

**DEZEMBRO 2021**

VOLUME 74, n. 2

# REVISTA TEOLÓGICA



Seminário Presbiteriano do Sul

# GREGORY THE GREAT ON THE BALANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE OF THE CLERGY

*Isaias D'Oleo Ochoa*<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

In Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care* the balance of the Christian life of the clergy not only permeates Gregory's discussions in each major section of the book but also this theological motif served him to challenge the tendency of the clergy of his times to have a negative attitude towards the active life.

## KEYWORDS

Gregory the Great, Active Life, Contemplation, Mixed Life, Vocation.

## INTRODUCTION

At least in the ancient and medieval periods, the relationship between theology and work in Christianity was difficult. A theologian who addressed this issue is Gregory the Great in his treatise *Pastoral Care*.<sup>2</sup> In his book Gregory offers his perspective, which is strongly shaped by a philosophical-theological motif: the balance between contemplation and action in the clergy's life. More recently, scholars and theologians who have approached this topic have noted that the balance motif seems to be recurrent in Gregory's thought, including his pastoral discussions.

Although research which examines extensively Gregory's pastoral work is currently scarce,<sup>3</sup> it is worth noting three particular books: American theologian Thomas C. Oden's *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition*,<sup>4</sup> British professor of Medieval Thought G.R. Evans's

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<sup>1</sup> Isaias D'Oleo Ochoa is a minister of Word and Sacrament in the Reformed Church of America. He is currently pursuing a PhD Degree at Calvin Theological Seminary with concentration in Philosophical Theology. He received his Master of Theology degree at Calvin Seminary (2017) and his Master of Divinity at Western Theological Seminary (2015).

<sup>2</sup> Gregory and Henry Davis, *Pastoral Care* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1950). Gregory's book *Pastoral Care* is known in Latin as *Liber Regulae Pastoralis*.

<sup>3</sup> See Thomas C. Oden, *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); G.R. Evans, *The Thought of Gregory the Great* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Andrew Purves, "Gregory the Great, Pastoral Care" in *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 55-75; Clare McGrath-Merkle, "Gregory the Great's Metaphor of the Physician of the Heart as a Model for Pastoral Identity." *Journal of Religion & Health* 50, no. 2 (June 2011): 374-388.

<sup>4</sup> Oden divides his work in two major parts. Part I: "The Dilemma of Modern Pastoral Care" is formed by two chapters where the author offers a brief historical assessment of how modern theologians have neglected the richness of the writers when discussing spiritual care among the clergy. For this reason, Oden proceeds to argue about the urgent need of religious workers to bring back the classical tradition of pastoral theology into their practical-theological discussions, especially Gregory's *Pastoral Care*. In Part II: "Contextual Pastoral Counsel," Oden offers brief comments of Gregory's contextual case studies defending Gregory's bipolar method and its usefulness to spiritual care.

*The Thought of Gregory the Great*,<sup>5</sup> and Scottish scholar Andrew Purves's *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition*.

In *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition* (1984), Oden offers a brief yet useful survey of the development of pastoral care besides exploring the ways in which Gregory advanced the classical tradition of pastoral theology.<sup>6</sup> He argues Gregory had previously redefined a series of interests such as the contrast between the contemplative and active life. In this respect Oden writes:

Even before Gregory's ascension to the papacy he had refined a remarkable combination of theological and pastoral interests: the dialectic between contemplation and action, the balance between orthodoxy and orthopraxis, scripture study practically applied, the combination of political activity with theology, and the concern for preserving the external safety of the Christian community amid an intermittently hostile political environment (ODEN, 1984, p. 48).

This shows that such an interest is not merely supplementary in Gregory's pastoral work. Oden's succinct acknowledgment of the role of the dialectics in Gregory's pastoral work and the Gregorian tendency to balance opposite statements is indeed appreciated.

In *The Thought of Gregory the Great* (1986), Evans studies closely the relationship between the central themes and topics in Gregory's theological work in order to argue that the virtue of contemplation and action are interdependent in Gregory's writings. Of interest to this paper is also what Evans has argued:

The key to [Gregory's] thinking lies perhaps in reference to the complete and perfect man. He who is whole as a Christian has already done good works and will return to the world to do more. Gregory was breaking new ground in insisting in this way on the interdependence of contemplation and action in every fully Christian life. He draws upon patristic material and on classical authors to make a separation between the two ways of life (EVANS, 1986, p. 108).

