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# Humility, Civility, and Vitality: Papal Leadership at the Turn of the Seventh Century

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### **Humility, Civility, and Vitality: Papal Leadership at the Turn to the Seventh Century**

In 416, Bishop Innocent I of Rome sent a colleague in Gubbio what was to become one of the most important set of liturgical instructions in early Christendom. Innocent composed his remarks on, inter alia, penitential discipline and prescribed gestures during the administration of the Sacraments to deter other bishops and their priests from improvising. He claimed that bishops of Rome, as successors of St. Peter, had the responsibility to authenticate ritual observances and achieve uniformity in Italy and elsewhere. Churches could not be left to alter or surrender valued practices because presiding priests or bishops thought them superfluous or ill suited to local tastes. Bishops of Rome, then and later known as popes, imposed order; their leadership should be as the apostle Peter's was (Cabié 1973). Even before Innocent's pontificate ended with his death in 417, he learned that he was expected to lead and, as the sacred text said, 'feed' flocks of Christians ( John 21: 17) wherever they pastured. So when crises jarred church officials or lay patrons remote from Rome and concerted action there seemed either impossible or inadequate to resolve them, the locals often appealed to Rome. And when in one church or region a doctrine seemed odd or discipline shabby in another, popes' opinions were summoned.

An instance: from several notable North African bishops, Innocent heard that colleagues in Palestine and elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean had mistakenly exonerated Pelagius, a popular yet ostensibly heretical teacher, who professed that the grace received at baptism was sufficient and that persons could live righteously without subsequent divine interventions. Innocent was told that Pelagius misled the bishops who found in his favor. In their presence, he referred to God's grace, yet, when not on trial, he alleged that goodwill was composed of--and perpetuated by--bursts of unaided,

good intentions--not by God's constant attention (Augustine 1904: 177). The heresy that developed around that allegation originated in Rome, where Pelagius taught for a time, but that had little to do with the African bishops' request. They asked Innocent to endorse their reading of the relationship between goodwill and grace because they looked to him as a reliable referee. And he agreed: 'one should not suppose any question resolved before Rome pronounces on an issue, he replied, even if that question is raised far from' St. Peter's See (Augustine 1904: 181,1; CSEL 44:702). To let locals in synods or conferences make critical decisions risked variations in doctrine or discipline that could dis-integrate the new faith, which the heirs of the apostle Peter, the popes, had been commissioned to secure. From them, the faithful could expect sound interpretations and trustworthy applications of sacred literature. From impressionable bishops swayed by the likes of Pelagius, Christians were much likelier to get views that were 'unjust, barbarous, and contrary to Christianity' (Augustine, 1904: 181.4; CSEL 44:706).

Such was the line taken by many popes in late antiquity and into the medieval periods; they were the church's umpires. Patriarchs of Constantinople understandably objected. They were closer than popes to the seat of government in the mid sixth century. To make Rome the repository of special wisdom was especially risky insofar as that city and church, as others in Italy, were often at the mercy of belligerent barbarous forces. Pope Leo I had deftly--yet only just--managed to save his city from Attila's Huns. Still, military matters aside, Leo explained, the apostle Peter had remained behind when Emperor Constantine moved his capital over a century before. The apostle Peter, as his bones and other relics of his ministry and martyrdom, stayed in Rome. No act of state or local bishop could make an emperor's Court a holy place (1881: 104,3).

At the start of his pontificate, nearly a century and a half after Leo's concluded, Pope Gregory I consolidated papal authority over the churches in Italy and extended Rome's influence on government decisions--those made locally, among Lombard leaders, and at the imperial Court in Constantinople. He

