

Ostriches, Spiders' Webs and Antichrist: Hypocrisy in Writings of Pope Gregory the Great and Archbishop Wulfstan II of York

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This article examines the use of the concepts of hypocrisy and the hypocrite in the writings of Pope Gregory the Great (590–604) and Archbishop Wulfstan of York (1002–23). Although separated by many centuries, these two treatments are connected through Wulfstan's debt to Gregory's ideas on the evil of hypocrisy, and particularly in his depiction of Antichrist as the chief of all hypocrites. Both use the idea of hypocrisy to critique their contemporary situation: for Gregory, the pride of the Patriarch John IV of Constantinople in adopting the title 'Ecumenical Patriarch'; and for Wulfstan, the court politics in the turbulent final years of the reign of Æthelred the Unready.

In her seminal treatment of hypocrisy in her book, *Ordinary Vices*, Judith Shklar claimed: 'Every age, every form of literature, and every public stage has held [the hypocrite] up for contempt and ridicule.'¹ However, unlike some of the other vices discussed in her book – cruelty, betrayal and misanthropy – the figure of the hypocrite and conceptions of hypocrisy are not constant themes in Christian discourse, but their prominence fluctuates over time. In the early Middle Ages, their profile is low.² My own interest in this subject was provoked by a long denunciation of hypocrisy in a sermon by the early eleventh-century archbishop of York, Wulfstan, which I shall argue was aimed at the court of the English king, Æthelred II

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¹ Judith Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), 45.

² Courtney Booker, 'Hypocrisy, Performativity, and the Carolingian Pursuit of Truth', *EME* 26 (2018), 174–202.

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'the Unready' (978–1016). I was struck by how unusual this accusation was in my period – the early Middle Ages – and this stimulated my interest in exploring this topic further. My investigations so far have tended to confirm the comparative lack of a polemic about hypocrites in the early Middle Ages, but have also led me to the sixth-century pope, Gregory the Great, in whose writings hypocrites occupy a very significant place. This article will therefore take two case studies from the early Middle Ages: the writings of Gregory (590–604) and Wulfstan (d. 1023). Five hundred years apart, these two treatments of hypocrisy are intimately linked by the pope's influence on the archbishop, but they provide contrasting treatments: Gregory's detailed expositions of the hypocrite, as opposed to Wulfstan's polemical usage.

GREGORY THE GREAT

Hypocrisy is a significant preoccupation for Gregory the Great, who was a towering figure in the Middle Ages, revered as a pope, saintly monk and church father.³ Gregory is not only unusual in the extensive treatment he devotes to the evils of hypocrites, but he is also one of the few figures in this period who actually levels an accusation of hypocrisy against a contemporary, no less a person than the patriarch of Constantinople. Gregory's reflections on hypocrisy have merited some scholarly attention through his description of Antichrist as *caput omnium hypocritarum*, 'the head of all hypocrites', but scholars have failed to do justice to the complexity and importance of hypocrisy in his thinking.⁴

The Bible was a powerful inspiration in Gregory's discussion of hypocrites, particularly the Book of Job to which he devoted his longest work, the *Moralia in Job*.⁵ This was initially composed by Gregory when he was serving as papal envoy, *apocrisiarius*, at the court of the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople from 579 to 585/6. It started life as a series of sermons and was revised by

³ On Gregory, see Bronwen Neil and Matthew J. Dal Santo, eds, *A Companion to Gregory the Great* (Leiden, 2013); Robert Markus, *Gregory the Great and his World* (Cambridge, 1997).

⁴ The best account of Gregory's treatment of hypocrisy is Carole Straw, 'Gregory, Cassian, and the Cardinal Vices', in Richard Newhauser, ed., *In the Garden of Evil: The Vices and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Toronto, 2005), 35–58, at 49–58.

⁵ Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, ed. Marcus Adriaen, 3 vols, CChr.SL 143, 143A, 143B (Turnhout, 1979).

Gregory when he returned to Rome in 586, but only released for wider dissemination in 596.⁶ It is a lengthy and capacious text, numbering thirty-five books, and has been described by Carole Straw as both ‘a loose, baggy monster’ as well as ‘an “all-you-need-to-know” manual for Christian life, folded within the exegesis of Job’. The *Moralia* also bears the imprint of Gregory’s own personal circumstances, and especially the tension he felt between his monastic vocation and the demands of high ecclesiastical office.⁷ It is not surprising that the Book of Job stimulated him to ponder the issue of hypocrisy: Job’s friends or comforters were seen as hypocrites because of their self-righteous reproaches and upbraiding of Job. In fact, seven out of the ten references to hypocrisy in the Old Testament are located in this book.⁸ The pope’s musings on hypocrisy, however, go far beyond the exegetical demands of individual passages and, cumulatively, they construct a substantial set of ideas.

GREGORY ON HYPOCRITES

Gregory’s understanding of hypocrisy is grounded in Scripture, informed not only by the text of Job but also by his own immersion in the Bible as a whole.⁹ The following passage, for example, weaves into its explication of Job 20 on the hypocrisy of Job’s friend, Zophar, an echo of and allusion to Matthew 23: 5:

Often the hypocrite passes himself off as holy, without a fear of letting himself appear wicked, he is honoured by everyone, and the glory of holiness is awarded to him, by those who perceive the outside, and are not able to look into the interior of things. And so it happens, that he rejoices in having the first seat, is overjoyed in getting the first couch, filled with pride at receiving the first invitation, elevated at the respectful address of his followers, swollen in the pride of his heart at the servitude of his dependents, just it is said by the voice of Truth Himself concerning such people. *But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders*

⁶ Carole Straw, ‘Job’s Sin in the *Moralia* of Gregory the Great’, in Franklin Harkins and Aaron Canty, eds, *A Companion to Job in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2016), 71–100, at 76.

⁷ Straw, ‘Job’s Sin’, quotation from 73.

⁸ Booker, ‘Hypocrisy’, 182.

⁹ On Gregory’s thought see, Carole Straw, *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection* (Berkeley, CA, 1988).

*of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi.*¹⁰

The discourse of hypocrisy in the *Moralia* is immensely rich, fed by Gregory's astonishingly fertile imagination. Hypocrites are likened *inter alia* to ostriches, tigers and spiders' webs. Why is an ostrich like a hypocrite? Because it has wings but cannot fly.¹¹ Unlike the heron and hawk, ostriches are unable to rise up to heaven but creep along the ground, weighed down by earthly cares despite their appearance of piety. A tiger's coat is variegated, making manifest the terrible sins of the hypocrite underneath his virtues.¹² The works of the hypocrite are like spiders' webs because, after the spider's great effort of spinning, they are fragile and destroyed by 'the wind of mortal life', in the same way that the glory sought by hypocrites is transient and earthly.¹³

These examples illustrate something of the creativity of Gregory's thinking and its variety. His concept of hypocrisy is more multi-dimensional than the simple feigning of virtue. To be sure, deceit is crucial: Gregory distinguishes between those who manage the appearance of virtue but fall into sin because of their infirmity, and those hypocrites whose wrongdoing is the sin of malice. He sees

¹⁰ 'Saepe hypocrita dum sanctum se simulat, et iniquum exhibere minime formidat, ab omnibus honoratur eique sanctitatis gloria defertur ab iis qui exteriora cernunt, sed interiora perspicere nequeunt. Vnde fit ut gaudeat in prima sessione, hilarescat in primo recubitu, infletur in prima salutatione, eleuetur in reuerenti uoce obsequentium; et superba cogitatione tumeat in famulatu subditorum, sicut uoce quoque Veritatis de talibus dicitur: *Omnia uero opera sua faciunt, ut uideantur ab hominibus. Dilatant enim phylacteria sua et magnificent fimbrias suas. Amant enim primos recubitus in cenis, et primas cathedras in synagogis, et salutationes in foro, uocari ab hominibus: Rabbi.*' *Moralia* 15.3.4 (CChr.SL 143, 143A and 143B, 143A: 750–1). Italics for biblical quotations, as in the CChr.SL edition. English translations in this article (with some modifications) are from *Morals on the Book of Job* by St. Gregory the Great, transl. John Henry Parker (London, 1844), online at: <<http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoraliaIndex.html>>, accessed 22 November 2023.

¹¹ *Moralia* 7.27.36; 20.39.75; 31.8.11; *Moralia* 15.3.4; and see 31.9.14; 31.10.15; 31.11.16; 31.12.17; also 31.13.25; 31.15.27, 28, 29; 31.20.36; 31.22.38–9; 31.33.42. For a comparison with rushes, see *ibid.* 8.42.65–9; 8.43.70. René-Jean Hesbert, 'Le bestiaire de Grégoire', in Jacques Fontaine, Robert Gillet and Stan Pellistrandi, eds, *Grégoire le Grand. Chantilly, centre culturel Les Fontaines 15–19 septembre 1982* (Paris, 1986), 454–66, at 458–9; Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 51–2.