Similar to Oden and Evans, Purves in *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (2001) is interested in retrieving Gregory's *Pastoral Care* among modern practical theologians. However, Purves's contribution focuses more on identifying some of the major theological themes in Gregory's pastoral work. By identifying these major themes, Purves's study opens the door to scholars to continue discussing the presence and the role that those themes play in Gregory's work. In this respect some of these theological themes are: "(1) the relations between the natural and supernatural worlds, (2) his understanding of *consideratio*,

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<sup>5</sup> As Evans acknowledges, her study on Gregory's theological work has a practical nature. Her aim is to study the virtue of consideration and the contrast between the contemplative and active life in Gregory's pastoral work. However, due to Evans's neo-scholastic approach, Carole Straw considers *The Thought of Gregory the Great* should be read with caution. Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 265.

<sup>6</sup> For a brief historical survey, see Oden, *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition*, 26-42.

and the need for a balance between spirituality and action, and (3) the nature of Christian life” (PURVES, 2001, p.55).

Out of the practical-pastoral field, there are other significant works one must mention.<sup>7</sup> Professor of History Carole E. Straw, in opposition to the neo-scholastic traditional approach to the studies of Gregory, presents her well-known book titled *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection* (1988), where she suggests that the traditional metaphysical categories which divide human life have been blurred. In that regard Straw writes:

[I]n order to understand Gregory one must begin by recognizing that he has modified the paradoxes of the mature Augustine and that the fluid boundaries of late antiquity have all but vanished. The supernatural is mingled with a world of ordinary experience, and in surprising ways. Visible and invisible, natural and supernatural, human and divine, carnal and spiritual are often directly and causally connected (STRAW, 1988, p. 9).

In a nutshell, Straw argues that Gregory’s thought reconciles some apparent contradictions—for instance, the contrast between active versus contemplative life, sin versus virtue, and alike (STRAW, 1988, pp. 23-24).<sup>8</sup>

Like Straw, Professor of Historical Theology George E. Demacopoulus has advanced the theological studies of Gregory significantly in his book *Gregory the Great: Ascetic, Pastor, And First Man of Rome* (2015). Demacopoulus argues that Gregory’s affinity to asceticism really influenced his vocation as monk and bishop. Thus, when reading and interpreting Gregory, his ascetic approach to theology cannot be ignored or downplayed.

Noteworthy are the valuable efforts done by theologians and other scholars, their positive influence on practical and historical theology, and their general discussions of the balance motif. Despite of this, the theme of balance in the Christian life of the clergy needs to be more fully and explicitly addressed. For instance, one might ask what role this motif plays in Gregory’s *Pastoral Care* as a whole. In that regard, this is the main question this paper will be addressing. It is the thesis of this paper that in Gregory’s *Pastoral Care*, the balance of the Christian life of the clergy constitutes a key theme which permeates Gregory’s discussions in each major section of the book, allowing Gregory to challenge the clergy’s tendency to have a negative attitude towards the active life.

As readers will notice, I have built up my thesis on past scholarship. I have agreed with scholars such as Straw and Evans that balance seems to be a central theme in Gregory’s

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<sup>7</sup> For example, Carole E. Straw, *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988); George E. Demacopoulus, *Gregory the Great: Ascetic, Pastor, And First Man of Rome* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015); Neil Bronwen and Matthew Santo, *A Companion to Gregory the Great* (Boston: Brill, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition*, 60-62.

thought. However, I will advance current scholarship by offering arguments and textual proofs that the balance motif seems to play an important role in Gregory's work. To demonstrate this thesis, I will make a brief exposition of Gregory's background and historical context. Next, I will explore Gregory's understanding of the active and contemplative life in relation to his view of work and vocation. After this, I will analyze how Gregory's emphasis on the balance between contemplation and action serves as a central motif in *Pastoral Care*. Finally, I will offer a brief statement to conclude this paper.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Gregory the Great became bishop of Rome from 590 to 604 AD. The personal context in which Gregory became a bishop is worth noting, especially if one is interested in integrating his theology with his understanding of religious vocation. "[Gregory knew that]...the acceptance of the office meant the end of the contemplative life that he much desired," Oden states (ODEN, 1984, p. 49). This internal conflict perhaps led Gregory to avoid the confirmation of his election as bishop. However, he could not avoid such confirmation and became bishop of Rome in 590 AD. It is in this circumstance where his book, *Pastoral Care*, was written, or at least finished in its actual form.<sup>9</sup>