was known to have suggested that adroit, virtuous government officials might dictate to their churches, but such suggestions most often appeared in his commentaries on the Hebrews' scriptures (1963: 4, 74), which placed great stock in the piety of the Old Testament's most pious princes. There as well, in his exegetical work, but especially in his correspondence, Gregory exhibited interest in papal competence, power, prerogatives, and leadership. An old hand at politics when he was named pope in 590, he held the highest civic office in Rome from 570 to 574. He was the pope's principal representative at Court in Constantinople from 579 to 585. Hence, we would only be surprised if he had given little or no thought to the uses and abuses of power during his pontificate (590-604). Indeed, readers cannot browse what he composed during that stretch without stumbling across his reflections on humility, civility, and the quality of leadership (Müller, 2009), but in what follows we adapt to our purposes what has been called in this journal 'a practice perspective,' which 'remind us that the overwhelming majority of action takes place "on the hoof" and involves skilled, improvised in-situ coping' (Carroll, et. al. 2008: 367). Historical studies of the papacy often emphasize the influence of papal hierocratic theory, which elaborated the pedigree and competence of Rome's bishops. Gregory had a hand in developing that theory, and one ought not--and we will not--overlook some of his remarks to that effect. But the practice perspective (or, as it is also called, 'practice theory') encourages us to underscore the influence of the crises that require Pope Gregory to improvise, crises and opposition, which called on him to cope 'on the hoof.' Hence, we can illustrate his modus operandi without minimizing the importance of the rhetoric that braced his confidence in his competence (Carroll, et. al. 2008: 365-367, 373-375).

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The apostle Peter was often used as a hedge against dissent. Much as did the more outspoken fifth-century popes, notably Innocent I and Leo I, Gregory considered Peter first among the apostles--

and the chief source of Rome's authority as well as an exemplary leader. Peter's power was awesome. In Matthew's gospel (16:18-19) God promised to endorse his decisions to condemn some and absolve others, yet when those judgments appeared flawed and his behavior unfashionable, the apostle explained--rather than complained--to colleagues raising objections. He elected to reason with critics and to resist the temptation, *ex potestate*, to throttle them (1982: 11,27; CCSL 140A:907). Apprehensive flocks would hardly be drawn to or consoled by shepherds' growling. What drew and kept Christians together was what Gregory admired in monks when he lived among them in Constantinople and Rome, the inner strength that inclined shepherds--priests and bishops--to rely on persuasion not power. Monasteries were perfect places to incubate character and competence for leadership, which was why Gregory was aghast in 593, when Emperor Maurice barred colleagues in government service from entering convents (1982: 3,61). The pope's reply has been read as an assertion of the church's authority to dictate to the government (Boesch Gajano, 2004: 95), but it seems only an effort to ensure unimpeded access to a cloistered life. As for the emperor, he was trying to keep secular administrators and soldiers at their jobs. Gregory must have sensed that monasteries had become politically inconvenient, but the path from political to religious leadership had long been popular, and convents, he believed, helped those en route reach the point at which neither prosperity nor adversity seduced them to self-importance or self-pity, respectively (1982: 1,24). Their equanimity would attract others to the faith and to spiritual endeavor, much as did the apostle Peter's.

Somewhat ironically, therefore, Gregory anxiously monitored the material wellbeing of several Italian monasteries. They had been plundered by Lombards, but also victimized by church officials who coveted the convents' estates. In 599, the pope instructed a subdeacon at Naples to see that property unjustly seized be restored to the monastery of Saint Mark near Spoleto (1982: 9,88), where one of the Lombards' most active armies was headquartered. Imperial officials in Italy, particularly the exarch of Ravenna, appeared powerless to restrict its movements. The Lombards had crossed the Alps several

decades earlier and quickly found their full stride, harassing Catholic Christian bishops and convents. Gregory took it upon himself, alternatively, to organize military operations and offer terms for truces, but the exarch objected. Comforted, to an extent, by the sacred text's injunctions to obey God rather than men when circumstances forced the choice (1971: 1.7,3), the pope nonetheless was obliged to defend his 'interference' when the emperor scolded him. Gregory granted that he was punching well above his weight. The Lombards were clever and dishonest; they waged war promptly after promising peace. Yet they had also outmaneuvered the emperor's deputies in Italy. The Lombards were making every adversary look foolish, capturing large chunks of Italy, and threatening Rome. 'Roma relicta est'; the pope sensed that the exarch's troops had all but abandoned his city. He watched while the Romans trapped outside its defenses 'were leashed and led away like dogs.' But the local garrison remained alert and loyal, and the city's residents, along with many who found refuge with them were spared (Gregory 1982: 5,36; CCSL 140:306). As Gregory predicted at the start of his pontificate, dismissing as impractical the idea that Ravenna could protect Rome, to be bishop of the Romans he would have to become bishop of the Lombards as well (1982: 1,30).

