BOZZI, *Commento*, in *Regola del Maestro*, v. I, introduzione, traduzione, e commento a cura di MARCELLINA BOZZI, Paidea, Brescia 1995, p. 58. M. BOZZI - A. GRILLI, *Regola del Maestro*, v. II, Introduzione, testo e note a cura di MARCELLINA BOZZI e ALBERTO GRILLI, Paidea, Brescia 1995, p. 49.

¹⁶⁹ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 12, 15, (BGM 3/1, p. 372): "Semper suae uoluntatis arbitrium ad diuini eloquii praeceptum frangat, quatenus, in caelesti iussione suspensus non suam, sed Conditoris sui uoluntatem impleat." This concept is found equivalently in St. Benedict's rule, in which he asks every monk to renounce self, that is, his own will and to accept the instructions of the abbot, *La Regola di San Benedetto*, 33, 4, p. 197: "Quippe quibus nec corpora sua nec uoluntates licet habere in propria uoluntate." And G. HOLZHERR, *Commento*, in *La Regola di San Benedetto*, 33, 4, p. 199: "In effetti la rinuncia cristiana ad ogni forma di possesso nasce proprio come imitazione dell'atteggiamento interiore di Gesù, il quale spogliò se stesso per entrare in comunione con l'uomo." *La Regola di San Benedetto*, 5, 4, p. 97. M. BOZZI, A. GRILLI, *Regola del Maestro*, v. II, 7, 7-8, p. 54: "Ergo hii tales relinquentes statim quae sua sunt et uoluntatem propriam deserentes, mox ex occupatis manibus et quod agebant imperfectum derelinquentes, uicino oboedientiae pede iubentis uocem factis sequuntur."

¹⁷⁰ Cf. *Mor.*, 1, 5, 5, (BGM 1/1, p. 388); cf. C. STRAW, *Gregory the Great, Perfection in Imperfection*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1988, p. 188.

¹⁷¹ *R. Past.*, 1, 11, (Sch 381, p. 166): "Paruo autem naso est, qui ad tenendam mensuram discretionis idoneus non est. Naso quippe odores foetoresque discernimus. Recte ergo per nasum discretio exprimitur; per quam uirtutes eligimus, delicta reprobamus".

hymn of the bride to groom, which says: “Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon.”¹⁷² This means that the soul must be vigilant to know all the bad signs and then to combat them before they enter into soul.¹⁷³ The temptation of Satan is compared to the wind; and the hostility of world is compared to a cloud. Gregory says that he, who looks at the wind, does not see anything; and who desires the cloud, does not reap anything,¹⁷⁴ because both are obstacles to having experience of God.

In his book *Regula Pastoralis* Gregory reminds the pastor that discernment is very important for pastoral care, it is useful for decision-making in what he must do,¹⁷⁵ in what error he had committed,¹⁷⁶ in deciding what he has to say or whether he must keep silent,¹⁷⁷ or if he should make a decision for the salvation of the people.¹⁷⁸ In his *Homiliae in Hiezechielem* Gregory stresses the importance of discernment for a preacher; he says that a preacher must be mature in order to discern correctly,¹⁷⁹ because in his preparation for preaching, he must distinguish the voice of the devil and that of the Holy Spirit. The Scripture is the source of preaching and both the literal and allegorical interpretations are helpful. In the use of these interpretations, the preacher needs mature discernment to help them toward ultimate goal of life.¹⁸⁰

2.17. *Tranquility*

Tranquility is an advanced way to have an experience of God; and the soul without disturbance, could feel the experience of God. As one grows in the monastic life, tranquility, which is union with God, is the goal of the monastic life, which is a union with Christ through white martyrdom, that is with a constant preparation of self by fasts and

¹⁷² Sg. 7: 5: “Your nose, the tower of Lebanon, sentinel facing Damascus”.

¹⁷³ *R. Past.*, 3, 32, (SCh 382, pp. 390-394); 1, 11, (SCh 381, p. 166); 2, 6, (SCh 381, pp. 204-206).

¹⁷⁴ *R. Past.*, 3, 15, (SCh 382, pp. 348-352).

¹⁷⁵ *R. Past.*, 2, 9, (SCh 381, pp. 236-238).

¹⁷⁶ *R. Past.*, 2, 4, (SCh 381, pp. 186-188).

¹⁷⁷ *R. Past.*, 3, 14, (SCh 382, pp. 340-348).

¹⁷⁸ *R. Past.*, 3, 21, (SCh 382, pp. 394-400).

¹⁷⁹ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 3, 4, (BGM 3/1, p. 136): “In sanctis ergo praedicatoribus planta pedis est uituli, scilicet mature incedens, et fortis, et diuisa, quia unusquisque praedicator et uenerationem habet in maturitate, et fortitudinem in opere, et diuisionem unguis in discretionem. Non enim facile praedicator eius accipitur, si leuis in moribus esse uideatur. Et nulla erit maturitatis ostensio, si contra aduersa omnia non adfuerit operis fortitudo”.

¹⁸⁰ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 3, 4, (BGM 3/1, pp. 136-138).

ascetical measures by which one fights one's own weakness and sins.¹⁸¹ Therefore a monk does not go to the desert anymore to fight against Satan, where the temptations are stronger, but he does so in daily life. One must prepare himself with self-discipline, mortification and asceticism in order to gain *apátheia*,¹⁸² which aims to control one's emotions and temptations, and to direct or to submit oneself to Christ. Self-discipline, mortification and asceticism are the new model of martyrdom, even in our time, by which one fights not in the stadium but in oneself, against the devil, the pleasures of the world, participating in the sufferings of Christ and in his resurrection.

To have an experience of God, according to Gregory, *apátheia* is the ultimate way; by it the soul is liberated from exterior activities and the pleasures of the world. And then the experience of God is attained in the silence of meditation on His word.¹⁸³ Gregory compares the pleasures of the world with the flesh, and the bone with virtues. The bone grows within the inside of the flesh, which means that the virtues grow up in the needed of pleasures of the world, in temptations.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Cf. ATHANASIUS, *Vita S. Antonii*, 46, (PG 26, pp. 909C-912B).

