

**CONTEMPLATIVE COMPASSION:
GREGORY THE GREAT’S DEVELOPMENT OF AUGUSTINE
ON LOVE OF NEIGHBOR AND LIKENESS TO GOD¹**

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Abstract

Gregory the Great depicts himself as a contemplative who, as bishop of Rome, was compelled to become an administrator and pastor. His theological response to this existential tension illuminates the vexed questions of his relationships to predecessors and of his legacy. Gregory develops Augustine’s thought in such a way as to satisfy John Cassian’s position that contemplative vision is grounded in the soul’s likeness to the unity of Father and Son. For Augustine, “mercy” lovingly lifts the neighbor toward life in God. Imitating God’s own love for humankind, this mercy likens the Christian to God’s essential goodness and, by this likeness, prepares him or her for the vision of God, which Augustine expects not now but only in the next life. For Augustine, the exercise of mercy can-when useful-involve a shared affection or understanding. Gregory makes this shared affection essential to the neighborly love that he calls “compassion.” In this affective fellowship, Gregory finds a human translation of the passionless unity of Father and Son-so that, for Gregory, compassion becomes the immediate basis for and consequence of seeing God-even in this life. Compassion does not degrade; rather, it retrenches the perfection of contemplation. Reconciling compassionate activity and contemplative vision, this creative renegotiation of Augustine and Cassian both answered Gregory’s own aspirations and gave to the tumultuous post-Imperial West a needed account of worldly affairs as spiritual affairs.

NOTE (8/2018, not in published edition): When in this paper I refer to the “direct” vision of God in this life, I mean not a vision of God’s essence, but an encounter with God that Gregory calls a “taste” or a “vision” which is ‘direct’ in not being anything mediated by or dependent upon the productive activity of the human mind.

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Introduction

Pope Saint Gregory the Great (r. 590–604) is today recognized for his energies as a civil administrator, his political vigor,² his missionary initiative,³ and—of course—his spiritual instruction.⁴ Yet he, without whom “the form of medieval Christianity” has been called “almost inexplicable,”⁵ remains somewhat mysterious. First, scholars find it difficult to assess the unity and character of Gregory’s theological thought, expressed chiefly in homiletic and pastorally-oriented writings. Second, there is the murkiness of Gregory’s relationships to his predecessors. While his debts to Augustine of Hippo and John Cassian are everywhere affirmed, the natures of these dependencies remain elusive.⁶ Writing on Gregory’s exegesis, Robert Markus offers a clue as to how one might approach this problem: “When you scratch Gregory,” he writes, “the blood you draw always seems to be Augustinian. And yet somehow the absolute gap persists” Markus opines that this gap is defined by Gregory’s *contemplative* orientation: More freely

² Admiration for administrative skill and political industry is expressed by Thomas F. X. Noble, “The Intellectual Culture of the Early Medieval Papacy,” in *Roma Nell’alto Medioevo* (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo, 2001), 179–219. See also Matthew dal Santo, “Gregory the Great, the Empire and the Emperor,” in *A Companion to Gregory the Great*, ed. Bronwen Neil and Matthew dal Santo (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 57–81; Bronwen Neil, “The Papacy in the Age of Gregory the Great,” in *A Companion to Gregory the Great*, 3–28.

³ Edward Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Random House, 2010), 3.24. See also Cristina Ricci, “Gregory’s Missions to the Barbarians,” in *A Companion to Gregory the Great*, 29–56 (n. 2); Jeffrey Richards, *Consul of God: The Life and Times of Gregory the Great* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 228–250; Robert A. Markus, “Gregory the Great’s Europe,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5th Series, no. 31 (1981): 21–36; Robert A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 178–185; Philippe Henne, *Grégoire le grand* (Paris: Cerf, 2007), 295–302.

⁴ From the vast body of relevant scholarship, I will cite works as necessary throughout this essay.

⁵ F. Homes Dudden, *Gregory the Great: His Place in History and Thought* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1905), 1:v.

⁶ Jean Leclercq notes a “slightly Eastern flavor which is hard to define” but, while acknowledging that Gregory “owes much to St. Augustine and to Cassian,” Leclercq finds it “difficult” “to assess his debt to the Fathers or to early monasticism.” Jean Leclercq, “St. Gregory, Doctor of Desire,” in *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi, 3rd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 5. John Moorhead calls it “maddeningly difficult to establish” Gregory’s “place in the context of preceding Christian thought.” Thus John Moorhead, “Introduction,” in *Gregory the Great*, ed. John Moorhead, Early Church Fathers (London: Routledge, 2005), 31–32. Moorhead continues: “[E]xplicit borrowings cannot be established” because “Gregory’s resolutely synthesizing mind . . . turn[ed] whatever he read to his own purposes.” With admiring frustration, Robert Markus writes: “Usually he covers his tracks so well as to expunge all identifiable traces of his sources” which, having “soaked into his mind,” later “re-emerge subtly transformed, sometimes scarcely recognisable, but always as his own.” Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World*, 17 (n. 3).

allegorical than Augustine, Gregory makes the text, in Markus’s words, “a springboard” for “a flight from hearing to seeing.”⁷ This “flight” is a movement from text to reality, from discursive thought to intuitive apprehension, and—at the highest peak—from faith to the direct intellectual vision of God. Gregory, Markus owns, would sculpt the whole Church into a “vast community of contemplation.”⁸ For, as Thomas Humphries points out, Gregory “parallels Augustine” on the relationship between contemplation and action but, while Augustine often defers contemplative vision to eternal life with God, Gregory shares “Cassian’s certainty that the contemplative life” of seeing God “is a regular part of [earthly] Christian existence.”⁹ Unlike Augustine, Gregory pursues direct vision as an earthly goal;¹⁰ unlike Cassian, Gregory asserts that this goal is attainable universally, by every “station among the faithful” (*fideliū officium*).¹¹

⁷ Robert A. Markus, “The Jew as a Hermeneutic Device: The Inner Life of a Gregorian Topos,” in *Gregory the Great: A Symposium*, ed. John C. Cavadini, Notre Dame Studies in Theology 2 (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 6. “Conversion, culminating in the life of contemplation . . . is the concern that drives Gregory’s exegesis.” Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World*, 43 (n. 3). This sort of movement from hearing to seeing is described by other scholars in Origen’s, Evagrius’s, and Cassian’s practices of passing through the allegorical interpretation of Scripture to vision. See Daniël Hombergen, “Gregorio Magno E L’ideale Contemplativo Nel Mondo Monastico Del Suo Tempo,” in *L’eredità Spirituale Di Gregorio Magno Tra Occidente E Oriente*, ed. Guido Innocenzo Gargano (Simposio internazionale Gregorio Magno 604–2004, Roma 10–12 marzo 2004, Negarine (Verona): Il segno, 2005), 37–66; Thomas L. Humphries, *Ascetic Pneumatology from John Cassian to Gregory the Great*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 178–182.

⁸ Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World*, 33 (n. 3).

⁹ Humphries, *Ascetic Pneumatology*, 185 (n. 7).

¹⁰ See Frederick Van Fleteren, “Augustine and the Possibility of the Vision of God in This Life,” *Studies in Medieval Culture* 11 (1977): 9–16. Gertrude Gillette writes that Augustine “wobbled on the question of whether it was possible to have a direct vision of God in this life, more inclined to the idea in his early life but then gradually abandoning it—at least as regards an intellectual vision of God—following St. Paul that ‘now we see dimly in a mirror but then face to face’ (1 Cor. 13:12). However, he never totally abandoned the possibility of seeing God even in this life with the eyes of the heart . . .” Such, however, was not the immediate *goal* of earthly life. See Gertrude Gillette, “Purity of Heart in St. Augustine,” in *Purity of Heart in Early Ascetic and Monastic Literature: Essays in Honor of Juana Raasch, O.S.B.*, ed. Harriet Luckman and Linda Kulzer (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999), 176.

¹¹ Gregory I, *Homiliae in Hiezechihalem (in Ezech.)*, 2.5.19. *Homiliae in Hiezechihalem; Omelie Su Ezechiele 2 (in Ezech.)*, ed. Vincenzo Recchia, trans. Emilio Gandolfo, Opere Di Gregorio Magno 3 (Rome: Città Nuova, 1993) [hereafter OGM 3/2], 142. Trans.: Gregory I, *Homilies on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, trans. Theodosia Tomkinson, 2nd ed. (Etna, Calif.: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 2008), 348. Si ergo nullum est fidelium officium, a quo possit gratia contemplationis excludi, quisquis cor intus habet, illustrari etiam lumine contemplationis potest. Please note that translations will be modified without notice for accuracy or emphasis, throughout this paper.