Studies of current leadership practice typically resist 'carv[ing] up leaders' responsibilities into what, in some settings, could be considered as 'ideologically loaded' categories that distinguish between leadership and management and between management and counsel (Carroll, t. al. 2008: 373). Much the same must be said about leadership practice at the turn to the seventh century. Gregory's letters prove just that; there are no better demonstrations of the multiple, overlapping roles associated with papal leadership than those in his correspondence with Lombards, Franks, Christian missionaries, fellow bishops, and imperial officials. The Lombards, for example, were Arian Christians, who subscribed to a Christology that Rome condemned as heretical, so when Gregory wrote to their queen, Theodelinda, he nudged her farther from distortions of 'the true faith'--Rome's faith--while imploring her to remain close

enough to her husband, King Agilulf, to tilt him and their tribe toward peace with the empire and with Rome (1982: 9,68).

A further complication surfaced by 593. Theodelinda's advisers were not Arian Christians, but they advocated doctrinal positions demonized by Pope Vigilius during the 550s, positions that deviated in important ways from Rome's during Gregory's tenure. In his view, therefore, her advisers, along with the northern Italian bishops who thought similarly, had seceded from the Catholic Church and were, in the terms of the times, in schism. Gregory lectured the queen in a churlish letter that sounded as if he were struggling with secessionists for her soul (1982: 4,4), but the bishop of Milan, who was to make delivery, decided to withhold the letter and lecture, and Gregory later agreed that the most imprudent, offensive, passages ought to be purged. Revisions were made, and Gregory's displeasure arrived (1982: 4,37), yet the tact was probably unappreciated. What we know is that the pope was unable to wean the queen from mainstays at her Court who were estranged from Rome. But ten years later, he still valued Theodelinda's opposition to Arianism and apparent dedication to peace, both of which he underscored in a letter congratulating her on the birth and Catholic baptism of her son Adaloald. Diplomatically, he declined to answer the queen's favorites who had censured Rome's doctrines. He was too ill, he said, but he enclosed a copy of the council's decisions that had precipitated the schism, and intimated that any fair-minded study of such would vindicate his and his see's case (1982: 14,12).

This letter, one of Gregory's last, achieves what Lorenzo Dattrino calls an equilibrium between the gentle and the forceful (2009: 366). Yet Robert Markus may correctly sense the spirit of resignation in Gregory's final words for Theodelinda. Possibly the pope had 'come to accept that the queen and her circle's adherence to the schism could not be remedied' (1997: 138). Or had tact trumped his interest in disputing dissidents? Disengagement with the Lombards would have been unwise and unwelcome; the

pope would have again been blamed for the hardships that were bound to attend another Lombard siege of Rome.

His and Rome's best defense appears to have been Theodelinda's influence on her husband, although the pope tirelessly appealed to the emperor and his deputies for assistance. Rome was the pope's special preoccupation. Bishops were often their cities most powerful patrons (Kaufman 1996). On that count, history should judge Gregory kindly. He was named pope just as floods, famine, and plague assailed the city. Soon the Lombards would add to Rome's troubles, demanding a gargantuan sum as a precondition for peace talks (Gregory 1982: 2,38). Stress took its toll on the pope's health, nonetheless, he, his church, and his city survived. Grain from his Sicilian estates fed the city's population bulging with refugees from surrounding, defenseless towns. Lombards went elsewhere, and Gregory got around to addressing the more routine business associated with church finance and city management. When church properties turned an unsatisfactory profit, he appointed more effective administrators (Gregory 1982: 14,3). He pitched into the polemics prompted when Rome's workers were incited by unnamed agitators to walk off their jobs on the Sabbath. The Old Testament, they argued, prescribed rest and prohibited labor, but the pope answered by recalling that Christ's coming abrogated many of the Hebrews' laws and prohibitions, inspiring fresh, figurative interpretations of others. Furthermore, Jesus toiled on the Sabbath; so should all the faithful in turn-of-the-century Rome (1982: 13,1).