¹⁸² *Apátheia* (ἀπάθεια: impassibility, insensibility, calm, imperturbability) is the tranquility of the soul, to that one can control one's emotions, which easily lead him to sin. Saint Paul expresses this with: "While I am acting as I do not want to, I still acknowledge the Law as good, so it is not myself acting, but the sin which lives in me. And really, I know of nothing good is in me, the power to do it is not: the good thing I want to do, I never do; the evil thing which I do not want, that is what I do. But every time I do what I do not want to, then it is not myself acting, but the sin that lives in me. So I find this rule: that for me, where I want to do nothing but good, evil is close at my side. In my inmost self I dearly love God's law, but I see that acting on my body there is a different law which battles against the law in my mind. So I am brought to be a prisoner of that law of sin which lives inside my body; Rm. 7: 16-23". St. Anthony expressed *apátheia* as the purity of heart, ATHANASIUS, *Vita S. Antonii*, 14, (PG 26, pp. 864C-865B). EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, *Monachikos*, 56, (SCH 171, pp. 630-632); 64, (SCH 171, p. 648); 81, (SCH 171, p. 670); and asceticism is a way to have *apátheia*, *Monachikos*, 81, (SCH 171, p. 670).

¹⁸³ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 37, (BGM 1/3, p. 316): "In somnio enim exteriores sensus dormiunt et interiora cernuntur. Si ergo interna contemplari uolumus, ab externa implicatione dormiamus. Si ergo interna contemplari uolumus, ab externa implicatione dormiamus. Vox uidelicet Dei quasi per somnium auditur, quando tranquilla mente ab huius saeculi actione quiescitur et in ipso mentis silentio diuina praecepta pensantur. Cum enim ab externis actionibus mens sopitur, tunc plenius madatorum Dei pondus agnoscitur". *Mor.*, 5, 23, 51, (BGM 1/3, p. 334).

¹⁸⁴ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 52, (BGM 1/3, p. 334): "Cum enim flagellis prementibus omnis exterior uoluptas atteritur, internae fortitudinis ossa nudantur. Quid autem hoc loco carnis nomine nisi ipsa delectato carnalis accipitur? Vel quid per ossa nisi uirtutes animae designantur? Tabescit ergo caro, et ossa nudantur, quia dum flagellis argumentibus carnalis delectatio extenuatur, ea quae dudum quasi sub carne latuerant uirtutum fortia patefiunt. Nemo quippe quantum profecerit nisi inter aduersa cognoscit".

Gregory then stresses that in *apátheia*, the soul receives grace, which is a gift of God.¹⁸⁵ Thus *apátheia* is evidence the victory of the soul over temptations, the pleasures of the world; this paves the way to have an experience of God.¹⁸⁶ Gregory does not identify the world as bad, but Satan uses the pleasures of the world to disturb the soul preventing from having an experience of God.

3. UNION

The last phase in having an experience of God is union, in which the soul touches him with the soul's senses. As mentioned above temptations, which attack the soul while using the body's senses, are an obstacle to having an experience of God. To achieve this experience, the soul's senses must be in harmony with the body's senses; in this experience the body's senses do not disappear, but they are the channels to and from the soul.¹⁸⁷ The experience of God is stunning to reach incorporeal being, in and through corporeal beings,¹⁸⁸ which is called contemplation.¹⁸⁹ Actually there are many concepts of the experience

¹⁸⁵ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 52, (BGM 1/3, pp. 334-336): "Videlicet unusquisque superni doni gratiam in tranquillitate quietis percipit, sed quantum perceperit, in aduersitate perturbationis ostendit. Tabescat ergo caro ut nudentur ossa. Feriamur paternis correptionibus, ut quantum profecimus agnoscamus. Flagellis enim Domini pinguedo carnalis delectationis atteritur, sed uirtutum nostrarum ossa patefiunt. Decus nostrum exterius ipsa huius mundi aduersitate foedatur, sed quid in nobis intrinsecus latebat ostenditur".

¹⁸⁶ On another occasion, Gregory compares the pleasures of the flesh with the east wind in Tarsis, (*Ps.* 48: 7: It was the east wind, that wrecker of ships from Tarsis). He says that Tarsis is the searching of pleasure. And the situation of our soul is like the sea of Tarsis, which is agitated because of the east wind; this means that the soul is disturbed by temptations, by pleasures of the world. But it would be tranquil if it has compunction, *Mor.*, 1, 5, 35, (BGM 1/1, pp. 338-340).

¹⁸⁷ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 43, (BGM 1/3, p. 322).

¹⁸⁸ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 42, (BGM 1/3, p. 322): "Perfectum scilicet animam ista compunctio afficere familiaris solet, quia omnes imaginationes corporeas insolenter sibi obuiantes discutit, et cordis oculum figere in ipso radio incircumscriptae lucis intendit. Has quippe figurarum corporalium species ad se intus ex infirmitate corporis trahit. Sed perfecte compuncta hoc summopere inuigilat, ne cum ueritatem quaerit, eam imaginatio circumscriptae uisionis illudat, cunctasque sibi obuiantes imagines respuit." *Mor.*, 1, 5, 60, (BGM 1/1, pp. 442-444). Cf. C. BUTLER, *Western Mysticism: The teaching of SS. Augustine, Gregory the Great and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life*, E. P. Dutton & Co. INC., London 1951, pp. 76-77.

¹⁸⁹ The background of the contemplation is founded on the Jewish and Hellenistic traditions. In Jewish tradition, God communicated through his word, initially speaking through human agents, the judges, and the prophets. And then the Scripture is the central life of communion and the Jews meditated on it to have communication with

of God in Gregory's writings, because he formulates them sporadically according to the senses of the soul.