I contend that this theological blending of Augustine and Cassian bears significantly on a third crux of Gregorian scholarship—the so-called “problem of the two Gregories.”¹² His ecclesiastical correspondence shows him to have been a zealous Roman administrator; his theological works display a would-be monk who preferred contemplation over the busyness of the world. How to account for these seemingly-opposed inclinations? Bringing us back to the question of Gregory’s theology, George Demacopoulos argues that “[Gregory’s] particular theological commitments to asceticism and pastoral ministry *informed* his approach to administrative and diplomatic tasks.”¹³ Indeed, Gregory says as much himself, writing in his *Book of Pastoral Rule*:

[Christ] the Truth himself . . . , assuming our human nature [and] engag[ing] in prayer on the mountain and work[ing] miracles in the towns [Lk. 6:12] [,] gave a way of imitation to be followed by good rulers: Although in contemplation they strive already after highest things, yet by compassionating they ought to be entwined in the needs of the infirm. For indeed charity surges to great heights when it is compassionately drawn down to the lowly needs of neighbors. And the more it descends to the infirm, the mightier is its reach to the highest things.¹⁴

¹² I adopt this useful phrase from Kristina Sessa’s jacket comments on George E. Demacopoulos, *Gregory the Great: Ascetic, Pastor, and First Man of Rome* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015). See <http://undpress.nd.edu/books/P03214>. Accessed September 29, 2017.

¹³ Demacopoulos, *Gregory the Great*, 9 (n. 12). Emphasis added.

¹⁴ Gregory I, *Regula Pastoralis (past.)*, 2.5. *Regula Pastoralis; Regola Pastorale*, ed. Floribert Rommel, trans. Giuseppe Cremascoli, *Opere Di Gregorio Magno 7* (Rome: Città nuova, 2008) [hereafter OGM 7], 50. Trans.: Gregory I, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, trans. George E. Demacopoulos, Popular Patristics Series 34 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2007), 60. Hinc ipsa Veritas per susceptionem nobis nostrae humanitatis ostensa, in monte orationi inhaeret, miracula in urbibus exercet; imitationis uidelicet uiam bonis rectoribus sternens; ut etsi iam summa contemplando appetunt, necessitatibus tamen infirmantium compatiendo misceantur, quia tunc ad alta caritas mirabiliter surgit, cum ad ima proximorum se misericorditer attrahit; et quo benigne descendit ad infima, ualenter recurrit ad summa. See also Gregory I, *moral.*, 7.15.18. *Moralia in Job; Commento Morale a Giobbe 1 (I–VIII)*, ed. Paolo Siniscalco, trans. Emilio Gandolfo, *Opere di Gregorio Magno 1* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1992) [hereafter OGM 1/1], 556–558. Trans.: Gregory I, *Moralia in Job: Morals on the Book of Job*, trans. James Bliss, 3 vols. (South Bend, Ind.: Ex Fontibus, 2012), 1:344.

Holding thus that breadth in the practice of compassion redounds to greater height in contemplation, Gregory declares succinctly in the *Homilies on Ezekiel*: “he who, for his own sake, flies to heavenly desire through contemplation still, however, sweats over temporal matters for the advancement and advantage of his neighbors.”¹⁵ Such a claim is to us quite attractive—and yet it runs counter to much precedent. Despite prominent biographical exceptions, the general *theological* bent of Late Antique reflection on the vision of God opposes the notion that deep practical involvement in worldly life could directly upbuild rather than erode contemplative vision. For the interior quiet and conformity to God’s life that are pre-requisite to this vision are disrupted by the world’s conflict-fraught and fragmentary bustling.¹⁶ It is little wonder that Demacopoulos has few companions in his suggestion that Gregory’s hope has a *theological* basis. For Markus, in fact, Gregory’s was a “resolution longed for rather than achieved.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Gregory I, *Homiliae in Hiezechihelam (in Ezech.)*, 2.1.7 (OGM 3/2:30; Tomkinson, *Homilies*, 266–267) (n. 11). Et qui propter se ad caeleste desiderium iam per contemplatione euolat, adhuc tamen pro proeuctu et utilitate proximorum in rebus temporalibus desudat.

¹⁶ The question here is not about the possibility of sanctity in the world but of its consummation in perfect love and contemplative vision. Late antiquity abounds with holy men and women that set their wider communities in order. We find them in Athanasius’s *Life of Anthony*, Sulpicius’s *Life of Saint Martin*, Gregory’s Benedict in the *Dialogues*, and the example of many a Byzantine bishop. However, one observes in these cases a tension both existential and theological, and while the *practice* of such holy men and women would indicate that contemplative vision can be a regular feature of a life in the world, there is—especially in the pre-Gregorian West—a decided lack of theological development concerning *how* this might be so. Neither Augustine nor Cassian offers such an account, and the monastic tradition that Cassian carries westward suggests that life in the world is in fact opposed to that perfection which is requisite to the vision of God. Nor does the situation seem to have improved in the fifth and sixth centuries. Among the monk-bishops of Gaul, we find “contemplation” made accessible to every bishop, but only when defined exclusively as meditation upon Scripture (e.g. Julianus Pomerius). Or, we find a life of perfect love (requisite to vision) declared as attainable by the laity, but only to the extent that they are able to live what amounts to a monastic schedule of prayer and vigils added atop the daily distractions of farming and family life (e.g. Caesarius of Arles). Where contemplation meant aristocratic meditative study, it was impractical for the unlesured. Where contemplation meant the vision of God in the perfection of prayer, no theological anthropology on offer seemed able to escape the Cassianese imperative of the monastic enclosure or (better) the solitary retreat. There was, in short, no account of how, apart from monastic-style practice, a life of charity in the world could build toward and sustain the *interior* peak of love that was considered to be the immediate basis for seeing God.

¹⁷ Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World*, 19 (n. 3). “It was a resolution longed for rather than achieved; or, perhaps, achieved on the personal level of a life experienced and accepted, rather than on the level of a conceptually defined and clarified relationship of the two forms of life.”

Thus, while Markus gives an entrée to the question of Gregory's predecessors by raising the question of contemplative vision; and if Gregory himself makes contemplation flow from and lead to compassion; it is Carole Straw who points us again toward Augustine. Straw writes that it was Gregory who first "'invented' compassion, marking a watershed in Christian tradition" by using the verb *compatior* with uncommon frequency, and doing so with "the modern meaning of sympathetic understanding or empathy with other people." Yet, she continues, in doing so Gregory has drawn upon "Augustine [who] writes frequently of [the] *miser cordia dei* [as a] mercifulness that is *close* to compassion because it involves shared feelings."¹⁸ Can we find in this connection to Augustine a resolution of the Gregorian tension?

Building on the work of these and other scholars, I propose three points: First, Augustine of Hippo described Christian life in terms especially of *mercy*, which loves the neighbor in order to lift the neighbor toward a life in God. This mercy, by imitating God's own love for humankind, likens the Christian to God's essential goodness and so by likeness prepares for the vision of him, which Augustine expects not now but usually only in the next life. Second, for Augustine, this mercy can—when useful—involve a shared affection or understanding in which the Christian might more effectively through friendship lift the neighbor toward God. Third, Gregory transforms Augustine's teaching on mercy into compassion by making this shared affection *essential* to the neighborly love that, now seen as translating the embrace of Father and Son, can be the direct and immediate basis for the vision of God enjoyed in this life. Gregory's development of Augustinian thought thus makes contemplative vision a concomitant element of compassionate activity in the torn world of the post-Imperial West.

¹⁸ Carole Ellen Straw, "Gregory and Tradition: The Example of Compassion," in *SISMEL 2012*, 2014, 132. Emphasis added.