The city's labor and commercial life--along with what he judged to be misreadings of sacred literature that unsettled both--dispossessed the pope of the time he hoped to set aside to contemplate celestial rewards, as did the demands of what we would call disaster relief. It was, as Georg Jemal notes, 'charitable activity,' broadly defined (1988: 132-35). Writing to colleagues, Gregory touted the virtue of compassion for destitute neighbors and captive Christians, ranking it high among traits making leaders effective. Followers must feel that they can confide in their bishops, he specified, and, more important,



compassion shown to 'the lowest' is contagious, circulates widely, demonstrates the civic significance of Christianity, and consolidates social capital among the faithful (1982: 1,24). Gregory took charge but also delegated, expecting accountability from his agents. He told a Neapolitan subdeacon to ransom captives with the funds sent from Rome but also to supply a list of the redeemed, the places from which they had been snatched, the places to which they repaired when ransomed, and the employment they eventually found (1982: 6,32). The Roman church's revenues, augmented by his own, were spent on such projects, and he solicited fellow philanthropists. Theodore, a surgeon in Constantinople responded favorably with subsidies for the pope's Italian work, and Gregory sent a relic from Rome's extensive collection--a link in the chain that bound the apostle Peter just prior to his execution--with his thanks (1982: 7,25).

Relics were a leadership resource. Some bishops hoarded them--bones, clothes, implements associated with martyrdoms--memorabilia that all but turned their churches into museums. But relics were not just tokens of late antique Christians' nostalgia for a seemingly less complacent, more heroic age. They were believed to have the power to cure diseases and avert disasters. They were often only fragments, threads, shards, or splinters, yet long before popes made a habit of sending them as gifts, Bishop Victricius of Rouen explained (1985: 10; CCSL 64:84) that wherever the smallest something survived--ubi est aliquid--the power of the whole was present--ibi totum est. Relics inspired reverence. They were aids to worship, alongside which words, even those drawn into the liturgy from the faithful's favorite texts--might sometimes seem ineffectual. Gregory, generations after Victricius, appreciated the value of such sacred souvenirs. Exchanged for favors or funds, they conveyed more than papal gratitude. They were, in essence, Gregory's blessing, and he was unhappy when relics went missing. He wrote to the bishop of Otranto in 601, ordering him to reclaim and return a body stolen from a monastery near Rome and deposited in a church in Brindisi (1982:11,57).

Stolen or exported memorabilia ‘graced’ places they landed. Gregory was no thief, but, as noted, he was an enterprising exporter. Missionaries he sent to Gaul and Kent traveled with some of the pope’s precious trinkets and sent for more. If we may trust other missionaries’ reports, relics drew infidels to the faith, from the worship of sticks or stones to the worship of the Christians’ God and the church’s saints. So relics of the apostles and of others left Rome--apparently, with supplemental altar cloths and clerical vestments--to address what missionaries perceived as others’ insensitivity to the paranormality and splendor of Catholic Christianity (Kaufman 1996; Markus 1997).

Gregory’s controversial Dialogues were probably composed for something of the same purpose. Stories of saints’ and martyrs’ miracles, with a lengthy account of the life of Benedict of Nursia studded with wonders, the Dialogues puzzle interpreters. Scrupulous biographers are still confounded by their pragmatic subject’s credulity (Boesch Gajano 2004: 151-57). John Moorhead concedes that the stories’ ‘standing within the Gregorian corpus has been awkward,’ yet the revisionists, he maintains, have not succeeded in making their case that what now looks like sorcery was uncharacteristic or their realistic pope (2003:197). Conceivably, transcripts of the tales accompanied a number of relics from Rome on trips through Italy, to northern Europe, perhaps to the East as well. Chronicling the Lombards’ Italian adventures, Paul the Deacon (1978: 4,5, 146) was confident in the eighth century that Gregory had forwarded the Dialogues to Queen Theodelinda, whose resistance to Rome’s doctrine put her well within ‘the mission field.’ And, as Matthew Dal Santo suggests, (2010) that ‘field’ should be further expanded; Gregory’s Missionschrift was meant for skeptics as well as for infidels, secessionists, and heretics. Whether we imagine Theodelinda or other recipients marveling at or mistrusting what they were told (or read) about the saints or martyrs--and what they saw of the sacred souvenirs that arrived at their churches and convents, historians ought to classify both the Dialogues and the relics from Rome as ‘thaumaturgical’ tactics (Müller 2009: 409), which were significant and, one could reasonably identify as, signature elements of early medieval papal leadership. Gregory comprehended just that and was not