¹² *Moralia* 5.20.39.

¹³ 'Uentus uitae mortalis': *Moralia* 8.44.72 (CChr.SL 143: 437).

hypocrites as agents of destruction who hide their own evil to destroy others.¹⁴

For Gregory, hypocrisy is essentially a manifestation of the cardinal sin of pride.¹⁵ Pride is in turn essentially impiety against God, it is being exalted by false glory.¹⁶ It is the pre-eminent sin, because it alone can destroy all other virtues; it poses therefore the greatest threat to the salvation of the soul.¹⁷ It hardens the soul against perceiving its sinfulness and spawns a whole series of lesser sins – vainglory, envy, anger, melancholy, avarice, gluttony and lust – and these, in turn, nurture a further brood of evils, which each have ‘their army against us.’ ‘For from vain glory there arise disobedience, boasting, hypocrisy, contentions, obstinacies, discords, and the presumptions of novelties’.¹⁸

In Gregory’s mind, vainglory leads to hypocrisy because the hypocrite seeks earthly praise and admiration, rather than seeking to please God. The hypocrite is the superficial master of Christian virtues and qualities, but he desires only to win human applause and lacks the interior love and fear of God.¹⁹ He imagines that God will – like the hypocrite’s fellows – only judge him on his exterior, but he will find at the last judgement that he is condemned:

Such are the minds of hypocrites: while they do one thing, they exhibit another to men. They win applause by the show of holy living itself; they are set before many better people in the esteem of men, and while within themselves in their silent thoughts they are proud, on the outside they exhibit themselves as humble. And whereas they are excessively praised by men; they imagine that in the eyes of God also they are that which they delight to present themselves to be to their fellow-creatures.²⁰

¹⁴ *Moralia* 5.17.34; 5.20.43; 7.31.46; 15.28.34; and see 15.15.19. Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 233. On the sin of deficient Christians, see *Moralia* 29.7.14.

¹⁵ Straw, ‘Gregory, Cassian’, 49–50.

¹⁶ *Moralia* 32.9.11 and see 29.8.18.

¹⁷ *Moralia* 31.45.87–8; 32.9.11. Straw, ‘Job’s Sin’, 77; eadem, ‘Gregory, Cassian’, 46–7, 49–50.

¹⁸ *Moralia* 15.53.60; 31.45.87–8. ‘Sed habent contra nos haec singula exercitum suum. Nam de inani gloria, inoboedentia, iactantia, hypocrisis, contentiones, pertinaciae, discordiae, et nouitatum praesumptiones oriuntur’: *ibid.* 31.45.88 (CChr.SL 143B: 1610). See also Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 241–2.

¹⁹ *Moralia* 8.42.69, 8.44.72, 73, 8.45.75, 8.48.81; Straw, ‘Gregory, Cassian’, 54–5.

²⁰ ‘Sic hypocritarum mentes dum aliud est quod agunt, atque aliud quod hominibus ostendunt, laudes de ipsa sanctitatis ostentatione recipiunt, in aestimatione hominum

Hypocrites are puffed up by praise and feel themselves to be superior to others. Gregory says: 'every hypocrite, by counterfeiting the life of justice, claims himself the praise that belongs to the just'.²¹ Beneath their façade of virtue, they conceal overweening pride.

Gregory's negative depictions of the hypocrite in the *Moralia* are inverse descriptions of the necessary spiritual resources and conduct of a Christian. His hypocrites are characterized by the essentially hollow nature of their spiritual lives.²² They are, in other words, Christians on the cheap, who fail to practise the interior rigours of the religious life and possess only its simulacra. Their façade of piety may deceive, but to Gregory the real failings are the consequences of pride: spiritual blindness, lack of self-knowledge and of self-examination, and a failure to endure worldly and spiritual afflictions.²³ In Gregorian thought, the Christian life is a perpetual battle: the faithful must be ever vigilant against sin, constantly active in self-examination to discern its beginnings.²⁴ They must exercise the faculty of discernment, *discretio*, to maintain consciousness of their sinfulness and of God's goodness and grace.²⁵ This constant watchfulness leads to penitence, vital for spiritual wellbeing, the purging force which can atone for humanity's perpetual sinfulness and enable the faithful to turn to God and to 're-connect' with him.²⁶ The faithful must also learn to bear both prosperity and adversity as the operation of divine will.²⁷ Both are sent by God

multis melioribus praeferuntur, et cum intus apud se tacita cogitatione superbiant, foris se humiles demonstrant. Cumque ab hominibus immoderate laudantur, tales esse se quoque apud Deum existimant quales se gaudent hominibus innotuisse.' *Moralia* 15.6.7 (CChr.SL 143A: 752–3). See also *ibid.* 8.72; 15.3.

²¹ 'Omnis autem hypocrita quia uitam iustitiae simulans, iustorum sibi laudem arripit': *Moralia* 5.20.39 (CChr.SL 143A: 245).

²² *Moralia* 8.42.66 (comparison with rushes).

²³ *Moralia* 5.10.16; 5.22.44; 7.20.39; 7.35.36; 8.47.77.

²⁴ For example, *Moralia* 8.6.9–10; 32.1.1; Straw, 'Gregory, Cassian', 55–6.

²⁵ On *discretio*, see Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 73, 99, 217–18, 227–8, 231–4, 252–3; eadem, 'Gregory the Great's Moral Theology: Divine Providence and Human Responsibility', in Neil and Dal Santo, eds, *A Companion to Gregory*, 177–204, at 198–200; eadem, 'Job's Sin', 72–3; eadem, 'Gregory, Cassian', 42–7.

²⁶ Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 175–9, 200, 213, 236; eadem, 'Gregory's Moral Theology', 200–4. For fear of death leading to self-examination and penitence, see eadem, 'Purity and Death', in John C. Cavadini, ed., *Gregory the Great: A Symposium* (Notre Dame, IN, 1995), 16–37.

²⁷ See, for instance, *Moralia* 5.16.33; 31.28.55; Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 236; eadem, 'Job's Sin', 85; eadem, "Adversitas" et "prosperitas". Une illustration du motif structurel de la complémentarité', in Fontaine, Gillet and Pellistrandi, eds, *Grégoire le Grand*, 277–88.

and can be sources of spiritual growth or of sin. The faithful must not be puffed up by earthly or spiritual prosperity and tempted into pride; nor should they be overwhelmed when things go wrong, but should see adversity as a form of spiritual training, sent by God, to discipline their souls and share in earthly chastisement for sin.²⁸

Gregory's hypocrites do none of these things: they love human applause and are gratified by earthly honours and praise.²⁹ They are inflated with self-congratulation at their earthly successes. Their virtues are like the exterior of a house but are absent within, as the hypocrite only seeks worldly reputation.³⁰ They are blinded to the true state of their souls and imagine themselves to be holy in God's sight, when they lack humility and penitence. Their spiritual blindness means that they no longer exercise discernment and can neither perceive their own sinfulness nor the forbearance of God.³¹ They fail to do penance.³² Lacking the tough discipline which Gregory requires of the holy, the inner strength of self-scrutiny and fear of God, they flourish like untended vines, which bear luxuriant fruit on the ground where it quickly perishes.³³

The wealth of denunciations of hypocrites in the *Moralia* has an urgent purpose: the dangers of hypocrisy lie all around the faithful, especially those who lead in the church. The temptation to pride is ever-present, even for good teachers. Gregory describes with great acuity – and feeling – how spiritual gifts can easily provoke their opposite vices and turn to sin. For example, an outstanding knowledge of divine law can become a source of pride. Hypocrisy is a particular threat to spiritual leadership. Hypocrites are false shepherds who love themselves more than God or their spiritual charges. Lacking real spiritual growth, they cannot nurture their followers in Christian virtue.³⁴ In contrast to holy men whose spiritual self-discipline enables them to discern the secret faults of others, hypocrites do not practise self-examination and are unable to correct others: 'Hypocrites therefore do not gather together the thoughts of their

²⁸ *Moralia* 29.30.62; Straw, "Adversitas" et "prosperitas".

²⁹ *Moralia* 8.47.80; 15.13.15.

³⁰ *Moralia* 8.45.74–5.

³¹ *Moralia* 8.42.67–9; 8.43.70–1; 8.44.72; 31.15.28.

³² *Moralia* 8.47.77; 15.12.14.

³³ *Moralia* 8.43.70.

³⁴ *Moralia* 31.9.14 (pursuing the metaphor of ostriches who lay their eggs in the ground and supposedly do not look after them), and 8.43.66.

mind, ... when do they, who are ignorant of their own faults, detect the faults of those committed to them?'³⁵ Their ignorance of God means that they do not understand the inner meaning of Scripture and descend into heresy.³⁶ This passage illustrates how hypocrisy not only endangers the soul of the individual hypocrite, but imperils the entire church.