1. Augustine on Mercy's Likeness to Divine *Bonitas*

Augustine writes:

[T]he Lord himself declared, “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God” [Matt. 5:8]. . . . [Therefore,] let us hold [earthly beauties] cheap and choose him for our love, and by this love so cleanse our hearts through faith that the vision of God may find our hearts already purified.¹⁹

Such advice is common to the broad tradition of Late Antique Christianity. Purity of love was seen as having a particular likeness to *God's own* love, a likeness pre-requisite to the sight of him. And yet the question of *how* this love resembles God determines how one goes about practicing purity of heart. John Cassian, following Christ's prayer in John 17, draws his description of pure love from the union of Father and Son in the simple divine nature. In the tenth conference, Abba Isaac explains that only a ceaseless human love and single thought of God can imitate the divine love that flows to humans from the divine unity. Cassian has just recounted to Isaac how it was recently explained to the anthropomorphite Abba Sarapion that the divine majesty is “immeasurable and incomprehensible and invisible” because his “nature is incorporeal and uncomposed and simple” and could not “be apprehended by the eyes or seized by the mind.”²⁰ After adding his own affirmation of God's simplicity, Abba Isaac emphasizes that only those properly instructed concerning the divine nature can “attain to that purest form of prayer” free of any illusion of corporeal multiplicity.²¹ To define this prayer, Isaac describes how God's own “pure

¹⁹ Augustine of Hippo, *en. Ps.*, 84.9 (CCSL 39:1168–1169, trans. Boulding, WSA, *Expositions of the Psalms*, III/18, 212–213). *et dixit Dominus: Beati mundo corde, quia ipsi Deum uidebunt. . . . et contemnentes ista, illum diligamus, ut ipsa dilectione per fidem cor mundemus, et mundatum cor nostrum inueniat aspectus illius.*

²⁰ John Cassian, *Conlationes XXIII (Coll.)*, 10.3.3 (CSEL 13:288, trans. Ramsey, *Conferences*, ACW, 57:372). . . . *nec posse in illam inmensam et incomprehensibilem atque inuisibilem maiestatem aliquid huiusmodi cadere quod humana compositione ualeat ac similitudine circumscribi, quippe quae incorporea et inconposita simplexque natura sit quaeque sicut oculis deprehendi, ita mente non ualeat aestimari . . .*

²¹ John Cassian, *Coll.*, 10.5.3 (CSEL 13:291, trans. Ramsey, *Conferences*, ACW, 57:374). *Quae tamen si quis fuerit catholicis dogmatibus institutus ut gentilem blasphemiam detestabitur et ita ad illam orationis purissimam perueniet*

and indissoluble love” for the Christian soul comes forth from the simple “unity which the Father has now with the Son and which the Son has with the Father.” Christ himself prayed to the Father “that they all may be one as we are one” (John 17:22) and so, in contemplative vision, the undivided love flowing from their simple unity is “carried over into our understanding and our mind.” To reach this vision, Isaac teaches, the soul must be perfected in a like love: “all the yearnings of one’s heart” must “become a single and continuous prayer” so that “whatever we . . . understand . . . may be God.”²² This is the prayer of the pure heart that Abba Moses described, a heart “perfect and utterly clean . . . , unsullied by any passion.”²³

The simple unity of pure love is supported practically by Cassian’s ideal of solitary life in the undisturbed desert. To be sure, he does not exclude assistance toward one’s neighbor. In the first place, as Abba John cautions, excellence in the love of neighbor must be practiced both inwardly and outwardly before one departs the monastery for solitary life.²⁴ Nor may even the hermit refuse the call of the neighbor in need. However, Abba Theonas stipulates, for those who have advanced to this solitary life, neighborly action is a *contingent* necessity imposed by the fall, commanded by the loving Lord, and requisite to the fullness of love.²⁵ Ongoing involvement with the neighbor is not *intrinsic* to perfect love, and its exercise can impede or degrade the progress of

qualitatem, quae non solum nullam diuinitatis effigiem nec liniamenta corporea . . . in sua supplicatione miscebit, sed ne ullam quidem in se memoriam dicti cuiusquam uel facti speciem seu formam cuiuslibet characteris admittet.

²² John Cassian, *Coll.*, 10.7.2–3 (CSEL 13:293–294, trans. Ramsey, *Conferences*, ACW, 57:375–376). Quod ita fiet, cum omnis amor, omne desiderium, omne studium, omnis conatus, omnis cogitatio nostra, omne quod uiuimus, quod loquimur, quod spiramus, deus erit, illaque unitas quae nunc est patris cum filio et filii cum patre in nostrum fuerit sensum mentemque transfusa, id est ut quemadmodum nos ille sincera et pura atque indissolubili diligit caritate, nos quoque ei perpetua et inseparabili dilectione iungamur, ita scilicet eidem copulati, ut quidquid spiramus, quidquid intellegimus, quidquid loquimur, deus sit . . .

²³ John Cassian, *Coll.*, 1.6 (CSEL 13:13, trans. Ramsey, *Conferences*, ACW, 57:42–45). . . . nisi cor perfectum atque mundissimum deo semper offerre et intactum a cunctis perturbationibus custodire?

²⁴ John Cassian, *Coll.*, 19.9.1 (CSEL 13:543, trans. Ramsey, *Conferences*, ACW, 57:675–676).

²⁵ John Cassian, *Coll.*, 23.4.4; 23.5.6; 23.11.1 (CSEL 13:645, 647, 655, trans. Ramsey, *Conferences*, ACW, 57:793–794, 795, 801).

contemplation.²⁶ We can appreciate, then, why Abba Isaac interprets Christ's activities rather differently than will Gregory: Jesus entered the villages because "he himself did not need the support of withdrawal," but he prayed alone on the mountain to teach "by example" that "if we too wish to address God with purity and integrity of heart," we must "likewise draw apart from . . . the crowd" and, spiritually and physically, go to "the lofty mountain of solitude."²⁷

Augustine chooses a different metaphysical starting point and reaches different practical prescriptions: To define the pure heart's likeness to God, he looks to the object of the heart's love—God's essential goodness, his *bonitas*.²⁸ For, as Augustine writes, "each one is such as is his love."²⁹

[B]y the only-Begotten himself, he calls us to his own Likeness. . . . [All this] takes place by the great goodness of God, which [goodness] we are commanded to imitate, if we wish to be children of God.³⁰

²⁶ John Cassian, *Coll.*, 1.8.1; 14.9.3 (CSEL 13:14, 408, trans. Ramsey, *Conferences*, ACW, 57:46–47, 512).

²⁷ John Cassian, *Coll.*, 10.6.4 (CSEL 13:292, trans. Ramsey, *Conferences*, ACW, 57:375). Quod uolens noster dominus confirmare ac perfectae nobis relinquere puritatis exempla, et quidem cum ipse fons inuiolabilis sanctitatis ad obtinendam eam secessionis adiutorio ac solitudinis beneficio extrinsecus non egeret (non enim poterat ullis turbarum sordibus puritatis plentitudo maculari nec contaminari humano consortio qui uniuersa polluta emundat atque sanctificat), secessit tamen in *monte solus orare*, per hoc scilicet nos instruens suae secessionis exemplo, ut si interpellare nos quoque uoluerimus deum puro et integro cordis affectu, ab omni inquietudine et confusione turbarum similiter secedamus, ut in hoc corpore conmorantes ad similitudinem quandam illius beatitudinis, quae in futuro repromittitur sanctis, uel ex parte aliqua nos aptare possimus, sitque nobis *omnia in omnibus deus*.

²⁸ Augustine, like Cassian, describes purity or cleanness of heart in terms of "simplicity," intending a singleness of love and intention, by way of ordering all loves with reference to God, thus with a meaning other than Cassian's. On Augustine, see Gillette, "Purity of Heart in St. Augustine" (n. 10).

²⁹ Augustine, *ep. Io. tr.*, 2.14 (SC 75:180, trans. NPNF1, 7:475). "Hold fast rather the love of God, that as God is eternal, so you also may remain in the eternal: because such is each one as is his love. Love the earth; you shall be earth. Love God, what shall I say? You shall be god? I dare not say it of myself. Let us hear the Scriptures: *I have said, You are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High* [Ps. 82:6]. If then you would be gods and sons of the Most High, *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world* [1 John 2:15]." tenete potius dilectionem Dei, ut quomodo Deus est aeternus, sic et vos maneatis in aeternum: quia talis est quisque, qualis ejus dilectio est. terram diligis? terra eris. Deum diligis? quid dicam? deus eris? Non audeo dicere ex me, Scripturas audiamus: *Ego dixi, dii estis, et filii Altissimi omnes*. si ergo uultis esse dii et filii Altissimi, *nolite diligere mundum, nec ea quae sunt in mundo*.

³⁰ Augustine of Hippo, *De serm. Dom.*, 1.23.79 (CCSL 35:88–89, trans. NPNF1 6:32–33). [P]er ipsum unigenitum, ad similitudinem suam nos uocat. . . . [M]agna dei bonitate fit, quae nobis imitanda praecipitur, si filii dei esse uolumus.