silent when he sensed that the cults of relics elsewhere were in jeopardy. He requested that the bishop of Spoleto set aside his reservations and consecrate sanctuaries for the three martyrs whose relics had been received in Rieti (1982: 9,49). When the founder of a convent in Sardinia grew impatient because his appeals for relics had fallen on deaf ears, he turned to the pope who endorsed the appeals, urging the local bishop to comply (1982: 4,8). The endorsement left unspecified where that bishop was to find the relics, although a Sicilian bishop charged with a similar commission was told by Rome to accept the relics from the founder's private collection (1982: 2,6). When the church of St. Stephen in Rimini had been burned and rebuilt, however, Gregory was ready to supply sacred souvenirs from his stash to replace the relics lost in the fire (1982: 6,45).

But there were limits. The pope's donations would not have included martyrs' body parts. To dismember the bodies of the religion's heroes was to invite trouble. Empress Constantina was told she could not have the head of the apostle Paul she summoned to Constantinople, insofar as previous plans to disturb Rome's sacred corpses had ended in the deaths of those exhuming and witnessing the results. True, a few Greek tourists returning from Italy claimed to have carried off--and to be selling--remains of Rome's saints, but they lied. They dug up what was left of men and women whose obituaries were obscure and passed them off as charred-- rather than rotting--fractions of their faith's most celebrated figures. Better, then, to have chains that bound the martyrs or swatches of cloth that they wore or that were placed near them for a time, because, in Rome and elsewhere in the West, Gregory explained to Constantina, 'it is intolerable and sacrilegious even to desire to touch the saints' bodies' (1982: 4,30; CCSL 140: 249).

Punishing prurient desire has a prominent place in the history of Christian discipline, although Gregory's regulation of relic cults returns us, for a time, from the practice of leadership to questions of competence. For restraint or self-discipline became, on his list of leaders' virtues, the sine qua non. The

problem was that 'external' honors attached to the church's most conspicuous leaders, and with honors came obligations and distractions. Cares weighed them down; ad ima, they would sink to the depths of despair, driven there by an awareness of unworthiness and of their inability to effect happy endings to envioning pastoral and political crises (1982: 7, 29; CCSL 140: 488). Still, the bishops were to cultivate precisely that awareness, which attested their humility and countered their desire for honor, although Gregory hastened to add, humility did not preclude leaders both coveting and earning their followers' trust.

Conrad Leyser (1991) analyses several of Gregory's emphatic 'protestations of weakness' and concludes that they 'constitute a discourse of power.' The pope's 'public rhetoric of vulnerability' did not signal embarrassment or disenchantment, Leyser remarks; Gregory's apparent candor about his supposedly uninspiring resume reflected his conviction that this wounded world was best served by leaders who exhibited their wounds and confessed their unworthiness. And making the fundamental qualification for high office in the church an awareness that one was unqualified to hold it, moreover, reinforced the claim that every salve for the world's wounds, every consolation for ordeals endured by faithful Christians, and all rewards for perseverance as well as perseverance itself came from God. What leadership studies in a largely secular academic world refer to as 'the humility factor' is something quite different from what the pope had in mind. Still, such studies--with evidence snatched from twentieth- and twenty first-century boardrooms--endorse Gregory's view that leaders professing indispensability were expendable; their hubris ill served the organizations they led. (Morris, et. al. 2005; Nielson, et. al. 2010).

For Gregory, the church's leaders must be constantly conscious of their limits and of the magnitude of the crises they faced (Müller 2009: 259-61). Street-level realities invariably complicated whatever lofty ambitions they might have had for the improvement of security or for the salvation of

souls. Although preliminary returns from the mission he sent to England gave Gregory hope for mass conversions, he was often found complaining that he rue the day he left his monastery in Rome. He preferred to see convents as places for prayer-filled escapes from this world, but, as pope, he was thrown into the convents' competitions for commercial rewards--for properties and revenues. He disliked litigation yet was forced to wade through lawsuits, investigate the terms of many convents' endowments and the allegations and grievances of heirs, abbots, and bishops. As we just discovered, Gregory himself added to the culture of complaint within the Italian churches, besieged relentlessly by aggrieved monks, clerics, and lay patrons as well as by disputatious secessionists and--by battalions of Lombards. He saw such 'sieges' as signs that this troubled world was nearing its end (1971: 1. 11,6).