In *The History of Theological Education*, Historian Justo González also informs us that around the end of the sixth-and beginning of the seventh-century AD, there was still a problem with a lack of formation and ignorance in the clergy in Roman territories. Although other books such as Cassiodorus's *Institutions* played a significant role during the early church,<sup>10</sup> Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Rule* was "the most significant work for the formation of clergy in the early centuries of the Middle Ages" because it dealt with how the clergy could fulfill their responsibilities through their ministry vocation (GONZÁLEZ, 2015, p. 26). As Gonzalez notes, Gregory was indeed concerned about the rampant ignorance among the clergy and argued that the clergy must have more than intellectual knowledge – they must also pay attention to the experiential practice of faith (GONZÁLEZ, 2015, p. 26). Not

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<sup>9</sup> In this respect, Oden informs us: "[Gregory's] first act in the papal office was to write his remarkable *Pastoral Care*. A book of pastoral instruction...originally intended primarily for bishops." Oden, *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition*, 49.

<sup>10</sup> Justo L. González, *The History of Theological Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 24. Although the clergy was more educated than the laypeople, there was significant ignorance among the clergy. Gonzalez writes: "If they appeared to be educated, this was due to the contrast between them and the warlike and illiterate conquerors [e.g., Germanic invaders]. In order to respond to this situation, some studious Christians wrote books whose purpose was to instruct the clergy. Among them, one may mention Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus and Isidore of Seville, but above all Pope Gregory the Great."

surprisingly, Gregory's *Pastoral Care* soon became a key training manual because of its theological perspective, pastoral usefulness, and innovative approach to religious vocation.

As noticed, it seems there were at least two main reasons why Gregory decided to write his *Pastoral Care*. In any case, these reasons are not mutually exclusive, and must be considered when interpreting Gregory's theological thought. One also should note that despite the multiplicity of Gregory's discussions in the different dimensions of Christian ministry such as religious vocation, worship, leadership, and pastoral care, the question of whether Gregory can be seen as a theologian emerges. In this respect, Oden clarifies that Gregory "did not think of himself as an original theologian" (ODEN, 1984, p. 51). Of course, this does not mean that Gregory was not interested in theological discussions and their applications to ministry. On the contrary, he soon became "an imaginative orthodox thinker, in the sense that he combined a commitment to orthodox church teaching...with a thoughtful and creative application of ecumenical orthodoxy" (ODEN, 1984, p. 51). In this sense, one might think of Gregory as a pastor-theologian who is not only concerned about his own struggles but also the struggles of the flock as well (Cf. DEMACOPOULUS, 2015, pp. 32-24).<sup>11</sup> This concern probably served him as a basis for the development of the balance motif in an ecclesiastical context.

Another important contextual aspect to pay attention is that Gregory's *Pastoral Care* was written at a time when the church had embraced the notion that a pastor tended to resemble solely the image of a spiritual administrator —an idea promoted by St. Ambrose's *On the Office*. It is perhaps against this narrow idea that Gregory promoted his belief that a pastor must be more than solely an administrator. Following Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory believes that a pastor must also be a physician of the soul serving the church actively.<sup>12</sup> Gregory seems to believe that the contemplative and the active life alone is not enough, but that both are necessary in the present life. One what observes here is Gregory's rejection of a dualistic position on vocation and his attempt to present a more holistic understanding of religious vocation. In this respect Gregory is not rejecting the early Catholic view on contemplation but seems to be concerned about any overemphasis of it, which may lead to clergy to ministry failure.

## THE ACTIVE AND CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

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<sup>11</sup> In this respect, one cannot forget what Oden states: "Gregory's preaching became the pattern for much of the preaching and moral instruction in the early medieval period." Oden, *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition*, 51.

<sup>12</sup> As seen in his writing, Gregory does not choose one over the another, but rather promotes an adequate balance between the two. The pastor must act as both, church administrator and pastoral caregiver. As Gregory's own life showed, both areas are connected and interdependent.