Embracing and imitating God's *bonitas*, one is likened to that goodness; being thus likened, one is ready to see him.³¹

What, however, is the path into conformity with God's goodness? To discover the Christian life of *bonitas*, Augustine—like Cassian—looks to *God's* life. However, he draws not on a direct analysis of God's immanent love but from God's economic *manifestation* of love in the *human* life of Christ incarnate. Augustine turns to Christ's human life because that is where God has seen fit to teach us. The sin-darkened heart (John 1:5) cannot grasp the Word directly (John 1:1–4),³² therefore, Augustine tells us, God “prepared” the Word “to be seen by the eyes of flesh as well.”³³ By becoming incarnate, God the Word translated his divine life into a human life, somewhat “as when we talk,” “our thought . . . takes on the form of spoken utterance.”³⁴ Christ's “example of

³¹ The soul turned toward God in love becomes good as God is good, as in Augustine, *trin.*, 8.3.5 (CCSL 50:274, trans. Hill, WSA, *The Trinity*, I/5, 245). “[T]he Good to which the [intellectual] soul turns in order to be good is that Good from which it gets its being [intellectual] soul at all. This is when the will accords with nature to perfect the soul in good, when the will turns in love toward that Good by which the soul is . . .” Ad hoc se igitur animus conuertit ut bonus sit a quo habet ut animus sit. Tunc ergo uoluntas naturae congruit ut perficiatur in bono animus cum illud bonum diligitur conuersione uoluntatis unde est . . . Henry Chadwick writes: “[Augustine’s] repeated point is that the object of our love, whether high or low, is the magnet irresistibly drawing us on. We become what we love;” thus Henry Chadwick, *Augustine: A Life*, Reprint edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 96. See also John Bussanich, “Goodness,” *AttA*, 390–391.

³² Augustine, *s. 261*, 6 (SPM1:92, trans. Hill, WSA, *Sermons 230–272*, III/7, 213). For the impure of heart “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it [John 1:5]”—and “[w]hat is the darkness but evil works? What is the darkness, but evil longings, pride, avarice, ambition, envy?” Ecce quare non capis : *Lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt*. Quae sunt tenebrae, nisi opera mala? Quae sunt tenebrae, nisi cupiditates malae, superbia, auaritia, ambitio, inuidentia?

³³ Augustine, *doctr. chr.*, 1.12.11 (CCSL 32:12, trans. Hill, WSA, *Teaching Christianity*, 2nd ed., I/11, 111). Et cum sano et puro interiori oculo ubique sit praesens, eorum qui oculum illum infirmum immundumque habent, oculis etiam carnis apparere dignata est.

³⁴ Augustine, *doctr. chr.*, 1.13.12 (CCSL 32:13, trans. Hill, WSA, *Teaching Christianity*, 2nd ed., I/11, 111). Sicuti cum loquimur, ut id, quod animo gerimus, in audientis animum per aures carneas inlabatur, fit sonus uerbum quod corde gestamus, et locutio uocatur, nec tamen in eundem sonum cogitatio nostra conuertitur, sed apud se manens integra, formam uocis qua se insinuet auribus, sine aliqua labe suae mutationis adsumit: ita uerbum dei non commutatum caro tamen factum est, ut habitaret in nobis. He writes similarly in *Io. eu. tr.*, 17.1 (CCSL 36:170, trans. NPNF1, 7:111). “[A]s the soul did not know him by whom it was to be healed, and had eyes in the flesh by which to see corporeal deeds, but had not yet sound eyes in the heart with which to recognize him as God concealed in the flesh, he wrought [corporeally] what the soul was able to see, in order to heal that by which it was not able to see;” quia ipsa anima non eum nouerat a quo sananda erat, et oculos habebat in carne unde facta corporalia uideret, nondum habebat sanos in corde, unde Deum latentem cognosceret; fecit quod uidere poterat, ut sanaretur unde uidere non poterat.

how to live” translated the divine life “in no other mode than the human one.”³⁵ By conforming themselves to this translation, Christians advance on a “way . . . traveled by the affections,”³⁶ a voyage unto likeness by which their minds are “purified to enable them to perceive [God’s] light and to cling to it once perceived.”³⁷

Christ’s commands tell us how to imitate God’s *bonitas*; therefore, the purifying way of the affections is especially the love of God and neighbor.³⁸ His example shows that this love takes the form of “mercy” (*miser cordia*).³⁹ Referencing the good Samaritan, Augustine explains:

If anyone is rightly to be called “neighbor,” either to whom the duty of mercy [*officium misericordiae*] is to be extended, or by whom it is to be extended to us, it clearly follows that . . . our Lord and God himself willed to be called our neighbor; for the Lord Jesus Christ indicates himself as the one who came to the help of that man lying half dead on the road, beaten and left there by robbers.⁴⁰

³⁵ Augustine, *doctr. chr.*, 1.11.11 (CCSL 32:12, trans. Hill, WSA, *Teaching Christianity*, 2nd ed., I/11, 110). Quod non possemus, nisi ipsa sapientia tantae etiam nostrae infirmitati congruere dignaretur et uiuendi nobis praeberet exemplum non aliter quam in homine, quoniam et nos homines sumus.

³⁶ Augustine, *doctr. chr.*, 1.17.16 (CCSL 32:15, trans. Hill, WSA, *Teaching Christianity*, 2nd ed., I/11, 113). Porro quoniam in uia sumus nec uia ista locorum est sed affectuum . . .

³⁷ Augustine, *doctr. chr.*, 1.10.10 (CCSL 32:12, trans. Hill, WSA, *Teaching Christianity*, 2nd ed., I/11, 110). purgandus est animus, ut et perpiscere illam lucem ualeat, et inhaerere perspectae.

³⁸ Augustine, *ench.*, 32.121 (CCSL 46:113–114, trans. Hill, WSA, “Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Charity,” I/8, 342). “*The end of the commandment is charity, and God is love* (1 John 4:8). So whatever God commands, such as, *You shall not commit adultery* (Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18), and whatever is not commanded but advised for spiritual reasons, for instance, *It is well for a man not to touch a woman* (1 Cor. 7:1), is rightly observed only when it is done out of love of God and of one’s neighbor because of God.” *Finis praecepti est caritas, et: Deus caritas est.* Quaecumque ergo mandat deus, ex quibus unum est: *Non moechaberis*, et quaecumque non iubentur sed spiritali consilio monentur, ex quibus unum est: *Bonum est homini mulierem non tangere*: tunc recte fiunt cum referuntur ad diligendum deum, et proximum propter deum.

³⁹ On mercy according to Augustine, see Allan Fitzgerald, “Mercy, Works of Mercy,” *AttA*, 557–561.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *doctr. chr.*, 1.30.33 (CCSL 32:25, trans. Hill, WSA, *Teaching Christianity*, 2nd ed., I/11, 120–121). Iam uero si uel cui praebendum uel a quo nobis praebendum est officium misericordiae, recte proximus dicitur; manifestum est hoc praecepto, quo iubemur diligere proximum . . . et ipse deus et dominus noster proximum se nostrum dici uoluit. Nam et se ipsum significat dominus Iesus Christus opitulatum esse semiuiuo iacenti in uia afflicto et relicto a latronibus.

Christ’s human mercy echoes his *divine* love for humankind, issuing from his essential character. Thus Augustine writes, “[God] renders mercy to us [*praebet misericordiam*] on account of his goodness [*propter suam bonitatem*].”⁴¹ God needs no good from humanity; he loves humankind “to our benefit and not his,” “that we should enjoy him” forever.⁴² *Misericordia* is therefore the outward expression of that love by which God wills to gather even *fallen* humanity into “the eternal perfection of all joys,” a union in God’s life in a common “direct contemplation of God the Father.”⁴³ *Misericordia*, John Cavadini writes, is “part of [the] eternal essence” that will be seen in beatitude, wherein God “*is* the content of that vision.”⁴⁴

God’s ingathering love originates in the divine *bonitas* and flows outward into human history as mercy in that it communicates goodness to others; and by this communication it draws human beings back into the inner life of love that they have forsaken. The love of the pure heart, then, desires and loves God for his very *bonitas*, but simultaneously it loves the neighbor—even the

⁴¹ Augustine, *doctr. chr.*, 1.30.33 (CCSL 32:25, trans. Hill, WSA, *Teaching Christianity*, 2nd ed., I/11, 120–121). The full passage reads: “[God] renders mercy to us on account of his goodness, but we [render mercy] to one another on account of his [goodness, not ours]. He has pity on us so that we may enjoy him, while we have pity on each other again so that we may all enjoy him.” Ille enim nobis praebet misericordiam propter suam bonitatem, nos autem nobis inuicem propter illius: id est, ille nostri miseretur, ut se perfruamur, nos uero inuicem nostri miseremur, ut illo perfruamur.