HYPOCRISY, THE DEVIL AND ANTICHRIST

The centrality of pride in Gregory's conceptualization of hypocrisy, and the hypocrite's desire to be unworthily set above others, leads to an intimate connection to Lucifer and his demonic pride. The devil – and man – fell because 'they desired to be like God, not by righteousness, but by power.' Lucifer was set by God above the angels, but chose to overreach himself and assert his equality with God.³⁷ This web of sinful kinship leads inevitably to Antichrist, whose reign would be preceded, according to New Testament prophecy, by false prophets and false Christs, Antichrist's harbingers. Antichrist himself would claim to be God, exalted in pride; his reign would unleash a terrible time when many of the faithful would be seduced by his counterfeiting of sanctity, his fake miracles and signs, while those who resisted would be subject to terrible persecution.³⁸

Antichrist was for Gregory the arch-hypocrite, the *caput omnium hypocritarum*, because he claimed to be God.³⁹ More terrifying still are his followers, because Antichrist is the inverse image of Christ:

³⁵ 'Hypocritae igitur, quia cogitationes mentis non colligunt ... Et qui sua nesciunt, commissorum sibi quando delicta deprehendunt?' *Moralia* 31.12.20 (CChr.SL 143B: 1565).

³⁶ *Moralia* 15.13.16.

³⁷ 'Idcirco ergo uterque cecidit, quia esse Deo similis non per iustitiam, sed per potentiam concupuit.' *Moralia* 29.8.18 (CChr.SL 143B: 1446).

³⁸ *Moralia* 29.6.10; 29.7.15; 29.7.17; 29.8.18; Frederic Amory, 'Whited Sepulchres: The Semantic History of Hypocrisy to the High Middle Ages', *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 53 (1986), 5–39, at 10; Hervé Savon, 'L'Antéchrist dans l'œuvre de Grégoire le Grand', in Fontaine, Gillet and Pellistrandi, eds, *Grégoire le Grand*, 389–405; Jane Baun, 'Gregory's Eschatology', in Neil and Dal Santo, eds, *Companion to Gregory*, 157–76, esp. 171–3. For biblical and early Christian views, see now Mateusz Kusio, *The Antichrist Tradition in Antiquity: Antimesianism in Second Temple and Early Christian Literature* (Tübingen, 2020); Cristian Badilita, *Métamorphoses de l'antichrist chez les pères de l'église* (Paris, 2005).

³⁹ Straw, 'Gregory, Cassian', 49–50.

like Christ he is the head of a body of the faithful, his own Church, whose members carried out his work. Commenting on Job 34: 30, 'Who maketh a man that is a hypocrite to reign for the sins of the people' [Douay-Rheims], Gregory saw this as an allusion to Antichrist:

Antichrist, the very chief of all hypocrites. For that seducer pretends to sanctity that he may draw men away in iniquity Although most them have not beheld his sovereign power and yet they are enslaved to it, by the condition in which their sins have placed them Are they not his very members, who seek by a show of affected sanctity to seem what they are not?⁴⁰

By their sinfulness, the godless in the present time are enslaved to Antichrist and are his members. Hypocrites therefore are a type of fifth column in the church, working its destruction from within.⁴¹ Gregory's conceptualization of the characteristics of hypocrites thus works on two levels: an individual level, in which hypocritical Christians endanger their own salvation; and a collective level, where hypocrites, even unknowingly, are agents of demonic subversion, undermining the church.

Antichrist was no abstract figure for Gregory but an imminent threat, for he believed that he was living in the last days, in the time prophesied by Christ when false prophets would arise, nations would be at war with one another, and there would be earthquakes and famines. Gregory believed that these signs had been fulfilled. In the period between the inception of the *Moralia* in Constantinople in 579 and its wider distribution in 596, the pope had witnessed warfare in the form of the Lombard attacks, devastations of towns and settlements, plagues and natural catastrophes, and heard report of earthquakes. Not all the signs had been fulfilled, but enough to convince him that the end was imminent. His anxieties about

⁴⁰ 'Potest ipsum omnium hypocritarum caput antichristus designatur. Seducor quippe ille tunc sanctitatem simulat, ut ad iniquitatem trahat ... quamuis plerique et principatum illius non uiderunt, et tamen eius principatui peccatorum suorum conditione deseruiunt, ... An non eius membra sunt, qui per affectatate sanctitatis speciem appetunt uideri quod non sunt?' *Moralia* 25.16.34 (CChr.SL 143B: 1259). On Gregory's innovative thinking concerning the Antichrist as the head of a body of followers, see Savon, 'L'Antéchrist'; Claude Dagens, 'La fin du temps et l'église selon Grégoire le Grand', *Recherches de science religieuse* 58 (1970), 273–88.

⁴¹ *Moralia* 29.7.15, 17; 29.8.18.

Antichrist and the endemic presence of his members were keen and urgent. Having suffered persecution under the pagan empire, the church was now under threat from internal enemies: heretics and hypocrites, false shepherds.⁴²

Gregory's letters reveal in a remarkable fashion how he saw these dangers realized in his own times.⁴³ The pope's apocalyptic sensibilities were particularly acute around 595 with increased pressure from the Lombards and the failure, as he perceived it, of imperial protection for the Italian provinces, especially Rome. His fears were exacerbated by what he saw as the overweening pride of John IV, patriarch of Constantinople, in his use of the title 'Ecumenical Patriarch'. In his letters of protest, Gregory denounces John IV's action as an act of hypocrisy.⁴⁴

The dispute over John's adoption of the title had arisen during the pontificate of Gregory's predecessor, Pope Pelagius II, who had protested at its ascription to John in the acts of a council in Constantinople sent to him.⁴⁵ While the title had much earlier origins, it had been used as an honorific for bishops with wide jurisdictions. The papacy, however, eschewed it. In the sixth century, it was deployed frequently for the patriarch of Constantinople; however, John's adoption of the title was remarkable, as he had applied it to himself.⁴⁶ The meaning and implications of the title are obscure: Siméon Vailhé suggested that it could signify 'Universal' without indicating ambitions to universal authority. However, he considered that once the term came to be used more sparingly, its significance

⁴² Baun, 'Gregory's Eschatology'; Markus, *Gregory*, 51–67; idem, 'Gregory the Great's Europe', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5th series 31 (1981), 21–36.

⁴³ Gregory the Great, *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum epistolarum*, ed. Dag Norberg, 2 vols, CChr.SL 140, 140a (Turnhout, 1982); idem, *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, transl. John R. C. Martyn, 3 vols (Toronto, 2004).

⁴⁴ *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum* 5.39, 5.45 (CChr.SL 140: 314–15, 337).

⁴⁵ George E. Demacopoulos, 'Gregory the Great and the Sixth-Century Dispute over the Ecumenical Title', *Theological Studies* 70 (2009), 600–21, is a useful reference point but does not supersede the important articles by Siméon Vailhé: 'Le titre patriarcale œcuménique avant Grégoire le Grand', *Échos d'Orient* 11 (1908), 65–9, and 'Saint Grégoire le Grand et le titre patriarcale œcuménique', *Échos d'Orient* 11 (1908), 161–71. See also Markus, *Gregory*, 91–6; Erich Caspar, *Geschichte des Papsttums von den Anfängen bis zur Höhe der Weltherrschaft*, 2 vols (Tübingen, 1933), 2: 449–65; André Tuilier, 'Grégoire le Grand et le titre de patriarcale œcuménique', in Fontaine, Gillet and Pellistrandi, eds, *Grégoire le Grand*, 69–80; George E. Demacopoulos, *The Invention of St Peter* (Philadelphia, PA, 2013), 152–7; Barbara Müller, *Führung im Denken und Handeln Gregors des Grossen* (Tübingen, 2009), 324–9.

⁴⁶ Vailhé, 'Le titre patriarcale œcuménique avant Grégoire le Grand', 65–9.

shifted to a statement of superior authority.⁴⁷ The precise meaning of the title for John and for the other patriarchs is not clear and has been subject to different scholarly interpretations. It may have indicated the sovereignty of the patriarch within his jurisdiction.⁴⁸ Gregory's objection to John's use of the title was grounded in his view that this use represented an act of pride, a claim to a status above that of other bishops, which deprived all other bishops of their full authority.⁴⁹ The title was not simply an arrogant assertion of superior status, but one which fundamentally challenged the church, both by denying the authority of other bishops and by ascribing authority uniquely to the patriarch of Constantinople.