3.1. *Enigma*

Gregory says that an experience of God can be grasped through the eyes of the soul, which have the capacity to see God, but they would not see him perfectly; and they cannot penetrate what they see. Gregory compares this with the touching of a torrent of water, seeing it without being able to cross.¹⁹⁰ In his *Homiliae in Hiezechielem* Gregory is more concrete about the vision of God. He says that the glory of the Holy Spirit is seen in vision, but the eyes cannot see Him as He is exactly; he is only according to a certain likeness; it is not the vision of the glory, but in the likeness of glory.¹⁹¹ The reason is that the soul is still within the mortal condition of the body, which means that the glory of God cannot be seen as he is in himself,¹⁹² because of the body's weakness. To confirm his statement, Gregory cites Paul who shares his experience of God; he says that now we see God as in a dim reflection.¹⁹³

God. In the Hellenistic tradition, the influence of Plato was very dominant. Plato's explanation of the allegory underlines the message that in the soul's ascent to the intelligible region the idea of the good is the highest and ultimate vision. The philosopher who has beheld these divine contemplation (*theorion*), later described as the contemplation of essence and the brightest region of being by means of the eye of the soul, B. MCGINN, *The Foundations of Mysticism, The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, Crossroad, New York 1997, pp. 11, 29. C. BUTLER, *Western Mysticism*, p. 76-78. L. BORRIELLO stresses the rule of the New Testament, in which contemplation is intimate vital, knowing, quasi experimental of God, *Contemplazione*, in *Dizionario di Mistica*, p. 341. R. Gillet expresses contemplation by the capacity of the soul to be pervaded by the love of God, *Introduction*, Sch 32B, pp. 36-39.

¹⁹⁰ *Mor.*, 5, 22, 50, (BGM 1/3, p. 266): "In qua scilicet contemplatione dum mens in altum ducitur, subleuata uidet in Deo, quia non potest penetrare quod uidet, et quasi tangit aquam torrentis, quam pertransire non ualet; quia et intuetur speculando quod libeat, et tamen hoc ipsum perfecte non ualet intueri quod libet".

¹⁹¹ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 8, 30, (BGM 3/1, p. 262): "Quid enim in uniuerso mundo sancti Spiritus gratia agat aspiciens, ait: Hic erat spectus splendoris per gyrum. Quae uero interius eiusdem sancti Spiritus maneat, considerare uolens, sed sicut erat non ualens, subiungit: Et haec uisio similitudinis gloriae Domini. Non enim ait: Visio gloriae, sed similitudinis gloriae".

¹⁹² *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 8, 32, (BGM 3/1, p. 264): "Qua in re cum magno maerore pensare et considerare cum lacrimis debemus in quantum miseriam et infirmitatem cecidimus, qui et ipsum bonum ferre non possumus ad quod uidendum creati sumus".

¹⁹³ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 8, 30, (BGM 3/1, p. 262): "Vnde et ille praedicator qui raptus ad tertium caelum fuerat dicebat: Videmus nunc per speculum in enigmatate, (*1 Co.* 13: 12)". See also *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 5, 12, (BGM 3/1, pp. 176-178).

Before Gregory, Augustine presented the same meaning of dim reflection in refer writing about the experience of God. T. J. van Bavel shows the neoplatonic philosophy background of Augustine as he interprets Saint Paul, according to which God is ineffable and incomprehensible; and therefore God manifests himself in a dim reflection.¹⁹⁴ According to Augustine a dim reflection is something, which neither completely reveals nor conceals the Truth;¹⁹⁵ it is the understanding of little ones; the stronger ones perhaps can understand something more.¹⁹⁶ We shall see God face to face and we shall participate in his divinity after this life;¹⁹⁷ but here in this world we have to live by faith.¹⁹⁸

Both Fathers base their opinion on Pauline theology with neoplatonic philosophy as an instrument as how an experience of God is only a dim reflection. Through faith we can grasp something of the divinity of God in his ineffability and incomprehensibility, even in this life in the world. But Gregory has a particular approach; as on other occasions he is more advanced than Augustine, even than other preceding Fathers.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ T. J. VAN BAVEL, *God in Between Affirmation and Negation According to Augustine*, in *Augustine, Presbyter "Factum Sum"* (Editors: Joseph Leinhard, Earl C. Muller, Roland J. Teske), Peter Lang, New York 1993, pp. 73-81.

¹⁹⁵ AUGUSTINE, *De Diuersis Quaestionibus ad Simplicianum* 2, Praef., (CCL 44, p. 57): "Aenigma uero tamquam per speculum, sicut idem apostolus ait: Vidimus nunc per speculum in enigmate, nec euidentiorem detegit speciem nec obtegit ueritatem".

¹⁹⁶ *Sermo*, 117, 5, 8, (NBA 31/1, p. 12). *Enarratio in Psalmum*, 99, 6, (CCL 39, pp. 1396-1397).

¹⁹⁷ *Enarratio in Psalmum*, 146, 11, (CCL 40, p. 2130); *Enarratio in Psalmum*, 144, 6, (CCL 40, p. 2091); *De Trinitate*, 9, 11, 16, (NBA 4, p. 384); *Epistula*, 147, 15, 36, (CSEL 44, p. 309); *Epistula*, 147, 23, 53, (CSEL 44, pp. 329-330).

¹⁹⁸ *Sermo*, 21, 1, (CCL 41, p. 276).

¹⁹⁹ See also *Dial.*, 2, 35, 3, (SCh 260, p. 238): "Mira autem ualde res in hac speculatione secuta est, quia, sicut post ipse narravit, omnis etiam mundus, uelut sub uno solis radio collectus, ante oculos eius adductus est. Qui uenerabilis pater, dum intentam oculorum aciem in hoc splendore coruscae lucis infigeret, uidit Germani Capuani episcopi animam in sphaera ignea ab angelis in caelum ferri". *Dial.*, 2, 35, 5, (SCh 260, p. 240): "Fixum tene, Petre, quod loquor, quia animae uidenti creatorem angusta est omnis creatura. Quamlibet etenim parum de luce creatoris aspexerit, breue ei fit omne quod creatum est, quia ipse luce uisionis intimae mentis laxatur sinus, tantumque expanditur in Deo, ut superior existat mundo. Fit uero ipsa uidentis anima etiam super semetipsam. Cumque in Dei lumine rapitur super se, in interioribus ampliatur, et dum sub se conspicit, exaltata comprehendit quam breue sit, quod comprehendere humiliata non poterat. Vir ergo qui intueri globum igneum, angelos quoque ad caelum redeuntes uidebat, haec procul dubio cernere non nisi in Dei lumine poterat". Cf. P. CUSACK, *An Interpretation of the Second Dialogue of Gregory the Great, Hagiography and St. Benedict*, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter 1993, pp. 118-121.