Regarding the contemplative and active life, Gregory writes in *Homilies in Ezekiel*:

There are two lives in which Almighty God by his holy word instructs: the active and the contemplative. The active life is: to give bread to the hungry, to teach the ignorant the word of wisdom, to correct the erring, to recall to the path of humility our neighbour when he wakes proud, to tend the sick, to dispense to all what they need and to provide those entrusted to us with the means of subsistence. But the contemplative life is to retain indeed with all one's mind the love of God and neighbour, but to rest from exterior action and cleave only to the desire of the maker, that the mind may now take no pleasure in doing anything, but having spurned all cares, may be aglow to see the face of the Creator: so that it already knows how to bear with sorrow the burden of the corruptible flesh, and with all its desires to seek to join the hymn-singing choir of angels, to mingle with the heavenly citizens, and to rejoice in its everlasting corruption in the sight of God.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike in *Homilies in Ezekiel*, Gregory in *Pastoral Care* seems not to define explicitly what he means by the active and the contemplative life. Nonetheless, he does not ignore the topic in his pastoral work. In fact, he does not avoid making a clear difference between these two different yet related dimensions of life. Despite his affinity for asceticism (as Demacopoulos has argued), Gregory avoids strongly dichotomizing the contemplative versus the active life of the clergy. Such a perspective indeed seems to permeate his holistic vision of life and vocation as reflected in *Pastoral Care*. Even more, the theme of balance seems also found in other of Gregory's writings, such as *Moralia*. In this respect, Demacopoulos writes:

Gregory's praise for the 'active contemplative' exists in every genre of his surviving corpus...he denies the traditional claim of ascetic writers that the summit of the Christian life is to be found in contemplation alone: perfection resides in those who are able to contemplate the divine mystery but willingly suspend (not cease) that contemplation for service to others. In the *Moralia*, Gregory repeatedly showcases Job's ability to balance the active and the contemplative life. In book 18 he runs through a series of Old Testament saints (especially Joseph and Daniel) to emphasize how the saints can take responsibility for others without losing the interior life. A little later he suggests that the preacher who strives for both will be more effective in ministry and obtain greater mystical insights by maintaining a strong balance between the two, precisely because the two reinforce one another" (DEMACOPOULUS, 2015, p. 78).

As Demacopoulos correctly argues, the pastor who achieves the balance between his search for God and divine knowledge and his service to the church will perform better in ministry than those pastors who neglect to obtain such a balance (DEMACOPOULUS, 2015, p. 78).

Similarly, Straw claims that a pastor's balance promotes humility, an aspect that is central to a strong development of his faith formation. In that regard, Straw states:

Gregory's formulation of the balance between activity and contemplation and even sin and virtue ensures the humility often wanting from ascetic virtue and the contemplative life. Complete devotion to the contemplative life is dangerous, as is the pure pursuit of the active life. Good stands in balance and equilibrium, which is

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<sup>13</sup> Gregory, Theodosia Tomkinson, and Juliana Cownie. *The Homilies of St. Gregory the Great on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1990), II.2.7-8.

achieved when both poles are embraced properly for the good qualities each possesses (STRAW, 1988, p. 20).

As one observes, the contrast between the contemplative and active life of the clergy seems to be a significant theme in Gregory's theological thought. For him, contemplation alone must not be the center of a pastor's life. In that regard, it seems Gregory noticed this issue in his own life and decided to depart from his former position that viewed the active and ordinary life mainly in negative terms. It is not a surprise Gregory's theological thought is shaped not by a mere defense of the practice of contemplation but by his commitment to find a balance between two opposites.<sup>14</sup> As such, contemplation should not stay static in the pastor's heart, but rather should lead him to produce spiritual fruits and offer service to his neighbor.

## **BALANCE AS A THEOLOGICAL MOTIF**

**In Book I.** Gregory's pastoral model makes a significant emphasis on the relationship between contemplation and action. Throughout *Pastoral Care*, such a relationship between the contemplative and the active life seems to be dialectical. For instance, from his introduction to part I of the book I, where he addresses John of Ravenna, a fellow bishop, Gregory seems to set up the moral framework of his theological-practical discussion regarding a pastor's work highlighting the importance of the virtue of consideration, which leads to humility:

Wherefore, before all else, fear must moderate the desire of compassing authority, and when this is attained by one who did not seek it, let his way of life recommend it. Then, too, it is necessary that the rectitude which is displayed in the pastor's way of life should be propagated by the spoken word. And finally, I have only to add that consideration of our own weakness should abase every work accomplished, lest proud conceit empty it of its worth in the eyes of the hidden Judge (GREGORY AND DAVIS, 1950, pp. 20-21).