⁴² Augustine, *doctr. chr.*, 1.31.34–1.32.35 (CCSL 32:25–26, trans. Hill, WSA, *Teaching Christianity*, 2nd ed., I/11, 121). See especially 1.32.35: Ille igitur usus qui dicitur dei, quo nobis utitur, non ad eius, sed ad nostram utilitatem refertur, ad eius autem tantummodo bonitatem. . . . Haec autem merces summa est, ut ipso perfruamur et omnes, qui eo fruimur, nobis etiam inuicem in ipso perfruamur.

⁴³ Augustine, *trin.*, 1.8.16–1.8.17 (CCSL 50:50, trans. Hill, WSA, *The Trinity*, I/5, 76). Haec enim nobis contemplatio promittitur actionum omnium *finis* atque aeterna perfectio gaudiorum. . . . De hac contemplatione intellego dictum: *Cum tradiderit regnum deo et patri* [1 Cor. 15:24], id est cum perduxerit iustos quibus nunc *ex fide* uiuentibus [cf. Rom. 1:17] regnat *mediator dei et hominum homo Christus Iesus* [1 Tim. 2:5] ad contemplationem dei et patris. In his *Enarrationes*, Augustine writes of mercy as God’s granting of good to those who do not deserve it: “[I]n showing us mercy God convinces us that whatever good we humans have, we have only from him who is our total good. When we see that whatever good we have, we hold not from ourselves but from our God, we also see that whatever is praiseworthy in us comes from God’s mercy, not from our own merits;” thus *en. Ps.*, 84.9 (CCSL 39:1167, trans. Boulding, WSA, *Expositions of the Psalms*, III/18, 210). Ostendo enim illi misericordiam suam, persuadet illi quia quidquid boni habet ipse homo, non habet nisi ab illo qui omne bonum nostrum est. Et cum uiderit homo quidquid boni habet non se habere a se, sed a Deo suo; uidet quia totum quod in illo laudatur, de misericordia Dei est, non de meritis ipsius.

⁴⁴ John Cavadini, “God’s Eternal Knowledge According to St. Augustine,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. David Vincent Meconi and Professor Eleonore Stump, 2nd Edition, Cambridge Companions to Philosophy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 42.

enemy—so as to desire and love that neighbor’s share in the inexhaustible good of God. By such a love of God and neighbor, the love that goes forth from God’s *bonitas* is returned in echo, as it were, to him.

Quite different than Cassian, then, Augustine’s practice of a purifying and God-like love does *not* tend toward withdrawal from the world, much less idealize self-alienation from all human community. As the good God has mercy that humanity may enjoy him, so, Augustine writes, “we have mercy on each other again so that we may all enjoy him.”⁴⁵ This mercy is lived best *within* a community of faith and love, even amidst worldly society. Such is Augustine’s path to the vision of God.

2. Augustine on Mercy as Sometimes Compassionate

For Augustine the practice of mercy is through friendship, forgiveness, almsgiving, preaching, and prayer—the general concourse of human relations in godly love. The earthly Christian life strives not for a simple love focused exclusively upon the thought of God but for a focusing of loves by *referring* them all to God.⁴⁶ Further distancing himself from Cassian’s radically untroubled love, Augustine introduces a note of empathy, even unto co-suffering. For *misericordia* means “wretched-heartedness.” Thus Augustine can say that, when Christ by his incarnation “came to the help of that man lying half dead on the road, beaten and left there by robbers,” he “*took pity on us*” (*miseretur nostri*).⁴⁷ Here are the seeds of Gregory’s teaching on compassion.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Augustine, *doctr. chr.*, 1.30.33 (CCSL 32:25, trans. Hill, WSA, *Teaching Christianity*, 2nd ed., I/11, 120–121). nos uero inuicem nostri miseremur, ut illo perfruamur

⁴⁶ Augustine, *doctr. chr.*, 1.4.4-1.5.5 (CCSL 32: 8-9), 1.22. 21 (CSEL 32: 17-18), and 1.26. 27-1. 27. 28 (CSEL 32: 21-22).

⁴⁷ Augustine, *doctr. chr.*, 1.30.33 (CCSL 32:25, trans. Hill, WSA, *Teaching Christianity*, 2nd ed., I/11, 120–121). Emphasis mine in English translation.

⁴⁸ In addition to Straw’s “Gregory and Tradition” (n. 18) see the helpful discussion of Augustine’s development on this and related matters in Susan Wessel, *Passion and Compassion in Early Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 98–129. As Sarah Byers puts it, Augustine’s mature understanding of *misericordia* “is not merely a disposition to do helpful things for others, but also to be sensibly affected by their suffering,” a disposition that is not “mere sentimentality” because in light of God “the emotion of compassion is caused by an accurate

What does Augustine’s merciful pity look like? Carole Straw observes that, whereas the Stoic tradition shunned any share in one’s neighbor’s suffering as a threat to the interior unity of one’s heart, Augustine saw it as a *useful* act of self-extension in love.⁴⁹ Around the year 400, analyzing the word *miseriordia* in his *Confessiones (conf.)*, Augustine writes: “Now, if one suffer in one’s own person, it is the custom to call this *miseria*. But when one suffers with another, then it is called *miseriordia*.”⁵⁰ Yet over a decade earlier, in 388, in his *De moribus ecclesiae Catholicae (mor.)*, he excluded *miseria* from the essence of *miseriordia*. There, he writes that God is “wretched-hearted” or “merciful” (*misericors*) toward his creatures in that he wills their good, unto a full-hearted involvement in their lives—but he suffers no painful feeling in result. God is divinely *misericors* without misery, compassionate without passion. Human beings, then, can be called *misericors* when they “dutifully and humanely supply all things required for warding off” the “evils and distresses” of others. The motive is the key: True, Augustine admits, the usual sense of *miseriordia* refers to what “makes wretched [*miserum*] the heart of one co-suffering [*condolentis*] another’s ill.” However, the “wise” are *misericors* in acts of charity that, undertaken to alleviate others’ sufferings, are “drawn forth by the duty of goodness.” They need feel no pain to be motivated and may even act “free of *miseria*.” That precisely wherein all such acts can be considered merciful is not in co-suffering but in willing the neighbor’s *good*.⁵¹ Any co-

judgment about the loss of real goods” maintaining “a distinction in magnitude between temporal goods and eternal goods;” thus Sarah Byers, “The Psychology of Compassion: Stoicism in City of God 9.5,” in *Augustine’s City of God: A Critical Guide*, ed. James Wetzel (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 148.

⁴⁹ Straw, “Gregory and Tradition,” 132 (n. 18). Augustine reproaches the Stoics with a “stiffness of inhumanity” (*rigore inhumanitatis*) for fleeing suffering. Augustine, *mor.*, 1.27.54 (CSEL 90:57, trans. NPNF1, 4:56).

⁵⁰ Augustine, *conf.*, 3.2.2. *Confessions*, ed. James Joseph O’Donnell, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 16. Trans.: Boulding, WSA, *The Confessions*, Rev. ed., I/1, 76. cum ipse patitur, miseria, cum aliis compatitur, miseriordia dici solet

⁵¹ Augustine, *mor.*, 1.27.53 (CSEL 90:56, NPNF1 4:56). Quare illa omnia, quibus huiusmodi malis incommodis resistitur, qui officiose atque humiliter praebent, misericordes uocantur, etiamsi sapientes usque adeo sint, ut iam nullo animi dolore turbentur; nam quis ignoret ex eo appellatam esse misericordiam, quod miserum cor faciat condolentis alieno malo? Et quis non concedat ab omni miseria liberum esse debere sapientem, cum subuenit inopi, cum esurienti cibum praestat potumque sitiendi, cum uestit nudum, cum peregrinum tecto recipit, cum oppressum liberat, cum

suffering is consequent upon rather than essential to one's merciful involvement in the neighbor's life.