3.2. *Darkness – Brightness*

Darkness is the third step in the experience of God according to the negative way. In his *Moralia in Iob* Gregory clearly says that the darkness is original sin, which produces death,²⁰⁰ and the weakness, which always leads to the sins or to the searching for the splendor of this world.²⁰¹ Often the mind is so ardent that although it is still within the flesh, still it is caught up into God hearing dominated every flashing thought.²⁰² This darkness causes the soul to deviate from the eternal light. Therefore darkness and light are locked in control in the carnal body,²⁰³ which is a negative manner of having an experience of God. God is ineffable and incomprehensible light to carnal thinking.²⁰⁴ In the ineffability and incomprehensibility of God, the soul is also led into obscurity. On this point, Gregory aims to say that in the obscurity about God, something is seen by the soul. The soul is lifted and then falls down because of corruptible flesh;²⁰⁵ therefore the soul does not know God really.²⁰⁶ Or on another occasion Gregory says that the soul approaches God to the measure that in conduces itself far from him.²⁰⁷ For Gregory eternal light is an object of experience, invisible

²⁰⁰ *Mor.*, 1, 4, 45, (BGM 1/1, p. 346): “Nox quippe illa, uidelicet consensus ad culpam quae ad nos primi parentis est excessu propagata, mentis nostrae oculum tanta obscuritate percudit, ut in huius uitae exilio, caecitatis suae tenebris pressus, quantalibet ui aeternitatis lumen intenderit, penetrare non possit. Post poenam namque damnati peccatores nascimur atque ad hanc uitam cum mortis nostrae merito uenimus”.

²⁰¹ *Mor.*, 1, 4, 45, (BGM 1/1, p. 346): “Et quidem multi in hac infirmitate carnis tanta uirtute roborati sunt ut resplendere mundo quasi stellae potuissent. Multi in tenebris uitae praesentis dum superiora de se exempla exhibent, astrorum ore nobis desuper lucent”.

²⁰² *Mor.*, 1, 4, 45, (BGM 1/1, p. 348): “Saepe autem ita mens accenditur, ut quamuis in carne sit posita, in Deum tamen omni subiugata carnali cogitatione rapitur”. JOHN OF THE CROSS expresses the dark night as suffering, pain, wound, sorrow, sickness and death, which are good for the spiritual life of the soul, because they bring it near to perfection; cf. John of the Cross, *Noche Oscura*, 1, 4, 1, p. 447. On the other hand, Pope JOHN PAUL II interprets this as the human and spiritual suffering, in *Master in the Faith, Apostolic Letter on the Occasion of the Fourth Centenary of the Death of Saint John of the Cross*, in *Catholic International*, pp. 203, 207.

²⁰³ *Mor.*, 2, 10, 17, (BGM 1/2, p. 150); *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 2, 12, (BGM 3/2, p. 60).

²⁰⁴ EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, *De Oratione*, 57, (MG 79, p. 1180A). Cf. H. EGAN, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, p. 69, says that Evagrius Pontus is the mystic of the light. He could equally be called the mystic of darkness.

²⁰⁵ *Mor.*, 2, 8, 50, (BGM 1/1, p. 662); 5, 23, 41, (BGM 1/3, pp. 320-322).

²⁰⁶ *Mor.*, 1, 5, 58, (BGM 1/1, p. 442).

²⁰⁷ *Mor.*, 5, 24, 11, (BGM 1/3, p. 348): “Cui ueritati tanto magis se longe existimat, quanto magis appropinquat, quia nisi illam utcumque conspiceret, nequaquam eam conspiceret se non posse sentiret”.

light, incorporeal light and infused,²⁰⁸ incorruptible and unchangeable light,²⁰⁹ the light of lights²¹⁰ or the source of light²¹¹ and unencompassed light.²¹²

As the other Fathers who deal with the negative manner to have an experience of God, so Gregory dwells on the relation of darkness and light. God is ineffable and incomprehensible light and the corporal flesh, can grasp something of this light.²¹³ In this situation, irradiation or absorption is the mediation or way out to relay the darkness and light, in which the soul experiences something of the eternal light, even the soul is being in the mortal flesh.²¹⁴ So in the irradiation or absorption of light, the soul has some bid of to experience God in this world.

²⁰⁸ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 5, 18, (BGM 3/2, pp. 140-142).

²⁰⁹ *Mor.*, 6, 31, 101, (CCL 143B, pp. 1619-1620).

²¹⁰ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 5, 16-17, (BGM 3/2, pp. 138-140).

²¹¹ *Mor.*, 6, 30, 8, (CCL 143B, pp. 1495-1496).

²¹² *Mor.*, 1, 5, 52, (BGM 1/1, pp. 432-434). *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 5, 16, (BGM 3/2, pp. 138-140; 2, 5, 18, (BGM 3/2, pp. 140-142).