As one notes here, Gregory seems to clarify that a pastor cannot overlook the strong relationship between his words and the way he lives, because his sermons come from moral character. That is, a pastor's personal life will be reflected in his sermons. For this reason, balance and the virtue of consideration are extremely important. The lack of them could make the pastor unfit for the ministry, along with his ignorance and vanity. In this respect, Gregory begins chapter I of book I with the following words: "No one ventures to teach any art unless

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<sup>14</sup> In this respect Neil Bronwen and Matthew Santo write: "Gregory believed that the movement from moderation to contemplation and thence to pastoral care to discipleship, is immediate and compelling – and arguably for all his emphasis on the soul's passage towards God, it is not so much mystical contemplation that stands at the centre of his reflection and work as much as discipleship, pastoral care, and morals, the formation of character." Bronwen and Santo, *A Companion to Gregory the Great*, xix-xx.

he has learned after deep thought. With what rashness, then, would the pastoral office be undertaken by the unfit, seeing that the government of souls is the art of arts!” (GREGORY AND DAVIS, 1950, p. 21). Unlike the fit pastor, the unfit one has not learned from his experiences, but “seek[s] the first salutations in the market place, the first places at feasts, and the first chairs in the synagogues” (GREGORY AND DAVIS, 1950, p. 22). The reason for a pastor’s unfitness is not merely vanity, but his lack of Christian virtues. This unfitness also appears in those pastors who do not possess a balance in their lives and their formation. Merely studying the Christian faith is not enough. Pastors must accompany their formation with practical learning, as Gregory explains: “[T]here are some who investigate spiritual precepts with shrewd diligence, but in the life they live trample on what they have penetrated by their understanding. They hasten to teach what they have learned, not by practice, but by study, and belie in their conduct what they teach by words” (GREGORY AND DAVIS, 1950, pp. 23-24). With this, Gregory seems to pay attention to the area of experiencing the divine calling of God in religious work. Through ministry, pastors can experience this divine call via serving the church in order to fulfill the second most important commandment: love your neighbor.

In the previous quotation, Gregory also shows that a pastor’s life must be congruent with what he has learned and what he teaches. Diversion would not only affect the pastor’s inward life but the flock as well. Again, for Gregory, the lack of balance in the pastor’s life might destroy both his inward and vocational life. In this respect Gregory, in chapter 2 of book I, states:

[I]f a man vested with the appearance of holiness destroys others by word or example, it certainly were better for him that his earthly deeds, performed in a worldly guise, should press him to death, rather than his sacred office should have pointed out to others for sinful imitation; surely, the punishment of Hell would prove less severe for him if he fell alone” (GREGORY AND DAVIS, 1950, p. 25).

Gregory’s statements, as constructed, might sound harsh, however, the spirit of his words seems to be shaped by a deep pastoral concern about the clergy’s attitude, including himself, towards religious work. The pastor has a double responsibility – the first to God (i.e., the contemplative life) and the second to the church (i.e., the active life). The pastor’s attitude while he is serving the church and his words/thoughts must match not only for his own sake, but for his vocational life’s sake. It seems that Gregory is attempting to give the active life of the clergy a more positive outlook. For Gregory, church work is not a negative activity, at least this is the position he is trying to embrace in *Pastoral Care*. The reader must note that this positive outlook might not necessarily be extended to Gregory’s broader view of work

because *Pastoral Care* was written exclusively for the clergy. Therefore, is difficult to appreciate how Gregory viewed other kinds of work out of the religious sphere.