Gregory argued that the title was against Scripture and canon law. His consternation at John IV's behaviour was compounded by the fact that he also believed that in a synod of Constantinople, John had unjustly condemned a monk and a priest as heretics.⁵⁰ It was the receipt of the acts of this synod – in which John had repeatedly used the title – which provoked Gregory to write a string of protest letters in June 595 to the emperor, the empress, to John himself and the patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch, and to the papal envoy in Constantinople, Sabinian.⁵¹ In these letters, Gregory sets out how John's adoption of the title is a mark of pride, an usurpation of the authority of other bishops. He also warns of the imminence of the advent of Antichrist: John IV's act of pride is a harbinger of his coming.⁵²

⁴⁷ Ibid. 68–9.

⁴⁸ See Demacopoulos, 'Gregory the Great', 616–19, for a summary of the range of opinions. For tensions between Rome and Constantinople concerning their ecclesiastical status, see Philippe Blauddau, *Le siège de Rome et l'orient (448–536). Étude géo-ecclésiologique* (Rome, 2012); idem, 'Between Petrine Ideology and Realpolitik: The See of Constantinople in Roman Geo-Ecclesiology (449–536)', in Lucy Grig and Gavin Kelly, eds, *Two Romes: Rome and Constantinople in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2012), 364–84; Judith Herrin, 'The Quinisext Council (692) as a Continuation of Chalcedon', in Richard Price and Mary Whitby, eds, *Chalcedon in Context: Church Councils 400–700* (Liverpool, 2009), 148–68.

⁴⁹ See the helpful formulation by Markus, *Gregory*, 94: 'To use the title "universal", on whichever bishop it was bestowed, was to undercut the legitimate standing of each and every bishop in his own church: if any particular bishop was "universal", no bishop anywhere else could be in possession of full episcopal status'.

⁵⁰ *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum* 3.52 (CChr.SL 140: 197–9).

⁵¹ *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum* 5.37, 5.39, 5.41, 5.44, 5.45 (CChr.SL 140: 308–11, 314–18, 320–5, 329–37, 337–8).

⁵² *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum* 5.39, 5.45 (CChr.SL 140: 314–18, 337–8).

Nonetheless, Gregory is not using the accusation of hypocrisy as an empty polemic. In fact, he generally avoids explicit accusations of hypocrisy and only uses the word in two letters, both, I think, to close associates. However, if the criticisms in his letters of John IV are mapped against the *Moralia's* description of hypocrites, they are revealed as virtually textbook applications of it. To John himself, he writes:

that most holy friend of mine, Lord John, a man of such great abstinence and humility, after being seduced by friendly tongues, has resorted to such great arrogance, that in his appetite for a perverse title, he tries to be like him who, while arrogantly wanting to be like God, even lost the grace of the likeness given to him. And because he sought false glory, he threw away true blessedness.⁵³

He also warns John against the counsels of those who flatter him, and against seeking an elevated position, quoting from Jesus's denunciation of the Pharisees in Matthew 23: 8–9, although Gregory does not here cite the passages which call them hypocrites.⁵⁴

Gregory is explicit about his view of John's hypocrisy only in a letter to Sabinian, the Roman envoy in Constantinople and his trusted deacon, writing: 'I hope in Almighty God that our celestial Majesty is destroying that man's hypocrisy'.⁵⁵ To the Empress Constantina, Gregory is rather more oblique, saying: 'I still ask that you allow nobody's hypocrisy to prevail against the truth'.⁵⁶ In what follows this rather muddled statement, Gregory gives an implicit account of John as a hypocrite but in generalized terms without naming him:

I still ask that you allow nobody's hypocrisy to prevail against the truth, because there are some who, in accordance with the words of the

⁵³ 'Quod ille noster sanctissimus dominus Iohannes, tantae abstinentiae atque humilitatis uir, familiarium seductione linguarum ad tantam superbiam erupit, ut in appetitu peruersi nominis illi esse conetur similis, qui, dum superbe esse Deo similis uoluit, etiam donatae similitudinis gratiam amisit et ideo ueram beatitudinem perdidit, quia falsam gloriam quaesiuit.' *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum* 5.44 (CChr.SL 140: 332). Translation from *Letters*, transl. Martyn, 2: 367.

⁵⁴ *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum* 5.44 (CChr.SL 140: 335).

⁵⁵ 'Spero in omnipotentem Deum quia hypocrisin illius superna maiestas soluit.' *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum* 5.45 (CChr.SL 140: 337). Translation from *Letters*, transl. Martyn, 2: 371.

⁵⁶ 'Vnde adhuc peto ut nullius praeualere contra ueritatem hypocrisin permittas' *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum* 5.39 (CChr.SL 140: 314). Translation from *Letters*, transl. Martyn, 2: 356.

egregious preacher, ‘by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.’ They have certainly been despised for their clothing, but they are proud in their hearts, and they seem to despise everything in this world, and yet at the same time seek to obtain all those worldly things. They confess to all men that they are unworthy, but cannot be content with private titles, because they seek out ways to appear more worthy than all others.⁵⁷

These criticisms echo Gregory’s depiction of hypocrites. It is no surprise, therefore, that later in this letter, Gregory asserts that John is imitating Antichrist.⁵⁸

This attack on the patriarch is particularly interesting, because John IV was renowned for his asceticism and was given the epithet ‘the Faster’. He is praised in seventh-century Byzantine sources for his fasting, vigils, prayers, personal poverty and his almsgiving to the poor.⁵⁹ His reputation as an ascetic had even reached the West: Isidore of Seville (c.560–636) includes him in his *De viris illustribus*, noting his inestimable abstinence and great generosity to the poor of Constantinople.⁶⁰ Gregory knew John personally from his time in Constantinople and alludes in his letters to John’s exceptional self-

⁵⁷ ‘Vnde adhuc peto ut nullius praeualere contra ueritatem hypocrisin permittas, quia sunt quidam qui iuxta egregii praedicatores uocem *per dulces sermones et benedictiones seducunt corda innocentium*; qui ueste quidem despecti sunt sed corde tumente et quasi in hoc mundo cuncta despiciunt sed tamen ea quae mundi sunt cuncta simul adipisci quaerunt; qui indignos se omnibus hominibus fatentur sed priuatis uocabulis contenti esse non possunt, quia illud appetunt unde omnibus digniores esse uideantur.’ *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum* 5.39 (CChr.SL 140: 314–15). Italics in CChr.SL edition. Translation from *Letters*, transl. Martyn, 2: 356.

⁵⁸ *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum* 5.39 (CChr.SL 140: 316). See also *ibid.* 7.30, where, to the emperor, he draws a comparison between the title as a ‘frivolity’ and the work of Antichrist. In 5.28, to the new Patriarch Cyriacus, he alludes to the coming of Antichrist.

⁵⁹ *The History of Theophylact Simocatta: An English Translation with Introduction and Notes*, ed. Michael and Mary Whitby (Oxford, 1986), 1.1.1–4 (p. 19), 1.10.1–3 (pp. 32–3), 1.11.14–20 (pp. 36–7), 7.6.1–5 (p. 186). On John IV, see the biographical entry by Daniel Stiernon, *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique. Doctrine et histoire*, 17 vols in 21 (Paris, 1932–95), 8: 586–9; Müller, *Führung*, 84–7. On the patriarchs of Constantinople, see Claudia Rapp, ‘The Early Patriarchate (325–726)’, in Christian Gastgeber et al., eds, *A Companion to the Patriarchate of Constantinople* (Leiden, 2021), 1–23; Hans-Georg Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Munich, 1959), 214, 423–4, 775. I am most grateful to Claudia Rapp and Phil Booth for help with John and with the Byzantine church.

⁶⁰ *El «De Viris Illustribus» de Isidoro de Sevilla Estudio y Edición Crítica*, ed. Carmen Cordero Merino (Salamanca, 1964), 146–7: ‘inaestimabilis abstinentiae et elemosynis ... largissimus’.

denial, both expressing admiration for it and using it as a weapon against him. Indeed, the contrast between John's ascetic practices and the claim which the pope saw in his adoption of the title of ecumenical patriarch is integral to much of Gregory's denunciation of John. For example, in his letters concerning the ecumenical title to the Patriarchs Anastasius of Antioch and Eulogius of Alexandria, he describes John's excellence in prayers, fasting and almsgiving, but continues by denouncing his pretence at humility which, according to Gregory, masks his pride in claiming a title superior to that of other bishops.⁶¹ Other aspects of John's conduct and life match Gregory's critique of hypocrisy: like the hypocrites in the *Moralia*, John was also learned in Scripture, having written a treatise on baptism. The patriarch's wrongful condemnation of the two men for heresy demonstrated his lack of discernment and his unfitness for office. Gregory knew John well and was quick to note the disparity between his apparent sanctity and his – in Gregory's view – proud and sinful behaviour.