However, in the year 406 a few years after the *conf.* and nearly two decades after the *mor.*, Augustine goes farther, to write that the *misericos* ought to welcome *miseria* in their love of neighbor. *Misericordia* works to alleviate the neighbor's burdens *by bearing* them (*alterius onera portare* cf. Gal. 6:2). By bearing one another's burdens, Christians form a community of mercy (cf. Eph. 4:2). The love that participates in the neighbor's burden is the love by which one begins to see God.⁵² This participation is carried even further in Augustine's roughly contemporaneous (405) *Epistle 82* to Jerome. Freely intermixing *compatior* with various forms of *misericos* and *misericordia*, Augustine writes that pure-hearted mercy bears the neighbor's burdens not only by exterior participation in the neighbor's lot but also *interiorly* by bearing them precisely *as one's own*. By compassionating, one loves one's neighbor as oneself.⁵³

To "compassionate" (*compatior, compati*), then, is to enter "mercifully" (*misericorditer*) into an affective and cognitive fellowship with one's neighbor. Augustine speaks of the "feeling of the one co-suffering" (*compatientis affectum*)⁵⁴ that "administers the care of wretched-hearted healing for all the ills of all others, as if they were one's own."⁵⁵ Now, to compassionate is not to feel pain *at* another's suffering. Nor is it simply to mirror the *feelings* of another. Rather, one feels pain or gladness because one has "stepped into the shoes" of the other and, from that stance, reacts to the

denique humanitatem suam usque ad sepulturam porrigit mortuorum? Etiam si id faciat mente tranquilla, nullis aculeis doloris instinctus, sed adductus officio bonitatis, *misericos* tamen uocandus est. Huic enim nihil obest nomen, cum absit *miseria*.

⁵² Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.*, 17.8–9 (CCSL 36:174–175). Augustine writes that love, drawing near to God by bearing the neighbor's hurts, fulfills the command: "take up your bed and walk" (John 5:8).

⁵³ Augustine, *Ep.* 82.27–29 (CCSL 31A:116–117, trans. Teske, WSA, *Letters*, II/1, 331).

⁵⁴ Literally, the "feeling of the [one who is] compassionating."

⁵⁵ Augustine, *Ep.*, 82.27 (CCSL 31A:117, trans. WSA, Teske, *Letters*, II/1, 331). *aliorum omnium malis omnibus, tamquam si sua essent, misericordis medicinae diligentiam procurando*

objects of the other's experience, *from the other's perspective*.⁵⁶ Compassionate mercy shares in another's affective experience *because* it shares in another's cognition of the world. "Compassion," writes Carole Straw, "implies shared understanding, sympathy with another's point of view."⁵⁷ Thus does it bear another's burdens as one's own.

Still, this co-suffering fellowship in another's ills is always with a view to *alleviating* them.⁵⁸ The other's experience of those objects, therefore, must not define the interior horizon in which one compassionately evaluates them. For instance, Paul the Apostle became "a Jew among the Jews" (1 Cor. 9:20) in order to free them for Christ. He practiced Jewish sacraments to express to them his understanding of their desire "to be cleansed from their sins and to be saved."⁵⁹ Paul sees beyond, to the final source of salvation in Christ but, by this intimate understanding, Paul (and the Christian that imitates him) is able to "help the other as he would have wanted the other to help him."⁶⁰ And so, like the Samaritan, one imitates the Incarnation, by which God mercifully and compassionately came to us in a manner suited to us, to show us something beyond us. Thus is compassion rooted in the imitation of God's *ad extra* love, the *misericordia* flowing from his *bonitas*, by which he bore our burdens to gather us into his life. Christian charity likens the

⁵⁶ Contemporary parlance sometimes identifies this as "empathy" in contradistinction to "sympathy." However, as "sympathy" has a broader connotation in academic discourse, I do not wish to rely on contemporary terms. Cf. n. 57 *infra*.

⁵⁷ Straw, "Gregory and Tradition," 131 (n. 18). More fully, she writes that, when Augustine joins *compatior* to *misericordia*, he "frees [compassion] from its Stoic context as a description of cosmic, medical, or literal harmony. Compassion is shared feeling, not just of suffering; compassion implies shared understanding, sympathy with another's point of view." Straw cites, as I do, Augustine's *Ep.* 82. Here, "sympathy with another's point of view" is not to be confused with the "sympathy" as popular discourse distinguishes it from "empathy."

⁵⁸ Augustine maintains, as in *mor.*, his emphasis on the interior intention.

⁵⁹ Augustine, *Ep.*, 82.28 (CCSL 31A:117, trans. Teske, WSA, *Letters*, II/1, 331). uel per uetera sacerdotia sua caeremoniarumque obseruationes se a peccatis posse mundari fierique saluos existimabant, sic liberare cupiebant

⁶⁰ Augustine, *Ep.*, 82.29 (CCSL 31A:117, trans. Teske, WSA, *Letters*, II/1, 331). Vide si non dixit: fiere tamquam ille, ut illum lucrifacias! Non utique ut ipsum delictum fallaciter ageret, aut se id habere simularet, sed ut in alterius delicto quid etiam sibi accidere posset attenderet, atque ita alteri tamquam sibi ab altero uellet misericorditer subueniret, hoc est non mentientis astu sed compatiens affectu . . . non simulando quod non erat, sed compatiendo quia esse potuisset, tamquam qui se hominem cogitaret, omnibus omnia factus est, ut omnes lucrifaceret.

Christian to the life of God, but the merciful compassion through which that charity is exercised is not so clearly rooted. Augustine leaves implicitly unresolved the question of whether a life of compassion is compatible with the earthly reception of the contemplative vision of God.

3. Gregory the Augustinian—Compassion’s Likeness to the Trinitarian Life

Augustine made *compati* an act in aid of a more general *miser cordia*. Gregory, as Carole Straw points out, “elevates compassion to a principle or general rule, as the form [that] love takes among human beings.”⁶¹ Susan Wessel notes that Gregory went beyond his predecessors to make compassionate charity a “bonding agent that joined the transcendent to the worldly in the person of the bishop.”⁶² As we saw at the beginning of this paper,⁶³ the bishop’s compassion is the downward counterpart to his upward contemplation. Now we can confront Gregory’s relationship to Augustine in order to understand his universal contemplative aspirations. That is, by considering how Gregory’s *compassio* develops Augustine’s *miser cordia*, we will be able to posit the theological *why* and *how* of his confidence in the possibility of contemplative vision for those in worldly life.

To begin with, recall that Augustine and Cassian alike seek love’s purity in its likeness to God’s own love. Gregory derives his characterization of godlike love not simply from the fact of the Incarnation but especially from the love that Christ showed *in his crucifixion*:

He who is good [*bonus*] not from some accidental gift but essentially says: “I am the good shepherd.” He adds the form of his same goodness, which we are to imitate, saying: “the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep” [John 10:11].

He did what he taught; he showed what he commanded.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Straw, “Gregory and Tradition,” 139 (n. 18).

⁶² Wessel, *Passion and Compassion*, 166 (n. 48).

⁶³ See quotation at n. 14.

⁶⁴ Gregory I, *in euang.*, 1.14.1. (SC 485:316). Trans.: Gregory I, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. David Hurst, Cistercian

God's essential goodness is shown in his crucifixion not only by its function in drawing us into God's life but also specifically—and here Gregory departs from Augustine—*specifically* in the knowledge that Christ gains by his cruciform participation in universal human suffering:

He would have loved us too little, except he took upon himself our wounds as well; For he found us subject to suffering, and mortal beings, [and] to show how great the virtue of compassion is, he deigned to become in our behalf what he would not have us be, that in his own Person, temporally, he should take upon himself death, that he might banish death from us forevermore. . . . [Such] good will surpasses [that] of one giving [aid only by outward action].⁶⁵

By Christ's love upon the Cross, we learn compassion to be the very *essence* of God-like love:

True compassion is to join, out of generosity, in the suffering of one's neighbor [Christ] decided to aid [us] . . . by dying, because he would not have exhibited to us the force of his love unless he himself underwent . . . that which he was to take away from us.⁶⁶

Studies 123 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 107. Ecce enim is qui non ex accidenti dono, sed essentialiter bonus est, dicit: *Ego sum pastor bonus*. Atque is eiusdem bonitatis formam quam nos imitemur adiungit dicens: *Bonus pastor animam suam ponit pro ouibus suis*. Fecit quod monuit, ostendit quod iussit.