Gregory continues unfolding his vision of the clergy's work in the beginning of book I, chapter 4. One notes Gregory calls for prudence in service when he argues that the pastor who deals with several matters at a time can become easily distracted. Gregory writes: "Often it happens that when a man undertakes the cares of government, his heart is distracted with a diversity of things, and as his mind is divided among many interests and becomes confused, he finds he is unfitted for any of them" (GREGORY AND DAVIS, 1950, p. 27). The issue is not solely the number of matters the pastor is dealing with, but his lack of attention to his interior life. That is, the pastor has not paid attention to his inward life because he has focused only on outward matters. In such a situation, he has become a divided self where his mind "busies itself setting external matters in order, and, ignorant only of itself, it knows how to give thought to a multitude of concerns, without knowing its own self" (GREGORY AND DAVIS, 1950, p. 27). Such lack of self-examination makes the pastor a dangerous subject, even if he does not realize it. In the end, this pastor has neglected to increase his self-awareness, which is a central element of his spiritual formation and balanced life. For Gregory the inward life has a central place in a person's life. This situation is noteworthy. Since in Gregory's times, most of the clergy were serving in churches, it is assumed they were involved in the active life as church administrators. This would suggest that by Gregory's times, perhaps the clergy's attitude toward the contemplative life was going through a process of change. In any case, Gregory warns the clergy not to downplay the role of contemplation in a pastor's wellness.

Even more surprising is Gregory's warning about the lack of attention to the vocational and active life of the clergy. Similar to those who ignore the role of self-examination because of the active life, there are other pastors who ignore the benefit of balance in life. In book I, chapter 5, Gregory warns his readers about the danger of overemphasizing contemplation. There are pastors who, having received several gifts and endowments, do not use those gifts to bless others, but instead keep those gifts for themselves. Instead of using their gifts for the sake of others, they would prefer focusing on holy things and the love of God. In that regard, Gregory argues that "if, therefore, we have the care of our neighbours as well as of ourselves, we protect each foot with a shoe. But a man who, thinking only of his own advantage, disregards that of his neighbours, loses with disgrace the shoe, as it were, of one foot" (GREGORY AND DAVIS, 1950, p. 31). In their pursuit of the contemplative life, these pastors neglect the active life, "declin[ing] to be of service to the

neighbour by preaching; they love to withdraw in quietude and desire to be alone for meditation” (GREGORY AND DAVIS, 1950, p. 31).

As one observes in chapter 4 and 5 of book I, Gregory admonishes both the pastor who overemphasizes the active life (neglecting the inward life) and the pastor who overemphasizes the contemplative life (depriving the active life and their gifts by focusing on merely on the quietude of life). In both cases, Gregory asserts that these pastors are guilty. Dichotomizing both dimensions of life, the active and the contemplative, is problematic due to its lack of balance and consideration. In a nutshell, Gregory has offered more examples that suggest he tries to overcome the traditional understanding of work and vocation of his times by challenging it through an inductive approach –in other words, he offers examples of how a balanced view of work and contemplation is needed before making his general statement. Readers might appreciate the repetition of the balance motif between action and contemplation in this section, probably because it seems to be a product of Gregory’s own struggles as a monk and his attempt to avoid the church office.

**In Book II:** In this second major section, Gregory deals with the inward life of the pastor. He begins this part discussing the conduct of a person who has become a pastor. For him, the pastor “should so far surpass the conduct of the people” and “maintain a life of rectitude” (GREGORY AND DAVIS, 1950, p. 45). Gregory starts developing more in depth the balance as a theological motif by highlighting the importance of the discipline of balance in the religious life. As G.R. Evans rightly states, “Book II of the *Regula Pastoralis* Gregory explores a series of aspects of the bishop’s behavior in which he balances one extreme against another” (EVANS, 2001, 1986, p. 23). Let’s pay attention to what Gregory writes:

It is necessary, therefore, that he [the pastor] be pure in thought, exemplary in conduct, discreet in keeping silence, profitable, in speech, in sympathy a near neighbour to everyone, in contemplation exalted above all others, a humble companion to those who lead good lives, erect in his zeal for righteousness against the vices of sinners. He must not be remiss in his care for the inner life by preoccupation with the external; nor must he in his solicitude for what is internal, fail to give attention to the external (GREGORY AND DAVIS, 1950, p. 45).