John, then, is a false pastor who fails his flock. Just like the hypocrites of the *Moralia*, he claims to be what he is not; he holds high office in the church. There can be no doubt of the severity of the danger which Gregory saw in the hypocrisy of John and his supporters. At a time when the advent of Antichrist was imminent, John was the breach in the citadel of the church which allowed the devil to penetrate. He was destroying the unity of the church and leaving it exposed to satanic attack.⁶² Implicit in Gregory's portrayal of John as a hypocrite is the notion that he is therefore a member of Antichrist's body and his agent. Gregory, unsurprisingly, does not go so far as to say this explicitly, but it would surely have been clear to anyone, like Sabinian, who knew his *Moralia*.

Gregory's protests fell on deaf ears: the emperor Maurice rebuked him, declaring the title not to be a serious matter.⁶³ John IV's successor, Cyriacus, continued to use it, leading to further, more muted

⁶¹ *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum* 5.41 (CChr.SL 140: 324). See also *ibid.* 5.37 for the same accusation. Compare also *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum* 3.52 (CChr.SL 140: 198), where, in a preliminary phase of the controversy, Gregory accuses John of lying and states that it is a greater sin to use the mouth to lie than to eat meat.

⁶² Charlotte Kingston, 'The Devil in the Writings and Thought of Pope Gregory the Great (590–604)' (DPhil thesis, University of York, 2011), 198–219.

⁶³ *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum* 7.30 (CChr.SL 140: 491), Gregory's letter concerning Cyriacus, June 597.

objections on Gregory's part.⁶⁴ The pope's letters to Patriarchs Eulogius of Alexandria and Anastasius of Antioch failed to win him their support.⁶⁵ Anastasius apparently also described the title as not important.⁶⁶ Initially, Eulogius did not reply and when he did, failed so badly to understand the nature of Gregory's objections that he applied the title to Gregory himself, much to the pope's consternation.⁶⁷ Some scholars suggest that latterly, faced with this incomprehension and hostility, Gregory may have softened his stance and accepted the title, but this is by no means certain.⁶⁸

Despite the central place that the hypocrite occupies in the nexus of Gregory's thought, he has received scarcely any attention.⁶⁹ Yet this figure of duplicity was the bearer of a spiritual message of the greatest significance: the dangers of pride and of secular acclaim for Christians, especially religious leaders. Gregory's hypocrite is not a failing Christian, one whose way of life is flawed, but a believer whose commitment to the faith is essentially shallow, one unable to withstand the rigours and demands of the faith. These men are a danger to the whole church because they are in thrall to the devil and do the work of Antichrist in anticipation of his reign. Scholarly neglect of the importance of the hypocrite has meant that the real import of Gregory's letters to John IV over the ecumenical title has been missed and the significance of this conflict underplayed, at least by some scholars.⁷⁰ Gregory saw the empire as a providential institution, and the emperor as divinely appointed. His letters address the emperor with traditional deference and recognize and appeal to his authority in the protection of the church in the empire.⁷¹ While

⁶⁴ *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum* 7.24, .30 (CChr.SL 140: 478–80, 490–1), to Cyriacus and Maurice; 9.157 (CChr.SL 140A: 714–16), to the Illyrian bishops, May 599.

⁶⁵ *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum* 5.41 (CChr.SL 140: 320–5); 7.24 (CChr.SL 140: 478–80), to Anastasius, June 597; 7.31 (CChr.SL 140: 492–5).

⁶⁶ *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum* 7.24 (CChr.SL 140: 479), June 597.

⁶⁷ *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum* 6.61 (CChr.SL 140: 434–5), July 596; 8.29 (CChr.SL 140A: 550–3), July 598.

⁶⁸ Markus, *Gregory*, 94; Demacopoulos, 'Gregory the Great', 613.

⁶⁹ With the exception of Straw, 'Gregory, Cassian'.

⁷⁰ See, for instance, Matthew Dal Santo, 'Gregory the Great, the Empire, and the Emperor', in Neil and Dal Santo, eds, *Companion to Gregory*, 57–81, at 71, who only briefly mentions the conflict, describing it as 'a squabble', albeit a grave one because it threatened the unity of the church. Savon, 'L'Antéchrist', 404 n. 112, notes the significant implications of Gregory's writings on hypocrisy, Antichrist and John the Faster.

⁷¹ Markus, 'Gregory the Great's Europe'; Dal Santo, 'Gregory the Great', 57–81. See also Phil Booth, 'Gregory and the Greek East', in Neil and Dal Santo, eds, *Companion to*

Gregory continued to affirm the place of the emperor in the divinely-ordained empire, he could be critical of imperial actions. The contemporary situation in Italy, where Byzantine power was limited and unable to provide sufficient defence against the Lombard attacks led to conflicts.⁷² Relations with the emperor and with the patriarch in Constantinople could be tense; it is clear from his letters concerning the ecumenical title that he had profound anxieties about the patriarch and his leadership of the church of Constantinople. It is no small matter that Gregory considered the emperor's foremost church leader and spiritual adviser as an agent of Antichrist.

Gregory's criticism of John IV as a hypocrite is revealing with regard to his composition of the *Moralia*, the work of Gregory where hypocrites and hypocrisy feature most prominently. It is intriguing to note that Gregory was composing this work as an *apocrisarius* in Constantinople, at the time when he came to know John. Claudia Rapp has shown that asceticism was a vital component of episcopal status: a reputation for ascetic sanctity demonstrated the gift of the Holy Spirit to the bishop, and could serve as a fundamental element in legitimizing his authority.⁷³ This therefore raises a question about the extent to which Gregory's reflections on hypocrites in the *Moralia* were prompted by his reservations concerning the public performance of ascetic holiness by church leaders such as John.

Gregory's writings were hugely influential, and the *Moralia* was widely circulated and read. It survived in countless medieval manuscripts and was excerpted and abbreviated by a number of authors.⁷⁴

Gregory, 109–31, esp. 113–17; Carole Straw, 'Gregory's Politics: Theory and Practice', in *Gregorio magno e il suo tempo. XIX Incontro di Studiosi dell'Antichità Cristiana, Roma, 9–12 maggio 1990*, 2 vols, *Studia Ephemeridis Augustianum* 33–4 (Rome, 1991), 1: 47–63. See also Claude Dagens, 'Grégoire le Grand et le monde oriental', *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 17 (1981), 243–52; Lellia Cracco Ruggini, 'Grégoire le Grand et le monde byzantin', in Fontaine, Gillet and Pellistrandi, eds, *Grégoire le Grand*, 83–94.

⁷² Rosamond McKitterick, *Rome and the Invention of the Papacy: The Liber pontificalis* (Cambridge, 2020), 17–23; eadem, 'The Papacy and Byzantium in the Seventh- and Early Eighth-Century Sections of the *Liber pontificalis*', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 84 (2016), 241–73.

⁷³ Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity* (London, 2005), esp. 100–55.

⁷⁴ René Wasselynck, 'Les compilations des "Moralia in Job" du VIIe au XIIe siècles', *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 29 (1962), 5–32; idem, 'Les "Moralia in Job" dans les ouvrages de morale du haut moyen âge latin', *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 31 (1964), 5–31; and idem, 'L'influence de l'exégèse de S. Grégoire le Grand sur les commentaires bibliques médiévaux (VIIe–XIIe s.)', *Recherches de théologie ancienne*

In the tenth century, for example, John of Gorze read the *Moralia* so frequently that he knew it almost by heart, while Odo of Cluny made an abridgement of the work at the request of the canons of St Martin of Tours.⁷⁵ The Gregorian hypocrite, however, did not really take off as a significant theme in early medieval discourse, neither as a polemical figure, nor as part of the burgeoning field of apocalyptic thought.⁷⁶ For example, one of the most popular and influential texts on the Apocalypse, the tenth-century biography of Antichrist by the Frankish monk Adso, the *De Ortu et Tempore Antichristi*, makes no mention whatsoever of hypocrisy or simulation.⁷⁷ Nonetheless, Gregory's exposition of the apocalyptic nature of hypocrisy in the present, his depiction of the essential connection between the arch-hypocrite Antichrist, and those whose Christianity was a façade maintained by deception, was still a powerful one with rich potential for exploitation. Gregory's exposition of the role of Antichrist and his army of hypocrites at the end of time did attract the attention of at least one figure: the eleventh-century archbishop, Wulfstan of York, who, in a lengthy denunciation of hypocrisy, describes Antichrist as 'the arch-hypocrite', in Old English 'se Peodlicetere'. Wulfstan knew Gregory's *Moralia* and drew upon it in his eschatological sermons.⁷⁸ Given that Gregory's

et médiévale 32 (1965), 157–204. See also Gabriella Braga, 'Moralia in Iob. Epitomi dei secoli VII–X e loro evoluzione', in Fontaine, Gillet and Pellistrandi, eds, *Grégoire le Grand*, 561–8. My thanks to Tessa Webber for advice on the circulation of the *Moralia*.