⁶⁵ Gregory I, *moral.*, 20.36.69. *Moralia in Iob; Commento Morale a Giobbe 3 (XIX–XXVII) (moral.)*, ed. Paolo Siniscalco, trans. Emilio Gandolfo, Opere di Gregorio Magno I (Rome: Città Nuova, 1997) [hereafter OGM 1/3], 158. Trans. Bliss, *Moralia*, 2:472 (n. 14). Nos uidelicet minus amasset, nisi et uulnera nostra susciperet Sed ut quantua esset uirtus compassionis ostenderet, fieri pro nobis dignatus est quod esse nos noluit, ut in semetipso temporaliter mortem susciperet, quam a nobis in perpetuum fugaret. . . . [E]nim dantis manum bona uoluntas uinceret

⁶⁶ Gregory I, *moral.*, 20.36.68–69 (OGM 1/3:156–158, trans. Bliss, *Moralia*, 2:471–472) (n. 65, 14). Quamuis uera compassio est passioni proximi ex largitate concurrere [Mediator] subuenire tamen moriendo hominibus uoluit nec uim nobis suae dilectionis ostenderet, nisi hoc quod a nobis tolleret ad tempus ipse sustineret. In a similar vein, although not applying it directly to the Incarnation, Gregory defines *miseriordia* as a divine attribute in *moral.*, 20.32.63 (OGM 1/3:150–152, trans. Bliss, *Moralia*, 2:466–467) (n. 65, 14). Such names “are derived to [God] from human qualities,” “descending to words expressive of infirmity, so that as it were a kind of steps being made for us, and set beside us by the things that we see close to us, we may sometime be enabled to mount up to the high things of him.” Haec namque omnia ab humanis in illum qaulitatibus tracta sunt, dum ad nostrae infirmitatis uerba descenditur, ut quasi quibusdam nobis gradibus factis, et iuxta nos positis, per ea quae nobis uicina conspiciamus ad summa eius ascendere quandoque ualeamus. “While, therefore, there is a coming down to the words of our mutability, by those, as being made a kind of steps, let him, who is able, mount up to the immutability of God, that he may see One showing jealousy without jealousy, one wroth without wrath, one repentant without sorrow or repentance, full of commiseration [*misericors*] without a wretched heart.” Dum ergo ad uerba mutabilitatis nostrae descenditur, ex eis

To be clear: Gregory nowhere attributes suffering to the divine essence. Why, then, does Gregory go farther than Augustine, to make this willing knowledge of the neighbor's experience essential to that in which human love imitates divine love? I propose this answer: For Gregory, compassion is not merely the *outcome* of a love by which one imitates God's mercy *ad extra*, the love for creatures that flows from divine goodness. Rather, compassion *is* the love by which human beings imitate God's love *ad intra*, the love that binds the Father and the Son. Compassion is not the divine economy as humanly lived; compassion is the divine *life* as humanly lived. Compassionate love imitates not only God's essential *bonitas* but also the Son's eternal divine knowledge and love of the Father (i.e. the immanent life into which one is drawn). For Gregory, the compassionate love of Christ's death echoes the Trinitarian embrace:⁶⁷

[T]he Lord immediately adds here: "Just as the Father has known me, and I recognize the Father and lay down my life for my sheep" [John 10:15]. As if to say openly: "In this it is certain that I know the Father and am known by him: that I lay down my life for my sheep. That is, by the charity by which I die on behalf of the sheep, I show how much I love the Father."⁶⁸

quibusdam gradibus factis ascendat qui potest ad incommutabilitatem Dei, ut uideat sine zelo zelantem, sine ira irascentem, sine dolore et paenitentia paenitentem, sine misero corde misericordem.

⁶⁷ Gregory has already signaled that the godhead is the root of what Christ expresses in his compassionate death. He maintains that focus by invoking the Father's knowledge of the Son; therefore, I understand as *divine* the filial love and knowledge here in view. He does *not* locate suffering within the Godhead. Instead, the suffering that accompanies human compassion comes about as a result of the suffering that already afflicts the life of one's neighbor. The life of utter sharing (indeed identity) of mind that is characteristic of the persons of the Trinity does not involve suffering, nor does Gregory depict the persons as entering by will into an alliance of compassion with one another, since they possess but one mind, and one will, as one God. Compassion is therefore an analogical imitation rather than a replication of the unity of Father and Son.

⁶⁸ Gregory I, *in euang.*, 1.14.4 (SC 485:322, trans. Hurst, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, 110) (n. 64). Vnde et hoc in loco Dominus protinus subdit: *Sicut nouit me Pater, et ego agnosco Patrem, et animam meam pono pro ouibus meis. Ac si aperte dicat: In hoc constat quia et cognosco Patrem, et cognoscor a Patre, quia animam meam pono pro ouibus meis, id est ea caritate per quam pro ouibus morior, quantum Patrem diligam ostendo.*

The Son's human love-unto-death translates both God's essential *bonitas* and the mutual love and knowledge that are the life of Father and Son in the unity of that essence. All Christ's *ad extra* acts, divine and human, can be called "compassionate" insofar as they echo the inner embrace. But why is this? How can the Father and Son be called "compassionate" in their passionless and simple love? Consider how Gregory describes the compassion shown by Christ:

[H]e gives perfectly who, together with what he offers [externally] to the afflicted, also takes into himself the mind of the afflicted; that he should first transfer the suffering of the person sorrowing into himself, and [only] then . . . meet the sorrow of that person by an [outward] act of service.⁶⁹

The core of compassion is a free cognitive and affective assimilation of oneself to one's neighbor.⁷⁰ As Gregory writes elsewhere, Paul "takes each one into himself and transforms himself into each one, by compassionating [*compatiendo*] with them" so that "he may remodel [*reficere*] another in himself, [and take] account of himself in another."⁷¹ Now, stripping away all notions of change and suffering that we associate with *human* experience, we can locate the core of compassion: a total self-gift to the other through the utter reception of the other's mind into oneself. In this gift, one receives an intimate knowledge of one's neighbor, a communion beyond any other.

⁶⁹ Gregory I, *moral.*, 20.36.68 (OGM 1/3:156, trans. Bliss, *Moralia*, 2:471) (n. 65, 14). Ille perfecte tribuit, qui cum eo quod afflicto porrigit afflicti quoque in se animum sumit, ut prius in se dolentis passionem transferat, et tunc contra dolorem illius per ministerium concurrat.

⁷⁰ Gregory writes of the ideal spiritual ruler in Gregory I, *past.*, 1.10 (OGM 7:28, trans. Demacopoulos, *Book*, 43) (n. 14). "He should not lust for the possessions of others, but give freely of his own. He should be quick to forgive through compassion . . . [but also] deplore the evil perpetrated by others as though it were his own. In his own heart, he must suffer the afflictions of others and likewise rejoice at the fortune of his neighbor as though the good thing were happening to him." Qui ad aliena cupienda non ducitur, sed propria largitur. Qui per pietatis uiscera citius ad ignoscendum flectitur, sed numquam plus quam deceat ignoscens, ab arce rectitudinis inclinatur. Qui nulla illicita perpetratur, sed perpetrata ab aliis ut propria deplorat. Qui ex affectu cordis alienae infirmitati compatitur, sicque in bonis proximi sicut in suis prouectibus laetatur.

⁷¹ Gregory I, *moral.*, 6.35.54 (OGM 1/1:526, trans. Bliss, *Moralia*, 1:322) (n. 14). singulos in se suscipiens et se in singulis transfigurans, compatiendo colligeret, si ita ipse. Also: Speciem suam uisitatur qui ut in se alterum reficiat, se in altero pensat.

This, then, is how Christ's compassionate death perfects the self-gift of the love of neighbor (*perfecte tribuit*)—by taking the “mind” (*animus*) of another into itself;⁷² this is how that same human love translates the mutual knowledge and love of Father and Son.⁷³ This is why Christ's death shows both the “force” of *divine* love for humanity *and* shows “how much I love the Father.” Lending further support to this interpretation, in a passage on the crucifixion, Gregory likens Christ's human compassion to the divine embrace of Father and Son: As the Father is the Son's “associate” (*consciis*) according to his divinity, so the Son—precisely in the suffering of the Cross—is *consciis* of humanity. Of the Father and the Son's communion, Gregory writes:

[W]ith one will, and with one counsel, the Father acts always in union with the Son. Whose witness [*testis*] too he is, in that “no one knows the Son but the Father” [Matt. 11:27]. Thus [Christ] had then “a witness in heaven” and his “associate [*consciis*] on high” [Job 16:19], [even] when they, who saw him dying in the flesh, had their eyes closed against seeing the power of his divinity.⁷⁴

Of the Son's relationship to all humanity by his human compassion, Gregory writes:

[He] is also rightly called “associate” [*consciis*], in that he has been acquainted with our nature, not only by creating, but also by taking it up. For his knowing is his having taken up what is ours. Whence too it is said by the Psalmist, “For he knows our frame” [Ps. 102:14 Vg.]. For what wonder is it if he is said specifically to “know our frame,” when it is certain that there is nothing that he does not know?