After offering this summary, Gregory proceeds to unpack each major aspect mentioned in the previous quotation in the rest of the chapters of Book II. Such development is not incidental. Gregory favors the discipline of balance in *Pastoral Care*. As Demacopoulos argues, “properly balancing the two (i.e., self and neighbor), allows the spiritual director to fulfill the commandment to love both God (contemplative) and neighbor (active)” (DEMACOPOULUS, 2015, p. 21). I concur. For instance, in chapter 6 of book II, Gregory tells us that a pastor might hurt the flock if he is careless. Without the required

balance, the pastor will fail in his task to lead people to God and be an instrument of God to bring healing to the flock. Thus, Gregory suggests that pastors must be fair when applying discipline to the people. This shows the pastor must be careful when balancing his internal and external life. The active life must be shaped by the love of the neighbor and not by solely a person's own's sake. Gregory seems to have in mind the dangers of the lack of balance in the clergy's work when in chapter 7 of book II he writes that "when earthly cares occupy the pastor's mind, dust, driven by the winds of temptation, blinds the eyes of the Church" (GREGORY AND DAVIS, 1950, p. 69). Gregory's strong words address a pastor's need to not relax the care of his inward life on account of his active life, or neglect his ministry, because of his emphasis on the inward life.

Gregory's admonition against neglecting any dimension of the pastor's life is reinforced by the end of the same chapter 7, which allows his readers to be more appreciative of his emphasis on the theme of balance. He writes:

Doctrine taught does not penetrate the minds of the needy, if a compassionate heart does not commend it to the hearts of hearers; but the seed of the word does germinate promptly when the kindness of a preacher waters it in the hearer's heart. Therefore, that the ruler may be able to plan within, he must also, with irreproachable intention, make provision for what is external. Let pastors, then, give their entire devotion to the inner of their subjects, yet not neglect to provide for the exterior life also (GREGORY AND DAVIS, 1950, p. 73).

Gregory, in this instance, is concerned that the pastor may be able to provide the flock with an adequate sense of balance of the dimensions of life based on the way a pastor teaches doctrine to the flock. We can interpret Gregory's passage at least in two different ways. First, Gregory is focusing on the issue of teaching doctrine in the church as one of the most important tasks done by the pastor. In that regard, the pastor needs to be sympathetic to his listeners as well. As pastors needs to teach the flock and do it in a gentle and nonthreatening manner, they must show a balanced preaching style in order that his flock may accept his teaching. By neglecting such a balance in preaching, the pastor could "terrify them in the exercise of their right to govern" (GREGORY AND DAVIS, 1950, p. 76). Second, Gregory perhaps seems to focus, as well, on the importance of finding an adequate balance between the pastor's religious work (e.g., external life, vocation, active life) and the pastor's responsibility of take care their own heart (e.g., internal life, care of the self, contemplative life). Third, a pastor must not only pay heed to the inner life of his congregation, but to their external needs as well (e.g., adequate food, clothing, shelter, safety, etc.) I think this second reading finds some support in the suggestion that Gregory seems to recognize that although the contemplative life seems to be better in quality, this does not constitute a good reason to

downplay or neglect the active life. Both are important. It seems Gregory has in mind both the pastor's tendency to neglect the active life and the church's suffering due to such a neglect. Gregory's thoughtfulness in dealing with the topic rises the issue of the meaning of the clergy's work. It seems to me Gregory's attempt to change his notion of religious vocation flows out his belief that all pastors must be aware of the impact of their work over the church.

**In Book III.** In this major part of the book, Gregory moves on to offer practical advice to pastors regarding how the clergy can offer pastoral care to the flock. Gregory recognizes almost forty different kinds of persons and how they should be exhorted (GREGORY AND DAVIS, 1950, pp. 8, 90-91). For example, Gregory invites the pastor to distinguish between men and women, old and young people, slaves and masters, the meek and the choleric, those who confess their sins and those who do not, and such like. This suggestion is important, not only for church leadership but also for Gregory's development of the balance motif since it acknowledges the role of fairness and justice in his view of work. As the visible church is formed by a diverse group of persons, the pastor must acknowledge such diversity while serving the other. Gregory, therefore, suggests that a pastor seeks to know his audience in both a corporate and individual dimension. This deals with how the clergy live within their vocations.