²¹³ AUGUSTINE dwells on the character of the ineffable and incomprehensible God. He says that God is ineffable because he never had been expressed in his substance, not even to Moses, but always through the mediation of the creatures, *Enarratio in Psalmum*, 138, 8, (CCL 40, p. 1994). God is never similar can be found in this earth in his immutable essence, *Sermo*, 117, 6, 9-10, (NBA, 31/1, pp. 12-14). Therefore in his ineffability, nobody can explain his essence with any language, with any human word, *Contra Adimantum*, 7, 4, (CSEL 25/1, p. 129); 7, 11, (CSEL 25/1, p. 136). What you said about God is just his attribute, and whoever could speak about this attribute. God is incomprehensible, which means that we never fully understood God's name as revealed to Moses, *Enarratio in Psalmum*, 104, 4, (CCL 40, p. 1537), because God is not always intelligible, *Soliloquia*, 1, 8, 15, (NBA 3, p. 404); if you understand God, he is no longer God, because to understand God is absolutely impossible, *Sermo*, 117, 3, 5, (NBA 31/1, pp. 6-8); therefore what ever you understand about him in your mind, this is no God longer, *Sermo*, 21, 2, (CCL 41, p. 278). Cf. T. J. VAN BAVEL, *God in Between Affirmation and Negation According to Augustine*, pp. 77-80. The reason for the ineffability and incomprehensibility of God is that all creation, of course including people, is mortal and changeable, *Tractatus in Euangelium Ioannis*, 2, 2, (CCL 36, p. 12): "Quod nomen suum dixit famulo suo Moysi: 'Ego sum qui sum'; et: 'Misit me qui est'. Quis ergo hoc capiet, cum uideatis omnia mortalia?" *Enarratio in Psalmum*, 121, 5, (CCL 40, p. 1806): "Noli de te desperare, quia dixi: 'Ego sum qui sum'; quia tu modo fluctuas, et mutabilitate rerum et uarietate mortalitatis humanae percipere non potes quod est idipsum." Gregory of Nyssa also has the same idea, *De Beatitudinibus*, 6, (PG 44, pp. 1268B-1269C). Cf. M. AZKOUL, *St. Gregory of Nyssa and the Tradition of the Fathers*, Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995, pp. 75-80; he clarifies that Plotinus influenced Gregory. So Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine and Gregory have the same reason for the ineffability and incomprehensibility, which is the mortality and the changeableness of the flesh.

²¹⁴ Cf. *Mor.*, 1, 4, 45, (BGM 1/1, p. 348); 2, 10, 13, (BGM 1/2, pp. 144-146); 2, 10, 17, (BGM 1/2, p. 150).

3.3. *Sense of Hearing*

Hearing is a way to have an experience of God, by which the ears of the soul can grasp the voice of God. To explain this experience, Gregory cites the first book of *Kings*; when Elijah heard the voice of God, he covered his face.²¹⁵ This means that the soul hears the voice of God, which seeks to draw the person away from corporal images.²¹⁶ When the soul hears the voice of God, it wishes to leave the mortal flesh and be together with God. Gregory compares this situation of soul with starting at the door,²¹⁷ because before this Gregory says that to have an experience of God, is a process with the soul standing at the door, where it can hear the voice of God; the reaction of the soul is the will to leave corporal flesh and be together with him.²¹⁸

In his *Moralia in Iob*, Gregory says that the soul can hear the voice of God, provided that it enters into silence, in which the soul leaves exterior things and enters into the secret sanctuary of the mind, and there it consults God and hears in interior silence what is to be done publicly. So for Gregory silence is a way to have an experience of God;²¹⁹ and the contemplative has an experience of God in the soul. Gregory compares the contemplative with Moses as he entered the tabernacle.²²⁰ Moses went in and out of the tabernacle. In that tabernacle, Moses experienced contemplation, by which he consults with God, and learns what he has to do and say for the people.²²¹ The taberna-

²¹⁵ 1K. 19: 11-13: "A mighty hurricane split the mountains and shattered the rocks before Yahweh. But Yahweh was not in the hurricane. And after the hurricane, an earthquake; but Yahweh was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, fire; but Yahweh was not in the fire. And after the fire, a light mourning sound, and when Elijah heard this, he covered his face with his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then a voice came to him".

²¹⁶ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 1, 18, (BGM 3/2, p. 44): "Aurem enim intendere et faciem operire est uocem interioris substantiae audire per mentem, et tamen et ab omni specie corporea oculos cordis auertere, ne quid sibi in illa corporale animus fingat, quae ubique tota et ubique incircumscripta est".

²¹⁷ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 1, 17, (BGM 3/2, p. 44): "Hinc est etiam quod Helias, cum uocem Domini secum loquentis audiret, in speluncae suae ostio stetisse describitur et faciem uelasse, quia cum per contemplationis gratiam uox supernae intelligentiae sit in mente, totus homo iam intra speluncam non est, quia animam carnis cura non possidet, sed stat in ostio, quia mortalitatis angustias exire mediatur".

²¹⁸ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 1, 17, (BGM 3/2, pp. 42-44).

²¹⁹ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 38, (BGM 1/3, p. 316): "Relictis quippe turbis ad tabernaculum redire, est postpositis exteriorum tumultibus, secretum mentis intrare. Ibi enim Dominus consulitur et quod foras agendum est publice, intus silenter auditur".

²²⁰ *Ex.* 2: 11-25.

²²¹ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 38, (BGM 1/3, p. 316): "Tbique cogitationis intimae cacumen ascendunt, et legem quasi in monte percipiunt, dum postpositis tumultibus actionum tem

cle is the soul, and to consult is to hear the voice of God, which is an experience of God. The ears of the soul are always ready to hear the voice of God, even when the exterior senses are sleeping.²²²

3.4. *To savor*

In the explanation of temptation, Gregory says that bread is the figure of Jesus Christ, who comes down from heaven, and also the figure of divine teachings, the Scriptures and also of preaching.²²³ In the context of temptation, the heretics and the world also understand bread, in another sense namely as the pleasures of the world.²²⁴ So in order to have an experience of God, the soul must avoid these temptations. Gregory stresses that the soul can also have an experience of God through divine teachings, the Scriptures and preaching. The Scripture is the base of the others, because divine teachings and preaching are founded on it. The soul savors this Scripture, divine teachings and preaching as an experience of God, because God himself comes down from heaven through his words; the soul savors them as sweet to the taste.²²⁵ To grasp this sweetness, Gregory underscores the importance of *lectio divina*, which is presented in his *Homiliae in Hiezechielem*. He says that the word of God is very profound, like entering into the obscurity of a forest; there, to comprehend something of the mind, it must be read, meditated, ruminated.²²⁶

poralium, in contemplationis suae uertice supernae uoluntatis sententiam perscrutantur. Hinc est quod idem Moyses crebro de rebus dubiis ad tabernaculum redit, ibique secreto Dominum consulit et quid certius decernat agnoscit". *Mor.*, 5, 23, 37, (BGM 1/3, pp. 314-316).