Gregory apparently wanted this world's fragility and finitude to get clerics to contemplate eternity. Nonetheless, he would not have had colleagues disavow their responsibility to measure and meet the faithful's 'most basic needs' (Modesto 1989: 104). As a result of Christianity's success since Constantine and of the empire's misfortunes from the early fifth into the seventh centuries, churches in Italy, Gaul, Spain, and North Africa had annexed larger blocks of civic life, and bishops balanced pastoral with political responsibilities. To say that prelates were overwhelmed would be an understatement, yet that was the price for the church's 'untroubled supremacy.' Robert Markus (2006: 77-79) proposes that Gregory assumed and appreciated the gains and costs. He took special interest in the maintenance and improvement of the church's presence in Rome. He commissioned new construction and founded new monasteries. All might soon be wrecked, but Gregory tried to ensure that the church's part in that 'all' would magnificently convey its 'supremacy' (Boesch Gajano 2004: 62-67). Of course, the church and its clergy's pastoral presence was of a wholly different order. Its challenge was to counsel Christians as the world's end approached, to increase their numbers by preaching the gospel's good news that their ends would be the start of something better, and to enlighten this world's secular rulers as their governments suffered serious setbacks. To oversee the three challenges satisfactorily, shifting the horizons of others,

Gregory imagined, church leaders would have to summon up enthusiasm comparable to that of the apostles, which, in effect, constituted a fourth (1971: 1. 11,9).

Gregory could only be imprecise about the end of time, yet meeting the fourth challenge--to inspire zeal that would both inspire and console the faithful--hardly required precise knowledge. What popes needed to be useful to bishops and abbots was a compelling way to remind them that they were, to borrow Lorenzo Dattrino's paraphrase (2009: 355-56), representatives of the eternal in the temporal. They were proof that God's strength would compensate for their infirmity, that God's constancy would make them constant--make the vulnerable robust, and free the faithful caught in the coils of corruption (1971: 1. 11,29; CCSL 142: 184). The condition was that Christians exhibit humility in prayer and in leadership practices, and our decision to underscore that condition takes us, at a trot, to a crisis that tested Gregory's humility, to his confrontations with what he perceived as the inexcusable arrogance displayed by Patriarchs John IV and, from 595, Cyriacus II of Constantinople.

Claims for the papacy made by Gregory's predecessors could be construed as arrogant. Popes Innocent I and Leo I, as we learned, thought that bishops of Rome--as the apostle Peter's heirs--rightly had authority to intervene decisively in disputes far from their see. In the early sixth century, however, colleagues more closely associated with bishops of Constantinople started to address them as universal or ecumenical patriarch. Constantinopolitan incumbents welcomed the title; after all, many of them had an emperor's ear and could influence policy much more effectively than could prelates in Rome. Maybe Pope Leo was right to insist that Peter had not moved east with the government, but power definitely had--even the power to shape the fate of Italian churches. Predictably, Gregory objected and ordered bishops in Greece, who were still under his jurisdiction, to refuse to use the title when referring to the patriarchs. He explained to the Greeks in 599 that, semel et iterumque, he had repeatedly warned his colleagues in Constantinople to avoid the traps pride set for pontiffs, but that they ignored him. That

had not deterred him from further lectures. He reminded Constantinople how highly God regarded humility and how humility's enemy, who was also 'humanity's enemy' and God's rival--clever devil--tempted the church's preeminent bishops to boast, knowing that their boasting would set a terrible example for clerics who served with them. Gregory instructed his Greek correspondents to express searing indignation and opposition whenever synods used the title. Yet should his friends relent, he added, they would 'be denied the peace of the apostle Peter' (1982: 9,157; CCSL 140A: 715-16).