Gregory's application of his balance motif does not stop here. By emphasizing dialectical relations in his discussion (for instance, the poor vs. the rich, the joyful vs. the sad, the subjects vs. the superiors, the slaves and the masters, and so on), one appreciates more the role that his motif plays in his theological and philosophical thought. Due to space limitations, I would only comment the chapter 2 of book III where Gregory admonishes the poor and the rich. As it is common in this section, Gregory affirms that each kind of persons must be admonished in different ways. Instead of trying to suggest that a poor person becomes richer, or a rich person becomes poorer, Gregory discards such an unrealistic solution. Instead, he considers that both the rich and the poor need to be admonished—the rich regarding the temptation of being proud and the poor regarding how to be encouraged amidst tribulation. This suggests that Gregory perhaps thought that there was a balanced point where a person has enough that does not need encouragement amidst tribulation but does not have too much that makes him/her proud. This idea is reinforced when Gregory asserts it is possible that a rich person be humble and a poor person proud. In this case, Gregory suggests the pastor must adapt himself to the particular circumstances (GREGORY AND DAVIS, 1950, pp. 92-95). For instance, Gregory does give importance to the virtue of moderation in order to avoid any lack of balance. This could be a product of his own experience attempting to reach such a

balance in his life, struggling between being a contemplative monk versus exercising the active office of the bishop of Rome. One observes Gregory welcomes the dialectical tension of life and encourages the pastor to embrace it.

This situation opens the door to reconsider Gregory's view on work and vocation. Gregory's understanding of work, at least in the religious sphere, is shaped by a moral dimension. While pastors ought to obey the divine calling and nurture their vocation via the contemplative life, Gregory suggests that this is not the end because pastors must also practice what they preach. They must leave the comfort zone of contemplation and move forward to a place of discomfort –the place where pastors offer what they have for the community's sake. It is within this context where Gregory offers pastoral advice to the clergy in order that they can improve their work functions in the church. In some sense, *Pastoral Care* constitutes a training manual on vocational matters for the clergy. It is not a mere guide for pastoral care in the modern sense.

**In Book IV.** This is the shortest part of *Pastoral Care*. However, despite its short length, Gregory's use of the balance motif makes it significant for this study. Gregory wants to admonish the pastor that has been fit for ministry not to forget about the importance of virtues such as humility, warning the clergy to avoid the dangers of pride. Once again, Gregory discusses the issue dialectically: pride versus humility. Important to mention is his words for the pastor not to neglect himself while helping others: "Let him not, while helping his neighbours, neglect himself" (GREGORY AND DAVIS, 1950, p. 234). When such a situation happens, the pastor's life is in danger because "[i]n this its state of inertia the cunning Seducer enumerates all that the man has done well, and aggrandizes him with conceited thoughts about his pre-eminence over all others" (GREGORY AND DAVIS, 1950, p. 234). In other words, the vice of pride takes over the pastor when he becomes idle because of his success in the active life. In this unhealthy state, the pastor also becomes spiritually unbalanced. Pastors ought to pay attention to the balance between both dimensions of life without deemphasizing the ordinary active life or their time of searching for God. With book IV Gregory concludes his treatise offering extensive examples in ministry that show pastors that the active life should not be viewed in negative terms. He also seems concerned about any distorted understanding of the virtue of contemplation that might lead the clergy to overemphasizing it neglecting their daily work serving the other.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, Gregory's middle-ground position of work is noteworthy and deserves more attention. He seems to defend 'the mixed life' in his discussions, where the balance motif serves such a purpose. The 'mixed life' is understood as the combination of both the active and contemplative life of the clergy in a religious context. In Gregory's view both the active and the contemplative life are good, although the contemplative life is better. This, however, does not mean that the contemplative life should be favored in an unbalanced position in regard to the active life. Such an idea is dangerous and might lead to vices. There is no doubt that it is Gregory's balance motif the tool he uses to get the clergy's attention of his times, where he uses such a motif to challenge the clergy's notion of religious work and vocation.

In addition, Gregory's *Pastoral Care* also has an autobiographical character. It is Gregory himself who is attempting to embrace a more flexible view of his vocational calling as the new leader of the church. In this respect the value of *Pastoral Care* for studying the early stages of the Christian church's understanding on vocation of the clergy is undeniable.

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### **RESUMO**

Na obra “*Pastoral Care*” de Gregório, o Grande, o equilíbrio da vida cristã do clero não só permeia as discussões de Gregório em cada seção principal do livro, mas também esta ideia teológica principal serviu para desafiar a tendência do clero de sua época de ter uma atitude negativa em relação a vida ativa.

### **PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

Gregório o Grande; Vida ativa; Contemplação; Vida Monástica; Vocação.