²²² *Mor.*, 5, 23, 38, (BGM 1/3, pp. 316-318): "Hinc est quod sponsa in Canticis canticorum sponsi uocem quasi per somnium audierat quae dicebat: 'Ego dormo et cor meum uigilat, (*Cant.* 5: 2).' Ac si diceret: Deum exteriores sensum ab huius uitae sollicitudinibus sopio, uocante mente uiuacius interna cognosco. Foris dormio, sed intus cor uigilat, quia dum exteriora quasi non sentio, interiora sollerter apprehendo".

²²³ *Jo.* 6: 41, 51. *Mor.*, 5, 23, 49, (BGM 1/3, pp. 328-330).

²²⁴ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 49, (BGM 1/3, pp. 330-332); 5, 23, 50, (BGM 1/3, pp. 332-334).

²²⁵ *Mor.*, 2, 8, 50, (BGM 1/1, pp. 662-664); 5, 23, 43, (BGM 1/3, p. 322); *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 5, 12, (BGM 3/1, p. 178).

²²⁶ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 5, 1, (BGM 3/1, p. 168): "O quam mira est profunditas eloquiorum Dei. Libet huic intendere, libet eius intima, gratia duce, penetrare. Hanc quoties intellegendis discutimus, quid aliud quam siluarum opacitatem ingredimur ut in eius refrigerio ab huius saeculi aestibus abscondamur? Ibi uiridissimas sententiarum herbas legendo carpimus, tractando ruminamus".

3.5. *Sense of Touch*

In the context of hearing an experience of God, Gregory presents the other possibility with the sense of touch, which he writes in the *Moralia in Iob*. He confirms this type of experience of God with citations from the book of Ezekiel.²²⁷ A thousand cubits of water is the figure of fullness, which is God and the soul desires to be joined to this fullness. At the first measure, the water reached the ankles; this is the first step of having an experience of God; through conversion, the soul receives grace, which leads to desire. Therefore the soul searches for this fullness more and more and it finds it deeper, which Gregory describes as water reaching to the knees. And finally the water reaches the waist, which means that the soul, by avoiding the stimuli of the pleasures of the flesh,²²⁸ is nearing the fullness. Arrives at the fullness, we cannot cross the strum; it has arrived at some knowledge of what at delights in, and still the soul is not able to understand this acquisition perfectly.²²⁹

3.6. *Incarnation*

Gregory also presents the incarnation as an experience of God. This opinion is found in his book commenting on the *Canticum canticorum*, which describes the union of the bride and groom. Gregory says that unction is inseparable with odor; unction is the contemplation of God, which is the experience of God, because the union of soul and Christ.²³⁰ Oil is used in anointing; and Gregory holds that oil is a

²²⁷ *Ezk.* 47: 3-5: “The man went off to the east holding his measuring line and measured off a thousand cubits; he then made me wade across the stream; the water reached my ankles. He measured off another thousand and made me wade across the stream again; the water reached my knees. He measured off another thousand and made me wade across the stream again; the water reached my waist. He measured off another thousand; it was now a river, which I could not across; the stream had swollen and was now deep water; a river impossible to cross”.

²²⁸ *Mor.*, 5, 22, 50, (BGM 1/3, p. 266): “Qui iterum mittitur mille, et propheta per aquam usque ad renes ducitur, quia uidelicet tunc in nobis plenitudo operis exrescit quando in nobis percepta sapientia omnem quoque, in quantum possibile, delectationem carnis extinxerit”.

²²⁹ *Mor.*, 5, 22, 50, (BGM 1/3, p. 266): “In qua scilicet contemplatione dum mens in altum ducitur, subleuata uidet in Deo, quia non potest penetrare quod uidet, et quasi tangit aquam torrentis, quam pertransire non ualet; quia et intuetur speculando quod libeat, et tamen hoc ipsum perfectae non ualet intueri quod libet. Propheta ergo ad aquam quandoque peruenit, quam non pertransit, quia ad contemplationem sapientiae cum ad extremum ducimur, ipsa eius immensitas quae ex se hominem subleuat ad se”.

²³⁰ Cf. *Exp. in Cant.*, 20, (Sch 314, p. 100).

figure of the Holy Spirit; and in the experience of God, this same oil is received, which means that the Holy Spirit is received.²³¹ According to Gregory, this unction is called the incarnation into the soul,²³² which actually is the incarnation of God in the soul. The oil, which is used in this anointing, is perfumed, because it comes from heaven, which is different from all earthly perfumes. Therefore the soul smells the odor of this perfume as spread all over the things surrounding it,²³³ or in other words, the experience of God creates the good odor everywhere.

3.7. *The longing to have an experience of God*

Gregory often refers to the longing for an experience of God. He is not consistent about the longing for this experience, because he expresses different opinions about it. On one occasion, in his *Homiliae in Hiezechielem*, Gregory says that this experience of God lasts no more than a half hour²³⁴ in our soul, which is the temple of God.²³⁵

²³¹ *Exp. in Cant.*, 14, (Sch 314, p. 90): “Hoc oleo tunc unctus est, cum incarnatus: non enim prius homo extitit, et postmodum spiritum sanctum accepit; sed, quia spiritu sancto mediante incarnatus est, eodem hoc oleo tunc unctus est”.

²³² *Exp. in Cant.*, 21, (Sch 314, p. 102): “Dicamus huic ecclesiae, dicamus huic animae, sic amanti, sic aestuanti, in amorem sponsi sui, unde tantum desiderium perceperit, unde notitiam diuinitatis eius apprehenderet. Vnguentum effusum est diuinitas incarnata”, 23, (Sch 314, p. 104). THERESA OF AVILA, in her *Castillo Interior*, calls this stage spiritual marriage, in which God appears in the soul, God communicates with the soul, as he appeared to the apostles through the closed door when he said to them: “Peace be with you,” *Castillo Interior*, 7, 2, in *Obras Completas*, Edición Manual, Transcripción, Introducciones y Notas de Efrén de la Madre de Dios y Otger Steggink, 9ª Edición, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid 1997, p. 567: “Esperanza tengo que, no por mí, sino por vosotras, hermanas, me ha de hacer esta merced, para que entendáis lo que os importa que no quede por vosotras el celebrar vuestro Esposo este espiritual matrimonio con vuestras almas, pues trai tantos bienes consigo como veréis.” JOHN OF THE CROSS has the same idea, *Cántico Espiritual*, 12, 8, pp. 627-628; 14 y 15, 29-30, pp. 648-649; 20-22, 7, pp. 667-668. *Noche Oscura*, 2, 24, 3, pp. 543-544.