That last phrase looks like a threat. Was the pope pulling rank? Did he think that Rome could set other portions of the church adrift? His meaning, Johannes Modesto acknowledges, 'is not entirely clear' and keeps us guessing (1989: 211-12), and guesses that do not describe Gregory battling arrogance with arrogance can develop into plausible and persuasive clarifications. George Demacopoulos does well on that count, chronicling both intransigence in Constantinople and impatience in Rome and concluding--correctly, I think--that the pope never proposed a universal papal privilege to anticipate and counter authority that might be associated with the patriarch's offensive title. Apparent inflexibility in the East, however, did get Gregory to assert Peter's special status among the apostles, which translated as special standing for the bishops who presided over those sees connected with him--Antioch, Alexandria, and, of course, Rome--and who could and should, exercise Peter's prerogatives as the church's chief arbiter ('on this rock'), attest or contest the validity of conciliar decrees. But, *si unus . . . universalis est, restat ut vos episcopi non sitis*, the pope wrote, the standing of all bishops would be sabotaged, if any one bishop was called 'universal' and therefore was taken as the source for the spiritual authority of all. Bishops' credentials came from God (1982: 9,157; CCSL 140A 715; Demacopoulos 2009: 610-611).

Constantinople's case for prestige and power rested on concessions supposedly made at the fifth-century Council of Chalcedon by none other than Pope Leo I. The spectacle of one pope griping about the acquiescence of another may have spurred Gregory's friend Bishop Anastasius of Antioch,

another apostolic see, to persuade Rome to let the matter drop and tolerate the title, but Gregory's response inveighed against Constantinople's arrogance--again--and implied that its patriarchs had proven themselves bewildered, at best, and possibly complicit in the many heresies that infected churches in their vicinity (1982: 7,24). Patriarchs John and Cyriacus were pilloried, yet Anastasius escaped unscathed; the pope's answer was surprisingly civil (Müller 2009: 91-92). What he left unsaid was that evidence for Pope Leo's concession at or after Chalcedon ought to have fooled no one. It had been forged. Gregory circulated word the year before that trustworthy documents in Rome showed the Constantinopolitan claims to be bogus. Anastasius must have missed that his colleague in Rome was not just trumping patriarchal pride with papal humility and defending apostolic collegiality against a terrible spiritual despotism but also vindicating truth and exposing fraud (1982: 6, 14; Ducet 1996).

Karl Morrison comments on the pursuit of 'collegiality' in Gregory's letter to Anastasius. And a similar 'congeniality unmarked by thoughts of hierarchic precedence,' Morrison says, characterizes the pope's other letters to the incumbents in other apostolic sees. Consensus among the four--Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, with Constantinople, an influential fifth in tow at times--should represent the consent of the whole church, Gregory proposed, without advancing arguments for the superiority of his see or city. Morrison accepts that no previous pope 'exceeded Gregory in his devotion to the dignity of the Roman see, but, in replacing administrative and juridical supremacy with the virtue of humility as the cohesive element in the church,' the substitution stressed in this paper, 'Gregory departed fundamentally from Roman ecclesiology of the fifth century,' Pope Leo I's century. At the turn to the seventh century, Roman ecclesiology and the inferences Gregory drew from it were 'defensive rather than aggressive' (Morrison 1969: 133-36). In practice, this meant papal tolerance for local initiatives. Leading local bishops, who had been designated papal vicars, possessed considerable independence, what Johannes Modesto (1989: 176) calls 'jurisdictional latitude' (rechtlichen Spielraum). Important controversies, therefore, could be settled on site.



Gregory's letter to bishop and papal vicar Vergilius of Arles in 595 illustrates a measure of papal restraint. Gaul's problems, if we can credit the pope's analysis, were Falstaffian. Corrupt or benumbed bishops and corruptible priests presided over bloated churches. Simony was contagious; everyone who purchased promotion, the pope pointed out, was disposed to selling offices in his 'gift.' Outcomes were predictable and lamentable: lay patrons bankrolled unsuitable candidates in return for access to church properties and revenues; riskier still, the affluent yet ignorant, who never bothered to hear a sermon, were put to preaching. Gregory referred to the untrained and woefully unfit clergy in Gaul as 'uncured wood' that burned badly and, in building either a home or the church, would bear little weight before collapsing. But he left Vergilius with advice rather than with orders, advice to bind local barons to the cause of reform. To Vergilius, belonged final authority over all Gaul's bishops. None could transfer or even travel outside his diocese without the papal vicar's permission. As for insubordination, only the most unruly colleagues should be referred to Rome. Vergilius should judge all others and, if necessary, empanel twelve prelates to assist him. Hence, for the most part, despite the prevalence of corruption, reprimand and rehabilitation were entrusted to local, significant others (1982: 5,58).