⁷² Gregory I, *moral.*, 20.36.68 (OGM 1/3:156, trans. Bliss, *Moralia*, 2:471) (n. 65, 14). Quoted in full at n. 69.

⁷³ See Gregory I, *in euang.*, 1.14.4 (SC 485:322; Hurst, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, 110) (n. 64). Quoted earlier at n. 68.

⁷⁴ Gregory I, *moral.* 13.24.27. *Moralia in Iob; Commento Morale a Giobbe 2 (IX–XVIII) (moral.)*, ed. Paolo Siniscalco, trans. Emilio Gandolfo, Opere di Gregorio Magno 1 (Rome: Città Nuova, 1994) [hereafter OGM 1/2], 330–332. Trans. Bliss, *Moralia*, 2:100. (n. 14). Qui recte etiam conscius dicitur, quia una uoluntate, uno consilio Pater cum Filio semper operatur. Cuius etiam testis est quia *nemo nouit Filium nisi Pater* [Matt. 11:27]. Tunc ergo *in caelo testem et conscium in excelsis habuit* [Job 16:19] quando hi qui eum morientem carne cernebant diuinitatis eius potentiam considerare nesciebant.

But his knowing [*scire*] our frame is his having taken it upon himself from loving-kindness.⁷⁵

Christ's compassion translates, into the world of distinct creaturely humans, the transcendent and simple intimacy of Father and Son who, together possessing the same single divine intellect and will, eternally give themselves over to one another in knowledge and love, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. If compassion expresses something essential to the love that is given to humans by the Holy Spirit, then what else *could* it be but a human likeness of the inner mutual knowledge and love of Father and Son in the single divine essence?

4. The Unity of the Two Gregories

Now we can see how Gregory can be an Augustinian and yet be separated from Augustine by the “gap” of contemplative vision as a regular feature of Christian life. In his *De trinitate*, Augustine asserts that the economy reveals God's immanent life. Extending this principle, Gregory has received Augustine's notion of compassionate mercy and followed it further than did Augustine, finding in it not only a human translation of the divine goodness from which springs God's love for creatures, but also a human translation of Trinitarian life. This allows Gregory to keep Cassian's definition of the basis for vision (likeness to the unity of Father and Son) while intensifying Augustine's description of how a God-like love is to be lived (merciful compassion). Thus, while Augustine looked forward to regular vision only beyond the horizon of death, and Cassian only in retreat, Gregory could confidently assert:

⁷⁵ Gregory I, *moral.*, 13.24.27 (OGM 1/2:332, trans. Bliss, *Moralia*, 2:101) (n. 74, 14). Qui recte conscius dicitur, quia naturam nostram non solum creando nouit, sed etiam assumendo. Scire enim eius est nostra suscepisse. Vnde etiam per psalmistam dicitur: *Ipse enim scit figmentum nostrum* [Ps. 102:14 Vg.]. Quid enim mirum si figmentum nostrum dicatur specialiter scire, dum constet nil esse quod nesciat? Sed figmentum nostrum scire eius est hoc in seipso ex pietate suscepisse.

[E]ach soul will be so high in knowledge of God [*cognitione Dei*] as it is broad in love of neighbor [*amore proximi*]. For while it spreads itself out [*dilatatur*] through love it exalts itself above by knowledge [*per cognitionem*] Let us be spread in charity's affection [*in affectu caritatis*] that we may be exalted in the glory of highness. Through love let us have compassion [*compatiamur per amorem*] on our neighbor that we may be joined together by knowledge of God [*coniungamur per cognitionem*]. Let us stoop to the least of our brethren on earth, and let us be made equal to the angels in heaven.⁷⁶

This principle is illustrated in Gregory's *Dialogues*. There, Benedict initially sets fidelity to his claustral rule over his sister's desire to converse through the night, but he is forced to accede by a thunderstorm that she procures "who loved more."⁷⁷ A chapter later, Benedict prolongs an evening in loving discourse with a visiting abbot and, after this, receives his great contemplative vision.⁷⁸ Breadth in compassion has brought him to height in knowledge.⁷⁹ Gregory, who in his *Book of Pastoral Rule* counseled all leaders to do likewise,⁸⁰ wrote to his fellow bishop Dominic of Carthage that the "pattern" (*forma*) of heavenly praise is "displayed on earth . . . through our

⁷⁶ Gregory I, in *Ezech.*, 2.2.15 (OGM 3/2:64–66; Tomkinson, *Homilies*, 291–292) (n. 11). Tomkinson's translation, which I have modified here, mistakenly reverses the relationship between height and breadth. *Unaqueque anima quantum lata fuerit in amore proximi, tantum et alta erit in cognitione Dei. Dum enim se superius exaltat, et tantum super semetipsam excelsa fit, quantum se iuxta se in proximi amorem tendit . . . Dilatetur in affectu caritatis, ut exaltemur in Gloria celsitudinis. Compatiamur per amorem proximo, ut coniungamur per cognitionem Deo. Condescendamus fratribus minimis in terra, et coaequemur angelis in caelo.*

⁷⁷ Gregory I, *Dialogi de vita et miraculis patrum Italicorum (dial.)*, 2.33. *Dialogi; Dialoghi: I–IV*, ed. Attilio Stendardi, *Opere di Gregorio Magno* 4 (Rome: Città nuova, 2000) [hereafter OGM 4], 202. Trans.: Gregory I, *The Life of Saint Benedict*, commentary by Adalbert de Vogüé, trans. Hilary Costello and Eoin de Bhaldraithe (Petersham, Mass.: St. Bede's Publications, 1993), 154–155. *Quia enim iuxta Iohannis uocem Deus caritas est [1 Jn. 4:16], iusto ualde iudicio illa plus potuit, quae amplius amauit.*

⁷⁸ Gregory I, *dial.* 2.35 (OGM 4:204; Costello, *Life*, 164–165) (n. 77).

⁷⁹ I discuss this episode in Jordan Joseph Wales, "The Narrated Theology of *Stabilitas* in Gregory the Great's Life of Benedict," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2014): 163–98. See complementary observations in John C. Cavadini, "A Note on Gregory's Use of Miracles in the Life and Miracles of St. Benedict," *The American Benedictine Review*, March 1998, 104–20.

⁸⁰ Again, see quotation at n. 14.

compassion.”⁸¹ And of the whole Church, it bears repeating, he taught that “there is no station among the faithful from which the grace of contemplation can be excluded.”⁸² Only in light of Gregory’s teaching on compassion could such statements be anything more than wishful thinking, given both his theological inheritance and his own experience.

Gregory’s creative re-negotiation of clashing traditions both answered his own aspirations and gave his tumultuous age a needed account of worldly affairs *as* spiritual affairs. As Demacopoulos suspected would be the case, it is in Gregory’s asceticism—here considered *theologically* through his transformative reception of Augustine—that we are able to discover an underlying basis for the unity of the two Gregories. For there are not two Christian lives, but one, in which one imitates Christ on the mountain and in the city, not finally in an unresolvable dialectical tension but in a difficult yet ultimately harmonious embrace of compassion as an imitation of the Cross, the Incarnation, and, most importantly, the unity of Father and Son.

⁸¹ Gregory I, *Registrum Epistularum (epist.)*, 6.63. *Registrum Epistularum; Lettere 2 (IV–VII)*, ed. Dag Ludvig Norberg, trans. Vincenzo Recchia, *Opere di Gregorio Magno 5* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1996) [hereafter OGM 5], 390–394. Trans. Gregory I, *The Letters of Gregory the Great* (3 volumes), trans. John R. C. Martyn (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies), 2:447–448. *Huius laus in caelo perfecta est, in terris autem forma eius ostendenda est potius quam dicenda, ut, qualis quantaque sit, postquam ore nostro plene non potest, ex nostra magis compassione monstratur.*

⁸² Gregory I, in *Ezech.*, 2.5.19 (OGM 3/2:142; Tomkinson, *Homilies*, 348) (n. 11). Quoted in n. 11.