²³³ Cf. *Exp. in Cant.*, 20, (Sch 314, p. 100).

²³⁴ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 2, 14, (BGM 3/2, p. 64): “Cum ergo quies contemplatiue uitae agitur in mente, silentium fit in caelo, quia terrenorum actum strepitus quiescit a cogitatione, ut ad secretum intimum aurem animus apponat. Sed quia haec quies mentis esse in hac uita perfecta non potest, nequaquam hora integra factum in caelo silentium dicitur, sed quasi media hora, ut neque ipsa media hora plene sentiatur, cum praemittitur quasi, quia mox ut se animus subleuare coeperit, et quietis intimae lumine perfundi redeunte citius cogitationum strepitu, de semetipso confunditur, et confusus caecatur. Vita igitur contemplatiua quae illic hora quasi media dicitur apud Hiezechiellem prophetam non cubitus, sed palmus appellatur”.

²³⁵ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 2, 14, (BGM 3/2, p. 64): “Nos ergo templum illius sumus, in quorum mentibus habitare dignatur”. 2, 5, 17, (BGM 3/2, 140); 1, 5, 12, (BGM 3/1, pp. 176-178).

And in the same book, but in a previous paragraph, Gregory says that the longing is definite; it depends of the capacity to hold *apátheia*.²³⁶

In his *Moralia in Iob* Gregory also mentions the longing for an experience of God, but he does not say how long exactly the experience lasts; he just says that it does not last a long time.²³⁷ On this occasion Gregory seems to stress the reason why the experience of God is not long. Because it is recalled to itself by the immensity of light, but flesh still makes itself felt by the very weight of its corruption. It depends of calling into himself,²³⁸ the carnal temptations. Finally Gregory clarifies that the length of an experience of God cannot be determined; much depends on each person, on how emotions are controlled, on the status of *apátheia*, on how one is not under the influence of one's weaknesses and the temptations.²³⁹ The same idea is found in Augustine; he observes that to have experience of God cannot be predetermined: at times it is experienced hurriedly (*raptim*) and with brief reference.²⁴⁰

3.6. *The effect of having an experience of God*

We have seen that the soul could grasp an experience of God, but incompletely; this means that it will be completed after life in this world, so here below the capacity of the experience of God is limited. On another occasion, Gregory follows the argument of Augustine, who uses the newplatonian philosophy based on the argument of the ineffability and incomprehensibility of God. As we saw above, Gregory says that when the soul knows something about God clearly, it is not God anymore.²⁴¹ It is not about his essence, but about an image. One

²³⁶ Cf. *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 2, 12, (BGM 3/2, p. 60).

²³⁷ *Mor.*, 1, 5, 57, (BGM 1/1, p. 440): "Sed cum mens in contemplatione suspenditur, cum carnis angustias superans, per speculationis uim de libertate aliquid intimae securitatis rimatur, stare diu super semetipsam non potest". 1, 5, 57, (BGM 1/1, p. 442): "Nobis praesentibus spiritus transit quando inuisibilia cognoscimus, et tamen haec non solide sed raptim uidemus. Neque enim in suavitate contemplationis intimae diu mens figitur". 1, 5, 66, (BGM 1/1, pp. 448-450); 1, 5, 68, (BGM 1/1, pp. 452-454).

²³⁸ *Mor.*, 1, 5, 57, (BGM 1/1, pp. 440-442): "Quia etsi hanc spiritus ad summa euehit, caro tamen ipso adhuc corruptionis suae pondere deorsum premit." 1, 5, 57, (BGM 1/1, p. 442): "Quia ad semetipsam ipsa immensitate luminis reuerberata reuocatur".

²³⁹ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 43, (BGM 1/3, pp. 322-324).

²⁴⁰ AUGUSTINE, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 41, 10, (CCL 38, p. 468): "Ecce iam quadam interiore dulcedine laetati sumus, ecce acie mentis aliquid incommutabile, etsi perstrictim et raptim, perspicere potuimus".

²⁴¹ *Mor.*, 1, 5, 66, (BGM 1/1, p. 450): "Quia nimirum mens cum in contemplationis sublimitate suspenditur, quicquid perfecte conspiciere praeualet, Deus non est. Cum uero subtile aliquid conspicit, hoc est quod de incomprehensibili substantia aeternitatis audit".

of Gregory's examples is the experience of Elijah with the murmuring sound,²⁴² which designates the experience of God; his soul tastes God; his soul knows something about him.²⁴³ After Elijah heard the voice of God, he covered his face; this also means that it is in vain to seek to know God completely in this world, because he is incomprehensible and the soul reverences what human weakness cannot fathom.²⁴⁴ So the knowing something of God, which is to have an experience of God, makes the soul capable of expressing it one's concrete life; even the soul is found within a mortal frames. The odor of the oil of anointing is also the figure of virtue.²⁴⁵ This odor has characteristics: it spreads everywhere, and virtue has the same characteristic, it spreads not only within person, but also extends to other persons.²⁴⁶ Therefore the experience of God is not meant to confer a person one self, or to be egoistic, but it should turn toward one other people, and this is especially important for the Church. The actualization of the virtues in one's exterior life makes the experience of God, which is invisible, into a visible reality.²⁴⁷ To clarify his statement, Gregory provides a comparison; he says that the soul or the Church is like a building, which is large and tall. The largeness of this building is charity toward other peoples even toward one's enemies. The tallness is the figure of

²⁴² *1 K.* 19: 13: "And after the fire, a light murmuring sound. And when Elijah heard this, he covered his face with his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then the voice came to him".