⁷⁵ Jean de Saint-Arnoul, *La Vie de Jean, abbé de Gorze*, ed. and transl. Michel Parisse (Paris, 1999), cap. 83, pp. 110–11; John of Salerno, *Life of Odo of Cluny* 1.20 (PL 133: 43–86, at 52); English translation in *St Odo of Cluny*, ed. and transl. Gerard Sitwell (London, 1958), 1–87, at 22–3. On Odo's *Epitome Moralium in Iob*, see Isabelle Rosé, *Construire une société seigneuriale* (Turnhout, 2008), 107–9.

⁷⁶ See Savon, 'L'Antéchrist', for the influence of Gregory's vision of Antichrist and his church and the work of his members in the present. Compare also Adriaan Bredero, 'The Announcement of the Coming of Antichrist and the Medieval Concept of Time', in Michael Wilks, ed., *Prophecy and Eschatology*, SCH Sub 10 (Oxford, 1994), 3–13.

⁷⁷ Adso Devensis, *De ortu et tempore Antechristi, necnon et tractatus qui ab eo dependunt*, ed. Daniel Verhelst, CChr.CM 45 (Turnhout, 1976). On the identity of Adso, see Simon MacLean, 'Reform, Queenship and the End of the World in Tenth-Century France: Adso's "Letter on the Origin and Time of Antichrist" reconsidered', *Revue belge de philologie et histoire* 86 (2008), 645–75.

⁷⁸ For Wulfstan's use of Gregory, see *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. Dorothy Bethurum (Oxford, 1957), 61, 96–7, 281–4, 289, 350; Joyce Lionarons, *The Homiletic Writings of Archbishop Wulfstan* (Woodbridge, 2010), 55, 57, 100, 111, 166. Source-hunting suggests that Wulfstan knew Gregory's dialogues, Gospel homilies and homilies of Ezekiel,

designation of Antichrist as the chief hypocrite is not taken up by other early medieval authors (as far as I can tell), he must surely have derived this description from the *Moralia*.⁷⁹

Gregory's *Moralia* was well known to and widely read amongst the English monastic reformers of the tenth and eleventh centuries. Although the evidence for its manuscript transmission in England at this time is very sparse and, literally, fragmentary, quotations from and allusions to it can be found in both Old English and Latin writings. Two manuscript witnesses to the work survive from England in this period.⁸⁰ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms 310 is a ninth-century continental manuscript, possibly from the Rhineland, of Books XI–XVI. Rosamond McKitterick finds that this had reached England by the tenth century.⁸¹ Two binding fragments – Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms G. 1. 7 Med and G 1. 9 Med – were copied in England in the early eleventh century.⁸² The *Moralia* is a sizeable text, which attracted more compact redactions: the epitome made by Laidcenn Mac Baith in the seventh century, the *Egloga de Moralibus in Iob*, also circulated in pre-Conquest England.⁸³ A tenth-century manuscript of this, possibly of continental origin,

as well as the *Moralia*. For a wider context, see also Andy Orchard, 'The Library of Wulfstan of York', in Richard Gameson, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, 1: c.400–1100 (Cambridge, 2012), 694–700, although this does not discuss Wulfstan's debt to Gregory.

⁷⁹ Searches of the Library of Latin Texts database does not reveal the use of this phrase in other authors. For the *Moralia* in Anglo-Saxon England, see Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006), 305–6.

⁸⁰ Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments written or owned in England up to 1100* (Toronto, 2014), nos 166e, 188.8e, 241e, 453.6, 469.3, 564e, 668.5f, 677.3f, 691e, 704, 7736e, 773.7e, 840.5e, 858f, 865.5f, 946.5e. Four of these are early copies from the eighth and ninth centuries. Nos 840.5e, 865.5f and 946.5e have a continental provenance, while 865.5f (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms G 30) was copied at Wearmouth Jarrow.

⁸¹ Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 564e; Rosamond McKitterick, 'Exchanges between England and the Continent', in Gameson, ed., *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, 1: 330; Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 171, 306.

⁸² Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 668.5; see also Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 306.

⁸³ *Egloga, quam scripsit Lathcen filius Baith de Moralibus Iob quas Gregorius fecit*, ed. Marcus Adriaen, CChr.SL 145 (Turnhout, 1969); Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, nos 135, 818.6f, another eighth- or ninth-century fragment with a continental provenance.

was at St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, by the second half of the century.⁸⁴ This meagre haul of manuscript evidence must be set against the knowledge of the text demonstrated by authors associated with English monastic reform: in addition to Wulfstan, the *Moralia* was known to Ælfric of Eynsham (c.950–c.1010), Byrhtferth of Ramsey (fl. c.986–c.1016) and Lantfred of Winchester (fl. 974–84).⁸⁵ Ælfric drew upon his knowledge of the *Moralia* in a number of homilies, particularly his homily for the first Sunday in September, when he dedicated an entire homily to the story of Job.⁸⁶ Lantfred, a monk at Old Minster, Winchester, came to England from Fleury so may have derived his knowledge of it from his earlier education; but Byrhtferth, whose writings draw upon phrases and sentences from numerous places in Gregory's *Moralia*, was a Benedictine monk at Ramsey.⁸⁷

Wulfstan was a major figure at the English court, who drafted law codes for both King Æthelred and his successor, the conquering king, Cnut. He was most likely a monk and achieved high office, first as bishop of London in 996, and subsequently as bishop of Worcester

⁸⁴ Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 135, and see Lucia Castaldi, 'La trasmissione e rielaborazione dell'esegesi patristica nella letteratura ibernica delle origini', *Settimane* 57 (2010), 393–428, at 400.

⁸⁵ Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 305, for a list of *Moralia* MSS in England; *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*, online at: <<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cr30/Mercian/Fontes>>, accessed 22 November 2023. Lantfred came from Fleury and may have encountered the text there, rather than in England.

⁸⁶ For Ælfric and the *Moralia*, see Lawrence L. Besserman, 'A Note on the Source of Ælfric's Homily on the Book of Job', *English Language Notes* 10 (1973), 248–52; Malcolm Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, EETS s.s. 18 (Oxford, 2000), 592–60; Martin Chase, 'The Book of Job and the Figure of Job in Old English Literature', in Harkins and Canty, eds, *Companion to Job in the Middle Ages*, 354–91; Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 259; and *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*, online at: <<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cr30/Mercian/Fontes>>, accessed 22 November 2023, with reference to the commentary in Godden's *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, with a fuller discussion of Ælfric's sources indicating some citations as parallels, rather than direct quotations or allusions.

⁸⁷ Mechthild Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of the Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2006), 46–9; Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 241, 270. Chase, 'The Book of Job', 377–8, identifies the *Moralia* as a source for the Old English homily: *Wulfstan. Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen Homilien nebst Untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit*, ed. Arthur Napier (Dublin and Zurich, 1883; repr. Cambridge, 1967), 249 (homily 48). However, this homily is an extract from the postscript to Byrhtferth's *Encheiridion*. See the edition by Peter S. Baker and Michael Lapidge, *Byrhtferth's Encheiridion*, EETS s.s. 15 (Oxford, 1995), cxxiii, 242–7, 370–1, who identify Isidore's *Sententiae* as the source for the comments on the sins of pride and lust which Chase traces to the *Moralia*.

and archbishop of York, two sees which he initially held together. These ecclesiastical offices gave him a powerful position at court. He has achieved literary renown for his vernacular sermons, a number of which address the crises of his day, and some of which were delivered to the royal council.⁸⁸

Like Gregory, Wulfstan believed that he lived in the last age of the world, in the time of tribulation immediately preceding the coming of Antichrist. Also like Gregory, he found himself providing spiritual leadership at a time of great political turmoil and uncertainty. These two strands came together for Wulfstan: the English kingdom was under external threat from Viking campaigns, which resulted in conquest in 1016 and the replacement of the West Saxon dynasty by the Danish ruler, Cnut. This series of devastating attacks placed the kingdom under enormous pressure and loyalties fractured. The royal court of King Æthelred was factionalized, uncertain how best to defend itself against the Vikings and riven by accusations of treachery.⁸⁹ Wulfstan saw treachery and godlessness all around him. In 1014, Æthelred was driven into temporary exile in Normandy and the archbishop denounced the sinfulness of the English which had led to God's wrath. Around the year 1000, as the Viking attacks escalated, Wulfstan's anxiety about the advent of Antichrist intensified; the collapse of moral and political order in his kingdom signified to him the fulfilment of St Paul's prophecy about the intensification of evil in the days before the reign of Antichrist.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ On Wulfstan, see Patrick Wormald, 'Wulfstan [Lupus] (d. 1023)', *ODNB*, online edn (2004), at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30098>>, accessed 22 November 2023; Andrew Rabin, *The Political Writings of Archbishop Wulfstan of York* (Manchester, 2015); Joyce Lionarons, *The Homiletic Writings of Archbishop Wulfstan* (Woodbridge, 2010); Patrick Wormald, 'Archbishop Wulfstan: Eleventh-Century State-Builders', in Matthew Townend, ed., *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York* (Turnhout, 2004), 9–27; Catherine Cubitt, "'Now what I want is Facts': Deconstructing and Reconstructing the Career of Archbishop Wulfstan II of York', *Quaestio insularis* (forthcoming).