There were conspicuously ineffective others. One could infer from Gregory's correspondence with Maximian, bishop of Syracuse and papal vicar in Sicily, that the pope was loath to relinquish any measure of control over the island's churches (Müller 2009: 304-5). The bill of complaints, filed in 593, suggests that Maximian lost control or never exercised it satisfactorily (1982: 4,11-12). Sicilian church property disappeared when left unattended. Ambitious, though insufficiently gifted persons were promoted. Clerics whose indolence should have disqualified them from holding any position of authority held several simultaneously. Sicily was critically important to sixth-century popes. The Roman church owned large estates there and, as noted, counted on the surplus from their estates to feed Romans in emergencies (Markus 1997). Gregory certainly had incentive to intervene decisively to appoint Maximian's successor early in 595. Yet he only urged resident officials to be circumspect in

selecting the next incumbent. He had reservations about the candidate likeliest to be named, favoring an alternative. The pope confided his choice to the deacon managing the papal patrimony in Sicily and may have hoped thereby to have that prelate drafted. Nonetheless, he specified that his views be kept secret. He acknowledged that his candidate's qualifications had not yet been--and would have to be--adequately reviewed. He let local deliberations take their course, declining, despite the strategic importance of the Sicilian sees, to have the last word (1982: 5,20).

The letters to Sicily and many others like them enable us to study papal leadership in practice and to assess Gregory's humility, civility, and vitality--'situated and socially defined'-- as Carroll, Levy, and Richmond have recommended (2008: 366-67). The irony is that the pope disliked being situated and socially defined. He repeatedly counseled clerical leaders not to let themselves become so 'situated' that they grow preoccupied with worldly affairs, yet he seems to have edged close to the very precipice he advised others to avoid (1982: 6,63). The preamble to his Dialogues concedes just that (1979: prol. 5), complaining that he was overwhelmed by problems posed by a church, sans frontières, by secessionists and heretics who were, in his judgment, counterfeit Christians, and by a city too often left undefended. But in that city, he found his voice; Barbara Müller calls Rome his 'practice field' (2009: 146-47). There, early in his pontificate, he identified for local clergy the virtues he most highly prized, the virtues that were most likely to be tested during their careers, humility and civility. But he also stipulated that the cultivation and preservation of those virtues should not to discourage church leaders from ladling out counsel liberally. He definitely did so, aware that, doing so, he could be tempted to overrate his place, among others, in God's purpose. His reason for persevering, particularly when opposed or obstructed, he added, was that he wanted good companions, in via Dei, on the path to God (1999; CCSL 141:43).

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Opposition and obstruction tormented Gregory, but they also provoked many of his most thoughtful remarks on leadership practice as well as his practice itself. That would hardly surprise Robert Chia and Robin Holt (2006), who steer Martin Heidegger into 'the practical turn in leadership studies,' to good effect. Ordinarily, Chia and Holt say, leadership strategy 'emerges non-deliberately, through everyday practical coping.' But leaders assign meanings and functions to themselves and to their relations with others most clearly when something or someone obstructs them. Hence, 'surprise and disruption of our . . . coping action and the experience of dissonance associated with it' stimulate profound reflection on leadership and, at the turn to the seventh century, tested some of the virtues Gregory associated with it--humility, civility and vitality. One wonders what he might have done, and how historians could retrieve it, had he not encountered colleagues' objections, Lombards' expeditions and disaffection, and patriarchs' self-assertion. At the time, predicaments presented by objections and opposition must have seemed like a plague on the papacy. From a distance, one could argue that they defined papal leadership. Chia's and Holt's interest is elsewhere; they want 'to construe actions to be non-deliberate and yet at the same time consistently strategic' (2006: 637, 642). Still, what Gregory's pontificate demonstrates is that 'disruption' and 'dissonance,' along with relics and rivals, shaped a critical chapter in the history of leadership in Italy.

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