²⁴³ *Mor.*, 1, 5, 66, (BGM 1/1, p. 450): "Sed spiritui commotionis et igni non inesse Dominus dicitur, esse uero in sibilum aurae tenuis non negatur".

²⁴⁴ *Mor.*, 1, 5, 66, (BGM 1/1, p. 450): "Vultui namque pallium superducere est ne altiora mens quaerere audeat, hanc ex consideratione propriae infirmitatis uelare; ut nequaquam intellegentiae oculos ultra se praecipitanter aperiat, sed ad hoc quod apprehendere non ualet, reuerentur claudat".

²⁴⁵ *Exp. in Cant.*, 14, (Sch 314, p. 92): "Odor unguentorum eius est flagrantia uirtutum, quas operatus est" .17, (Sch 314, pp. 94-96); 20, (Sch 314, p. 100). John of the Cross says that the flowers of the vineyard, which is figure of the soul, are the figure of the virtues, *Cántico Espiritual*, 17, 10, p. 658 ; 18, 5, p. 661.

²⁴⁶ *Exp. in Cant.*, 21, (Sch 314, p. 102): "Vnguentum effusum est diuinitas incarnata. Si enim sit unguentum in uasculo, odorem exterius minus; si uero effunditur, odor effusi unguenti dilatatur. Nomen ergo dei unguentum effusum est: quia ab immensitate diuinitatis suae ad naturam nostram se exterius fudit et ab eo quod est inuisibilis, se uisibilem reddidit".

²⁴⁷ Gregory indicates the virtues of knowledge, chastity, compassion, humility and charity, as the aroma or perfume of Church, *Exp. in Cant.*, 20, (Sch 314, p. 100): "Habet hic sancta ecclesia aromata, dum uirtute scientiae, uirtute castitatis, uirtute misericordiae, uirtute humilitatis, uirtute caritatis pollet".

the sublime comprehension of God by the soul. This building cannot become taller, if it largeness does not increase nor the contrary.²⁴⁸ Therefore the largeness and the tallness of the building must be equivalent.²⁴⁹ If the building is tall without sufficiently large, the building will collapse; and if the building too large, without the correct height, the building will have no artistic value.

In this statement, Gregory wants to stress the effect of the experience of God in a person. Virtue is a sign of this experience. It does not come from itself, but it is a transformation caused by the experience of God. Therefore the experience of God is measured through the virtues, transform a person. In his *Canticum Canticorum*, Gregory cites Saint Paul: "Through us is spreading everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Himself. To God we are the fragrance of Christ."²⁵⁰ He wants to show that the virtue comes from an experience of God, which means that it proceeds from God.²⁵¹ The soul, which has this experience, is led to actualize this virtue.²⁵²

Gregory also expresses the other way to express the experience of God, which is to indicate the attributes of God; it was affirmed by Gregory that God is ineffable and incomprehensible. He says, as we mentioned that this experience of God is sweet,²⁵³ beautiful,²⁵⁴ and powerful,²⁵⁵ or God is the Truth,²⁵⁶ love and joy,²⁵⁷ sweetness.²⁵⁸ All these are the attributes of God, not the essence of God; and everybody can speak about these. The particularity of a person, who has an experience of

²⁴⁸ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 2, 15, (BGM 3/1, p. 64): "Considerandum quoque nobis est quia latitudo ergo in aequalitate, altitudo uero in sublimitate tenditur. Latitudo ergo pertinet ad caritatem proximi, altitudo ad intellegentiam conditoris. Sed latitudo et altitudo aedificii uno calamo mensuratur, quia uidelicet unaquaeque anima quantum lata fuerit in amore proximi, tantum et alta erit in cognitione Dei. Dum enim se per amorem iuxta dilatat, per cognitionem se superius exaltat, et tantum super semetipsam excelsa fit, quantum se iuxta se in proximi amorem tendit".

²⁴⁹ *H. in Hiez.*, 2, 2, 15, (BGM 3/1, p. 66): "Latitudo ergo aedificati tanta est, quanta et altitudo".

²⁵⁰ 2 *Co.* 2: 14-15.

²⁵¹ *Exp. in Cant.*, 20, (SCh 314, p. 100).

²⁵² *Mor.*, 1, 5, 58, (BGM 1/1, p. 442).

²⁵³ *Mor.*, 2, 8, 50, (BGM 1/1, pp. 662-664); 3, 15, 20, (BGM 1/2, p. 448); *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 5, 12, (BGM 3/1, pp. 176-178); 2, 2, 8, (BGM 3/2, p. 56).

²⁵⁴ *Mor.*, 1, 5, 63, (BGM 1/1, p. 446).

²⁵⁵ *Mor.*, 1, 5, 60, (BGM 1/1, pp. 442-444).

²⁵⁶ *Mor.*, 5, 23, 42, (BGM 1/3, p. 322); 5, 24, 11, (BGM 1/3, p. 348).

²⁵⁷ *Mor.*, 1, 5, 63-64, (BGM 1/1, pp. 446-448).

²⁵⁸ *H. in Hiez.*, 1, 5, 12, (BGM 3/1, pp. 176-178); 2, 2, 8, (BGM 3/2, p. 56).

God, is that he incarnates these attributes in his life, the virtues in particular. For this person, the quality and the quantity are accentuated. This experience of God cannot be expressed adequately by words or by figures.²⁵⁹ And the best manner is with the living out of the virtues in one's concrete life.

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²⁵⁹ *Mor.*, 1, 5, 64, (BGM 1/1, pp. 446-448); 1, 5, 66, (BGM 1/1, pp. 452-454). PSEUDO DIONYSIUS, in the expression of experience of God, stresses the role of symbols, *Gerarchia Coeleste*, 2, 3, (SCh 58, p. 77-80). Cf. S. LILLA, *Introduzione*, in *Ps. Dionigi l'Areopagita: Gerarchia Celeste Teologia Mistica Lettere*, traduzione, introduzione e note a cura di Salvatore Lilla, Città Nuova, Roma 1993, pp. 9-10. JOHN OF THE CROSS says that the experience of God cannot be expressed perfectly by words; therefore it needs figures, *Cántico Espiritual*, Prologue, pp. 571-572.