⁸⁹ Pauline Stafford, 'The Reign of Æthelred II: A Study in the Limitations on Royal Policy and Action', in David Hill, ed., *Ethelred the Unready*, British Archaeological Reports British Series 59 (Oxford, 1978), 15–46; Catherine Cubitt, 'Reassessing the Reign of King Æthelred the Unready', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 42 (2020), 1–28; Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred the Unready 978–1016* (Cambridge, 1980); Ann Williams, *Æthelred the Unready: The Ill-Counselled King* (London, 2003); Levi Roach, *Æthelred the Unready* (New Haven, CT, 2016); Ryan Lavelle, *Æthelred II King of the English 978–1016* (Stroud, 2002).

⁹⁰ Catherine Cubitt, 'On Living in the Time of Tribulation: Archbishop Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* in its Eschatological Context', in Rory Naismith and David

Wulfstan's most interesting denunciation of hypocrisy is found in a sermon on the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and their opposing vices, a sermon which superficially is neither eschatological nor ostensibly political, but which is exceptionally revealing.⁹¹ It shows not only that Wulfstan translated Gregory's vision of apocalyptic hypocrisy into a critique of contemporary life, but also how he deployed it as a polemic aimed, most likely, at the royal court itself. The sermon itself is a revised and extended treatment by the archbishop of a base text written by his contemporary, the homilist Ælfric, perhaps commissioned by Wulfstan himself.⁹² This original sermon is, however, little more than a catalogue of virtues and vices which follows an earlier tradition in noting that the opposing vices simulate the virtues they replace. In Ælfric's sermon, the element of hypocrisy and simulation is lightly sketched, but Wulfstan builds on this to denounce full-blown hypocrisy. He turns what is essentially a spiritual tract on the gifts of the Spirit and their opposing vices, into a critique of contemporary evils, directly connecting the deliberate, deceitful simulation of virtue with the reign of the arch-hypocrite, Antichrist, and the hypocritical work of his members in the present.⁹³

Wulfstan does this in two ways, firstly by rewriting the original text to emphasize the deceit of hypocrisy, heightening the verbal register of the tract by additional words designating lying, deceit and hypocrisy, and by adding a substantial conclusion concerning Antichrist and his work in the present.⁹⁴ One example of his verbal elaboration will have to suffice:

A. Woodman, eds, *Writing, Kingship and Power in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2018), 202–33; eadem, 'Apocalyptic and Eschatological Thought in England around the Year 1000', *TRHS* 25 (2015), 27–52; Levi Roach, 'Apocalypse and Atonement in the Politics of Later Æthelredian England', *English Studies* 95 (2014), 733–57.

⁹¹ *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. Dorothy Bethurum (Oxford, 1957), 185–91 (homily 9). See also Sherif Abdelkarim, 'The Terms of Hypocrisy in Early English Law and Literature: Ælfric and Wulfstan', in Anya Adair and Andrew Rabin, eds, *Law, Literature, and Social Regulation in Early Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2023), 236–258, esp. 246.

⁹² *Ælfrician Homilies and Varia Editions, Translations and Commentary*, ed. Aaron J. Kleist and Robert K. Upchurch, 2 vols (Woodbridge, 2022), 2: 787–801, 803–26 (no. 16), which updates Loredana Teresi, 'A Possible Source for the *seofonfealdan Godes gifu*', *Leeds Studies in English* 37 (2006), 101–10.

⁹³ On the *Moralia* in pre-Conquest England, see n. 87 above.

⁹⁴ Angus McIntosh, 'Wulfstan's Prose', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 35 (1949), 109–42; Andy Orchard, 'Crying Wolf: Oral Style and the *Sermones Lupi*', *Anglo-Saxon England* 21 (1992), 239–64, esp. 243–47, 259–64.

[Ælfric:] Wisdom is holy, a gift of the Holy Spirit, and the devil gives foolishness in opposition [to it] so that [the person] neither pays heed to wisdom nor lives wisely, and yet it is more despicable that he considers himself to be wise and so has pretended to be wise.⁹⁵

[Wulfstan:] Wisdom is, as we have already said, is the gift of the holy spirit and the devil sows in opposition unwisdom and deception, and he does so that the unblest man does not desire wisdom nor does he order his life wisely, and he does what is more wicked, that he considers the while himself cautious and wise and he will also, as a hypocrite, feign that he is wise, although he considers more about deception/ treachery than wisdom.⁹⁶

The treatise concludes with the final gift, fear of God, the lack of which causes foolish behaviour, recklessness and the pretence of virtue. Wulfstan uses Ælfric's conclusion on those who lack the fear of God as a bridge into a treatment of Antichrist, by warning that the devil can cause those who lack the fear of God to become feigning hypocrites, completely filled with evil in their inner thoughts. Wulfstan's added conclusion is a text of over forty lines, effectively a rant against the arch-hypocrite, Antichrist, and those who follow him in the present, feigning virtue and wisdom. It opens with these words: 'There is no worse evil nor one more hateful to God than the hypocritical evil because the devil himself guides and forms it'.⁹⁷ Antichrist's reign of deception will cause many to join him and speak or appear other than they think. The deceptions of the arch-hypocrite will defeat the defences of the faithful because 'there will never be anyone in the world more worldly-wise nor more fluent in words nor worse in heart and more deceptively

⁹⁵ 'Se wisdo<m> is halig, þæs Halgan Gastes gifu, and se deofol forgifð þærtogeanes dysig þæt he wisdomes ne gyme ne wislice ne libbe, and gyt þæt forcuþre is þæt he telle hine wisne and bið swa gehiwod swylce he wis sy': *Ælfrician Homilies*, ed. Kleist and Upchurch, 2: 810–13 (translation from this edition).

⁹⁶ 'Se wisdom is, swa we ær cwædon, þæs halgan gastes gifu, 7 deofol sæwð þærtogeanes unwisdom 7 swicdom 7 gedeð swa þurh þæt unsælig man wisdomes ne gymeð ne wislice his lif ne fadað, 7 gyt eac gedeð þæt forcuðre is, þæt he talað þeh hwilum hine sylfne wærne 7 wisne, 7 bið eac for oft swa gehiwod licetere swylce he wis sy, byð þeah smeagende oftor ymbe swicdom ðonne ymb wisdom.' *Homilies*, ed. Bethurum, 187 (no. 9). See also Orchard, 'Crying Wolf', 262–3.

⁹⁷ 'Nis næfre nan wyrse yfel ne Gode laðre þonne þæt gehiwode yfel, forðan deofol sylf hit gefadað 7 gehywað to þam' *Homilies*, ed. Bethurum, 189.

deceitful than he is'.⁹⁸ If Antichrist is the arch-hypocrite, his followers are 'downright hypocrites' who do his work:

There are now, he says, too many men in this deceitful world who speak or think something completely different in this way through feigning. They conduct themselves as if cautious so that they are able to deceive treacherously; and all this comes from the devil, although they do not believe this, and they both injure with such clever deeds first themselves and then too many ... Traitors who in this way deceitfully deceive very often through evil ...⁹⁹

These are deceitful traitors who do terrible harm and, although they do not realize it, 'they are forerunners and thralls of Antichrist who prepare his way'.¹⁰⁰

This diatribe against Antichrist and his deceitful followers connects therefore with the earlier account of the devil's counter-vices, with Wulfstan's words recalling here his previous condemnation of those who make a pretence of wisdom. He concludes the sermon by warning against those who deceive by pretending to teach true doctrine but who advocate false teaching by approving the earthly satisfaction of bodily pleasures, specifically sexual ones. These are pleasing Antichrist by their wickedness and promote his reign.

Why did Wulfstan pen this invective against the wickedness of hypocrites of his own day? It seems to me that this polemic is at least partly aimed at the royal council, which Wulfstan later denounced for exactly such deceit and treachery. Looking back on the reign of Æthelred at the inception of Cnut's reign, Wulfstan wrote:

Indeed, formerly treachery was everywhere greater than wisdom, and at that time he was considered wisest who was most devious and who

⁹⁸ 'Forðam ne weorþeð on worulde ænig woruldsnotera ne on wordum getingra ne on heortan wyrsa 7 lytelice swicolra þonne he wyrðeþ.' *Homilies*, ed. Bethurum, 189.

⁹⁹ 'And to fela manna eac is nu on ðissere swicelan worulde þe ealswa to swyðe þurh hiwunge eal oðer specað oþer hy þencað 7 lætað þæt to wærscype þæt hy oðre specað oþer hy þencað 7 lætað þæt to wærscype þæt hy oðre magan swa swicollice pæcan; ac eal þæt cymð of deofle, ðeah hy swa ne wenan, 7 ægðer hy deriað mid swa gerædan dædan ge ærest him sylfum gesyððan to manegan... And swa gerade manswican þe on ða wisan swæslice swiciað ofost on unriht 7 ðurh þæt deriað for Gode 7 for worulde, þæt syndan forbodan 7 Antecristes prælas þe his weg rymað, þeah hy swa ne wenan.' *Homilies*, ed. Bethurum, 189–90.

¹⁰⁰ *Homilies*, ed. Bethurum, 189–90 (original text in previous footnote).

understood most cunningly how to profess falsely that lies were truth and the unjust how to judge others to their detriment; but woe to them for their cunning and all of their pride.¹⁰¹

The dating of Wulfstan's composition of the sermon of the seven gifts of the Spirit is complicated. It has been dated to 1002 x 1008. Malcolm Godden, however, argued that Wulfstan may have derived all his Ælfric-based sermon material from a collection put together after 1006, and therefore these texts have to be dated to 1006–12 or later.¹⁰² The first two decades of the eleventh century were a particularly troubled period, with an intensification of the Viking onslaught. There are signs within the English elite of distrust and anxieties concerning allegiance and treachery. In 1002, Æthelred ordered the massacre of Danes living in England (probably those who had settled relatively recently as mercenaries), whom a contemporary charter describes in an apocalyptic reference as 'cockles amongst the wheat'.¹⁰³ 1005–6 saw a court revolution of a particularly vicious kind: in addition to the retirement of a number of long-standing court members, one was forced out by accusations of treachery, while another, Ealdorman Ælfhelm, was murdered, allegedly having been lured to his death by an invitation to a feast by another prominent court member. Ælfhelm's sons, also court members, were then blinded on the orders of the king.¹⁰⁴ This episode appears to suggest Æthelred's collusion in this political assassination. The purge was therefore a bloody one which was marked by

¹⁰¹ Rabin, *Political Writings*, 147. 'forþam ær þysan wæs gehwar swicdom swyðra, þonne wisdom, and þuhte hwilum wisast, se þe wæs swicolost ans se þe lytelicost cuðe leaslice hiwjan unsod to soðe and undom deman oðrum to hynde. ac wa heom þæs wærscipes and calles þæs weorðscipes.' *Wulfstan Sammlung*, ed. Napier, 268 (homily 50). On the theme of fair speaking and deceit in Old English, see Jonathan T. Randle, 'The "Homiletics" of the Vercelli Book Poems: The Case of *Homiletic Fragment 1*', in Samantha Zacher and Andy Orchard, eds, *New Readings in the Vercelli Book* (Toronto, 2009), 185–224.

¹⁰² Malcolm Godden, 'The Relations of Wulfstan and Ælfric: A Reassessment', in Townend, ed., *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York*, 353–74, at 366–72; see also Sara M. Pons-Sanz, *Norse-Derived Vocabulary in the Late Old English Texts* (Odense, 2007), 25; and Wormald, 'Archbishop Wulfstan', 26.

¹⁰³ Simon Keynes, 'The Massacre of St Brice's Day (13 November 1002)', in Niels Lund, ed., *Beretning fra seksogtyvende tværfaglige vikingesymposium* (Aarhus, 2007), 32–66; Roach, *Æthelred*, 187–200; idem, 'Apocalypse and Atonement in the Politics of Æthelredian England', *English Studies* 95 (2014), 733–57. See also Jon Wilcox, 'St Brice's Day Massacre and Archbishop Wulfstan', in Diane Wolfthal, ed., *Peace and Negotiation Strategies for Co-existence in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Turnhout, 2000), 79–91.

¹⁰⁴ Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred the Unready*, 208–11.

allegations of treason and double-dealing. Moreover, previously high-ranking and respected court members were disgraced and removed through accusations of sinful behaviour and abuse of office. Wulfstan's allegiances probably lay with those who were forced out, as these seem to have been men with a track record of supporting church reform, while many of those who remained important members of the king's council were notorious for their treachery and duplicity.¹⁰⁵ This is evidenced by such witnesses as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the annals of which are a catalogue of allegations of cowardice, deceit and disloyalty on the part of the elite; while the homilist Ælfric, a tart commentator on contemporary politics, also denounced the deceitful practices in judgements of the king's council.¹⁰⁶ The palace coup of 1005–6 seems to have expunged the court of those who saw the current disasters as the product of the abuse of the church and its property, and brought about their replacement by men of a more secular turn of mind. Perhaps Wulfstan's words on the dangerous evil of hypocrisy and the work of Antichrist were aimed at the political elite, urging them to reflect on their own behaviours and that of other council members at a time of great political stress.

CONCLUSION

Wulfstan was deeply influenced by Gregory's account of the hypocrisy of Antichrist and the wicked work of his forerunners. The connection made by the pope between the false Christians of his own time, the hypocrites and the apocalyptic scenario of the last days was a powerful one which intensified the evil of hypocrisy. It held great appeal for Wulfstan. He translated the pope's essentially spiritual interpretation of hypocrisy into an immediate political polemic, weaponizing his ideas to attack his fellow councillors at court in a

¹⁰⁵ On a reform party at court, see Keynes, *Æthelred*, 154–231; Roach, *Æthelred*, 133–85; Catherine Cubitt, 'The Politics of Remorse: Penance and Royal Piety in the Reign of Æthelred the Unready', *HR* 85 (2012), 179–92.

¹⁰⁶ 'Annals 978–1016 (CD)', in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, in *English Historical Documents, c.500–1042*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, 2nd edn (London, 1996; first publ. 1955); *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition 5 Ms C*, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe (Woodbridge, 2001), 84–103; *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, ed. John C. Pope, 2 vols, EETS 259–60 (Oxford, 1967–8), 2: 497–510 (no. 13).

deeply-factionalized and highly charged situation. It was a powerful tool: as Judith Shklar has observed, 'it is ... easier to dispose of an opponent's character by exposing his hypocrisy than to show that his political convictions are wrong'.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, Wulfstan's denunciation of those at court who mask their real thoughts and views is more, I think, than political manoeuvring. Wulfstan really did believe that Antichrist's reign was imminent. The kingdom was in turmoil, on the brink of disastrous defeat. Political, military and spiritual solutions had all been attempted, but to no avail. Where in this uncertain world did truth lie? Who could discern how best to please God and assuage his wrath? Wulfstan took from Gregory the association between hypocrisy and the end time, and the role of hypocrites as the unwitting forerunners of Antichrist who do his work. The archbishop does not articulate in his writings any of the depth of Gregory's thought: Wulfstan's hypocrites are characterized by their deception, their simulation of virtue and their association with Antichrist, not by pride or by a desire for human applause. While Wulfstan's understanding of hypocrisy must rest upon his reading of the *Moralia*, his expression of it is a polemic one.

Gregory's deployment of the idea of hypocrisy in his letters to the Empress Constantina and to his deacon, Sabinian, is very different. Here it stands as not as invective, but as something less overt, a signal, a signpost to his recipients of his deepest fears and anxieties about the contemporary condition of the world, a warning, but a careful one. His psychologically complex, spiritual interpretation of hypocrisy informed his reading of current events. Gregory's hypocrite is a vessel for his anxieties about authentic Christianity and about the state of the contemporary church. The hypocrite is an antitype of the true Christian, a useful device for articulating what Christians should not be.

But why was it the hypocrite who occupied this central place? I think that there was something in the ambiguity of the hypocrite which made him a profoundly unsettling figure. A hypocrite is not what he seems. He is a type of category confusion like the ostrich, a flightless bird. For Gregory, the ascetic monk, the hypocrite also encapsulated his deepest fears about the dangers of ecclesiastical office, the pull of worldly affairs, the ever-present peril of pride.

¹⁰⁷ Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, 48.

His conception of hypocrisy was in part a critique of spiritual leadership which reminded his audience that they too could fall into the trap of pride and become lazy about their faith. His anxieties were intensified by the imminence of the reign of Antichrist, which made the detection and denunciation of his hypocritical agents all the more urgent and necessary.

Contrary to Judith Shklar, hypocrisy in the early Middle Ages was no ordinary vice. Gregory's and Wulfstan's hypocrites are terrifying figures, diabolical agents whose simulations endanger both their own salvation and the safety of the church. Gregory's and Wulfstan's understanding of hypocrisy is rooted in their own experience of the present, but their hypocrites transcend the contemporary world and occupy a place in the spiritual order, in eschatological expectations. Wulfstan's treatment of hypocrites is derived from Gregory's, but is deployed in a different way and to a different end. The examples of Gregory and Wulfstan demonstrate not only the historically embedded nature of interpretations of hypocrisy, but also its enduring appeal.